The Idea of Race in Interwar Britain: Religion, Entertainment and Childhood Experiences

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Historians writing on the subject of race have largely focused on the period after the Second World War: the arrival of the SS Empire Windrush in 1948 has become a defining symbol of Britain’s immigration history. Studies that examine the earlier decades of the twentieth century privilege either imperial or scientific discourses on race. This focus neglects the variety of social and cultural discourses through which the idea of racial difference was disseminated to the British public. This thesis focuses on the idea of race in the 1920s and 1930s and explores how other peoples and places were constructed in the British imagination through three separate but interconnected themes: religion, entertainment and childhood experiences. The thesis has three central arguments: firstly it argues that racial discourses were varied; secondly, that while Britain’s cities offered opportunities for interracial contact, most British people’s experiences of the racial other were limited to the realm of the imagination, nourished by a variety of constructions emanating from churches, schools, entertainment venues and the home; thirdly, that the racial other was constructed in the British imagination as a source of both fear and desire.

Religion was one of the dominant forces disseminating ideas about racial difference to the British public in the interwar years. Religious leaders were able to construct an image of other peoples and places through their connection to important annual events such as Empire Day and in their commentaries on current events; their response to the 1919 race riots illustrates how religion, empire and politics intersected on matters of race and national identity. Missionary groups also played an important role in constructing ideas about race, especially to children, through missionary exhibitions. The role of religion in society in the interwar years has been underplayed and yet religious discourses on race that were familiar in the nineteenth century continued well into the twentieth.

In the realm of popular entertainment, both blackface and orientalist productions excelled in the art of racial disguise. These productions underline the contradiction at the heart of race discourse between fear and desire; fear of a difference that undermined the notion of white supremacy and thus the strength of Britain’s Empire, and a simultaneous desire to ‘know’ the ‘other’, be that through cultural interactions or physical intimacy. The act of dressing-up as the racial ‘other’ was a crucial means of exploring fantasies of the ‘other’ without transgressing contemporary racial boundaries. Newspaper reviews of popular entertainments constructed a narrative on race that used both positive and negative stereotypes. The history of licensing and censorship in the files of the Lord Chamberlain’s Archive reveals contemporary anxieties about race focusing particularly on miscegenation.

People were encouraged to imagine racial difference in a variety of ways and from a young age. The stereotyped images presented to children are open to less nuanced interpretation than those aimed at adults and more than any other were composed of binary oppositions between black and white, civilised and savage, ancient and modern. Evidence from newspapers and the Mass-Observation Archive highlights how children were encouraged to imagine racial difference and the variety and complexity of childhood experiences that defined people’s ideas about race.

This thesis builds on an established body of work on the subject of race and uses a variety of sources in order to advance the discussion beyond a narrow focus on empire or scientific debates towards a more comprehensive analysis of the circulation of the idea of race in interwar Britain. It focuses on an era that has received less scholarly attention than the years after 1945 and highlights the variety of discourses on race that permeated the social and cultural life of interwar Britain.
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Note on Key Terms

This thesis illustrates that, in the 1920s and 1930s, race was constructed as a biological reality that affected behaviour, intelligence and physical appearance. Race, is however, a socially constructed phenomenon and this is how the term should be understood in this thesis, despite the fact that it is not written in inverted commas.\(^1\) Equally, the terms black and white are used, not because these are absolute terms, but because they denote established ethnic groups, both inside and outside academic scholarship.\(^2\)

The terms ‘East’ and ‘Orient’ should also be understood as cultural constructs and not as absolute terms. They are used in this thesis to demonstrate their hegemonic status as geographical locations in the British imagination.

The term British rather than English is used as this was the dominant expression of national identity articulated in the sources; where the term English is used, again it is specifically relevant to the sources in question.

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\(^1\) P. Gilroy, *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack* (Oxfordshire, 2002), p. 35.
**Introduction**


The First World War brought many social, cultural and political changes in its wake. Studies that explore the immediate psychological impact of the war and how it came to be imagined by subsequent generations provide a particularly useful framework for understanding the social and cultural history of the interwar years. Samuel Hynes describes the war as an ‘imaginative event’ that caused people to look ‘back at their own pasts as one might look across a great chasm to a remote, peaceable place on the other side.’ Susan Kingsley Kent argues that ‘in the years immediately following the armistice in November 1918, Britons from all political quarters and ideologies began to categorize who did and did not belong to the nation, drawing lines according to race and ethnicity, class, and gender.’ This process intensified after the war as men and women attempted to bridge the psychological ‘chasm’ that the war had opened in the minds of many Britons. Part of this process involved a redefinition of traditional concepts of Englishness, driven by a desire, particularly common in times of war or social and political uncertainty, to answer the question of exactly who the English were and, more importantly, who they were not. As Robert Young asserts, ‘Fixity of identity is only sought in situations of instability and disruption, of conflict and change.’ Alison Light argues that the war fundamentally changed how the idea of Englishness was constructed as buoyant imperial sentiments were increasingly cast aside in favour of a more inward-looking, domestic and ultimately feminine conception of national identity. The ensuing debates about race and nation did indeed become more inward-looking as Light suggests, but they also remained stubbornly imperial, celebrating Britain’s Empire as evidence of the superiority of the British race.

The First World War redefined the language of citizenship, and military service in particular was afforded increasing importance, and this was the case for both British citizens

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The nature of British citizenship, that is, who could claim to be a British citizen, was not a question that could be answered simply through the law. It was a question which was answered by ordinary people in the way that they reacted to the presence of immigrants in Britain. It was also a significant question for those who had left the colonies to come and live in Britain and who articulated their own rights to British citizenship. These often competing claims to British citizenship were expressed during a wave of riots that took place in 1919 in cities including Liverpool, Cardiff and South Shields. The violence was directed against black men, largely ex-seamen, who had settled in Britain’s port cities after the war. Many were British subjects, but their presence was viewed as problematic. White men, mostly ex-servicemen, attacked black men and destroyed the properties of black residents. Reports on the events of 1919, as well as the subsequent historiography, highlight two key issues precipitating the violence: high rates of unemployment and interracial relationships. In both cases, black men were perceived to be benefitting at the expense of the white male population. These events underline the impact of the war on ideas about race and national identity; amidst social, cultural and political changes, including shifting gender roles and the weakening of the British Empire, many British people ‘took increasing refuge in the privileges of “whiteness”.’

Laura Tabili argues that ‘Intolerance, bigotry, prejudice…are not explanations for racial or ethnic conflict: in themselves they require explanation.’ In addition she asserts that ‘to identify racial difference as a source of conflict is thus to beg the question of how racial difference has been constructed and assigned meaning in the first place.’ Studies that focus on the history of racism and prejudice often overlook the ways in which race has been constructed as a category of difference. By focusing on the negative effects of racism and

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16 Tabili cites for example T. Kushner and K. Lunn, eds, Traditions of Intolerance: Historical Perspectives on Fascism and Race Discourse in Britain (Manchester, 1989). For more on the history of immigration see C.
racial violence, there is also a danger that the histories of Britain’s ethnic minority communities are confined within a narrative of oppression. By exploring the construction of racial difference, it is possible to underline both the positive and negative ways in which difference was imagined and the impact that this had on both white Britons and those defined as racially ‘other’.

This thesis is concerned with the social and cultural processes that constructed the idea of race in the British imagination between the wars. It explores three separate but interconnected themes: religion, entertainment and childhood experiences. The thesis has three central arguments: firstly, it argues that racial discourses were varied, ranging from imperial to non-imperial, eugenic and orientalist; secondly, that most British people’s experiences of the racial ‘other’ were limited to the realm of the imagination; thirdly, that the racial ‘other’ was constructed in the British imagination as a source of both fear and desire.

The Idea of Race in Interwar Britain

Histories of the idea of race often ignore the interwar period. During this period, race was perceived as a biological fact and different physical and mental characteristics were ascribed to people based on their ethnic origin. These years also saw the idea of race crystallize into ‘scientific’ theories propagated by the increasingly influential eugenics movement. Originally concerned with the working-classes in Britain, eugenic theory was brought to bear on questions of race and national identity, focusing specifically on the perceived dangers of interracial relationships; it was argued that such transgressions of racial boundaries threatened not only the stability of the British Empire, but the integrity of the British race.

Contemporary fears about miscegenation focused attention on Britain’s ethnic minority communities, specifically the children of interracial relationships. These children were a visible sign of ‘race mixing’ and were a source of anxiety for many social commentators including academics and journalists. The eugenicist K.B. Aikman, writing in


18 For a notable exception see S. Pennybacker, From Scottsboro to Munich: Race and Political Culture in 1930s Britain (Princeton, 2009).
19 Robb, British Culture and the First World War, p. 7.
the *Eugenics Review* in the 1930s, argued that nothing less than ‘the white race itself and through it the future of civilization’ was at stake if those of ‘Celtic-Anglo-Saxon stock’ failed to preserve their imagined ethnic purity.\(^{22}\) Aikman’s argument is a strong statement of the concept of white superiority, as the future of the ‘white race’ is intimately bound up with the future of civilization itself; this was not an idea restricted to the eugenics movement and was an integral aspect of imperial expressions of race and national identity. The notion of a pure white race capable of degenerating through interracial contact, specifically sexual relationships with those defined as racially ‘other’, was central to eugenic racial theory.

One of the most notorious reports on the subject of interracial relationships was conducted by the social scientist Muriel Fletcher and published in 1930 as a *Report on an Investigation into the Colour Problem in Liverpool and Other Ports*. The purpose of Fletcher’s investigation was to examine the physical and mental attributes of Liverpool’s ‘mixed-race’ population, in addition to assessing their educational and employment prospects. The children who were the primary focus of the report were those with black fathers, usually from West India or West Africa and white mothers. Contemporary discussions of these relationships reveal where gender and class intersect on the issue of race, as white working-class women were constructed as morally weak and susceptible to the advances of black men who were constructed as hyper-sexual and predatory.\(^{23}\) Fletcher concluded that the children of these relationships inherited the worst characteristics of both parents and that their mothers could not help but regret bringing children into the world so ‘handicapped by their colour’.\(^{24}\) Fletcher’s report is discussed in more detail in Chapter Two, and Chapters Two and Three stress that the discourse of miscegenation was circulated outside of academic circles in the popular entertainments of the 1920s and 1930s.

Where this thesis refers to local case studies its focus is on the North-West and the urban centres of Liverpool and Manchester in particular. Both cities had pronounced ethnic minority communities, especially Liverpool a city that, by virtue of its role as an important sea port had ‘more pronounced ethnic neighbourhoods than any other city in England.’\(^{25}\) Pat O’Mara remembered the city of his childhood as multi-racial, crowded with ‘almost every


\(^{23}\) For more on the intersections of race, class and gender in this report see Tabili ‘Women “Of a Very Low Type”’.

\(^{24}\) M. Fletcher, *Report on an Investigation into the Colour Problem in Liverpool and Other Ports* (Liverpool, 1930), p. 35.

nationality under the sun’ and it is this that makes the city such a rich case study for historians of race and national identity.²⁶

David Caradog Jones’s *Social Survey of Merseyside* recorded that Liverpool was home to immigrants from Spain, Italy, Scandinavia, Germany, America and China as well as Canada, Australia and West Africa; there were also significant Welsh and Irish communities.²⁷ There is considerably more scholarship on the histories of various ethnic groups in Liverpool compared to that of Manchester as the ‘pervasive myth of racial harmony’ that permeated public discourses about the city and the legacy of its long-established ethnic minority communities makes the city of special interest to those studying the history of those communities in Britain.²⁸

The interwar years saw many refugees flee to Britain, largely Jewish, displaced by Hitler’s policies. The largest minority group in Britain in the 1920s and 1930s were the Irish and their presence was felt in the North-West of England in particular.²⁹ Manchester had a substantial Irish population, in 1835 it was estimated that one fifth of the population was of Irish origin.³⁰ By 1865 Manchester’s Jewish population was estimated at 5,000 and by 1914 it constituted the largest Jewish population in England outside of London, thus immigration to Britain in the interwar years came from both inside and outside of Britain’s Empire.³¹ This contributed to a variety of constructions of racial difference that often had deep roots but which adapted to the contemporary social, cultural and political context.

The discourses of orientalism and anti-Semitism, explored in Chapters Two and Five respectively had a long cultural pedigree, but the circulation of these discourses in the interwar period was shaped by the historical context as well as by the medium through which these discourses were circulated. The anti-Socialist politics of the *Daily Mirror*, for example, had a direct bearing on specific representations of Jewish people in the newspaper. In addition, contemporary fears about miscegenation were woven into the narratives of many of the orientalist theatrical productions of the 1920s and 1930s. Imperial discourses on race had constructed black people as inferior in the British imagination before the First World War and

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the persistence of such stereotypes into the interwar period is highlighted in Chapters Three and Four.

The interwar period provides a useful chronological framework for the study of the idea of race. Imperial discourses on race from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries persisted, while new scientific discourses on race reached their zenith in the decades before the Second World War. Both of these discourses converged in debates about interracial relationships that reached a new intensity in this period as black men became an increasingly visible sight in some of Britain’s cities. The rise of Fascism in Europe also forced the issue of race into the forefront of public discourse; it also fundamentally changed how ideas about race were expressed in the second half of the twentieth century.

For much of the twentieth century the subjects of race and racism have been the preserve of social scientists. Since the 1920s and 1930s, race has played a significant role in political, social and cultural discourses. In the United States the work of social theorists such as Robert E. Park and W.E.B Du Bois was highly influential in shaping what came to be known as the study of race relations. After the Second World War, biological arguments used in the interwar years to justify racial prejudice were increasingly discredited as academics and politicians attempted to distance themselves from any association with eugenics and thus Nazi ideology. In the second half of the twentieth century ‘new racism’, or prejudice that is focused on cultural differences rather than skin colour, has fuelled sociological debates about the changing nature of racism and the continuing fact of race as it manifests itself in the social condition of ethnic minority groups in Britain.

In 1982 the University of Birmingham’s Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies published The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain. One of the central aims of this collection of essays was to illustrate how racism transforms itself in relation to political and social change. It was the belief of some of the contributors that, ‘Racism as it exists and functions today cannot be treated simply from a sociological perspective: it has to be located historically and in terms of the wider structures and relations of British society.’

By the end of the 1980s sociologists such as John Solomos continued to argue that more

34 Donald and Rattansi, eds, ‘Race’, Culture and Difference; P. Gilroy, There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack (Oxfordshire, 2002); P. Gilroy, Between Camps: Nations, Cultures and the Allure of Race (London, 2004).
36 Solomos, Findlay, Jones and Gilroy, ‘The Organic Crisis’, p. 11.
historical and political analysis needed to take place alongside the study of theories about race and racism, as well as highlighting the ‘need to move away from a notion of racialisation which is uniform across different historical formations or even particular societies.’

The other concern of sociologists such as Ali Rattansi, Paul Gilroy and John Solomos is that racism is viewed as a multi-dimensional phenomenon that is not fixed but that can alter its form depending on the social and political context. James Donald and Ali Rattansi argue that even the term racism itself may be too simplistic to describe a wide range of experiences lived by people from different ethnic minority groups:

The term *racism* can be stretched to impose a brittle coherence on multi-faceted phenomena, thus avoiding the need for more diverse and discriminating forms of analysis. It can also impose a constraining and reductionist interpretative grid on the political and cultural life of Afro-Caribbean, Asian and other minority communities in Britain today. Not only can it homogenize these communities as insensitively as assimilationism or multiculturalism. It can also imply that all the experiences and aspirations of their members are exhausted by the fact of racial subordination.

The agency of ethnic minority communities in defining their own identities is demonstrated in the historiography and must be considered in any study that examines the question of racial difference. Britain’s Empire produced complex interdependent relationships between the colonies and the metropole and the construction of racial identities in a colonial context was a two-way process between coloniser and colonized. Through a study of the Afro-Caribbean writer and intellectual C.L.R. James, Simon Gikandi examines the process that allowed those colonised by the British to claim Victorian culture for themselves and use it to argue for decolonization. Gikandi uses the term ‘colonial Victorianism’ to describe this process and usefully illustrates how the relationship between the colonisers and colonized was a two-way exchange influencing both sides rather than simply viewing Englishness as something that was defined as ‘other’ to those striving for national independence. Colonial subjects engaged in colonial discourses in order to defend their own civil rights, and Chapter One illustrates this argument in relation to religious discourses on race. Chapter Three explores how black and Asian performers adapted particular genres of entertainment for themselves,

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38 Donald and Rattansi, eds, *Race*, *Culture and Difference*, pp. 3-4.
constructing new racial identities in the process. All chapters of this thesis stress the agency of those defined as racially ‘other’ in discourses about race and identity.

Aside from sociological debates, key developments in literary theory have influenced recent historical studies of race. Of central importance has been Edward Said’s use of Foucault to illustrate how the European pursuit of knowledge about ‘the Orient’ and the dominant discourses about ‘the East’ that this knowledge produced, helped to sustain imperial power and thus domination of colonial peoples. In *Castes of Mind* Nicholas B. Dirks argues that the official collection of anthropological and ethnographic information about Indians and Indian society directly supported the colonial enterprise. Dirks suggests that the interpretation of the caste system by colonial government bolstered the argument that Indians could not govern themselves and was thus an important argument against self-rule. Similarly, Tony Ballantyne’s work *Orientalism and Race* focuses on imperial notions of race as they were constructed away from the metropolitan centre, and examines how the colonisers acquired knowledge about other peoples and cultures: ‘This model for understanding the empire draws our attention to the important role of knowledge gathering in imperial contexts.’ Ballantyne also states: ‘Writing, collecting and circulating documents were foundations of imperial power.’ Chapter One underlines the importance of ‘knowledge gathering’ to British missionaries and the subsequent impact that this had on religious discourses on race.

Said’s argument has been criticised, in particular for its binary distinction between the East and the West. This distinction has been seen as merely a reversal of the paradigm that Said himself condemns in relation to western views of the Orient. Nevertheless, even those who challenge Said’s argument have found his theory invaluable for analysing power relations in Britain, the Empire and beyond. Mica Nava and John Mackenzie both challenge Said on the grounds that he does not consider how western views of the Orient were positive, born out of desire rather than merely derisory, yet their analysis is dependent on Said’s original assertion that the Orient has provided the West with its most enduring ‘cultural contestant’. Chapter Two uses *Orientalism* with caution, arguing that the British idea of the

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East was not always a negative concept, yet it supports Said’s central premise, that received ideas about the East and its peoples formed the basis of western knowledge about the East and that these stereotypes were powerful and persistent.

For historians of Empire, race and national identity, Britain’s imperial possessions are important settings, both in terms of how British people imagined the racial ‘other’ and in terms of how they imagined themselves. Missionary exhibitions, plays, films, literature and newspapers all represented an idea of Empire that celebrated the perceived superiority of the British race. On the subject of race, national identity and Empire, both John Mackenzie and Catherine Hall demonstrate the importance of imperial connections to British national identity. This thesis builds on this work, highlighting not only the role of imperial discourses on race in shaping how British people imagined those defined as racially ‘other’, but also how the idea of whiteness was constructed in the process.

The historiography on the construction of white British identity focuses on the period after 1945, when international conflict once again threw the subject of national identity into the spotlight. Decolonization and commonwealth immigration intensified the debate about what it meant to be British and this was the period that saw the ‘consolidation of the equation of whiteness and Britishness.’ Bill Schwarz’s recent study, *The White Man’s World*, forms the first part of his volume *Memories of Empire* and demonstrates how white identities were constructed through Britain’s imperial experience. Schwarz’s work highlights that the British Empire did not just influence how British people thought about others, it was also crucial in defining themselves. British people did not just imagine the racial ‘other’, they also had to ‘imagine themselves as white’. Schwarz focuses on the relationship between the metropole and white settler communities and he argues that memories of the colonial past were crucial in shaping the response of British people to the arrival of non-white migrants after the Second World War. This thesis traces the social construction of white identities back to the 1920s and 1930s and argues that the construction of racial difference in the British imagination was effected by positioning the racial other as inferior to a concept of Britishness that was invariably white and Protestant.

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Empire continued to be central to British culture in the interwar period but the language of eugenics was also important in shaping ideas about racial difference. While some have argued that there was a decline in scientific racial thinking between the wars, others, notably Marek Kohn, argue that the subject of race in science never really disappeared but simply changed its form. There are several useful studies on the history of eugenics. The most recent, comprehensive survey of scientific discourses on race is Gavin Schaffer’s *Racial Science and British Society*, a study that focuses on scientists and their role in the construction of the idea of racial difference. The convergence of imperial and eugenic discourses on race is a subject that has received less attention. One exception is Chloe Campbell’s work on colonial Kenya in the 1930s. Campbell highlights just how closely linked the eugenics movement was to the imperial project as racial improvement was deemed essential if the Empire was to be maintained. Campbell’s study underlines the importance of examining both imperial and eugenic discourses on race in the interwar period. This thesis stresses that discourses on race consisted of a variety of narratives that have to be considered alongside one another if we are to gain a fuller understanding of how the concept of race has been constructed.

Tony Kushner’s work on the Mass-Observation archive is particularly instructive, pointing the way towards hitherto neglected areas of research on race. It highlights several important issues about the way in which ordinary people understood race in the years immediately before and during the Second World War. Kushner argues that, in the second half of the twentieth century, government had taken a ‘top-down’ approach with regard to the implementation of race relations policies. Similarly, he argues that academics have often ignored ordinary people when researching how national identities are constructed in relation to those defined as racially ‘other’. Through this study of directive responses and diaries produced by Mass-Observation volunteers, Kushner seeks to produce a more balanced history of race relations in Britain than those that simply focus on the prejudice directed at ethnic minorities. While not trivialising the fact that racial prejudice and violence were prevalent

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60 Kushner, *We Europeans?*, p. 5.
during this period, Kushner emphasises the varied and often contradictory nature of prejudice in a way that offers a deeper insight into the way in which it has affected people on a daily basis in Britain. In addition to challenging simplistic accounts of racial prejudice, Kushner counters academics who have focused on the decline of the British Empire in order to explain features of race relations post-1945 noting that factors such as the Germanophobia prevalent from 1914, as well as anti-Semitism should not be ignored.61

Kushner argues that centring histories of race on the Empire often excludes the important influence of those minorities who came from outside the Empire on the construction of British national identity.62 His use of Mass-Observation directives also reveals important influences on attitudes to race in Britain, including that of America, and the importance of childhood experiences for people’s formative ideas about racial difference.63 This thesis builds on Kushner’s work, examining both imperial and non-imperial ‘others’ and exploring the influence of childhood experiences on ideas about race and national identity.

The literature on the subject of race underlines the variety of ways in which the idea has been understood and experienced in twentieth-century Britain. It also highlights the danger of using general terms such as racism and prejudice, especially when trying to understand the multiple factors that constructed racial difference in the British imagination; this is particularly important in the context of the interwar years when these terms did not have their twenty-first century resonance. By focusing on the ways in which race was imagined, that is the way in which people thought about other peoples who, in most cases, they had never met, this thesis aims to provide a more nuanced and balanced understanding of the impact of the idea of race in the interwar period.64 It avoids generalising the experience of ethnic minority communities and recognises that race is a social and cultural construct; therefore the idea of racial difference was something that had to be constructed in the mind.

There are many useful studies that incorporate the idea of the imaginary, from Frank Mort’s work on post-war urban regeneration, to Alan Mayne’s study of newspaper representations of slum life.65 Benedict Anderson’s concept of the ‘imagined community’ has

61 Kushner, We Europeans?, pp. 29-36.
62 Kushner, We Europeans?, p. 31.
63 Kushner, We Europeans?, pp. 112-113.
64 Benedict Anderson states that nations are imagined in the sense that ‘the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communon.’ See B. Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London, 2006), p. 6.
proved a valuable concept for understanding how identities are formed. The concept of the imaginary is particularly fitting for a study of race during a period when many people may not have had personal experience of people from different ethnic minority communities. Apart from the information provided by Mass-Observation, there is little evidence of how ordinary people felt about the subject of race in the interwar period. This thesis argues that we can begin to understand how people were encouraged to think about race through an examination of multiple social and cultural discourses on the subject.

One of the key ways in which discourses on race were circulated was through newspapers, and sources from the local and national press are used extensively in this thesis. The work of Adrian Bingham illustrates the importance of newspapers as a source for historians, and one that has been underused. Although this thesis does not rely solely on evidence from the press, it does form a substantial element of the source material, especially in Chapters One to Four. There are useful histories of the role of the press in the British Empire and in the construction of specific racial identities but there still remains a large gap in the historiography on the subject of newspapers and the idea of race. The style and format of newspapers changed during the interwar years and they were marketed to an increasingly diverse audience, including women and children. To cater for this market, and in part to attract it, newspapers contained an increasingly diverse range of material after the First World War; beyond political commentary they reveal the social and cultural concerns of the day and were a crucial medium through which these issues were circulated to the public.

After 1918 and the establishment of newspaper reading as a daily habit amongst British people, the popular press has been subject to analysis by experts across a wide range of disciplines. A major issue of debate in relation to newspapers and society is the question of whether newspapers ‘reflect’ the opinion of their readers, or have a predominantly manipulative role. In fact as early as 1913 R.A. Scott-James, journal editor and literary scholar, stressed the importance of press influence on the opinions of ordinary people and recognised that some people, ‘the knowing ones’, may be drawn to particular newspapers

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Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.


based on opinions that they have already formed, however, he argued that for many people, the press was influential in forming their opinions on particular subjects.\(^{69}\)

The knowing ones of the world have learnt that the Press is a manifold engine for moulding, controlling, reforming, degrading, cajoling, or coercing the public, whilst the great public reads its paper as it eats bread, without a thought of the mighty trick that is being played upon it.\(^ {70}\)

In his collaborative work, \textit{Paper Voices}, A.C.H Smith, novelist and playwright, assigns the readers of newspapers a passive role. While conceding that there has to be a mutual understanding between newspapers and their readers, Smith argues that it is the newspapers that are responsible for shaping public opinion:

The notion that the \textit{Mirror} or the \textit{Express} simply reflect the society as it is, and ‘give the people what they want’, begs the crucial question of how ‘the people’, who do not have the means of communication at their command, know ‘what they want’ until a model has been offered to them.\(^ {71}\)

This analysis of the press presents the reader as malleable and newspaper editors as dominant because they control powerful and persuasive media. This approach has persisted, especially in work on the influence of tabloid newspapers and their readership.

In Chris Searle’s study of racism in the \textit{Sun}, he argues that stereotypes of Africa and African people demonstrate the prevailing attitude of the newspaper towards black people in Britain and constantly nourish the prejudices of ‘working-class adults and young people’.\(^ {72}\) Searle believes that the press shapes public opinion as he talks of the \textit{Sun’s} racist ‘curriculum’ and warns against ‘the greater deception of the duped reader.’\(^ {73}\) According to Searle the reader is a passive agent who absorbs the lies that they are being fed and he puts the responsibility with the press rather than acknowledging that newspapers such as the \textit{Sun} may be printing such stories because the ideas presented in them were already circulating amongst the public and were important to them. More recent studies emphasise the dialogic relationship between readers and newspapers, in which to be successful newspapers have, at

\(^{70}\) Scott-James, \textit{The Influence of the Press}, pp. 13-14.
least to some extent, to listen to their readers and give them a voice, for example by publishing letters to the editor and by covering a wide range of local activities. There are various ways in which historians can use the press as a primary source. Some studies use newspapers in conjunction with other sources. There are studies that detail the history of the press, or the history of press attitudes to particular subjects. Chandrika Kaul’s work uses newspapers to examine press attitudes to government policy. Kaul’s study of Fleet Street’s relationship with the Raj reflects on representations of Indian politics in the British press. Kaul does not focus on society and culture in the press but imperial policy and how press opinion was influenced by the government. This political focus presents one of the problems that Kaul identifies with using newspapers as a primary source, and that is the influence of those in power on the content of newspapers. As Kaul notes, ‘Fleet Street was a free press at the heart of an imperial system of coercion, and to that extent it was inevitable that the press both reflected and reinforced prevailing images of order and power.’ Kaul’s work illustrates the usefulness of newspapers as a primary source as she highlights the advantage of being able to examine how contemporaries reacted to events at a specific point in time.

Another useful guide to the relationship between newspapers and politics, and one that takes greater account of public opinion, is Hannah Barker’s history of the newspaper press from 1695 to 1855. In addition to exploring the role of public opinion during a period when ‘the public’ were increasingly defined as those with access to printed material, Barker notes both the influential role that newspapers played in shaping public opinion and the importance of public opinion in shaping newspaper content.

The work discussed so far enhances our understanding of the role of the press in public life, but there still remains the question of how to use newspapers effectively, given how difficult it is to determine their relationship with the public. Adrian Bingham’s work is most valuable in this respect, highlighting as it does both the difficulties in using newspapers

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75 For example see A. Davies and S. Fielding, eds, *Workers’ Worlds: Cultures and Communities in Manchester and Salford, 1880-1939* (Manchester, 1992); C. Langhamer, *Women’s Leisure in England, 1920-60* (Manchester, 2000). There are, of course, numerous examples of studies that use press sources in some capacity.
77 See Kaul, *Reporting the Raj*.
as a primary source but also the overwhelming benefits of this approach. Bingham notes the limitations of newspapers as a source, observing for example that they often focus on the unusual rather than the commonplace, but nevertheless makes a strong case for further examination of newspapers in other historical studies.  

Commenting on the extent to which newspapers shape public opinion, Bingham states that ‘there is no mechanical way of measuring the ‘impact’ or ‘influence’ of newspapers on society’ and yet for financial reasons newspapers ‘could not operate in isolation from the demands of their readers.’ According to Bingham, it is the reception of newspapers by the public that is a useful indicator of the issues that were important to people at any given point in time, and despite the fact that there is little available primary evidence relating to the reception of the popular press, both circulation figures and letters from readers, while they should be viewed with caution, suggest the importance of the press in shaping and responding to the attitudes of their readers.

On the subject of press stereotypes, Bingham notes that newspapers are often cited in arguments about negative stereotypes when they were often instrumental in undermining them. Despite this criticism, the way in which the press chooses to represent a particular area or people can have a considerable impact on the public imagination. Newspaper stereotypes of ethnic minorities, for example, often persist over a long period of time, thus making the press of critical importance in assessing how representations of those defined as racially ‘other’ have changed, if they have at all, and the extent to which they have influenced public perceptions of different ethnic groups.

*Newspapers and Empire in Ireland and Britain*, edited by Simon J. Potter, includes a useful essay by John Mackenzie that underlines the importance of press stereotypes to the historian and the care that has to be taken when using them as examples of prejudice. Mackenzie’s piece is particularly interesting as he highlights the importance of the press as ‘a key disseminator of popular culture’. Mackenzie reflects on John Hobson’s view that the press, especially with regard to Empire, led public opinion on an issue that otherwise should

84 Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press*, p. 50.
87 Bingham, *Family Newspapers?*, p. 6.
88 P.M. Lester, ed, *Images that Injure: Pictorial Stereotypes in the Media* (London, 1996). Although the examples given in this book are largely drawn from the American experience, it is a useful guide to the style and variety of stereotypes that appear in the press.
not have concerned the public a great deal.\textsuperscript{90} Mackenzie goes on to make several observations about the usefulness of newspapers as a primary source and the extent to which they can be exploited further than they have been so far.\textsuperscript{91}

Newspapers play a key role in determining how their readers imagine different peoples and places. Alan Mayne’s study of San Francisco, Birmingham and Sydney during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries examines how the popular press created stereotypes of slums as part of a wider preoccupation with city life.\textsuperscript{92} Mayne acknowledges that the poverty that was described in the press did exist, but that the image of the slums that was reproduced to describe all poor areas of cities was an invention.\textsuperscript{93} Using the phrase ‘slum sensationalism’ to describe the type of journalism that thrived off such ‘slumland stereotypes’, Mayne’s work illustrates the diversity of press stereotypes and highlights the importance of the press in creating images of places and peoples.\textsuperscript{94}

Chapters Two, Three and Four of this thesis engage with a variety of stereotypes constructed by newspapers and demonstrate that these stereotypes, whether they were positive or negative, were of fundamental importance in defining how the British public imagined other peoples and places in the interwar period. Newspapers were a key vehicle through which dominant racial stereotypes, constructed through a variety of social and cultural processes, were disseminated to the British public. The varied content of newspapers increased their influence in this respect, as both images and text constructed an idea of race through content ranging from advertising and articles to children’s comic strips.

In his study of the sexual content of the popular press after the First World War, Bingham examines a variety of ‘sexual discourses’ that were present in popular newspapers.\textsuperscript{95} This approach allows for a more comprehensive examination of the subject matter and has influenced my own methodological approach. I refined my methodological approach over the course of this study conceding to the constraints placed upon me by time and resources. I started with several national and local newspapers and then narrowed my focus to the \textit{Daily Mirror} and the \textit{Manchester Guardian and Observer} for the nationals and the \textit{Liverpool Echo}, \textit{Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury}, \textit{Garston and Woolton Weekly News} and the \textit{Manchester City News} for the local newspapers. The \textit{Daily Mirror}, \textit{Manchester

\textsuperscript{91} Mackenzie, ‘The Press and the Dominant Ideology of Empire’, p. 35.
\textsuperscript{92} Mayne, \textit{The Imagined Slum}, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{93} Mayne, \textit{The Imagined Slum}, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{94} Mayne, \textit{The Imagined Slum}, p. 1 and p. 3.
\textsuperscript{95} Bingham, \textit{Family Newspapers?}, p. 4.
Guardian and Observer, Manchester City News and Garston and Woolton Weekly News were sampled across the twenty year period from 1919 to 1939. The Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury was sampled until 1920 in favour of the Liverpool Echo which was sampled until 1932. The sampling method was refined, being reduced to a sample of all the newspapers twice a year, in May and November. This decision was based on time constraints and on the volume of material that was generated by sampling these two months alone; as has already been stressed, newspapers contain a vast amount of material.

The local newspapers used in this thesis were all only available on microfilm. Both of the Liverpool newspapers were popular in the city; the Daily Post was the first penny paper and by 1947 the Echo, an evening paper, had the largest sale of any evening paper outside London. As the research for this thesis progressed it became apparent that it was not necessary to use two popular Liverpool papers and I chose to focus on the Liverpool Echo, a paper which still has strong ties to the city. Liverpool’s papers were said to be ‘Independent in politics’ and alongside the Manchester press were amongst the most successful provincial newspapers.

The national newspapers were sampled solely in digitized formats provided by Proquest (for the Guardian and Observer) and UKpressonline (for the Daily Mirror). I conducted a key word search of the Guardian and Observer; for this I used fourteen key word search terms that were eventually narrowed down to ten. I examined whole editions of the Daily Mirror using key word searches to supplement my research when I had a clearer idea of the subject matter that I wanted to focus on.

I took a flexible approach to the newspaper research. This is necessary when using different newspapers in different formats; the digitized archives, for example, allow more research to be done more quickly. In addition, once I had decided on the central themes of my thesis it became apparent that the content of some newspapers was more fruitful than others; this is most notable in Chapter Four. The potential source material in newspapers is so vast that this flexible approach is necessary as it is impossible to predict beforehand the nature or the volume of the material that may be found in each individual newspaper. The volume and diversity of press content is also one of its greatest benefits. As Bingham notes, ‘Few, if any, cultural forms contain as diverse a range of material as the newspaper. Inside the covers of the morning newspaper one found reports on not only high politics but also housewifery, on

97 Camrose, British Newspapers, p. 114.
football as well as foreign affairs, on both court cases and the latest fashions.\textsuperscript{99} When used in conjunction with other sources, newspapers are a vital component of any historical study; on the subject of race, they provide an important part of the narrative on racial difference that was disseminated to the British public between the wars.

The varied content of newspapers also enables particular narratives on race to be traced through other sources. Entertainment reviews, for example, reveal popular films and theatrical productions that contained racialised stereotypes or that circulated specific discourses on race. The titles of these productions can then be investigated in the Lord Chamberlain’s Archive at the British Library. As the official theatre censor, any comments or revisions required by the Lord Chamberlain reveal prevailing contemporary social mores. Similarly, the Mass-Observation Archive can be used in conjunction with press sources to establish important influences on people’s ideas about race and racial difference. In 1939, Mass-Observation commissioned a race directive that explored attitudes to black people and anti-Semitism.

This thesis builds on an established body of work on the subject of race and uses a variety of sources from the local and national press, to the Lord Chamberlain’s collections and the Mass-Observation Archive (for more on these sources see Chapters Two and Five respectively) in order to advance the discussion beyond a narrow focus on Empire or scientific debates towards a more comprehensive analysis of the popular circulation of the idea of race in interwar Britain. It argues that discourses on race were multiple and complex and that they were disseminated to the British public through a variety of cultural and social institutions. These discourses had long roots but they were flexible and adapted to changing historical contexts.

Chapter One explores religious discourses on race through an analysis of press responses to the 1919 race riots and Empire Day celebrations. Callum Brown observes that the role of religion in society in the interwar years has been neglected and an undue emphasis placed on the trend towards secularization; this chapter builds on this argument and stresses that religion was still one of the dominant forces disseminating ideas about other peoples and places to the British public in the interwar years.

Chapter Two examines the discourse of orientalism as it manifested itself in the popular entertainments of the 1920s and 1930s; it explores evidence from the local and national press and illustrates how newspaper reviews of popular entertainments helped to

construct a narrative on race. The Orient that was constructed in the British imagination was a source of both fear and desire. Orientalism in the arts was not a new phenomenon, but its expressions in the interwar period were affected by specific contemporary concerns; this was particularly evident in the discourse of miscegenation that permeated the narratives of popular entertainments. In addition to press sources, Chapter Two also uses evidence from the Lord Chamberlain’s archive to illustrate how the application of censorship laws reveals the nature of contemporary concerns about race.

Chapter Three also explores the idea of race in popular entertainment, but focuses on the representations of black people on stage and screen. It uses newspaper reviews and the experience of popular black performers to illustrate how the idea of black people constructed through popular entertainment was often positive, although it was derived from stereotypes that restricted the ways in which black performers could express themselves. This chapter also builds on the work of Mica Nava, underlining the importance of the United States in shaping how British people imagined blackness. The popularity of American films and music made black people synonymous with the United States in the British imagination; this process underlines the fact that being black was viewed as fundamentally incompatible with being British.

The tension between fear of and desire for the racial ‘other’ was an important duality in discourses on race. Both Chapters Two and Three explore how this duality was expressed on stage and screen and in newspaper reviews of popular entertainments. Both Oriental costumes and blackface make-up were important signifiers of racial difference that reveal an intense fascination with those defined as racially ‘other’; the act of dressing-up was a crucial means for exploring these fantasies without transgressing contemporary social and cultural mores.

Chapters Four and Five explore formative influences that shaped the way that British people imagined racial difference. The discourses emanating from churches and entertainment venues often had a particular resonance with children, if they were not explicitly aimed at a young audience in the first place. The final two chapters of this thesis highlight the social and cultural processes that constructed the idea of race in the imaginations of children. These early experiences were crucial in shaping how children imagined both themselves and those defined as racially ‘other’.

Chapter Four illustrates how newspapers constructed the idea of race in content aimed at children. The world that was constructed for children in the stories and comic strips of their children’s pages was a source of danger and excitement. It was a world peopled with crude
stereotypes from within and outside Britain’s colonies. These images are open to less nuanced interpretation than those aimed at adults and were composed of a series of binary oppositions between black and white, civilised and savage, ancient and modern. These images encouraged children to imagine themselves as white, Protestant and British. The newspaper children’s column was remarkably resilient to change and imperial discourses on race that would have been familiar to readers in the Edwardian and Victorian era dominated their narratives. This chapter highlights the persistence of orientalist, imperial and non-imperial discourses on race and argues that the exposure of children to such discourses, in part explains their durability.

Chapter Five continues this discussion, focusing on the effect that childhood experiences had on the way that people imagined racial difference. This is explored through an analysis of directive responses from the 1939 Anti-Semitism directive in the Mass-Observation Archive. One of the questions in this directive asked observers where they had formed their first impressions of Jewish people. The responses provide a valuable insight into the variety of ways that people were encouraged to imagine racial difference both in the private and the public spheres. It also builds on the work of Chapter Four by exploring how people struggled to adapt their established ideas about racial difference in the face of their own personal experiences and developing political awareness.

This thesis demonstrates that a variety of publics engaged with the idea of race that was constructed in the interwar years. Discourses on race were varied, circulated in newspapers and disseminated in churches, schools, and entertainment venues. The British public was encouraged to imagine, not only those defined as racially ‘other’, but their own racial and national identity and the two were inexorably linked. This was constructed in opposition to both imperial and non-imperial ‘others’, but Empire still dominated expressions of national identity. Racial difference was a source of both fear and fascination, but ultimately to be white and British was imagined as a privilege and one that brought great responsibility. Upholding the values perceived to be inherent to the British race was deemed essential, not only for the good of the Empire, but also for the colonial peoples constructed as socially, racially and culturally inferior and in need of the guiding hand of British, specifically Christian leadership.
Chapter One
Race, Religion and Empire.

The role of religion in interwar British society has often been neglected by historians. Callum Brown argues that the secularization of British society has been dated earlier than it should and that it happened rapidly in the 1960s, triggered by women’s desertion of the Church.\(^1\) Brown’s work has stimulated the debate about the role of religion in the early decades of the twentieth century and historians have highlighted the continued centrality of religion to society in the 1920s and 1930s. Keith Robbins charts the response of the Christian churches to modernity after the First World War, and Charlotte Wildman illustrates the vibrancy of Catholic culture in interwar Manchester.\(^2\) Catherine Hall examines the role of missionaries in constructing racial identities in the nineteenth century, both at home and abroad.\(^3\) The role of religion in constructing and disseminating ideas about race in the 1920s and 1930s, however, has been neglected by historians.

This chapter examines how churches and church missions encouraged the public to imagine different peoples and places. It focuses on the Church of England and Protestant missions associated with the Church of England and nonconformist groups. This approach reflects the information gained from newspaper research and therefore press bias towards the Protestant and nonconformist churches. It also reflects the fact that, in the twentieth century, the Church of England was the dominant Christian church in England accounting for approximately sixty to seventy per cent of people of faith.\(^4\) The chapter uses evidence from the local and national press and mission archives to illustrate the role of churches and the clergy in the construction of discourses on race; this was not simply a process enacted by white church leaders and black and Asian voices are heard through the source material. Churches and missionary groups constructed imaginary worlds for the British public but they also facilitated encounters between people from different ethnic backgrounds, particularly in cities, thus they were instrumental in facilitating first-hand encounters of ethnic difference in interwar Britain. Churches negotiated this role during a period when tensions ran high in

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communities struggling to cope with the economic and social implications of the First World War.

The trauma of the First World War tested the faith of many Britons. Religious leaders were forced to assess the role of religion within an altered society and newspaper articles attest to the concerns these changes raised amongst members of the clergy.\(^5\) Amid calls for sport and recreational activities to be allowed by churches, one vicar lamented:

> It is now openly advocated that Sunday games and sports shall be held, so that the day will be in the future a day of pleasure and amusement rather than of rest and worship…Here already, with the vast majority of people, religion has been shunted to the evening services, and very soon it will be shunted out altogether.\(^6\)

In 1921, the *Manchester City News* reported on a sermon given by the Archbishop of York in which he distinguished between ‘The Old World and the New’.\(^7\) According to the paper, the Archbishop observed that people were ‘living in a world that had been shaken to the depths by the greatest war in history.’ In 1921 this world was ‘still staggering under the shock, and was restless and perplexed’. The results of this restlessness were perhaps most worrying for religious leaders. An article from the *Daily Mirror* addressed the question of why so many women felt alienated by religion as early as June 1919. Under the headline ‘Why women are leaving the Church’ it questioned the relevance of some of the Church of England’s doctrines to the modern world, especially with regard to women. For a generation of women bereaved by the war, the article argued, the Church was not a place that provided the comfort and advice that they needed.\(^8\) Nevertheless, the Church itself and religious iconography played a vital role in acts of remembrance in the interwar years. Churches became ‘sites of mourning’ and the clergy were called upon to speak on Armistice Day.\(^9\)

Church attendance was in decline but religious discourses were still an important part of social and cultural life.\(^10\) Notable members of the clergy had regular columns in national

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\(^6\) *Manchester Guardian*, 7th May 1919, p. 4.

\(^7\) *Manchester City News*, 4th June 1921, p. 4.

\(^8\) *Daily Mirror*, 12th June 1919, p. 7.

\(^9\) Robbins, *The Christian Church*, pp. 154-155. Jay Winter argues that traditional religious motifs were used to articulate the sense of loss felt after the war see J. Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 5.

newspapers and contributed their opinion on a variety of contemporary issues.\textsuperscript{11} They were also central to discourses on national identity circulated on days of increased national patriotism such as Empire Day. Churches were also instrumental in defining racial identities through engagement with different ethnic communities; this was particularly evident in the area of welfare provision. In the North-West the local press illustrates the importance of the clergy and church missions in the construction of discourses on race. The responses of religious leaders to the 1919 race riots provides a specific case study that illustrates how they attempted to reconcile spiritual messages with a commitment to Britain’s Empire and their own evangelising mission.

Britain’s imperial experiences are inextricably linked to religious discourses on race during this period as missionaries found themselves, whether they wanted to or not, caught up in the process of imperial expansion. They often had to defend the racial ‘other’ both at home and abroad against prejudice that directly threatened their aim of converting native populations to the Christian faith. Their concern to convert colonial populations to Christianity led church leaders to speak out when they felt that this project was being hampered by prejudice in Britain. Their experiences in the colonies were often brought to bear at home as they tried to educate their congregations about the importance of the Empire or the cultures and religions of the ‘native’ races. They were part of a process of imperial ‘knowledge gathering’ that maintained and strengthened the imperial enterprise.\textsuperscript{12} It is the way this experience affected racial discourses at home in Britain that is the main concern of this chapter; thus it builds on the work of historians such as Catherine Hall and John Mackenzie who have concentrated on the impact that the experience of empire had on British society.\textsuperscript{13} This chapter also highlights where eugenic discourses on race intersected imperial discourses on the subject.

The role of religion and specifically missionaries in Britain’s colonial expansion has been well documented. The historiography has favoured the nineteenth century as the heyday of the missionary and, with the exception of Jeffrey Cox and Andrew Porter, neglected the

\textsuperscript{11} In a city like Liverpool the clergy were particularly vocal on the subject of the social and moral conditions arising from the city’s slums. See for example the Rev. F. Samuels’ ‘Sidelights on Merseyside Slumdom’, \textit{Evening Express}, 17\textsuperscript{th} October 1921, p. 4.


early decades of the twentieth century. Some historians, notably Susan Thorne and Catherine Hall have emphasised the centrality of missions to the imperial enterprise. Others have asserted that the relationship between the Empire and missions was never so unambiguous. Whether through conscious participation or not, missionaries could not escape association with Britain’s imperial mission. This was true both in the colonies and in Britain, and inevitably affected the relationship between missionaries and colonial populations. Missionaries often found the racial hierarchies imbedded in the ideology of Empire a hindrance to their work as they tried to convince colonial populations to convert to a religion that was seen as part of the imperial ruling system.

While they varied as to the amount of weight given to biological theories of race, missionary and imperial discourses on race were inexorably linked. Susan Thorne, John Mackenzie and Keith Robbins have all observed that churches were important sites for the transmission of knowledge about other peoples and cultures, specifically those who lived in Britain’s overseas colonies. Yet the interplay between race, Empire and religion in the interwar period still awaits comprehensive examination. This chapter opens the investigation by exploring newspaper reports, the subject matter of which ranges from missionary activity that promoted the work of the missions in the colonies (specifically conversion) to religious observances on occasions such as Empire Day.

Newspapers are a useful source for understanding religious discourses on race, not least because they confirm that religious affairs and religious leaders were still an important part of social and cultural life in the 1920s and 1930s: in 1926 the Liverpool Echo introduced a new column titled ‘From Pulpit and Pew: Church Life and Personalities on Merseyside’. As if to highlight the fact that religious affairs were not just the concern of those within the clergy, this ‘Weekly “Echo” Causerie’ was penned by a ‘Layman’. By contrast, the national press tended to focus on addresses given at high profile meetings and conferences. Both the

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15 S. Thorne, Congregational Missions and the Making of an Imperial Culture in Nineteenth-Century England (Palo Alto, 1999); Hall, Civilising Subjects.
16 Porter, Religion versus Empire?, pp. 12-13. For more on the relationship between British missions and imperialism see B. Stanley, The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (Leicester, 1990), and Cox, The British Missionary Enterprise.
18 Porter, Religion versus Empire?, p. 283.
20 Liverpool Echo, February 1926.
local and national press provide ample evidence of the role played by churches in constructing the racial ‘other’ in the British imagination. Religious leaders played an important role in disseminating ideas about race but they also brought religion to bear in contemporary discussions about race and national identity. This is evident in the responses of religious leaders to the so-called race riots of 1919.

The 1919 ‘Race’ Riots

In 1919, a wave of riots took place in several British towns including Liverpool, Cardiff, Barry, Newport, London and Manchester. The rioting, in most cases, took place between the local white working-class population and a black population largely made up of men who had found work on British ships and subsequently settled in British cities. There are a variety of explanations that have been put forward to explain why these events took place at this time, and in specific locations. The primary explanation has been the resentment felt by many ex-servicemen about unemployment, especially in the merchant navy, and this anger, bolstered by deep-seated prejudices, was directed towards foreign workers who were accused of benefiting at the expense of white British workers; this accusation was vehemently denied by the foreign seamen themselves, many of whom had come from British colonies, who cited the role of imperial troops in the war and their rights as citizens of the British Empire in their defence.21 Public anxieties about interracial relationships, specifically between black men and white women, surfaced in newspaper reports on the riots.22

There has been extensive work on the riots that uses local and national press coverage of events to examine the central causes of the violence. Indeed, Michael Rowe notes that, due to the lack of government interest in these riots, newspapers are our best source of information.23 Newspapers covered events both at home and abroad as similar riots broke out across the Atlantic in New York, Chicago and Washington. Jacqueline Jenkinson’s study covers the events in the greatest detail and provides the clearest picture of how events unfolded across the country as she covers all the major riots while highlighting hitherto neglected sites of unrest such as more minor, but still significant, riots in Salford.24

The riots that took place in Liverpool in June 1919 were amongst the worst that year and led to the death of one man, a Bermudan named Charles Wooten, who drowned in the

21 Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury, 11th June 1919, p. 3.
24 J. Jenkinson, Black 1919: Riots, Racism and Resistance in Imperial Britain (Liverpool, 2009), p. 16.
Queen’s Dock after being pursued by a mob. Roy May and Robin Cohen, Michael Rowe and Andrea Murphy have written useful case studies of the Liverpool riots. The extent to which race was a factor in these so-called race riots has been contested. While Andrea Murphy argues that the role of racism is often played down, the causes of the riots were complex and racial prejudice was a subsidiary factor.

The government’s response to the riots was an unsuccessful policy of voluntary repatriation. Amidst the tension, there were those who recognised the damage these events could do to Britain’s reputation in the colonies and the threat that this posed to the imperial mission:

Some of the more sympathetic white public reactions to the plight of black people attacked during the riots also revealed a concern for the future of the imperial/colonial relationship. Perhaps predictably, white dominated Christian and humanitarian groups were prominent in expressing these sentiments.

In Liverpool, the relationship between Britain and its colonies was in fact a central theme in the clergy’s response to the riots. In June 1919, in the wake of the rioting that had taken place in the city earlier in the month, an anonymous ‘letter-to-the-editor’ sent to the Liverpool Daily Post asked, ‘What are the bishops, priests, and parsons about in this lamentable business, seeing that it is an important part of their mission to set forth that God “hath made of one blood all nations of the earth”?’ This demand underlines that the clergy were viewed, by some at least, as an important moral authority in times of social unrest.

The Rector of Halewood and the Bishop of Liverpool gave an official response to the riots in June 1919. On 27th June, the Weekly News printed a lengthy appeal from both men on the subject of racial prejudice. The Rector of Halewood reminded his audience, ‘let us try to prevent these coloured men from judging Christianity by what they have experienced at the hands of those who are utterly unworthy professors (if even they are professors)’. The Rector’s comments echo the frustrations of missionaries who, since the earliest clashes between missionary and imperial interests in Britain’s North American colonies, felt that the

26 A. Murphy, From the Empire to the Rialto: Racism and Reaction in Liverpool, 1918-1948 (Birkenhead, 1995), p. 45; Jenkinson, Black 1919, p. 27.
27 Rowe, ‘Sex, “Race” and Riot’, pp. 64-65.
behaviour of white settlers towards indigenous peoples made their efforts to convert much more difficult.\textsuperscript{31} The repetition of such sentiments with reference to events in Britain rather than the colonies highlights the importance of religious figures as intermediaries in encounters between different ethnic groups. This underlines their involvement in the construction of racial discourses, as they sought not only to better understand other peoples and cultures in order to facilitate conversion, but also to oppose racial prejudice that hampered their efforts to achieve it. The Rector’s comments were also overtly critical of Britain’s imperial policy; he implored readers to remember ‘how white men have forced themselves into other countries which did not want them’ and to ‘take good care not to force away from our land strangers who have much more right to be here- many of them even our fellow-subjects’.\textsuperscript{32}

By contrast, the Bishop of Liverpool’s response to the riots focused on the specific threat to empire imposed by such an outpouring of violence. He appealed on the grounds of upholding Christian values and preventing revenge attacks against white people in the colonies. He addressed the public on behalf of the Liverpool Diocesan Chapter opening with the statement that, ‘We appeal to them on the double ground of Christian teaching and Imperial obligation’. He began by condemning racial violence on the grounds of Christian teaching:

As Christians we are bound to remember that God is the Father of all men, whether white or coloured; that Christ died for all; that the Spirit of God strives with all; that we are all brethren, and all one in Christ Jesus. We are false to our faith and unworthy of our Christian name if we treat with injustice and cruelty those who have been reared under different skies and come of a different race to ourselves.\textsuperscript{33}

The Rector of Halewood was careful to stress that the violence had been directed against British citizens, largely eschewing the language of race, but the Bishop was not so reticent in deploying racial stereotypes:

As members of the British Empire, upon which the sun never sets, we are bound, for our own welfare and for the sake of our own kith and kin, to deal fairly and humanely with our fellow-subjects, and with those in whose countries our own people are at present living.

\textsuperscript{31} Porter, \textit{Religion versus Empire?}, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{32} Garston and Woolton Weekly News, 27\textsuperscript{th} June 1919, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{33} Garston and Woolton Weekly News, 27\textsuperscript{th} June 1919, p. 2. The Bishop’s appeal was also printed in the \textit{Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury}, 21\textsuperscript{st} June 1919, p. 4.
The stories of deeds of violence wrought in Liverpool circulate like wildfire through the world. They are told in every market and bazaar and exchange in Asia and in Africa. They rouse the worst passions of a hot-blooded race. They provoke reprisals. They will lead to the shedding of the blood of defenceless men and women of our own race.

Implicit in this statement is the duality of white civility versus native barbarism. The Bishop condemned the violence perpetrated by the white community while he simultaneously warned that they themselves, or at least their ‘own kith and kin’ in the colonies, would become victims if they provoked a race perceived as naturally violent. The reactions of both men display an acute awareness of the connections between colony and metropole and underline the centrality of churches and their leaders in mediating cultural encounters both at home and in the Empire.

A case study of the Liverpool riots does not only illustrate how economic and social issues manifested themselves in inter-community tensions. A closer focus on the response to the violence reveals important aspects of interwar society and culture. It is the press that provides the best source of information on the riots and responses to it. Through the medium of the newspaper the local clergy were able to bring their influence to bear on an issue that was discussed in terms of spiritual doctrine and contemporary politics. The anonymous plea to church leaders cited above highlights their continuing importance in non-religious affairs during the interwar years.

Religion still permeated most aspects of public life in this period, in an indirect way through addresses in the local newspaper, and directly, when members of the clergy attended important local and national events. In both cases religion was firmly located at the centre of discourses on race and national identity. This is especially evident in the celebration of Empire Day. This was a celebration of the British Empire that took place on 24 May each year from 1904 until 1958 when the title ‘Commonwealth Day’ was deemed more appropriate. Despite increasing political opposition to the event during the interwar years it remained an important means by which ordinary people connected with the Empire. Aside from schools and other public places, churches were important places where people could experience Empire Day and they marked the occasion through sermons designed to educate congregations about Britain’s imperial responsibilities. Jim English’s research attests to the commitment of the clergy of the ‘established church’ to support Empire Day through the

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preaching of appropriate sermons, and to the importance of newspapers, especially those owned by Lord Northcliffe, in the promotion of Empire Day.\textsuperscript{36}

**Churches, Missions and the Idea of Race**

The Empire Day celebrations were a regular annual event for both the local and the national press. On 26 May 1919, an article in *The Times* on the Empire Day celebrations stressed the importance of churches to the occasion, stating that, ‘throughout the country military parades and religious services expressed the pride felt in the soldiery of Empire and a thankfulness for the cessation of hostilities.’\textsuperscript{37} This description highlights the importance of religion, Empire and military service to expressions of national identity in the aftermath of the First World War.\textsuperscript{38}

On 28 May 1920, the *Garston and Woolton Weekly News* reported on a service that took place at Farnworth Parish Church. According to the paper, ‘The preacher pointed out the position of advantage that the possession of the Empire gave to the British people, and called upon his hearers to do their part in living up to the responsibilities entailed by those advantages.’\textsuperscript{39} The comment echoes the Bishop of Liverpool’s sentiments in the wake of the 1919 riots as it is the Empire that was heralded as both a source of pride and obligation—the congregation is encouraged to bear the ‘burden’ of Empire. In this statement, the public’s own destiny was linked inexorably to that of the Empire making it an essential element of British national identity.

The content of such sermons highlights that churches were important settings where ideas about national identity were disseminated to the public; on Empire Day their use was actively encouraged. A letter-to-the-editor penned by the treasurer of the Empire Movement, on the subject of Empire Day, suggested that, amongst other things, ‘a religious service of praise and thanksgiving for mercies received, held in church and chapel, and in some places out of doors, should form an essential feature of the celebrations.’\textsuperscript{40} The coverage that both local and national newspapers gave to Empire Day provides us, not only with evidence of the popularity of the event, but with evidence of the specific role played by churches in its celebration.

\textsuperscript{36} English, ‘Empire Day’, pp. 255-256.
\textsuperscript{37} *The Times*, 26\textsuperscript{st} May 1919, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{38} On the development of ideas about citizenship during the First World War see N.F. Gullace, *“The Blood of Our Sons”: Men, Women, and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship during the Great War* (Hampshire, 2004).
\textsuperscript{39} *Garston and Woolton Weekly News*, 28th May 1920, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{40} *The Times*, 19\textsuperscript{st} May 1920, p. 12.
Church involvement in an event specifically designed to celebrate the British Empire, underlines the role of religion in constructing ‘Britishness’ in the national imagination. It also confirms that churches were crucial settings for the construction of racial identities. Empire Day, for many, reinforced a sense of pride in the British Empire and in ‘the primacy and destiny of the Anglo-Saxon race’. It was also a day when people were encouraged to imagine their position in relation to the rest of the world. Missionaries were also involved in this task as they themselves acted as crucial intermediaries in cultural encounters both in the colonies and in Britain. Their fundraising and other public activities often involved the sharing of their experiences and impressions of the colonies with the British public. This information was dispensed to the public through a discourse that firmly bound churches and church missions to Empire and to imperial discourses on race.

Missionaries performed many tasks; in addition to their efforts at conversion they also took western medicine and education abroad. The process that Jeffrey Cox calls medical and educational institution-building reached its peak in the 1920s. While much of the historiography on missions focuses on the nineteenth century, it was the interwar years that saw the largest number of British missionaries sent abroad, an increasing number of whom were women. Just as the influence of missions abroad continued during the interwar years, they also sustained a presence at home in England and spread their message through exhibitions, demonstrations and campaigns in the national press (see Figure 1).

Figure One is an advertisement from The Times promoting the work of the Church Missionary Society. The advertisement appeals to the public for ‘Inquiries, Communications and Donations’ in language that links the idea of Christian sacrifice with the sacrifices of the First World War. It argues that evangelization is the only sure way to safeguard the newly won peace: ‘A definite effort for world evangelization...will be the greatest Peace Celebration that the nation can undertake.’ This piece exploits the language of duty and personal sacrifice central to acts of remembrance:

The most terrible of wars, after intense labour and sacrifice, at last bears fruit in a victorious peace. But this is not all. Men of action who have taken leading parts in the War and the Peace unite in declaring that sacrifice and devotion are needed now no less than in the War. There is still another harvest to be reaped.

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41 For more on the Church and national identity see Robbins, History, Religion and Identity, p. 85.
42 English, ‘Empire Day’, p. 249.
43 Cox, The British Missionary Enterprise, p. 218.
45 The Times, 2 July 1919.
46 The Times, 2 July 1919.
Religious iconography and language were central to acts of remembrance; this advertisement illustrates how the memory of the war was used to galvanize public support for missionary endeavours.

Missionaries played a crucial role in disseminating information about the colonies and their inhabitants to the British public. Much of the information that missionaries had about other peoples and cultures, and the images of them that they constructed for the British public, were based on their experience of living and working in Britain’s overseas colonies. The racial aspects of this knowledge varied and were often at odds with the pseudo-scientific theories permeating public discourses in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, missionaries reinforced ideas about racial difference through their engagement with colonial peoples.

Catherine Hall explores the link between missionaries and the construction of racial identities by examining the reciprocal relationship between colony and metropole. Through a study of the Baptist Mission in Birmingham and Jamaica, Hall notes that despite their

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47 On war memorials see Winter, Sites of Memory, pp. 78-93.
48 Thorne, Congregational Missions, p. 6.
opposition to slavery, missionaries reinforced racialised hierarchies through the production of their own particular stereotypes of African people.\textsuperscript{50} These stereotypes contrasted with those constructed by plantation owners but were none the less a product of Britain’s imperial enterprise. While plantation owners constructed the idea of, ‘Quashee-evasive, lazy, childlike and lacking judgement’, missionaries constructed ‘the black Christian man and woman’.\textsuperscript{51}

Andrew Porter notes that while ‘a general discourse of paternalistic benevolence’ characterised the missionary experience of colonial others, the principle of universality, central to the missionary belief in the possibility of conversion, allowed them to look beyond biological definitions of race.\textsuperscript{52} Susan Thorne agrees, noting that from the missionary point of view, ‘if character is biologically fixed, then conversion would be pointless.’\textsuperscript{53} Church leaders were alive to contemporary racial discourses. For some, concerns about the condition of the British population attracted them to the subject of eugenics with its theories of inherited characteristics and racial decline. The Bishop of Birmingham spoke to the Birmingham rotary club in 1925 on ‘the decay of civilisation’. He urged his audience to ‘listen to our eugenists and adopt measures which will improve the racial qualities of our own people.’\textsuperscript{54}

Perhaps the most notable religious figure to speak on this subject was the Anglican priest and Dean of St. Paul’s, William Ralph Inge. Also known as Dean Inge, he contributed articles to newspapers on a variety of subjects, including eugenics.\textsuperscript{55} Speaking to a packed hall at the Church Congress in October 1930, the Dean stated that ‘We believed to-day more than our grandfathers that the test of the welfare of a nation and of the value of its civilisation was not the extent of its territory or the volume of its trade but the kind of man and woman it produced.’\textsuperscript{56} He was careful to note that he was ‘not advocating any particular programme of racial hygiene’ and his comments focused on the ‘dwellers in the slums’ and ‘the mentally deficient’.\textsuperscript{57} These concerns parallel the original focus of the eugenics movement and illustrate the movement’s fears about the declining birth-rate amongst the middle and upper classes, and the comparatively high birth rate amongst those considered to be of the ‘lower

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{50} Hall, \textit{Civilising Subjects}, p. 97.
\bibitem{51} Hall, \textit{Civilising Subjects}, p. 108.
\bibitem{53} Thorne, ‘Religion and Empire at Home’, in Hall and Rose, eds, \textit{At Home with the Empire}, p. 158.
\bibitem{54} \textit{Manchester Guardian}, 6\textsuperscript{th} November 1925, p. 15.
\bibitem{56} \textit{Manchester Guardian}, 10\textsuperscript{th} October 1930, p. 6.
\bibitem{57} \textit{Manchester Guardian}, 10\textsuperscript{th} October 1930, p. 6.
\end{thebibliography}
orders’. 58 Although an adherence to eugenic theory did not necessarily entail a commitment to ideas of biological racial difference, the idea of race, be it of the British race or otherwise, was explicitly referenced by church leaders.

Eugenic discourses on race may not have fitted the missionary purpose but missionary discourses on race were often infused with a language and rhetoric that took for granted white, western superiority over other peoples and cultures. In the Duff Missionary Lecture of 1923, James Nicoll Ogilvie, a Scottish Minister, could extol the virtue of missionaries as ‘the Empire’s conscience’ and defenders of colonial populations against violence and oppression by colonists and the colonial government, while simultaneously dedicating a chapter to the ‘civilising work of missions among the child-races of the Empire’. 59 His comments highlight one of the contradictions inherent to missionary discourses on race as on the one hand they sought to distance themselves from the racial prejudice evident in the colonies and in Britain, while on the other they could not quite escape the fact of their involvement in the Empire and their link to established colonial discourses on race. Individual missionaries may have differed in their views on imperial policy, but their overall attitude towards colonial subjects was an inevitable consequence of prevailing notions of race and Empire. As Jeffrey Cox observes, ‘British missionaries entered a world beyond the boundaries of Britain where the social and racial superiority of the people of Britain over non-Western peoples was treated as axiomatic.’ 60

To missionaries, their key responsibility was to convert non-Christians to the faith. As Bishop Frodsham informed his audience at the University of Cambridge in 1919, ‘The function of the Church was not to reproduce Europe in Asia or in Africa, but to establish the Kingdom of God.’ 61 In order to do this effectively, missionaries attempted to understand the different cultures and religions that they encountered. Tony Ballantyne notes that ‘knowledge gathering’ was central to the imperial project because, as Edward Said explains, imperial power was built on a foundation of acquired and assumed knowledge about other peoples and cultures. 62 Jeffrey Cox states the importance of applying Said’s arguments to the relationship between missionaries and colonial peoples:

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60 Cox, The British Missionary Enterprise, p. 12.
62 Ballantyne, Orientalism and Race, p. 9; Said, Orientalism.
much of what he (Said) says about the nature of western perceptions of the non-western world in the age of imperialism, and the distortions of western scholarship created by the imperial context in which it was developed, is directly relevant to the understanding of British missions.63

Knowledge of other peoples and religions was seen as an important asset in order to achieve the aim of converting colonial peoples to Christianity. This was often discussed in terms of understanding the ‘colonial mind’.

In November 1920, at a meeting of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, Lord Lamington who had been both Governor of Queensland and of Bombay argued that it was possible to convert the Indian population to Christianity if only missionaries were prepared to better understand the existing culture of the people they were trying to influence. Reporting on the event, the Manchester Guardian observed that he:

did not think it would have been possible for the Empire to have been built up had it not been for missionary zeal…in India there were tremendous possibilities for the missionary if he took pains first of all to understand the mind of the Indian and then tried to imbue him with the greater beauty and truths of Christianity.64

The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts was founded in June 1701 to facilitate the provision of religious teaching for both settlers and natives in Britain’s North American colonies.65 Its continued efforts to convert colonial people in the interwar period highlights the long-standing relationship between missionaries and Empire and the critical impact of this relationship on their idea of race. According to Lord Lamington, with the right amount of knowledge missionaries could change the way Indian people thought about their own culture and turn them away from their own religion. That this placed the people attending the Society’s meeting in an extraordinary position of power underlines the fact that missionaries were embroiled in a discourse of domination in relation to colonial peoples.

For missionaries, the lack of knowledge and understanding that characterised many policies in the colonies was a source of great anxiety and the Manchester Guardian in particular reported across the period on the concerns of church leaders that racial prejudice in the colonies was undermining the efforts of missionaries as well as breeding ‘native’ resentment that may lead to future conflict; headlines such as ‘The Colour Clash’ and ‘Race

63 Cox, The British Missionary Enterprise, p. 6.
64 Manchester Guardian, 30th November 1920, p. 16.
Divisions’ introduced reports on speeches given at various conferences across the country. In January 1929 the headmaster of Liverpool College, Rev. R.W. Howard spoke at a missionary conference on ‘The Clash of Colour’; the *Liverpool Daily Post* converted this into the headline ‘Black and White War’? These speeches acknowledged the increasing demands amongst colonial peoples for political rights and warned of the threat to the Empire if colonial peoples were treated unfairly. As the Bishop of Salisbury warned the Chester Diocesan Conference in 1925, ‘The Church had to face a tremendous problem in Asia, India, and Africa, and other countries consequent upon the desire of native races to enjoy equality with their white brothers.’ The imposition of a ‘Colour Bar’ was a specific concern both at home and abroad. In May 1927 the *Guardian* reported on the ‘Colour Ban’ in Edinburgh that prevented ‘men of colour’ from entering ‘certain dance halls in the city’. The Rev. Dr. Drummond described it as ‘the blot that had been put upon Edinburgh.’ Just one month later the paper reported on a speech given by the Rev. George Ayre at the Primitive Methodist Conference in Leicester in which he criticised the South African Colour Bar Bill.

The rhetoric of ‘universal brotherhood’ was important in debates about ‘native rights’ just as it was central to religious responses to social problems at home (see the responses to the 1919 riots at the beginning of this chapter). The clergy were important intermediaries in cross-cultural encounters both at home and abroad and they used this role to assert their opinions on international affairs. In October 1929 a conference of the Manchester and Salford Brotherhood Federation met to discuss ‘how best to promote world-wide good-will’. The conference was presided over by the Rev. H Allen Job and included speakers from Armenia, Africa, India and China. This spirit of internationalism promoted tolerance but not necessarily equality. Eugenic concerns about the condition of the British population also manifested themselves in these discussions as growing colonial populations fuelled fears that the British race was in decline and ‘coloured races’ in the ascendancy.

In a meeting on the 1st March 1926, the Rev. Henry Carter addressed an audience on the question of the survival of the ‘white race’. In language that evoked both ideas of Christian duty and national responsibility, the Rev. Carter stated:

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71 *Manchester Guardian*, 14th October 1929, p. 11.
72 *Manchester Guardian*, 1st March 1926, p. 11.
The world was not made for white people; it was made for mankind...What the white races should realise was that upon them rested a peculiar responsibility, because of their large share in the broadening of human knowledge. What needed to be said was not that white men feared black men, or brown men, or yellow men, but that white men had a tremendous responsibility towards these others.\textsuperscript{73}

The paternalistic language of responsibility used by the Rev. Carter was typical of religious discourses on race and paralleled that used at Empire Day services. It was a language that was suggestive of internationalism and was particularly evocative of the League of Nations Union. The League raised ‘the issue of a statement on the League in connection with Armistice Day or Empire Day celebrations’ with Local Education Authorities and churches also worked with the League of Nations Union to promote ‘international friendship’.\textsuperscript{74} This relationship underlines how national events maintained links with Britain’s past, promoting pride in Empire for example, while simultaneously responding to contemporary discourses on pacifism and international co-operation. That churches made a major contribution to these discourses highlights their role in both domestic and international affairs.

Aside from the language of Christian responsibility, religious discourses on race constructed a series of dualities between black and white, British and native and Christian and non-Christian. Newspapers contributed to this narrative through the language used in their reports. Accounts of missionary activities overseas were described in terms of these binary distinctions. In an article that celebrated the career of the missionary Dr. John G. Paton, the \textit{Manchester City News} described this ‘missionary to the cannibals’ as a fearless Christian who travelled to the New Hebrides in order to convert the native population. The reader was informed that previous missionaries had been killed and eaten by the inhabitants and that Paton volunteered in spite of this ‘to carry the Gospel to the murderers’.\textsuperscript{75} Paton and his wife are described as self-sacrificing (his wife died of malaria) in contrast to the native inhabitants who are likened to wild animals. It was through such binary oppositions as civilised/savage that British people were encouraged to imagine their relationship with the rest of the world.

This narrative on race was perpetuated in missionary exhibitions. Newspaper reports on conferences and meetings illustrate how churches disseminated ideas to particular audiences and the missionary exhibition was by far the preferred method of reaching the

\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Manchester Guardian}, 1\textsuperscript{st} March 1926, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Manchester City News}, 17\textsuperscript{th} May 1924, p. 5.
wider public. These took place in local venues and were advertised in the local and national press. One example from *the Garston and Woolton Weekly News* is typical of the content of these exhibitions:

Under the auspices of the Church Missionary Society a week’s exhibition dealing with Africa and the East was opened in the Parochial Hall on Monday afternoon by the Bishop of Warrington. The exhibition was efficiently organised by the members of the combined parishes and the objects are to instruct the Church at home as to the needs of the heathen and Mohammedan nations and the triumphs of Christ’s kingdom throughout the world...there are a series of courts showing life and customs in Palestine, Uganda, West Africa, India, China, and Japan.\textsuperscript{76}

The Church Missionary Society was founded in 1799 and went on to build missions all over the world.\textsuperscript{77} It was well versed in self-promotion and, as Thomas Beidelman notes, it ‘pioneered in mission propaganda at home.’\textsuperscript{78} The idea of the ‘courts’ used in this local exhibition, representing foreign places and peoples, was not unlike those that would be the cornerstone of the British Empire Exhibition in 1924. At Wembley the public were invited to ‘tour’ Britain’s colonies and dominions and were confronted with human exhibits designed to educate and entertain.\textsuperscript{79}

In many ways the Empire Exhibition replicated the model of the missionary exhibition on a much larger scale. The dissemination of knowledge in this way was a familiar feature in provincial exhibitions. In February 1924 for example, the *Manchester Guardian* noted that a series of exhibitions had been held in Manchester and Salford during the winter of that year.\textsuperscript{80} In July 1924 a missionary exhibition was held in Whalley Range entitled ‘Isles of the Sea’. The public was educated about the work of the missionaries in ‘Madagascar, New Guinea, and the South Seas’ though ‘a series of scenes of native life, examples of native arts and crafts, tableaux, pageant plays and native games.’\textsuperscript{81} In May 1927, the Bishop of Hulme opened a missionary exhibition in Fallowfield, Manchester that included ‘different “courts”’ and ‘illuminative kinema displays’.\textsuperscript{82}

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\textsuperscript{76} *Garston and Woolton Weekly News*, 28\textsuperscript{th} October 1921, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{78} Beidelman, *Colonial Evangelism*, p. 49.
\textsuperscript{79} S. Britton, “‘Come and see the Empire by the All Red Route!’: Anti-Imperialism and Exhibitions in Interwar Britain’, *History Workshop Journal* 69, 1 (2010), p. 70.
\textsuperscript{80} *Manchester Guardian*, 4\textsuperscript{th} February 1924, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{81} *Manchester City News*, 5\textsuperscript{th} July 1924, p. 14.
\textsuperscript{82} *Manchester Guardian*, 26\textsuperscript{th} May 1927, p. 13.
Missionary societies had become adept at appealing to the public in order to promote their work. They also actively encouraged children’s involvement in the missionary cause (see Figure 2). The minutes of the Altrincham Methodist Circuit’s Juvenile Missionary Committee illustrate attempts to engage with popular culture. During a discussion of their annual demonstration it was suggested that ‘the possibility of providing a missionary film instead of lantern slides during the interval between the tea and meeting should be enquired into.’

In 1936 it was suggested that ‘juvenile collectors and other scholars’ should be shown

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the film *Zambezi Days* and this was indeed purchased from the Religious Film Society at a fee of 10/6.\(^{84}\) A similar event was reported some months later by the local press and it was noted that the Rev. J.L. Matthews, ‘a missionary from Northern Rhodesia’ presented the film in which he himself starred. The film showed ‘scenes of a journey into the interior of Africa, life in an African village and the impact of Christianity upon the natives.’\(^{85}\) It is possible that this was the same event or that the film itself was shown at more than one occasion. In either case the use of film highlights how churches sought to engage with popular culture in an effort to promote their work.

One particular event that took place in Liverpool highlights this even more starkly. The ‘Palestine’ Exhibition took place across at least three weeks in May 1921 at Liverpool’s Philharmonic Hall. It combined various displays with lectures and attracted many visitors.\(^{86}\) The *Liverpool Echo* described the occasion in glowing terms; ‘one of the finest exhibitions presented in our city, it has both a material and a spiritual interest which appeals for all tastes’.\(^{87}\) Appealing to people’s material interests, the exhibition was able to promote its activities in Palestine. This involved the conversion of the Jewish population there to Christianity and this aim was stated in no uncertain terms by the Bishop of Warrington when he visited the exhibition. Dr Kempson asserted that this was ‘the most difficult piece of evangelisation the Church had to face’.\(^{88}\) He went on to state that:

Those difficulties were largely of Christians’ own making. The ill-treatment which the Jews had received from the hands of the Christians in almost every country in Europe had had a most disastrous effect. They were branded into the memory of the Jewish people. For that reason those engaged in the promotion of Christianity among the Jews must be very patient and sympathetic, hoping and believing that in God’s own time the Jews would become followers of Jesus Christ and acknowledge Him as their Lord and rightful King.

The *Echo* does not describe this event as a missionary exhibition although its format and the attendance and statement given by the Bishop of Warrington suggest its provenance. It is notable that the newspaper reported on the event more than once, on one occasion in its entertainment column. This description focused on the ‘material’ elements of the event:

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\(^{84}\) Altrincham Circuit, Circuit Missionary Secretaries’ Book, 1936, Greater Manchester County Record Office, C18/1/5/3/1.

\(^{85}\) *Manchester City News*, 6\(^{th}\) November 1936, p. 4.

\(^{86}\) *Liverpool Echo*, 17\(^{th}\) May 1921, p. 3.

\(^{87}\) *Liverpool Echo*, 30\(^{th}\) May 1921, p. 6.

\(^{88}\) *Liverpool Echo*, 19\(^{th}\) May 1921, p. 8.
One is transported straight away into another country when one enters the Philharmonic Hall Exhibition of Palestine in Liverpool. The representations of Jerusalem, as our Tommies saw it and many interesting biblical scenes are brought realistically before the interested visitor while the quaint customs or corn grinding, drawing water in Eastern fashion, quaint groups of women arrayed in Eastern fashion with a scribe and a Bedouin or two get undivided attention.\footnote{Liverpool Echo, 13th May 1921, p. 7.}

The ‘East’ that is imagined in this description is not only of interest in its own right, but also as a place that ‘our Tommies’ experienced. This review exploits the memory of the war and uses it as an added inducement to the public. This underlines how religious iconography and the act of remembrance interacted in public discourses. The use of the phrase ‘our Tommies’ suggests that the intended audience for this exhibition shared a social and cultural experience; that of the war and its aftermath. The ‘Tommy’ was a British soldier, thus the audience is assumed to be British.

There was a report in the Manchester City News of an impending ‘Palestine Exhibition’ in July 1923 although it is unclear whether it was the same event as that held in Liverpool; it seems likely that it was. Despite the apparent popularity of this event, its message did not go uncontested. A Mr Henry B. Hayes of St. Saviour’s Rectory, Chorlton-upon-Medlock, wrote to the City News upon learning about the upcoming exhibition:

I do feel that before Manchester people are definitely asked to support this exhibition, it should be made perfectly clear that this effort has no connection, direct or indirect, with any movement that has for its object proselytism (sic) among the Jews, whether at home or abroad.\footnote{Manchester City News, 14th July 1923, p. 8.}

Mr Hayes went on speak on behalf of Manchester’s Jewish community, noting their contribution to the religious life of the city:

No one who has lived any length of time in this city can be unaware of the high principles, philanthropy and religious spirit of the Manchester Jewish community, and it is in the interests of vital religion that the Christian Churches should recognise their many obligations to Judaism and the various points of contact that exist between that religion and Christianity.
This response highlights that there was more than one voice within the church community when it came to the evangelising mission and that at least one member of the public believed that churches should be reminded of their responsibility to local communities. Missionaries were not allowed to simply speak on behalf of people from different ethnic backgrounds and their success in promoting Christianity abroad meant that black and Asian Christians could disseminate their own views to the British public.

Churches and missionary societies did facilitate encounters between people from different ethnic backgrounds and also provided a platform for black and Asian clergy and church members to express their own faith. In this context, missionary exhibitions were essential in order to raise public awareness and thus funds for missionary activities. The process of transmitting knowledge to the general public often took place within church. The church building and the services held within them provided a setting where many people could meet those from different ethnic backgrounds, perhaps for the first time. On 14th October 1932, the Weekly News reported the following:

Practically every seat was occupied in St. Paul’s Methodist Church, Runcorn, on Tuesday night, when Miss Alyce Fraser, the well-known West Indian soprano, provided a unique programme…An interesting programme, mainly of negro spirituals and folk songs, was greatly enjoyed, the whole of Miss Fraser’s contributions being thoroughly appreciated…During the evening a collection was taken on behalf of the women’s department of the missionary society.\(^91\)

Callum Brown notes that there was a ‘mellowing’ of religion during the interwar years and that it became increasingly receptive to popular culture; this is evident here.\(^92\) The ‘negro spiritual’ was a common feature of minstrel shows and other entertainment acts that appeared at the music-halls of the period. Their religious content was particularly appropriate given the setting.

The example of Alyce Fraser reminds us that reciprocal relationships often developed out of the missionary experience. While missionaries were an important part of the imperial enterprise and thus in a position of power with regard to local populations in the colonial setting, there was active cooperation between missionaries and colonial peoples; ‘native agents’ converted to Christianity and took up the missionary cause themselves.\(^93\) It was not always white British clergy members who preached to non-white populations. Black and

\(^91\) Garston and Woolton Weekly News, 14th October 1932, p. 5.
\(^92\) Brown, Religion and Society, pp. 139-141.
\(^93\) Porter, Religion versus Empire?, pp. 163-165.
Asian ministers travelled to Britain to inform congregations about their role in spreading Christianity abroad. In May 1920 the Liverpool Daily Post reported on the visit of Dr. Azariah, an Indian Bishop, to the city: ‘Dr. Azariah…who is to be one of the principal speakers at the Church Missionary Society’s centenary meeting at the Philharmonic Hall, tonight, gave some account of the work of the society in South India, in the course of his sermon at St. Bride’s Church, yesterday morning.’\(^{94}\)

A key black figure in religious and philanthropic networks was the Jamaican Harold Arundel Moody. Moody came to Britain in 1904 to study medicine at King’s College London and he is perhaps best known for his leadership role within the League of Coloured Peoples (founded in 1931).\(^{95}\) In 1921 Moody was elected to the chair of the Colonial Missionary Society’s board of directors and in 1931 he was elected president of the London Christian Endeavour Federation. Moody used his contacts to help black people fight the colour bar and the prominent positions that he held in religious networks emphasise that black people could work within these networks to represent themselves and speak on issues that were important to the black community.\(^{96}\) Harold Moody was a national figure but there were also those who worked at the local level to ameliorate the living conditions of their communities, both black and white.

It was not uncommon for mission halls to be used for philanthropic purposes. In 1928, for example, the Manchester Guardian reported on the anniversary celebrations of The Coloured Men’s Institute at Victoria Docks, London: ‘The large mission hall was crowded with white people, coloured people, and intermediates.’\(^{97}\) Large city missions were faced with diverse communities often united by common problems such as unemployment. When these communities clashed it could result in violence like that witnessed in the summer of 1919; when they came together it was often in spaces provided by churches and missionary groups.

In Liverpool, one of the main ways that the church came into contact with the city’s different ethnic communities was through the distribution of welfare. This allowed churches to function as places where the city’s diverse communities could encounter one another and resulted in the construction of specific ethnic identities; charitable activities not only illustrate how this influence extended beyond the pulpit, but also underline the far-reaching implications for the question of race and racial identities. An investigation of the situation in

\(^{94}\) Liverpool Daily Post, 10\(^{th}\) May 1920, p. 9.
\(^{96}\) Fryer, Staying Power, p. 327.
\(^{97}\) Manchester Guardian, 29\(^{th}\) February 1928, p. 6.
Liverpool adds another dimension to our understanding of this subject as city-based missions situated in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods became places where both the established local population and new arrivals to the area could congregate to worship and receive much needed welfare support.

The case of Pastor Daniels Ekarte and the African Churches Mission exemplifies how places of worship acted as spaces where people from different ethnic backgrounds could interact with one another. It was not only white missionaries who facilitated this. The Reverend G. Daniels Ekarte was a Nigerian preacher who, while in Nigeria, had been a student of the Scottish Presbyterian missionary Mary Slessor. He set up the African Churches Mission (ACM) in 1931 in the Toxteth area of Liverpool. As well as a place to worship, the ACM acted as ‘the local centre for those in need’, sheltering wives and children from violent husbands, and offering free meals to the destitute. The life of Pastor Daniels highlights the fact that some black people did actively define their own identity and the identity of their communities in direct contrast with the images constructed of black people through religious discourse on race; Daniels was particularly hostile to the paternalistic attitudes often displayed by the Liverpool Methodist Mission.

The Liverpool Methodist Mission supported the African and West Indian Mission (AWIM). Pastor Daniels’ Mission took an egalitarian approach to its work but the AWIM indirectly played an active role in constructing negative ideas and stereotypes of the people they were trying to help. Carlton E. Wilson’s research into African welfare networks in Liverpool compares the approach of the AWIM with the values of the ACM, run by Ekarte. Wilson highlights the negative portrayal of black immigrants by the AWIM, who constructed an image of them as an economic and social problem in contrast with the ACM that took a more positive approach. By contrast, the ACM’s beliefs were rooted in the idea of racial equality. Through the distribution of welfare therefore, Liverpool’s missions played an active role in constructing racial and ethnic identities.

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100 Sherwood, *Pastor Daniels*, p. 34.
102 Wilson, ‘Racism and Private Assistance’, pp. 55-76.
In her study of the Mission, Marika Sherwood uses oral testimony to recreate the life of Pastor Daniels and the work of the ACM. One such testimony comes from a Mr Dave Young who remembered how, in the 1940s, the Mission was an ‘open house, the door never shut, anyone was welcomed, colour of skin made no difference’. While this is a memory of life in the 1940s, it is reasonable to assume that the ethos of the mission would not have been drastically different between the wars. Marika Sherwood describes the area around the African Churches Mission as ‘multi-racial, multi-ethnic and multi-faith’. A Liverpool Daily Post reporter, who visited the Mission in 1932, noted that amongst the congregation were ‘Several white people among the Africans’. Sherwood’s research illustrates that it was commonplace for community boundaries to be crossed, especially by those such as Pastor Daniels seeking to promote racial harmony. Pastor Daniels himself remembered, ‘holding services in private rooms and in the open air…All sorts of people listening, Chinese, Arabs, Africans like myself.’

Religious discourses on race were influenced by experiences both at home and abroad. While missionaries in the colonies focused on conversion, church leaders at home had to contend with the effects of unemployment and immigration and the subsequent tensions heightened by prejudice. The way in which churches disseminated their views on race also depended on the social setting in which they were working. Here there has to be a distinction made between city-based missions and suburban churches as the needs of individual communities varied widely. The approach of church missions to African and West Indian immigrants focused on short-term needs while the knowledge that was dispensed to church congregations outside the city centred on their experience of the colonies and with the long-term view of securing the future success of the imperial enterprise and their own role within it.

Edward Said’s theory of orientalism is central to understanding the role of missionaries in the process of colonial ‘knowledge gathering’; church missions were contributing to a discourse of domination that characterised European encounters with ‘the other’. Nevertheless, the construction of the idea of race was not a one-way process. The British public were not simply confronted with the views of white missionaries and city missions had to be alive to the issues affecting their local communities whatever their ethnic background.

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104 Sherwood, Pastor Daniels, p. 34.  
105 Sherwood, Pastor Daniels, p. 31.  
106 Sherwood, Pastor Daniels, p. 29.  
107 Sherwood, Pastor Daniels, p. 25.
Churches in interwar Britain were not only places of worship that people attended to be reaffirmed in their faith. During national events such as Empire Day, sermons were preached on the subject of imperial responsibility that promoted a notion of national identity firmly linked to the British Empire. Even when church leaders attempted to quell the flames of racial prejudice, they conveyed a paternalistic message that reinforced racialised hierarchies, as they appealed to the public on the grounds of religion and Empire to take the moral high ground to avoid disrupting imperial boundaries and hindering the process of conversion. Their chief aim was to convert people and the urgency with which they set about doing this was rooted in the theological belief that they had to be saved from a certain eternity in hell. This meant that there could not be an equal relationship between missionaries and colonial peoples as from a cultural and religious point of view they believed them to be inferior. Whatever their views on race or Empire, missionaries acted as ‘agents of cultural communication’. They articulated information and ideas about the foreign ‘other’ to English audiences through sermons and exhibitions that were as imbued with notions of racial difference in the interwar years as they had been during the nineteenth century. Church leaders and missionaries succumbed to what Andrew Porter, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, terms ‘paternalistic benevolence’. People from different ethnic backgrounds were constructed as culturally inferior and in need of civilising through the process of conversion. In Liverpool, the distribution of welfare allowed church missions, with the exception of Pastor Daniels’ ACM, run by a black man, to construct an image of the African and West Indian population as a social and economic burden.

Although there were ‘agents’ of missionary groups who were of different ethnic backgrounds, newspaper evidence suggests that they were the exception rather than the rule. The individual sermons or meetings addressed by these figures could not compare with the impact of national events such as Empire Day that included large proportions of the population. The durability of the missionary exhibition across the interwar period also indicates that older, Victorian concepts of racial difference were still firmly fixed in the national imagination. Paradoxically, these exhibitions were supposed to promote cultural awareness, when in fact they were part of a cultural process that reinforced dominant ideas

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108 Porter, Religion versus Empire?, p. 166.
111 Wilson, ‘Racism and Private Assistance’, pp. 55-76.
about the innate superiority of the white race and its responsibility towards those who were perceived as culturally and racially inferior.

Churches and missions were instrumental in the construction of racial discourses during the interwar years. By exploring the role of religion in the construction of racial discourses, we gain a valuable insight into what people understood about the concept of race in the 1920s and 1930s, who provided them with this information, and the methods that were employed to ‘educate’ them about different peoples and cultures. This was largely a process that took place in the imagination as missionary exhibitions constructed miniature worlds for the amusement and education of the public. But it also took the form of first-hand experiences as the setting of the church enabled cultural encounters to take place, be it through sermons, entertainments or the distribution of welfare.

While church attendance figures may have started to decline, religion still had a considerable impact on the social and cultural life of Britain during this period. Churches fostered a strong sense of national identity during the interwar years; the dominance of the Church of England in the construction of this identity reminds us of the fact that this nation was Protestant. The Christian religion was constructed as incompatible with other religions such as Judaism. In the colonies, conversion was believed to confer at least some of the benefits of ‘civilization’ to Britain’s colonial subjects, a notion that further highlights how British people were encouraged to imagine their religion and ethnicity as synonymous and superior to those of other peoples.

Missionary exhibitions underline how the public’s fascination with exotic peoples and places could be exploited in order to raise awareness of the work of various missionary societies. It also highlights that the British public were fascinated by different peoples and places; difference was a commodity that could be exploited for a variety of purposes. The following two chapters examine how the idea of race was constructed through the popular entertainments of the 1920s and 1930s.
Chapter Two
Orientalism in Popular Entertainments between the Wars.

On 31st May 1920, the *Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury* published an article by the writer and journalist Sir Philip Gibbs detailing life in Constantinople. Using both literary and theatrical references, Sir Philip described a cosmopolitan city where ‘strangers from the West brush shoulders with newcomers from the East’:

I have seen nothing so like a coloured cinematograph drama as this life in Constantinople, where the Turk is protesting against the terms of peace and punishment after his disastrous war. It is as (sic) Hugh Griffith, the “Movie King” had arranged a great spectacular show, and had let his imagination run away with him in his desire to crowd his screen with all possible types of humanity, and all possible contrasts of the Eastern and Western worlds.

The influence of theatrical orientalism is evident in the narrative and Sir Philip depicted scenes using familiar orientalist frames of reference:

The aroma of old carpets, spices, coffee, and a thousand other indefinable smells touches one’s senses, not unpleasantly, and in the twilight one sees the Turkish merchants sitting among their tapestries and rugs, like characters in an Eastern play, waiting for Oscar Asche and Lily Brayton to come upon the stage.

For Sir Philip, Constantinople provided an array of images that were readily translated to people at home by referring to familiar theatrical images of the Orient. When describing the bazaars, for example, he noted that, ‘one feels at first like Aladdin, who holds the genii’s lamp at the entrance of the enchanted cave.’ While describing one specific evening listening to the Muslim call to prayer, Sir Philip utilises a common orientalist trope that emphasises the differences between the perceived modernity of the West and the ancient spirituality of the East: ‘there was something which stirred one with a sense of things spiritual in that call through the starry sky above the moon-lit world.’ Symbolically, he noted that ‘the gramophone, with its music of the West, was silenced’. There is a clear distinction made between East and West in this piece: ‘the voice of the East, so old, so strange to Western ears, so full of mystery, calls across the housetops of Constantinople at dusk and dawn, and the

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Europeans listen sometimes to the calling with a sense of its uncanny contrast to their way of life.\(^2\)

Sir Philip Gibbs was a writer and journalist whose newspaper career began at the *Daily Mail* in 1902. In 1915 he was dispatched to the battlefields of France where he was to become famed as a war correspondent. Sir Philip’s comments on life in Constantinople reflect a literary style influenced by journalistic practice and they encapsulate the central problem of this chapter. The East that Sir Philip described is one totally at odds with western modernity. It is the orientalist’s East in every sense of the term. Not only are the sights and sounds of Constantinople described using classic orientalist tropes, ancient versus modern for example, an imagined East, constructed on the British stage is actually invoked to describe the city; the actors Oscar Asche and Lily Brayton were synonymous with the orientalist productions of the period. The article illustrates how existing imaginative ideas about other peoples and places informed actual lived experiences and underlines the popularity of orientalist themes; it is reasonable to expect that an experienced writer such as Sir Philip would have chosen a style that he knew would appeal to readers.

Orientalist language and imagery permeated the social and cultural life of interwar Britain. Shop displays, advertising, fashion, novels and newspapers constructed fantasies of the Orient that took hold of the British imagination and provided the public with some of its most enduring ideas about race. The impact of orientalism on various aspects of British social, cultural and political life has been the subject of many studies since the publication of Edward Said’s work in 1978. Rana Kabbani examines its influence in art and Edward Ziter explores its impact in Victorian theatre.\(^3\) Its impact has also been traced in the context of commercial spaces, music and imperial administration.\(^4\)

As the introduction to this thesis explained, Said’s theory of orientalism has been much debated since the publication of his book. Some of his more vociferous critics are Bernard Lewis, Robert Irwin and John Mackenzie, who all reject Said’s argument.\(^5\) For John Mackenzie it is the rigid binary that Said’s thesis imposes between ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ that is

\(^2\) *Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury*, 31 May 1920, p. 4.


particularly unpalatable. Mackenzie argues in *History, Theory and the Arts*, that ‘orientalism was but one of a whole sequence of perceived or invented traditions invoked by the restless arts’ and challenges Said’s assertion that orientalism and imperialism were parallel processes.

Mica Nava’s work argues for a reassessment of orientalism, particularly its commercial manifestations, as a reflection of ‘the cosmopolitan aspirations of popular English modernity.’ Nava distinguishes between ‘the exoticising imagination and the more authoritarian colonising imagination’. The ‘exoticising imagination’ was constructed on positive ideas about the ‘other’; what Nava terms ‘the allure of difference.’ Nava’s argument is particularly relevant to part of this chapter as it focuses on how orientalist entertainments constructed an image of the East that was both erotic and exotic, based on desire as much as fear of the ‘other’. Nava’s theory of cosmopolitanism is useful but it is important not to exclude the other side of orientalism from this analysis. Orientalist entertainments also perpetuated stereotypes that trivialised the culture of a large part of the world and its peoples. These stereotypes were only positive where they satisfied western fantasies and more often they were not, contributing to notions such as ‘eastern despotism’ and ‘oriental villainy’.

Mackenzie’s argument focuses on this tension between fear and desire. He explores the ‘high arts’ where he states ‘the effects of the depiction and adaptation of the Orient were powerful and positive’ in contrast to the stereotypical characters often presented in popular culture. In orientalist discourses the East was a place of danger and excitement and the exotic other was something both to be desired and feared; this ‘striking duality’ that Mackenzie observes, between positive and negative representations, was not just apparent between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture, it was also present within popular productions. Theatre reviews in particular perpetuated this discourse as their descriptions of popular entertainments highlighted the dichotomy between exoticism and barbarism that defined the orientalist’s East. The Orient was portrayed as a dangerous place that would lead to the downfall of unsuspecting westerners, particularly if they were to transgress racial boundaries.

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10 Nava, *Visceral Cosmopolitanism*, p. 21.
and enter into relationships with the racial ‘other’. It was also an appealing place for audiences to transport themselves, an exotic escape that reflected ‘another side of Self waiting to be released from repression or financial and social constraint’.

One of MacKenzie’s criticisms of the debate surrounding orientalism in the arts is, ‘that it tends to be given a privileged alterity: it is viewed as the single Other against which Europe was constantly setting itself.’ This is a direct challenge to Said’s argument that the Orient is ‘the place of Europe’s greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other’. Mackenzie’s qualification is important, yet his argument is not sufficient to explain the endurance of the Orient as a setting for theatrical productions, nor its continued popularity into the twentieth century. Said argues that ‘European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self.’ This argument could be applied to orientalism as it appeared on the stage, as a whole tradition of popular music and theatre was inspired by European ideas about and fantasies of the East. The escapist element in orientalist productions was predicated on the fact that the Orient was portrayed as a place of glamour and mystery, far removed from people’s everyday lives. As Rana Kabbani notes, ‘Europe was charmed by an Orient that shimmered with possibilities, that promised a sexual space, a voyage away from the self, an escape from the dictates of the bourgeois morality of the metropolis.’ MacKenzie criticises Kabbani for judging the past using modern frames of reference: ‘we find the susceptibilities of the late twentieth century applied to nineteenth-century art’. Her argument is an important one if we are to understand the enthusiastic reception that audiences gave to orientalist productions. The evident tension between fear and desire that characterised these productions also reveals the fears and desires of the society that produced them.

This chapter focuses on the theatre, and to a lesser extent the cinema which, by the 1930s, continued the legacy of the theatre in reproducing the orientalist’s East on the screen rather than the stage, often in film versions of popular theatrical productions. The advantage of exploring the theatre, for a study of this kind, is the multiple cultural forms that it

15 Said, Orientalism, p. 3.
17 Kabbani, Imperial Fictions, p. 112.
18 Mackenzie, Orientalism, p. xvii.
incorporates, both within the theatre itself and beyond in manuscripts and reviews. As John Mackenzie observes:

The theatre …brought together the art of stage scenery, the design of sets, costumes and props, the music of song and the instrumental pit, the architecture of both the building in which the performance took place and the fantasy world portrayed beyond the proscenium arch, and the text and characterisation of the play.\(^{19}\)

This orientalism also had a currency outside of the theatre as this ‘fantasy world’ was constructed in the press reviews of popular entertainments.

British impressions of the splendour and luxury of the East lent themselves well to opulent stage productions and descriptions of lavish sets are commonplace in newspaper reviews of oriental plays. The use of eastern themes, amongst others, to create an atmosphere of luxury also pervaded the new cinemas of the 1920s:

The buildings themselves became escapist fantasies, their decor and accoutrements…providing a real-life extension of the dream world on the screen. The Twenties and Thirties produced cinemas in the form of Chinese pagodas…Egyptian temples…Jacobean manor-houses…Assyrian ziggurats…Italian palazzo…and Spanish haciendas.\(^{20}\)

Audiences were entertained in surroundings reminiscent of the orientalist stage, and from the 1920s, screen productions with which they were so familiar.

By the nineteenth century, foreign locations were a dominant theme in theatrical productions. One reason for this was that censorship laws meant that many domestic issues could not be discussed on the stage.\(^{21}\) Setting a production in another country could afford an opportunity to satirize events at home. Outside of official legislation, the East provided a location where the sexual taboos of the day could be ignored, this was particularly evident in the costumes; women, for example, dressed in revealing costumes that were only permissible in the fantasy world of the orientalist’s East. It was also an opportunity for ‘fascinating cross-race contact’ in the form of the elaborate costumes and make-up that were worn by performers.\(^{22}\)

\(^{19}\) Mackenzie, Orientalism, p. 176.
\(^{21}\) Mackenzie, Orientalism, pp. 177-178.
Edward Said argues that western representations of the East have existed ‘since antiquity’ through literary mediums such as travellers’ tales.\(^{23}\) Such representations proceeded to infiltrate European culture through orientalist paintings to orientalist theatre productions and then, in the twentieth century, to the cinema.\(^{24}\) In the case of the theatre the influence of orientalism has been extensive. Edward Ziter’s study of orientalism and the Victorian stage illustrates the popularity of oriental images in nineteenth century theatres and the way in which they helped to shape popular notions of the east, in terms of geography, culture and the idea of race.\(^{25}\) This chapter argues that this influence extended into the interwar years.

Mackenzie provides a useful template for understanding audience reception of popular entertainments. Mackenzie states that understanding the message of a piece is fraught with complexities, and while it is difficult for us to know for certain the impact of a particular art form on its audience, and whether their response was what the producer had intended, nevertheless, ‘we can recognise that arts which secure a degree of contemporary acceptability and popularity must be using elements of a common language and meanings shared by producer and consumer.’\(^{26}\) While the producer’s specific views may not have been totally in keeping with that of the audience, the overarching themes of a production had to appeal to as many people as possible if it was to be a success, making theatre ‘a potent vehicle for the conveyance of dominant ideologies.’\(^{27}\)

We know that the theatres of Liverpool and Manchester, particularly those offering musical productions and revues, attracted large audiences. While exact figures are not mentioned in the newspaper reviews, direct references to ‘packed houses’ are a useful measure of the popularity of a production, particularly if the capacity of the theatre is known; the Ardwick Empire, for example, could house 3,000 people.\(^{28}\) John Belchem’s research reveals that in Victorian Liverpool, theatres and concert halls had a cross-class appeal, thus ‘formal paid entertainment was by no means totally exclusive’.\(^{29}\) By the advent of cinema in the first half of the twentieth century, however, the number of theatres declined as they were viewed as the preserve of the skilled working and middle classes.\(^{30}\) The rising popularity of

\(^{24}\) On orientalist painting see Kabbani, *Imperial Fictions*.
\(^{25}\) Ziter, *The Orient on the Victorian Stage*, p. 3 and p. 18.
\(^{26}\) Mackenzie, *Orientalism*, p. xvii.
\(^{27}\) Mackenzie, *Orientalism*, pp. 176-177.
\(^{29}\) J. Belchem, ed, *Liverpool 800* (Liverpool, 2006), p. 239.
\(^{30}\) Belchem, *Liverpool 800*, p. 239.
cinema amongst the working class, by contrast, reflected its affordability.\textsuperscript{31} In the 1930s cinema was the most popular form of entertainment for the working-class.\textsuperscript{32} The number of cinemas and audience attendance figures increased throughout the 1930s. In Liverpool the number of cinemas rose from 85 in 1930 to 96 in 1939, and in Manchester and Salford the figure rose from 137 in 1930 to 156 in 1939.\textsuperscript{33}

In the 1920s, newspaper reviews attest to the continued popularity of theatrical productions which, in this period, included plays, musicals, operas and revues. The London theatres, typically viewed as the preserve of the middle-class, saw a more diverse audience as a result of the First World War, made up of increasing numbers of women and ‘servicemen and officers on leave’.\textsuperscript{34} These new audiences contributed to the popularity of revues and thrillers after the First World War and also to the audiences of the era’s most popular productions, including \textit{Chu Chin Chow} discussed later in this chapter.\textsuperscript{35}

The popularity of orientalist stage productions has been observed, especially for the period from the Victorian era to the early 1920s, but the phenomenal success of these productions in the 1920s and 1930s, and their role in constructing racial difference, has not been fully explored. This chapter investigates how the East was constructed in the British imagination through an analysis of various forms of popular entertainment including plays, revues and films. It uses evidence from local and national newspapers, the Lord Chamberlain’s collections as well as the manuscripts of popular plays in order to draw out the key themes that constituted orientalist discourses in the popular entertainments of the 1920s and 1930s.

Newspapers played a pivotal role in disseminating orientalist discourse and constructing an idea of the East in the British imagination. Newspaper reviews illustrate the pervasiveness of orientalist discourse by employing the same imagery and language used in the plays themselves. They are a useful source of information on well-known plays and they draw our attention to those that remain at the margins of theatre history. Newspaper reviews and articles highlight the currency that orientalist language and imagery had during this period and they underline the extent to which they were disseminated, beyond theatre audiences, to the public at large; it is not unreasonable to suggest that people may have read reviews of plays that they never actually went to see.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{31} Belchem, \textit{Liverpool 800}, p. 239.
  \item \textsuperscript{32} Richards, \textit{The Age of the Dream Palace}, p. 12.
  \item \textsuperscript{33} Richards, \textit{The Age of the Dream Palace}, pp. 11-12.
  \item \textsuperscript{34} C. Barker and M.B. Gale, eds, \textit{British Theatre between the Wars, 1918-1939} (Cambridge, 2000), p. 71.
  \item \textsuperscript{35} Barker and Gayle, \textit{British Theatre between the Wars}, p. 71.
\end{itemize}
Under the Theatres Act of 1843, the Lord Chamberlain had to license every new play before it could be performed to the public. A new play was sent to one of the Examiners of Plays who would then read the play and write a synopsis of the plot. The Examiner would also ‘draw attention to any possibly doubtful or offensive scenes, language or ‘business’. Plays could be refused a license on several grounds including indecency, containing anti-religious sentiment, promoting crime or vice and for diplomatic reasons. For most of the interwar period (1922-1938) the Lord Chamberlain was the Earl of Cromer. The recommendations made by the Lord Chamberlain’s Office before plays were issued with a licence are a useful indicator of contemporary social mores.

There were a variety of productions in which the East was portrayed to British audiences in the interwar years but the orientalist frames of reference that were used to create this imaginary East were repetitive and changed little over time. Prominent among them were the themes of Exoticism, Barbarism and Miscegenation. The productions analysed in this chapter vary from plays to musicals, operas and magic shows with exclusively eastern themes. This chapter advances the argument that orientalism was a powerful theme in British popular entertainments between the wars, one that constructed an imagined East for British audiences, founded on both their fears and desires.

Exoticism, Barbarism and Miscegenation: The Dangerous Allure of the East
In many of the entertainment reviews of these orientalist plays, the stage settings are invariably praised as giving the audience a real sense of the beauty and ‘spectacle’ of the East. This notion of beauty did not only relate to the scenery, as the exotic nature of the Orient also rested on a vision of eastern women as sensuous beings possessed of an alluring and often dangerous sexuality. The theme of exoticism cannot be examined in isolation from the theme of barbarism as the image of the cruel, despotic and dangerous East was often juxtaposed against the image of a colourful and above all beautiful environment. Indeed the twin themes of Exoticism and Barbarism are inexorably linked through an orientalist discourse that variously emphasised the excitement, otherness, sensuality, sexuality, mystery, vice, corruption, danger and beauty of the East. In orientalist narratives the dangerous allure of the East was often emphasised by the tragic effects of cross-cultural encounters, especially those that involved sexual relationships between white westerners and non-white others.

37 Johnston, The Lord Chamberlain, pp. 63-64.
38 Kabbani, Imperial Fictions.
While the spectre of miscegenation often presented itself in the genre of the desert romance, it was also a central narrative in another popular genre of the interwar years: the South Seas romance. The literature of Robert Louis Stevenson and Mark Twain had already constructed what Tom Brislin calls the ‘tropical paradise imagery of the Pacific Islands’ and in the twentieth century these images were reproduced in plays and films set in the region.\(^{39}\) The popularity of the genre is attested to by the continued success of Roger and Hammerstein’s 1949 musical *South Pacific*. The imagined landscape of the region was constructed using familiar orientalist references:

The land itself has similarly been portrayed as ripe and ready for the Westerner’s picking. The image of the “deserted tropical isle” is alluring as the place that will save, support and nurture the life of the lonely castoff-from *Robinson Crusoe* to the pair coming-of-age in the *Blue Lagoon*.\(^{40}\)

The South Sea Islands were portrayed as a fascinating place, offering, as Brislin notes, an attractive refuge from modern western life. They were also a dangerous place offering sexual experiences that could destroy the unwitting traveller. The physical landscape was also important as the perceived geographical isolation of ‘the island’ became a place for the construction of western fantasies:

Again and again the island has figured in the European mind as a place where human potential would emerge unhampered by the conventional life, where a passage over the sea would involve leaving behind items of cultural, moral, social, psychological, or historical baggage and allow a new experiment in living. On islands, too, the strange and unfamiliar—be it within the voyager’s mind or outside it, animate or inanimate, human or natural—would and could be confronted.\(^{41}\)

Paradoxically, while the Pacific islands were constructed as a ‘refuge from modernity’, they were also fixed in the western consciousness as sites of scientific inquiry, from the work of Charles Darwin in the Galapagos islands, to the anthropological studies by Bronislaw Malinowski and Margaret Mead in the twentieth century.\(^{42}\) The anthropological studies are particularly relevant, not only because they fall immediately before and during the period of

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\(^{42}\) Lansdown, *Strangers in the South Seas*, pp. 14-15; on Malinowski see pp. 299-310 and on Mead see pp. 311-316. On the term ‘refuge from modernity’ see Ziter, *The Orient*, p. 12.
this thesis, but also because the details they contain about island life contributed to the notion that these were primitive societies, adding a particular racial aspect to their descriptions.

In entertainment, the Pacific, or the South Seas as it was commonly referred to, was very much constructed in the language and imagery of the island fantasy; a fantasy of both fear and desire. Richard Lansdown notes that, in the western imagination, there were ‘dream islands’ and ‘nightmare islands’, both constructed according to western notions of morality: ‘Imaginative visions of these kinds were connected to similar ideas about ideally good or ideally bad places: utopias or dystopias.’43 The island iconography then changed little over time, but the narratives constructed around it were historically specific. In the interwar years narratives of the South Seas were explored in plays with titles such as *Idol Dancer* (1920), *The Woman Untamed* (1922), *Where the Pavement Ends* (1923), *Lost and Found* (1923), *White Shadows in the South Seas* (1930) and *Hurricane* (1938).44 One of the earliest examples of the genre that incorporated the themes of Exoticism, Barbarism and Miscegenation was an American export: Richard Walton Tully’s *The Bird of Paradise* (1911).

With Oliver Morosco as the producer, the play premiered in Los Angeles on 11 September 1911 and was performed throughout North America between 1912 and 1924.45 The show was also a hit in Britain, arriving in London’s West End in 1919 and showing in both Liverpool and Manchester in 1920 and 1921. It was also made into a film starring Dolores Del Rio (who played the part in ‘brown-face’) and Joel McCrea in 1932.46 The production exploited some of the most familiar stereotypes of the South Sea Islands and their peoples and helped to construct the ‘Pacific imaginary’ in the United States and in Britain.47 Newspaper reviews of the play illustrate how the discourse of exoticism was used to describe Pacific Islanders for both theatre audiences and newspaper readers alike, as the language employed in the press echoed the images that were portrayed on the stage; these images invariably invested the peoples of the South Seas, and the women in particular, with an erotic appeal that was both alluring and dangerous and that evoked the spectre of miscegenation.

43 Lansdown, *Strangers in the South Seas*, p. 11.
The plot begins with a young American doctor, Paul Wilson, leaving for Hawaii in order to assist the lepers of Molokai. He then falls in love with, and marries, the Hawaiian princess, Luana. The relationship eventually breaks down as Wilson does not pursue his work among the lepers and ‘gradually begins to lose his ambition and his self-respect.’\(^{48}\) According to the *Liverpool Daily Post*, Wilson ‘turns out to be an unmitigated cad and an inebriate to boot’, and Luana suffers when she ‘tries to emulate the affectations of her civilised sisters.’\(^{49}\) Hawaii takes its toll on Wilson’s ambitions and the effort of conforming to western expectations proves too much for Luana. The princess, hearing that her people are threatened by a volcanic eruption and need a human sacrifice to prevent disaster, volunteers herself and ‘as the curtain falls is seen precipitating herself into the flaring crater.’\(^{50}\) Implicit in the narrative is the notion that interracial relationships are doomed to failure. The gifted doctor is reduced to the level of the supposedly less civilised Hawaiian, losing his drive and ambition as he gives in to his baser instincts and the fate of the native Princess underlines Tully’s concern with eugenic ideals and the consequences of miscegenation.\(^{51}\)

The plot of the play reflects a western interpretation of island life. Donald A. Mackenzie’s 1930 study, *Myths and Traditions of the South Sea Islands*, detailed the burial rites of the worshippers of the ‘volcano deity’, Pele, who threw the bones of their dead into the crater of a volcano.\(^{52}\) Even the title of the play itself is suggestive of an imagined Pacific as Mackenzie noted ‘a Rarotongan tradition’, as told by western observers, that ‘tells of a long voyage to New Guinea for the sacred scarlet feathers of the Bird of Paradise’.\(^{53}\) This later work is obviously not the source of Tully’s original ideas, but it illustrates that his vision of ‘island life’ was inspired by western notions of an imagined Pacific. This imagined landscape tells us much about contemporary concerns, specifically the spectre of miscegenation that pervaded discourses on race during the interwar years.

Within the genre of ‘theatrical orientalism’ the issue of miscegenation was used to dramatize the effects of the East on those who could not resist its imagined allure. The inevitable degeneration of white men who visited the Pacific was a common theme in literature on the South Seas.\(^{54}\) This is amply illustrated in the reviews of *The Bird of Paradise*. The *Daily Post* hinted that the union between the American and the Hawaiian

\(^{48}\) Balme, ‘Selling the Bird’, p. 6.
\(^{49}\) *Liverpool Daily Post*, 17\(^{th}\) February 1920, p. 5.
\(^{50}\) *Liverpool Daily Post*, 17\(^{th}\) February 1920, p. 5.
\(^{51}\) Balme, ‘Selling the Bird’, p. 10.
Princess was unsuccessful, but other reviews were more explicit in conveying the disaster that befalls them and the reason for it. In Manchester the play was performed at the Prince’s theatre, and the review in the *Manchester City News* declared, ‘We have the meeting of East and West, after the “Madam Butterfly” type only in a different latitude–the South Sea Islands, and Mr. Tully gives a picture of the ruin which the south seas exact of the white man who responds to their advances.’ This review places the play within an existing canon of fictional work on the South Seas and in this context the outcome is unsurprising.

In eugenicist and imperial discourses during this period interracial relationships were seen as a transgression of racial boundaries that would heighten racial tensions. In addition, the University Settlement Movement and other welfare networks became preoccupied with the children of interracial unions as their traditional concern—the working class—were increasingly taken care of by state welfare after the First World War. Philanthropic organisations such as the University Settlement Movement were often supported by the pseudo-scientific information provided to them by academics working in the field of eugenics. The Liverpool Association for the Welfare of Half-Caste Children, for example, was founded by Rachel Fleming from University College Aberystwyth. This body authorised Muriel Fletcher’s infamous report into the ‘colour problem’ in Liverpool and other port cities.

Fleming herself was concerned with examining people of mixed-heritage in order to assess the ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ effects of miscegenation. As well as working in British cities, including Liverpool, Fleming travelled to Cape Town to work amongst South Africa’s mixed-race population. In one particular article in the *Eugenics Review*, Fleming references a study by Leslie C. Dunn and Alfred M. Tozzer: *An Anthropometric Study of Hawaiians of Pure and Mixed Blood*. The South Seas were fixed in the scientific imagination as a place where their eugenics theories could be tested. Throughout the 1920s eugenics had a profound impact on ideas about race amongst welfare reformers and academics. This is evidenced in the pseudo-scientific claims of those who sought to measure intelligence based on race, and in the ‘philanthropic racism’ of reports by social workers such as Muriel Fletcher.

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55 *Manchester City News*, 3rd April 1920, p. 8.  
The claims of the eugenics movement to scientific authority were specific to the period but the spectre of the ‘half-caste’ child had a much longer history as did the method of social investigation undertaken by Fletcher. As Paul Rich notes:

The Victorian association of mixed-race people with both immorality and a slum-land underclass standing outside the main social order of Britain grew in the early twentieth-century to become a fairly common stereotype by the inter-war years, reflecting a growing consciousness of black-white relations within the metropolitan society itself.\(^{59}\)

The popularity of a play like *the Bird of Paradise* indicates that these issues were disseminated to a much wider audience. The theme of miscegenation and the dangers perceived in interracial relationships dominated newspaper reviews of the production. The *Manchester City News* went so far as to describe the play as ‘a study in degeneration’.\(^{60}\) On the play’s return visit to Manchester the *Manchester City News* described the plot as demonstrating:

> the risk and tragedy of the intermingling of Europeans with the insidious charm of the Hawaiians. It is not so much the fault of humanity as the inexorable law of nature herself which brings about the crisis, and in this piece the sympathy is as much aroused for the natives as for the foreigners.\(^{61}\)

This review highlights an important aspect of the play as it underlines that the ‘natives’ suffer as much as the ‘foreigners’ from cross-cultural contact. The impact of western ideas on indigenous cultures was one of the plot’s central concerns and this was an issue noted by the Lord Chamberlain’s Office in their synopsis of the play.\(^{62}\)

In his summary of the *Bird of Paradise*, Ernest A. Bendall, Examiner of Plays for the Lord Chamberlain’s Office (1913-1920), noted ‘its loveable heroine’s sad failure to turn herself into a satisfactory English wife or companion for the visitors’.\(^{63}\) This suggests that the ‘native’ woman is not necessarily cast in a negative light; rather it is her attempts to transgress racial boundaries that cause her trouble. Bendall also noted that this aspect of the play was comparatively straightforward compared to the rest of the plot. He observed that ‘the politics of the Drama are puzzling, as are also its local customs and medical details.’\(^{64}\) This view reflects the view of the official theatre censor and is not representative of broader

\(^{59}\) P. Rich, *Race and Empire in British Politics* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 120.

\(^{60}\) *Manchester City News*, 10\(^{\text{th}}\) April 1920, p. 8.

\(^{61}\) *Manchester City News*, 19\(^{\text{th}}\) February 1921, p. 7.

\(^{62}\) Balme, *Selling the Bird*, p. 7.


\(^{64}\) The Lord Chamberlain’s Plays, Tully, *The Bird of Paradise*, 1919, BL.
public opinion; nevertheless this comment gives us some insight into how the play was received. It is significant that the historical and cultural details are problematic for the censor but that the inability of the princess to become truly English in her manners is not. In fact this aspect of the plot seemed to satisfy a censor keen to suppress any perceived transgressions of racial boundaries, and above all to uphold certain standards of taste and decency. Bendall asserted that: ‘For English playgoers the blend of history and Western mythology must prove in many ways bewildering, but not offensively so, provided that the very airy costumes described for the Princess and her associates are not too savage in their picturesque realism.’ For the censor, the realism of the costumes and their savagery were the same thing; of course the savagery of the costumes was determined by how revealing they were. The censor’s comments reveal that the exotic setting of the play was of secondary importance to the prerogative of upholding a certain vision of British standards. The only thing that is deemed to be intelligible in the piece is that these standards are unobtainable to those perceived as racially inferior.

There is an explicit assumption in reviews of this play that the tragedy of the plot lies in the fatal act of union between the American doctor and the Hawaiian Princess; the Manchester City News noted that the play appealed to those who were excited by ‘the thought of earthly doom associated with human beauty’. Here the exotic and erotic attractions of the racial other are brought to the fore in order to reveal the destructive effects of miscegenation to the audience. This duality of fear and desire characterised many orientalist productions.

The play itself was popular in Britain; on 17th February 1920 the Liverpool Daily Post stated that the production ‘was warmly welcomed by a large audience last evening’. The Daily Post described the play as ‘a strong, primitive story, set in an alluring exotic atmosphere’, thus opening its review with a favourable comment that illustrates the escapist element within the production. The fine line that divides beauty from barbarism in orientalist discourse is highlighted in this newspaper review as it contrasted the setting with the development of the relationship between the American doctor and the Hawaiian princess. Once they marry, according to the Post’s reviewer, ‘one scents trouble brewing immediately’. The destructive nature of their relationship meant that ‘the cloying glamour of these easy-

65 The Lord Chamberlain’s Plays, Tully, The Bird of Paradise, 1919, BL.
66 Manchester City News, 10th April 1920, p. 8.
67 Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury, 17th February 1920, p. 5.
going isles soon palls’ and ultimately results in death as ‘the Princess, answering to the call of her pagan people, takes “the only way”’.  

Another review of the play from the *Manchester City News* makes explicit the connection between beauty and barbarism that is central to orientalist discourses. The *City News* declared that:

Those who like a little creepiness mingled with their romance, or the sound of mournful and haunting music heard amid blissful scenes, or who are thrilled by the thought of earthly doom associated with human beauty-those people can have their fill of such weird contrasts in “The Bird of Paradise”.

In this review “creepiness” and romance can exist simultaneously, creating an effect that is evidently supposed to attract a certain audience (‘those people can have their fill of such weird contrasts’). This contradiction underlines the centrality of the tension between fear and desire at the heart of orientalist performances; romance can be sinister and beauty deadly.

The themes of the play would have been familiar to audiences at the time, specifically the theme of miscegenation and the dangerous sexuality ascribed to foreign women. The same review that advertised the ‘weird contrasts’ in the *Bird of Paradise* stated, ‘We have all heard of the deadly fascination of Hawii (sic), with its sunny landscapes and its lovely women-all alike with the seeds of corruption lurking within them.’ In this review it is the spectre of miscegenation that looms large within the play and its presence is described in the language of the supernatural:

The drama tells of the fortunes of certain men who fall under the lure of the island witchcraft, and there is a mystical atmosphere pervading the whole dim and dreadful story. For the ghost of tragedy stalks in terror and blasts the loves and lives of men and women, and the feeling created is one of deepening gloom.

The concluding comments in this review illustrate how both positive and negative critiques used language laden with orientalist overtones: ‘But it has a feverish and sensuous beauty of its own, with its hectic scenes and its languorous native music; and “The Bird of Paradise” is a new thing in drama decidedly worthy of attention.’ The use of the words ‘feverish’ and ‘sensuous’ evokes the familiar orientalist tropes about the passionate, sexual nature of the exotic ‘other’. While the reviewer is referencing one particular play, he or she is doing so using a vocabulary that was already well-established in writings about the South Seas, a

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70 *Manchester City News*, 10th April 1920, p. 8.
vocabulary laden with familiar images and themes that above all stressed the ‘otherness’ of the Orient to the reader. The duality of fear and desire permeated descriptions of the play. The *Manchester City News* for example described it as ‘a haunting love-tale of the mysterious southern clime, in its warmth and colour, and, alas, its corruption and decay.’\(^{71}\) This opposition was also characteristic of the genre of the desert romance.

The British love affair with an imagined Orient found ultimate expression in the form of the Desert Romance. E.M. Hull’s *The Sheik* (1919) epitomised this genre and it pervaded popular stage productions as much as popular literature. In the years immediately following the First World War, in the Lord Chamberlain’s Day Books, the books in which all plays issued for licence are detailed by year, plays with oriental themes dominate, and the Desert Romance is particularly well-represented. Plays with titles such as *Arabian Love* (1922), *Daughter of the Sheik* (1923), *Desire of the Desert* (1924) and *The White Sheik* (1925) were issued licences along with much more familiar pantomimes such as *Aladdin*. These productions incorporated familiar orientalist themes, as stories of passionate desire were set against an imagined desert landscape that was both alluring in its wild, untamed beauty and dangerous in its vast isolation.

The central motif suggested by many of these titles, inspired by the story of *The Sheik*, is a romance between a white woman and an Arab man, or at least a man purporting to be an Arab. In E.M. Hull’s famous novel ‘the sheik’ turns out to be an aristocratic man of European descent. The suggestion of interracial romance is used throughout the plot in a way that plays upon British fascination with the exotic ‘other’. The Sheik’s true identity limits this encounter to the realms of fantasy and in reality no transgression of racial boundaries has taken place.\(^{72}\) Such was the anxiety aroused by the spectre of miscegenation in the interwar years that even theatre censors were keen to avoid undermining the taboo surrounding interracial relationships. When a 1923 play, *The Sheik of Araby*, was issued with a licence, the accompanying comments by the Lord Chamberlain indicate that explicit references to interracial relationships were problematic: ‘This Licence is issued on the understanding that “Sheik Ahmed” although dressed as an Arab, will in all other respects resemble an Englishman.’\(^{73}\) This statement underlines the fact that, while the practice of racial disguise was acceptable, this disguise should not mislead the audience into believing “Sheik Ahmed” to be an Arab. This comment also suggests two historically specific concerns: firstly interwar

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71 *Manchester City News*, 4th September 1920, p. 3.
73 Lord Chamberlain’s Day Books/Register of Lord Chamberlain’s Plays, Volume XII, 1922-1925, British Library, ADD.MS.61956.
anxieties about interracial relationships and miscegenation, and secondly, the concern that the rising popularity of romance fiction and the cinema after the War was a sign that the public, and women in particular, were being lured into a dangerous fantasy world that distorted their perception of themselves and their expectations of life.\footnote{On ‘practices of fictionality’ in women’s writing and its reception in 1920s Britain see, M. Houlbrook, ‘A Pin to see the Peepshow: Culture, Fiction and Selfhood in Edith Thompson’s Letters, 1921-1922’, \textit{Past and Present} 207, (May 2012), pp. 215-249. On concerns about the influence of mass culture see Houlbrook, ‘A Pin to see the Peepshow’, p. 216 and p. 224.} It also highlights that characters that were markedly other may be subject to different rules of censorship:

By choosing Orientalist settings, writers, including those for theatre, could offer social commentary on a myriad of issues. Domestic issues could be played out in foreign locales and threats of censorship were removed because, after all, the characters were not and could not be English: their exotic costumes proved their Otherness.\footnote{W.A. Everett, ‘Chu Chin Chow and Orientalist Musical Theatre in Britain during the First World War’, in Clayton and Zon, eds, \textit{Music and Orientalism in the British Empire}, p. 278.}

In the genre of the Desert Romance, the subject of interracial relationships could be explored without transgressing contemporary social boundaries; the act of disguise, then, is a useful guide to ‘a society’s particular cultural preoccupations.’\footnote{A. McLaren, ‘Smoke and Mirrors: Willy Clarkson and the Role of Disguises in Inter-War England’, \textit{Journal of Social History} 40, 3 (Spring 2007), p. 597.}

Newspaper reviews support the notion that orientalist productions were a common feature of 1920s entertainments, and that they employed a series of persistent tropes to construct an imagined East. \textit{The Rose of Araby} is a typical example of the Desert Romance genre and the play’s plot owes much to Hull’s bestselling novel. Mr Frederick G. Lloyd’s musical production played its debut in Liverpool in August 1920. The \textit{Liverpool Daily Post’s} review of \textit{The Rose of Araby} declared that it had been a success, ‘mainly due to the reminiscence of the musical setting’ and that ‘the composer in creating his atmosphere has quite frankly borrowed themes that are unmistakeable in their rhythm and melody’. The fact that the play drew on well-known techniques in its staging was not lost on them either, as the review notes that \textit{The Rose of Araby} was ‘fashioned on the most familiar lines of musical comedy’. The lack of excitement generated by the plot is evident in the \textit{Daily Post’s} review and this suggests that there was little novelty to its central theme: ‘The story is of subsidiary importance. It concerns the search for an English heiress in the Algerian desert, her captivity, and eventual release by a bold British artist and his Cockney manservant.’\footnote{\textit{Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury}, 24\textsuperscript{th} August 1920, p. 3.} This play was considered unoriginal in its format and content, and it doesn’t appear to have generated the same amount of interest as \textit{The Bird of Paradise}. This ‘conventional musical comedy’ was
recognised as an ‘oriental romance’ with all the trappings that were inseparable from this genre: ‘As befits an Oriental romance, the scenes are lavishly mounted.’

Edward Ziter notes that the romantic Orient of the European imagination was often perceived as a ‘refuge from modernity’ while simultaneously acting as a space where modern contemporary issues could be discussed: ‘The Orient, then, was both timeless and timely’. This supports Said’s argument that orientalism was a ‘closed-system’ in which the Orient never changes. The genre of the Desert Romance embodies the spirit of escapism, Ziter’s ‘refuge from modernity’, that was at the heart of the popularity of ‘theatrical orientalism’. It also highlights the recurring images that shaped the East in popular entertainments. These were productions that defied the pace of social change taking place in interwar Britain and this was perhaps a comforting thought for audiences still coming to terms with the effects of the First World War. It also had the effect of denying the East its place in the modern world, creating an idea that it had not yet kept pace with western modernity. If Britain’s eastern imaginary was constructed as a sanctuary to which audiences could retreat in the face of a rapidly changing world, it was also a place of mystery and adventure, albeit one safely confined to the realms of fantasy.

Mystery and the East were synonymous terms in orientalist discourses and this aspect of the imagined Orient manifested itself most acutely in terms of popular entertainment in the magic shows of the 1920s. The period between 1880 and 1930 is known as the ‘golden era’ of British magic, with magicians, a number of whom came from India, receiving substantial fees to play to packed houses across the country. While some western magicians tried to discredit their Indian counterparts, others realised the popularity of their methods and chose to embrace them in their own acts; including the wearing of traditional eastern dress. The oriental imagery prevalent in such acts often bore no relation to the nationality of the performer or to a specific region of the Orient, and the newspaper reviews discussed in this chapter attest to the fact that ‘the stereotypical, orientalist British perspective upon the East or Orient was not particularly discerning and rarely respected national, cultural, or geographical boundaries.’

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78 Liverpool Daily POST and Mercury, 20th August 1920, p. 3.
79 Ziter, The Orient, p. 12.
80 ‘Theatrical orientalism’ is a term used by Edward Ziter in Ziter, The Orient, p. 91.
One of the most prominent Indian magicians of the period was Linga Singh, also known as A.N. Dutt, a middle-class Indian who had originally come to Britain to study medicine at the University of Edinburgh. Dutt had a long career that saw him work across Europe, Britain and the United States. In May 1919 the Liverpool Echo’s ‘In the Limelight’ column reported on the performance of Linga Singh at the Birkenhead Hippodrome. In November 1919 he also performed in Manchester at the Ardwick Empire, and the Manchester City News described ‘the wizardry of Linga Singh, an Indian magician, who...performs some amazing feats in the spectacular Eastern manner.’ In August 1919 the same newspaper reported on the appearance of another Oriental magician, ‘the Great Rameses, whose feats of magic...are characterised by a serious vein, as becomes a man of dark Egyptian mystery.’ “Rameses the Great” returned to Manchester to the Ardwick Empire in January 1921, where he was ‘the central figure in the weeks entertainment’, described as ‘bewildering as ever with his mysterious feats of magic, which he fittingly performs amid picturesque Egyptian surroundings.

A variation on the theme of the eastern magician is evident in a review from the Manchester City News of March 1920. The Ardwick Empire, Manchester, hosted the illusionist Ching Wu, described in the following terms: ‘The magical feats which are performed by Ching Wu possess all the elements of wonder and surprise so necessary in the art of the Eastern illusionist, and, as might be expected, spectacular display adds completeness to the several items.’ The bill for the Hippodrome, Manchester, on 17 July 1920 further highlights the popularity of such entertainment:

This week’s program provides two special attractions in the entertainment by Tameo Kajiyama and Linga Singh. The former in a demonstration of handwriting is ingenious when he writes upon one subject and reads to the audience quite different matter. Linga Singh, the Royal Indian Magician, with his staff of assistant wizards, is fascinating as well as entertaining in his extraordinary feats of Oriental mysticism. During this performance no words are spoken. Those who love music will be charmed with the pianoforte solos by Kharum, the Persian pianist.

This bill underlines the centrality of the arts to orientalism as three different performances are presented in a celebration of Oriental creativity.

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85 Liverpool Echo, 9th May 1919, p. 3.
86 Manchester City News, 22nd November 1919, p. 10.
87 Manchester City News, 16th August 1919, p. 8.
88 Manchester City News, 15th January 1921, p. 7.
89 Manchester City News, 13th March 1920, p. 9.
90 Manchester City News, 17th July 1920, p. 7.
The idea of a mysterious Orient that was at once both known and unknown fired the imaginations of reviewers as it is a theme that recurs in descriptions of eastern illusionists. The mysterious East could also be imagined as a sinister place where cunning Orientals waited to outwit unsuspecting westerners. This notion more often than not attached itself to descriptions of China and the Chinese and found perhaps its greatest literary expression in Sax Rohmer’s *Fu Manchu* series. The character of Dr Fu Manchu first appeared in short stories published in 1912 and continued in B-films from the 1920s to the 1960s. In the stories, Fu Machu is ‘the stereotypical Oriental villain—a sinister mastermind bent on world domination’. He is contrasted with Sir Denis Nayland-Smith in a battle of ‘Western acumen’ against ‘Eastern cunning’. Rohmer’s books were instrumental in the construction of ‘The Limehouse Legend’ and various myths surrounding East London’s Chinatown. They were also illustrative of what Jenny Clegg terms a ‘mythology of race’ that is the myth of the ‘yellow peril’. Popular conceptions of Chinese people as malicious and deceitful, inhabiting the shady underworlds of Britain’s Chinese quarters, crystallize in the figure of Fu Manchu; as the archetypal Oriental villain, the influence of this character is evident in subsequent plays and films. Oriental villainy as it was portrayed on the stage became associated with a stock set of images: ‘the secret panels in the Oriental’s bungalow, the doped decanter’. By the early 1920s it was such a common theme on the stage that the *Manchester City News* described a dramatic monologue given at the Hippodrome in the following terms:

It is a story by Mr. Sax Rohmer, a student of the Chinese temperament who has much good stuff to his credit. It tells of a mandarin who, finding that his wife is loved in secret by his best friend, kills both in an atmosphere of incense and poisoned Pekoe. Of itself the story is common, even meretricious…Mr. Bransby Williams saves it from becoming cheap melodrama…but we prefer to see him in something less flavoured with Oriental malignity.

This review illustrates that Oriental themes were often considered the preserve of low-brow populist entertainments. Like most of the reviews analysed in this chapter fact and fiction merge as the details of the story are taken as an accurate reflection of its subject matter; the

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94 Clegg, *Fu Manchu*, p. 5.
95 Clegg, *Fu Manchu*, p. x.
96 *Liverpool Echo*, 13th May 1930, p. 4.
97 *Manchester City News*, 26th March 1921, p. 7. This act was also performed in Liverpool in November 1921; see *Liverpool Echo*, 29th November 1921, p. 6.
author is described as ‘a student of the Chinese temperament’ and the ‘malignity’ that characterises the plot is seen as synonymous with its Oriental flavour.

My own research has focused specifically on press reactions to Liverpool’s Chinese community, who were often maligned (the men in particular) as opium-smokers and gambling addicts who, as one book review in the *Liverpool Daily Post* put it, possessed a ‘highly developed spirit of intrigue’. Pervading these concerns was the fear that white women were being lured into relationships with Chinese men. In fact, Marek Kohn argues that the issue of drug use was of subsidiary importance to the anxieties aroused by the prospect of relationships between white women and Chinese men.

Significant Chinese communities existed in London’s East End and Liverpool and both were constructed in the popular imagination as sites of intrigue. It has already been noted that Sax Rohmer’s novels were an important source of popular ideas about London’s Limehouse, but Liverpool’s Chinatown was also portrayed using orientalist language and imagery. That the experience of these areas was confined to the imagination is illustrated by the experience of a *Daily Mirror* columnist when he actually visited Liverpool’s Chinatown for the first time. The article appeared in the newspaper in November 1934 under the headline: ‘Where East is going West and West is going East…or Liverpool’s Chinatown Debunked’. The author of this piece, known only as ‘a romantic young man’, visits Liverpool with a host of notions about what it would be like to spend a ‘night in Liverpool’s Chinatown’, only to have the Chinatown of his imagination exposed as a myth:

Night in Liverpool’s Chinatown…Can’t you imagine it? Swaying lanterns…the soft beat of drums…clanging gongs…scent of incense rising sweetly…almond eyed dancing girls? You can see it all in your mind? Well, you’re wrong. I have just spent a night in Chinatown-and it wasn’t like that at all. Because Pitt-street (sic), the heart of Liverpool’s Chinatown, is scheduled for demolition, it seemed like a last chance of seeing something of the romance of the East in an English city.

The original misconception expressed here, that Liverpool’s Chinatown may offer a glimpse of ‘the romance of the East’, highlights that orientalist language and imagery did not only construct ideas about peoples and places who were geographically distant from Britain, it also affected the way in which Britain’s ethnic minority communities were imagined.

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100 *Daily Mirror*, 21st November 1934, p. 5.
The fact that the first Chinese person that he meets has an English accent comes as somewhat of a surprise to this intrepid explorer; a reminder that British national identity was an exclusive concept: ‘The night began badly. I wanted cigarettes. I went into a queer old shop where a Chinese girl (who spoke English just like any English girl) served behind a rickety counter.’ Imagine his consternation then, when this apparently interesting shop that he depicts as slightly unusual, adheres to British law and refuses to sell him cigarettes after eight o’clock: ‘The first blow to romantic ideas! What price opium-smoking when they won’t even break the Shop Hours Act to let one do a little harmless cigarette-smoking?’ The idea that opium-smoking could be viewed as romantic underlines how racial difference was constructed as both a source of fear and desire. A vice that concerned social commentators and created a sense of fear and uncertainty around Britain’s Chinese communities also contributed to the allure of Chinatown. This attraction was believed to be particularly appealing to women.

Despite the assertion that this article presents ‘Chinatown Debunked’, it also reinforces dominant contemporary stereotypes about the nature of relationships between white women and ‘men of colour’ in Britain’s seaports. After stumbling upon a Chinese café, the young romantic comes across another disappointing scene:

At the top was a large room lit by glaring electric lights in modern bowl fittings. There were a few Chinese, a few Arab seamen, a number of Englishmen and an even greater number of English women. I was given a cup of very ordinary tea served in the English fashion. One of the English women very kindly came and sat beside me, and told me what a nice fellow I was. She was soon joined by another.

The writer’s faux naiveté in the face of the advances of these women underlines the sense of disillusionment running throughout this piece; so much for romance and ‘almond-eyed dancing girls.’ It also reveals contemporary prejudices about the morality of white women who consorted with ‘men of colour’.101 This article underlines how positive and negative stereotypes interacted in the construction of the imagined Orient. The imagined glamour and intrigue of Chinatown is exposed as a myth but those who wanted to remain in a fantasy of Orient could find this world intact on stage and screen. The ‘romantic young man’ does not state where his own ideas about the East came from but popular entertainments were one of the dominant purveyors of an Orient of lanterns, incense, opium and dancing girls. In fact the era’s most successful musical production exemplifies the genre.

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101 Tabili, ‘Women “Of a Very Low Type”’, p. 165.
The immediate aftermath of the First World War saw the continued run of a British musical production that was, at the time, the most successful of its kind. *Chu Chin Chow* was the first musical to play over 2,000 performances and has been celebrated as ‘one of the greatest successes in the history of popular musical theatre’.\(^{102}\) Described as ‘a must-see for servicemen’ during the First World War, it was both a product of British theatre’s established fascination with the Orient and inspiration for a genre that continued into the interwar period.\(^ {103}\) Newspaper reviews exalted its elaborate settings, costumes, its music and its ‘colour’; it was viewed with contempt by some critics, yet it had cross-class appeal.\(^ {104}\) The show first opened in London at His Majesty’s Theatre in August 1916 where it ran until July 1921.\(^ {105}\) It then went on to tour the rest of Britain, opening back in London in 1940. Between 1917 and 1924 it was also staged in the United States and Australia.\(^ {106}\)

Based on the *Arabian Nights*’ story of *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*, the plot centres on the character of Abu Hasan, a famous thief who disguises himself as a Chinese merchant named Chu Chin Chow. His arrival at the palace of Kasim Baba signals the start of a story filled with romance and intrigue.\(^ {107}\) The play’s main protagonists were played by Oscar Asche (writer, director and star of the show) and his wife, Wigan-born actress Lily (Elizabeth) Brayton. The couple starred in other productions together although their Oriental productions were most famous, as evidenced by Sir Philip Gibbs’s comments at the beginning of this chapter. In September 1916, one week after the premiere of *Chu Chin Chow*, Brayton was photographed on the front cover of *The Tatler* in the opulent Oriental dress synonymous with the production (see Figure 3). The accompanying text described Brayton’s character in the play as a ‘star of the desert’ and posing with an elaborate dagger she looks strong, suggesting the violence of the orientalist’s East. By contrast, other images of both Brayton and Asche depict Brayton as the epitome of passive, sexual Oriental femininity (see Figure 4 and Figure 5).

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\(^{105}\) Everett, ‘Chu Chin Chow’, p. 277.


Oscar Asche’s first oriental production was *Kismet*, staged at the Garrick theatre in April 1911. Like *Chu Chin Chow*, Asche starred in the film alongside his wife. How can we begin to understand Asche’s obsession with an imagined Orient? In her case study of Selfridge’s department store, Mica Nava notes that the character of Gordon Selfridge was key to the way in which orientalism was marketed to women. Nava describes Selfridge as:

Part of the movement against the conventions of certain sectors of Victorian and Edwardian Britain—the imperialism, snobbery, traditional hierarchies and narrow nationalisms—from which Gordon Selfridge, the self-made modernising American businessman and immigrant to Britain, is himself both overtly and subtly marginalised in his life in London.

There are notable similarities between this description of Selfridge and the summary of Asche’s character provided by Richard Foulkes in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Foulkes concludes that, ‘with his Norse paternity, his antipodean upbringing, his outstanding Shakespearian repertoire, and his fascination with the Orient, Oscar Asche was a true cosmopolitan’. By this measure Asche’s orientalism is seen as intrinsic to his cosmopolitanism. Asche was fascinated with the Orient, or at least the Orient of his imagination. The images of him in oriental costumes support the idea that his fascination was borne out of some form of desire. As Nava notes, ‘desire for the other, for something different, is also about the desire for merger with the other, about the desire to become different’; costume was an important part of this process.

There is, however, another side to Asche’s orientalism. Something of Asche’s ideas, especially regarding race, can be understood from his autobiography, written in 1929. On the subject of his native Australia Asche had firm ideas about how the country’s economy should progress. For him the answer was ‘coloured labour’ as Asche was of the opinion that ‘donkey work should be carried out by donkeys.’ When questioned on the potential success of black actors by *The Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly* in 1919 Asche answered with the following statement: ‘As to your question as to whether a black man is capable of portraying

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Figure 3: Lily Brayton’s Personal File, Lily Brayton as Zahrat al Kulub in *Chu Chin Chow*, *The Tatler*, 6 September 1916, V&A Theatre and Performance collections, BIOGBRAYTONBOX23.
Figure 4: Lily Brayton’s Personal File, Oscar Asche and Lily Brayton in *Kismet*, 19 April 1911, V&A Theatre and Performance collections, BIOGBRAYTONBOX23.

Figure 5: Lily Brayton’s Personal File, Lily Brayton as Marsinah in *Kismet, The Sketch*, 17 May 1911, V&A Theatre and Performance collections, BIOGBRAYTONBOX23.
characters of Shakespeare, Goldsmith, etc., in a way that will commend them to the general public, I think it is just as possible for a camel to pass through the needle’s eye.’\textsuperscript{113} He also warned about the threat posed to Australia by the ‘yellow peril’.\textsuperscript{114} Asche had what can be described as Victorian attitudes towards race which weaken any claims he may have had to cosmopolitanism. They were also brought to bear in his most popular production.

As part of the orientalist discourse that characterised \textit{Chu Chin Chow}, racialised identities were performed that tell us much about popular attitudes to race between the wars. The main example is to be found in the character of \textit{Chu Chin Chow}, the deceitful alter ego of Abu Hasan, who ‘embodies the negative stereotypes associated at the time with the Chinese.’\textsuperscript{115} \textit{Chu Chin Chow} simultaneously perpetuated negative stereotypes and celebrated the exoticism of the orientalist’s East: ‘

Chu Chin Chow’s exoticism and eroticism made it extremely entertaining, but there was also a serious side to the musical, one that reflected and endorsed contemporary British attitudes towards both China and the Arab world.’\textsuperscript{116} This duality was especially evident in the production’s setting, specifically the costumes which were the subject of comment both in the press and by the Lord Chamberlain.

Act one, scene one of the original prompt-script sets the tone for the representation of eastern femininity in \textit{Chu Chin Chow}. The entry of Marjanah, a ‘singing slave’ is described in the following stage direction: ‘Abdullah (Kasim Baba’s Steward) introduces “The dancers from the Nile” (Languorous music). Enter eight dancers all in thin black draperies and yashmaks, with their bodies gleaming through, then Marjanah appears and sings’. The use of a form of Islamic dress, distorted to satisfy western fantasies, illustrates how Britain’s eastern imaginary was both a celebration and a denigration of eastern culture. While the exotic and erotic East is celebrated, the difference signified by the yashmaks is neutralized into a source of simple pleasure. The following scene depicting a ‘slave market’ uses classic orientalist themes:

A walled enclosure with slave pens seen through a number of arches. Glimpses of the slave are seen… (Abdullah and his black guard are squatted down on the ground by the slave pens…There is an incessant beating of tomtoms throughout the scene. Enter Mukbill, the auctioneer, reading from a scroll in a sing-song voice. He is attended by two gate keepers dressed in white and carrying two long bamboo poles…several women advance with gaudy draperies and pose, uncovering their nakedness to the buyers.\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{113} ‘Coloured Artistes on the Screen’, \textit{The Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly} (August 1919), p. 88.
\textsuperscript{114} Asche, \textit{Oscar Asche}, pp. 183-184.
\textsuperscript{115} Everett, ‘Chu Chin Chow’, p. 282.
\textsuperscript{116} Everett, ‘Chu Chin Chow’, p. 277.
This scene is evocative of orientalist painting and theatre. The image of black men, usually acting as slaves, in close contact with white women is a familiar one in the orientalist’s imaginary.\(^{118}\)

Mica Nava explores the impact that the prospect of interracial sex had on audiences attending the Russian ballet’s production of *Scheherazade* in early twentieth-century London: ‘the ballet experience will have been both disturbing and arousing’.\(^{119}\) Nava argues that the prospect of white women taking black lovers subverted the traditional orientalist imagery based on white male domination of the eastern female, and furthers this argument in her discussion of the figure of the Sheik in the genre of the Desert Romance.\(^{120}\) The Desert Romance in particular offered women increased freedom to explore their sexuality through fantasies of the exotic ‘other’.\(^{121}\) While this offers a useful counter-balance to traditional theories of orientalism, it is necessary to explore the limitations placed on these fantasies and what these tell us about contemporary ideas of race. The case of the Russian ballet is indeed exceptional as ballet was excluded from the Lord Chamberlain’s scrutiny under the 1843 Theatres Act.\(^{122}\) In this instance themes could be explored that were subject to censorship in other contexts. This chapter has already argued that fantasies of interracial contact were heavily mediated, especially in the Desert Romance, as the ‘Arab’ lover usually turned out to be in disguise.

In *Chu Chin Chow* the Lord Chamberlain’s Office was satisfied with the play, although slight concerns were raised about the ‘slave market’ scene mentioned above. Ernest Bendall noted that the play was similar to Asche’s previous offering *Kismet*: ‘This is a version of the old Arabian Nights legend of the Forty Thieves. In the manner of its illustrative action it recalls the rather grim violence of “Kismet”… and in its dialogue it suggests that drama’s Wardour Street orientalism.’ This disparaging reference to the play’s dialogue reveals that this was not considered high-brow entertainment, and the use of the term orientalism shows that contemporaries were sensitive to the nature of the play’s narrative and the genre of theatrical entertainment that it belonged to. The examiner’s synopsis was similar to that of *The Bird of Paradise* as the play’s setting was linked to its moral tone, or lack thereof. Bendall noted that ‘the whole tone of the drama is picturesquely truculent in its

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\(^{118}\) For more on this image in art see Kabbani, *Imperial Fictions*, pp. 126-127.

\(^{119}\) Nava, *Visceral Cosmopolitanism*, p. 30.


\(^{121}\) Nava, *Visceral Cosmopolitanism*, pp. 36-37.

primitive non-morality.' Like *The Bird of Paradise* it was the costumes in the play that were the only cause for concern: ‘There is, however, nothing in it to call for modification, provided that discretion is used in the slave-market, scene v, with regard to the stage-direction “uncovering their nakedness to the buyers” as carried out by the girls put up for auction.’ Bendall was on familiar terms with Asche and was ‘assured by him that the oriental draperies of the girls in the slave-market scene will be quite adequate, and that the “uncovering” as seen by the audience will be only that of the shoulders.’ A year later, in 1917, an examiner went to see *Chu Chin Chow* and commented on ‘the scarcity of dress and some over-emphasis in action’ for which the theatre manager received a warning from the Lord Chamberlain. The concerns raised by the Lord Chamberlain’s Office are evidence that the production challenged established boundaries of good taste. *Chu Chin Chow* was not alone in this respect as nudity and innuendo increased in productions both during and after the war, although it has been credited with setting ‘new levels for female (and male) exposure.’

*Chu Chin Chow* was staged in the north-west on several occasions to packed houses. Such was its success that the *Liverpool Echo* observed in February 1920, ‘That “Chu Chin Chow” could visit Liverpool during its strike period and in spite of that pack the house all the time, is sure evidence that a return visit was advisable.’ Oscar Asche’s production was also a hit in Manchester ‘attracting crowded houses’ in 1919. Asche himself noted that ‘nothing seemed to affect Chu. It went merrily on, through war, through peace, police strikes, everything.’ According to the *Manchester City News*, the play was ‘a gorgeous Eastern entertainment’. The rest of the review goes on to present a list of stock images central to descriptions of the orientalist’s East:

There are dazzling palatial scenes, a mysterious treasure cave, a slave market, a garden by moonlight, and a series of incidental pictures, enclosed in a Moorish arch, shown whilst the comprehensive stage spectacles are in process of preparation. At the bazaar of Bagdad is a marvellous procession of slave mannequins, and the play throughout is marked by vivid incidents of pomp and circumstance in keeping with the general theme.

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124 The Lord Chamberlain’s Plays, Asche, *Chu Chin Chow*, 1916/18, BL.
125 The Lord Chamberlain’s Plays, Asche, *Chu Chin Chow*, 1916/18, BL.
130 Asche, *Oscar Asche*, p. 166.
The following week the same newspaper reiterated these sentiments in another review: ““Chu Chin Chow” is gorgeous pantomime with a mixture of musical comedy and revue...The bazaar scenes are dazzling; the slave market is a riot of Eastern opulence and barbarism.”

For the purposes of entertainment the East is a ‘dazzling’ place of mysterious caves, slave-markets and moonlit gardens. These images, particularly of slave-markets and harem scenes were popular in orientalist paintings in the nineteenth century and while these familiar orientalist images entertained the audience they simultaneously reinforced and reflected British attitudes towards the East. A land of ‘opulence and barbarism’ it is an amalgamation of popular literary and theatrical themes that often have their roots in the One Thousand and One Nights (Arabian Nights), a collection of stories that first came to Britain in the early eighteenth century. These stories are synonymous with Britain’s eastern imaginary, a place of extremes. As the Liverpool Echo declared in a review of an ‘eastern’ film screened in 1923, ‘One cannot take an “Arabian Night” story in other than the spirit of extravagance.’

Chu Chin Chow’s setting was not unique, the Arabian Nights had inspired many musical productions, including operas, since the latter half of the eighteenth century, but its success was unprecedented.

What were the reasons then for the shows’ unparalleled success? William Everett observes that the spectacle of Chu Chin Chow was the perfect antidote to the hardships of wartime, an ‘escapist commercial extravaganza’ that remained popular after the Great War was over. It is especially fitting that Asche claimed to have written the production during a wet week in Manchester; during this time the world of Chu Chin Chow must have seemed a particularly pleasant retreat! For audiences both during and after the war Oscar Asche’s East may have been a welcome escape from the troubles of war and the upheavals of its aftermath, but it did more than provide escapism. Through its characters, costumes, music and setting the production was part of a longer tradition of orientalism in the arts and its commercial success ensured that this tradition would carry on into the interwar period and beyond. It was a tradition that fixed the East in the European imagination as a place of exoticism and barbarism, where fantasies of interracial contact could be carried out, neutralized by the obvious fact that the actors and actresses were in racial disguise.

133 Kabbani, Imperial Fictions, p. 129 and p. 136; Everett, ‘Chu Chin Chow’, p. 277.
134 Liverpool Echo, 8th May 1923, p. 7.
135 Mackenzie, Orientalism, p. 143.
137 Asche, Oscar Asche, p. 160.
Both *Chu Chin Chow* and the *Bird of Paradise* set a benchmark for orientalist theatre in the interwar period. In May 1920 the *Manchester City News* described one offering, *Sunshine of the World*, as ‘sumptuous as a spectacle’ with ‘a haunting effect’ not unlike *The Bird of Paradise*. All of the typical orientalist terms are present; the East is a place of ‘opulence’, ‘mystery’ and ‘charm’, both dangerous and alluring:

We are transported to a palace at Delhi, to a gorgeous pavilion, and to a military tent at Ispahan: we see the dim figures of the natives and the sylph-like dancing girls; we hear strange music and singing, and it all acts like a spell. Love, and languor, and fierce passion, and tragedy come with their brightness and gloom, and the emotions are stirred in various ways.138

In this review ‘the natives’ are just one part of the eastern landscape, of equal importance as the dream-like palaces and pavilions in which they dwell. The sensuality of the East is ascribed to the landscape and the people (‘the sylph-like dancing girls’) and, inevitably, there must be ‘tragedy’ on the horizon.

It is music that often sets the scene in the plays discussed in this chapter; indeed it is often described in the reviews as being one of the most important components of the production. Mackenzie notes that, ‘so numerous are western music’s excursions into the Orient that it is almost impossible to compile a complete list.’139 *Sunshine of the World* is no exception and the review suggested that ‘special attention should be devoted to M. Cuvillier’s music, which is distinctive and has a witchery all its own’.140

In September 1920, the *Manchester City News* reviewed another orientalist production. Described as a ‘comic opera’, *The Maid of the East* was outlined in the following terms:

It is really comic; the music is tuneful even fascinating at times, and as befits an Eastern play there is a prodigality of colour with lovely scenery and rich dresses. We are very much inclined to agree with the bulk of the criticisms that have appeared since (and before), the opera last appeared in Manchester that “The Maid of the East” marks a return of the real stuff.141

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139 Mackenzie, *Orientalism*, p. 139.
141 *Manchester City News*, 4th September 1920, p. 3.
This review has an even more simplistic take on the requirements of an orientalist production, noting the ‘colour’, ‘scenery’ and ‘rich dresses’. There was a formula for success in this genre and it was exploited by many producers in the 1920s.

_Afgar_, an opera that was granted a licence in September 1919,\(^{142}\) was very much in the tradition of _Chu Chin Chow_, as the popularity of the latter encouraged managers to ‘grab their share of the profits from the payload that _Chu Chin Chow_ had opened up.’\(^{143}\) Described as ‘the new Don Juan in an eastern seraglio’, the plot’s humour derived from the fact that ‘the ladies of the harem … strike, form a trade union, issue conditions of settlement, and reverse the usual matrimonial custom by choosing their husbands.’\(^{144}\) According to the reviewer in the _Manchester City News_, ‘the real humour of the piece comes in the introduction of modern slang, cockneyisms, and topical illusions uttered by Orientals’.\(^{145}\) There is a clear distinction being made between what are thought to be two very different cultures. The modern, politicized language of the West is incompatible with the ancient world of the mysterious East where the idea of women, confined as they are to the harem, demanding their ‘rights’ is hilarious in its absurdity (it also has to be considered that this was a satire on the demands of suffragists). It is the peculiarities of the oriental race, conditioned by their climate, that allow the ‘erotic character’ of some of its humour to be deemed acceptable: ‘if now and then a jest had somewhat of an erotic character we suppose we must ascribe it (like the ladies’ diaphanous and scanty costumes) to the climate.’\(^{146}\) The orient in the European imagination was a place characterised by a lack of sexual restraint in direct contrast with British sexual mores.\(^{147}\)

The East that was constructed in popular entertainments was an imagined place peopled with crude stereotypes. Racial disguises in the form of elaborate costumes and make-up (brown-face) were common-place but it should not be forgotten that the Asian actors, Anna May Wong (Chinese-American) and the Japanese actor Sessue Hayakawa were amongst the most prominent and popular actors of their generation. Hayakawa starred in many films such as _An Arabian Knight_ (1921).\(^{148}\) He also appeared on the British stage; the _Manchester City News_ reported that he was ‘the chief attraction’ at the city’s Hippodrome in

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\(^{144}\) _Manchester City News_, 14\(^{th}\) August 1920, p. 6.

\(^{145}\) _Manchester City News_, 14\(^{th}\) August 1920, p. 6.

\(^{146}\) _Manchester City News_, 14\(^{th}\) August 1920, p. 6.

\(^{147}\) A point echoed by Kabbani in _Imperial Fictions_, p. 112.

\(^{148}\) _Liverpool Echo_, 1\(^{st}\) November 1921, p. 7.
December 1923, performing in ‘a dramatic sketch’ titled *The Knees of the Gods*.\(^{149}\) In May 1923 the *Liverpool Echo* described one of his films, *Five Days to Live*, as a ‘typical Hayakawa romance of the Far East.’\(^{150}\) Both Anna May Wong and Sessue Hayakawa appeared in films that perpetuated negative Oriental stereotypes, most notably in one of the Fu Manchu series, *Daughter of the Dragon* (1931) in which they appeared together.\(^{151}\) Nevertheless, their popularity is a useful reminder of the role played by such actors in making people from different ethnic backgrounds visible in a way that they had not been before.

Orientalist discourses in popular entertainments did not go unchallenged. Peter H. Hansen’s work on the controversy surrounding John Noel’s silent film *The Epic of Everest* (1924) illustrates how orientalist assumptions were resisted and how popular entertainment had a direct impact on diplomatic relations. The film depicted Mallory and Irvine’s ascent of Everest and contained scenes that offended the Tibetan government. They had also taken offence to an act that took place before each screening that saw Tibetan lamas performing ‘music, chants, and dances’. The representation of such sacred places and rituals was challenged by the Tibetan government and in March 1925 civil servants from the India Office were sent to review the film.\(^{152}\) This case had earlier precedents: the annual reports of the Lord Chamberlain’s Office record that in 1893 the Turkish ambassador complained to the Foreign Office about a reference to the Sultan of Turkey, and his harem in particular, in a burlesque *Don Juan*; the manager of the offending theatre was made to remove this material.\(^{153}\) Even the great Oscar Asche was not immune from such diplomatic considerations. Asche was forced to review the title of one of his plays on the advice of the Lord Chamberlain; *Mecca* was thought likely to offend Muslims. Asche told the *Daily Mirror* in May 1921 that ‘the Lord Chamberlain was very charming, very courteous–but quite inflexible.’\(^{154}\)

For productions that made it past the censor, newspapers were an important vehicle through which they were promoted to the public. By the interwar years newspapers were using an increasing number of images; the *Daily Mirror* had a double picture page on which readers were often treated to stills from popular theatrical productions. This underlines the importance of newspapers in disseminating popular images and ideas as even people who did

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\(^{149}\) *Manchester City News*, 1\(^{st}\) December 1923, p. 9.

\(^{150}\) *Liverpool Echo*, 22\(^{nd}\) May 1923, p. 3.

\(^{151}\) *Liverpool Echo*, 27\(^{th}\) May 1932, p. 11.


\(^{154}\) *Daily Mirror*, 30\(^{th}\) May 1921, p. 3.
not go and see particular plays for themselves could view such images as ‘the half-caste girl’ who is seen ‘begging poison from a sorcerer’ in an ‘African’ play or an image of ‘Persia in the Potteries’ from an Amateur Operatic Society’s production of ‘The Rose of Persia’. In amongst such descriptions there was occasionally displayed an awareness that the orientalist’s East was a figment of the imagination. In May 1921 the Daily Mirror contained photographs of a play titled If that it described in the following terms: ‘It has a strong flavour of the Orient that only exists in the imaginations of authors and artists who love to work in a fantastical world of their own creation.’ Reporting on the news that ‘talkies’ were being successfully exported to non-English speaking countries, the Daily Mirror’s R.J. Whitley pondered, ‘I understand that it is only a question of a few weeks before talkies are heard in Morocco…I wonder what some of the natives will think of “The Desert Song”? ’

Despite glimpses of such knowing humour on the part of journalists, there was little doubt revealed in the press that Oriental films and plays were incredibly successful. In April 1924, the Manchester City News declared that ‘next week’s attraction is one of those exotic Eastern films that are so popular.’ The Liverpool Echo’s entertainment review of 27 May 1930 noted that The Desert Song was assured success by virtue of ‘its title alone’. These productions proliferated in the aftermath of the First World War. Even documentary films that claimed to depict real peoples and landscapes indulged in orientalist language and imagery. In June 1924 the Manchester City News described a film called Through Romantic India; the title suggests the impact that it was intended to have. Newspaper reviews of the film perpetuated the orientalist narrative: ‘Besides showing pictures of the strange peoples, there is included in the series the exquisite scenery to be found in this mystic land.’ Reviewing the same film, the Liverpool Echo informed its readership, ‘You thrill with pride when told that Britain, of all the countries in the world, is the only successful ruler of this vast domain.’

The exotic landscape of the orientalist’s East promised an escape from the mundane and a setting where the British public could imagine the peoples of the Middle East and Asia as different in both positive and negative ways. The glamorous sets and exotic costumes offered a tantalising glimpse into worlds that were viewed with both fear and desire. White

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155 Daily Mirror, 30th November 1927, p. 5; Daily Mirror, 12th May 1922, p. 16.
156 Daily Mirror, 31st May 1921, p. 16.
158 Manchester City News, 5th April 1924, p. 8.
159 Liverpool Echo, 27th May 1930, p. 10.
161 Liverpool Echo, 27th November 1923, p. 6.
actors disguised themselves in elaborate costumes that offered a fleeting fantasy of interracial contact in a society where interracial relationships were condemned. This East was a fearsome place, both more violent and aggressively sexual than home; paradoxically, its difference was also exciting and an opportunity to escape the constraints of British social mores. In this respect, the imagined East was not just a prism through which the British public imagined other peoples and places; it also reflected back to them their own fears and desires and contained them within the safe and familiar space of the British theatre.

The discourse of orientalism has deep historical roots that pre-date the interwar period. In the 1920s and 1930s it provided both a sense of continuity with the past essential for a nation struggling to adjust to the post-war world. But it also changed in this period, adapting to contemporary concerns about interracial relationships. Chapter Three builds on this chapter, examining how black identities were constructed though popular entertainment and the impact that this had on ideas about race; it also explores the extent to which representations of black people changed between the wars.
Chapter Three
From Stage to Screen: Popular Entertainments and the Idea of Blackness.

The idea of race manifested itself in multiple forms in the popular entertainments of the interwar period. Orientalist productions such as Chu Chin Chow relied on many aspects of the performance, including costume, setting and dance to represent an imagined East to the audience. Costume was used to emphasise racial difference including the use of make-up to create the appearance of a darker skin-tone. The art of racial disguise found ultimate expression in blackface performance. The blackface mask, synonymous with nineteenth-century minstrel acts, constructed the black body as different and informed the way that the British public imagined black people. These ideas were transferred to descriptions of black performers who became increasingly visible on stage and screen in the 1920s and 1930s. The language and imagery used to describe black performers highlighted many of the negative assumptions that British people had about racial difference, but the popularity of these acts showed that difference was also an attractive commodity and black performers, most notably Paul Robeson, used their success as a platform to discuss civil rights.

Black performers were received enthusiastically by the British public but they were often described as the ‘exception to the rule’ and negative ideas about Britain’s black communities persisted. The interwar years marked a period of transition; blackface entertainments, while they continued in various forms until the second half of the twentieth century, were increasingly seen as a product of the Victorian era and African-American entertainers appropriated the popular aspects of these acts in their own performances. In addition, the contemporary vogue for jazz music heralded a change that shaped the very nature of interracial contact in the interwar years; jazz clubs were places where people from different ethnic backgrounds could socialise together.

Scholarly work on the subject of minstrelsy and ‘blacking-up’ has focused on its racial aspects and the reasons for its popularity. Michael Pickering’s contribution to the field of popular musicology analyses how images of black people were constructed and represented in minstrel shows as well as exploring the reasons behind minstrelsy’s popularity.1 Pickering outlines how the process of blacking-up allowed the British public to confront racial difference, thus neutralizing the threat that they perceived from it:

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1 M. Pickering, Blackface Minstrelsy in Britain (Hampshire, 2008).
Blackface minstrelsy was very much part of a racialized process of coming to terms with cultural difference, with the ‘nigger’ mask acting as a ritualistic device for confronting and assimilating a black low-Other while also rendering that figure safe and harmless, and so enjoyable as an object of comic or sentimental regard.²

The notion that blacking-up contained a perceived threat, specifically from the black male, is a familiar theme in the historiography. As Eric Lott notes:

The black mask offered a way to play with collective fears of a degraded and threatening-and male-other while at the same time maintaining some symbolic control over them. Yet the intensified American fears of succumbing to a racialized image of Otherness were everywhere operative in minstrelsy, continually exceeding the controls and accounting, paradoxically, for the minstrel show’s power, insofar as its “blackness” was unceasingly fascinating to performers and audiences alike. This combined fear of and fascination with the black male cast a strange dread of miscegenation over the minstrel show.³

Like orientalist productions, blackface performance reveals deeply held fears about miscegenation in the interwar years. The extent to which its popularity was based upon fear of or desire for interracial contact has been debated. Pickering states that racism was integral to British minstrelsy but that this was not the sole basis of its appeal: ‘its historical significance lay just as much in the cultural permit it gave to otherwise unavailable versions of licence, display and release.’⁴ Just as Rana Kabanni notes that Europe’s imagined East was a setting for the exploration of western fantasies, Pickering argues that blacking-up was a way to transcend contemporary social mores: ‘The blackface mask was an acceptable prism through which Englishness could become un-English, and so allow laughter and tears to flow without moral inhibition.’⁵ Lott argues that it was ‘cross-racial desire’ that determined the popularity of minstrelsy in both its positive and negative aspects, and that made it ‘less a sign of absolute white power and control than of panic, anxiety, terror, and pleasure.’⁶

The importance of black performers in re-defining perceptions of black popular culture has been noted, especially in studies of popular musicology.⁷ There were many black performers who were successful in Britain and who were not from the United States, but the

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² Pickering, Blackface Minstrelsy, p. 110.
⁴ Pickering, Blackface Minstrelsy, pp. xii-xiii.
⁵ Pickering, Blackface Minstrelsy, p. 105.
idea of black culture that was constructed through popular entertainments was primarily of African-American origin. Some of this influence was a result of the Harlem Renaissance but primarily it was disseminated by popular musicians and actors who performed in the theatres, music halls and appeared on screen in British cinema. From the plantation songs of the minstrel shows to the on-screen performances of Paul Robeson, the history of slavery and the reality of Jim Crow segregation brought an air of sentimentality that audiences enjoyed. By contrast, jazz music brought a fresh modern sound that gave audiences a new experience of African American culture. The shift from representations of African American culture and people to the presence of African-American performers who sought to reclaim their own experiences and cultures in order to become successful entertainers is a significant one. Yet this development was not always noted in descriptions of popular entertainments and newspaper reviews often described African-American performers using racialised language and imagery. There was a tension between fear and desire in these descriptions and a broader tension between the voices of black performers themselves and those cultural commentators who represented these acts to the public.

This chapter uses newspaper reviews and autobiographical evidence to highlight these competing and often contradictory narratives. It traces the development of these narratives from the theatrical productions of the 1920s when blacking-up was still commonplace, through to the popular jazz acts of the era, focusing specifically on a case study of the Southern Syncopated Orchestra, and concludes with an assessment of the position of black stage and film actors, the most notable of whom was the African-American Paul Robeson. A brief examination of race in sport during this period underlines how other leisure pursuits provided an arena for the construction and contestation of racial identities.

Minstrelsy in the 1920s

Blackface performance illustrates the negative impact of Victorian racial hierarchies, as well as the lexicon of derogatory terms that were simultaneously used to describe black entertainers at this time, including ‘nigger’ and ‘coon’. The first minstrel troupe to perform in Britain, The Virginia Minstrels, did so in Liverpool in 1843. Minstrelsy had a broad appeal

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and attracted a diverse audience at an equally diverse range of venues, from local troupes that performed at charity events, to street performers, to the theatres and music-halls it was synonymous with the popular entertainment of the nineteenth century. By the 1920s, descriptions of minstrel acts were characterised by a strong sense of nostalgia. In his history of ‘burnt cork’ minstrelsy, Harry Reynolds asserted that ‘The burnt cork was a quaint and inoffensive disguise, with nothing repulsive about it, which statement would hardly apply to the grease paint facial make-up of many variety comedians.’ This defence of ‘blackening-up’, written in 1928, suggests that public tastes were changing with regard to entertainment. By defending the ‘burnt cork’ minstrels of the nineteenth century, Reynolds, who had himself been manager of a successful minstrel troupe, reveals a shift in attitudes that characterised the entertainment of the interwar period and is underlined by evidence from the local and national press.

In Garston, an annual charity concert was held by the Liverpool Police Minstrels and Pierrot Troupe throughout the interwar period and in 1932 The Garston and Woolton Weekly News reported on this ‘Popular Function’:

The City Minstrels, which were formed several years ago, with the direct object of aiding the funds of the orphanage, were originally all black, but gradually times have changed and the “serious” men of the show have undergone a metamorphis (sic), and regained the white man’s colour.

There are two ways of analysing this shift. Firstly, it may be that the offensive caricatures portrayed in the minstrel acts had become unpalatable to contemporary tastes, although this seems unlikely given contemporary ideas about racial difference. It is more likely that the acts were perceived as out of date and a younger audience may not have understood the genre in the same way as the older generation; for the bright young things of the 1920s the concept of blackface was more likely to be experienced as an amusing novelty rather than as an evening’s entertainment (see Figure 6).

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11 Pickering, Blackface Minstrelsy, pp. 2-4.
12 Reynolds, Minstrel Memories, p. 10. ‘Burnt cork’ was used in the ‘blackening-up’ process.
Much of the press discourse on minstrelsy centred on nostalgic reminiscences and childhood memories. A *Times* article from 1920, written by ‘a correspondent’, observed how the fashion for seaside entertainments had changed from a preference for minstrel acts to pierrots:

The early ‘nineties are, no doubt, of no very great antiquity, but memories of a boyhood even of those days preserve features, manners, sights and sounds that have vanished, albeit unregretted. The bathing machine, cumbrous and never moved when wanted, has given place to the private bathing box; the rigid seclusion of the sexes in bathing is no longer conceivable; and the niggers have given place to the pierrots.\(^\text{14}\)

\(^{14}\) *The Times*, 11\(^{th}\) August 1920, p. 13. Pierrots were clowns who performed in white make-up.
For this correspondent it was certainly not the racial aspects of the minstrel routines that were regrettable, but their lack of artistic merit:

The niggers, it must be confessed in retrospect, were not refined, and were broad in their effects...The niggers, or at any rate the songs, remembered by the boy here in question were not remarkable for sentiment...but the chief memories were comic, of the low comedy which was still the staple of the London music-halls.\textsuperscript{15}

The language used by the correspondent is strongly racialised and indicates clearly how minstrel routines were inexorably linked to concepts of race. The correspondent references his own childhood and there is a strong sense of nostalgia that runs through the piece:

There is something inevitably pathetic in the evocation of past joys, and to a boy of the early ‘nineties the niggers were a joy indeed. Where are those dusky faces gone, that virtuoso on the penny whistle, that jangling banjo, that gay tambourine, and, above all, those clattering bones which it was the ambition of every boy to possess and play?\textsuperscript{16}

While minstrel shows may not have been as popular as they were in the nineteenth century, people of adult age remembered the acts from their childhood. As Chapters Four and Five show, popular entertainment was an important childhood experience that informed people’s ideas about race and nostalgia is a theme that pervades descriptions of minstrel acts during the early 1920s. In January 1920 the \textit{Manchester City News} described a minstrel act performed by Pierce and Roslyn at the Ardwick Empire as minstrelsy, ‘according to the modern manner’, that nevertheless contained ‘a reminiscence of sixty years ago’ as ‘the lady in dainty Dolly Varden costume and hat seats herself at the piano and her companion in the swell suit of the period sings of tender memories, a song in which she joins.’\textsuperscript{17}

The interwar years heralded many changes in popular entertainment, not least with the advent of cinema, but more traditional forms of entertainment continued to attract audiences. Tastes were changing but blackface minstrel acts were to remain popular in Britain until the 1970s and successive generations were exposed to this form of racial stereotyping.\textsuperscript{18} In the interwar period ‘blacked up’ acts, as opposed to large minstrel troupes remained a staple in music-hall acts, with ‘darky’ comedians continuing minstrelsy’s legacy. During the early 1920s blacked-up acts were by far one of the most popular acts at the music halls. Established

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{The Times}, 11\textsuperscript{th} August 1920, p. 13.
\textsuperscript{16} \textit{The Times}, 11\textsuperscript{th} August 1920, p. 13.
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Manchester City News}, 17th January 1920, p. 10. The ‘Dolly Varden costume’ is a reference to a woman’s fashion that was popular for a time during the nineteenth century.
\textsuperscript{18} Pickering, \textit{Blackface Minstrelsy}, p. xi.
acts such as the Combined Mohawk and Moore and Burgess Minstrels and individual acts such as G.H. Elliott, known as the original ‘chocolate-coloured coon’, were popular.\textsuperscript{19} Elliott (1882-1962) was a singer and dancer who began touring Britain in minstrel troupes in the early 1900s and continued to record right up to 1960.\textsuperscript{20} He appeared in the North-West five times between 1919 and 1921.\textsuperscript{21}

The appeal of minstrel and ‘coon’ performances was similar to that of the eastern plays discussed in Chapter Two. There is a strong link between orientalism and minstrelsy as modes of performance as they both relied upon an elaborate costume (or mask) that allowed for the exploration of the self through representations of the ‘other’. Michael Pickering observes how buskers often turned to blackface as a popular act, although their costumes could reveal other influences. Max Cohen remembered seeing four unemployed men performing in blackface in Hoxton market in the 1930s:

Wearing grotesque wigs and false beards…their show was a peculiar bricolage of Niggerdom and Orientalism. Although they began with “a pang-pang-pang from the banjo, a portentous thud on the drum”…they also wore fezze s on their heads… “made salaams, turned somersaults and generally acted the fool with great zest and crudity.”\textsuperscript{22}

This image underlines the fact that dressing-up as an imagined racial ‘other’ was a central feature of popular entertainments in the interwar years. From street entertainments to theatrical productions the art of racial disguise was an essential element of performance; its use in informal entertainments such as busking highlights the extent to which it had permeated the popular consciousness.

From a child’s point of view dressing-up in the ‘minstrel mask’ could be a way of provoking adults by undermining contemporary notions of propriety. \textit{The Times} correspondent who reminisced so fondly about the minstrel acts of his boyhood noted: ‘They may not be seized with the desire to black their faces, too, as was the boy of the early ‘nineties, to the great scandal of a maiden aunt’.\textsuperscript{23} Indeed in the decades before jazz allowed for greater self-expression in music and dance, minstrelsy was seen as quite a rebellious form of entertainment, as Harry Reynolds remembered: ‘It seems quite a time ago when a minstrel show was the only approach to a variety entertainment that many respectable citizens

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Liverpool Echo}, 29th August 1919, p. 3; \textit{Manchester City News}, 31\textsuperscript{st} January 1920, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{20} Pickering, \textit{Blackface Minstrelsy}, p. 179.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Liverpool Echo}, 20th May 1919, p. 5; \textit{Manchester City News}, 31\textsuperscript{st} January 1920, p. 8; \textit{Manchester City News}, 6\textsuperscript{th} March 1920, p. 8; \textit{Manchester City News}, 18\textsuperscript{th} September 1920, p. 3; \textit{Liverpool Echo}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} May 1921, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{22} Quoted in Pickering, \textit{Blackface Minstrelsy}, pp. 65-66.
\textsuperscript{23} \textit{The Times}, 11\textsuperscript{th} August 1920, p. 13.
permitted themselves to indulge in. To many it was quite an unconventional—even a riotous—dissipation.\textsuperscript{24} The imagined transgression of racial boundaries that took place through blackface performance was part of its ‘unconventional’ appeal but the humour derived from the performances was also taken to be a true representation of black people.

The ‘character studies’, ‘coon acts’ and minstrel shows of the early 1920s portrayed an image of black people that the British public found highly entertaining. That the stereotypes used in such acts were viewed as authentic representations of black people is illustrated in the following review from the entertainment section of the \textit{Manchester City News}:

The stump oration of Mr. Al Jonson reminds the old playgoer of the late Billy Richardson, a great favourite Christy Minstrel in his day. Like his famous predecessor, Mr. Jonson visualises the ingenuous nigger to the life, the droll tone of voice and manner, the malapropos way of looking at current affairs, and the effort to describe them in imitation of the practised orator. In addition, Mr. Jonson attempts a song, and gives one or two dances quite in keeping, the whole being the very essence of humour peculiar to the negro character.\textsuperscript{25}

This act performed at the Hulme Hippodrome in 1920 and the authenticity attached to such entertainments is evident in the review, as the humour on display is described as ‘peculiar to the negro’ rather than as an interpretation performed for the amusement of the audience. This review also displays a sense of nostalgia common to descriptions of minstrelsy; minstrelsy was enjoyed as both contemporary entertainment and as a source of ‘sentimental retrospection’.\textsuperscript{26}

Both ‘theatrical orientalism’ and minstrelsy illustrate how concepts of race could be constructed on the stage and disseminated to a wide audience. They also highlight the racialised way in which other peoples and cultures were represented during the interwar years. Once black entertainers became an increasingly common sight on the stages of British music-halls and theatres during the 1920s and 1930s, this mode of representation was used to describe black performers using this established language and imagery.

\textbf{The Southern Syncopated Orchestra}

Formed by the American composer Will Marion Cook, the Southern Syncopated Orchestra (SSO) was made up of 27 musicians and 19 singers of British West Indian, West African and

\textsuperscript{24} Reynolds, \textit{Minstrel Memories}, p. 47.
\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Manchester City News}, 28\textsuperscript{th} August 1920, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{26} Pickering, \textit{Blackface Minstrelsy}, p. 5.
American origin. In 1919 the group performed at Buckingham Palace and the Royal Albert Hall. Their experience underlines the necessity of conducting further research on the subject of race during the interwar period as it illustrates both the stereotypical representations that characterised descriptions of black performers and the agency displayed by these performers in defining themselves and their own brand of popular entertainment.

The SSO made two visits to Liverpool in 1920, both to critical acclaim. In February 1920 the Liverpool Daily Post noted that ‘The Southern Syncopated Orchestra and their speciality artistes have gone at a bound into high public favour, and their efforts in Liverpool have received generous and discriminating critical appreciation.’ The act was liable to change as members came and went, and often only a quartet would perform. In November 1920 when the act visited Birkenhead the Post noted that ‘Harmony and mirth are the outstanding features of the Hippodrome programme, where the principal item is given by the Royal Southern Syncopated Singers. This quartette of coloured vocalists render a choice selection of songs (sic).’ Evidence of the success of the SSO abounds in the Liverpool press as substantial articles were devoted to their act and news of financial and legal issues within the group made pages of the newspaper outside of the entertainment section. One reviewer for the Liverpool Echo declared that ‘Liverpool is in for a jolly fortnight’, and that, ‘the American Southern Syncopated Singing Orchestra gave their first performance in Liverpool to a thrilled and delighted audience.’ The same reviewer had nothing but praise for the performers themselves: ‘There are about thirty coloured musicians in the Syncopated company, including four ladies. And they are all performers of remarkable talent.’ The SSO were a unique act and they were warmly received as something new and fresh on the entertainment scene. A review in the Liverpool Echo enthused, ‘What we have known as jazz is archaic by comparison.’

In order to avoid the pitfall of collapsing the experience of ethnic minority groups in Britain into one narrative of racism and oppression, it is vital to stress the warm and

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29 Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury, 13th February 1920, p. 5.
30 S. Kester, Under My Own Colours (Leicestershire, 2003), p. 22.
31 Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury, 9th November 1920, p. 10.
32 Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury, 15th May 1920, p. 9; Liverpool Echo, 18th May 1920, p. 5.
33 Liverpool Echo, 12th February 1920, p. 4.
34 Liverpool Echo, 12th February 1920, p. 4.
35 Liverpool Echo, 11th February 1920, p. 7.
enthusiastic reception given to black entertainers in Britain—indeed many commented on the favourable conditions for performers in Britain compared to the hostility they faced in the United States. Some, such as Paul Robeson, chose to settle here as a consequence of this. In addition, the success of the Southern Syncopated Orchestra forms part of a narrative that celebrates the history and achievements of black people in Britain and is a source of pride to the descendants of the performers. In her autobiography Under My Own Colours, Suzy Kester remembers the legacy of her grandfather, Pete Robinson, who was a drummer with the Southern Syncopated Orchestra. Pete Robinson married Suzy’s grandmother, Florence, and they had three children together before he drowned, along with several other members of the SSO, when their ship was struck by another vessel en route to a performance in Dublin in October 1921. Suzy acknowledges both the success that the orchestra had, and their positive experiences as black men in Britain: ‘These young men found the Europeans were so much more enlightened than white America. In England their dark complexions were an advantage rather than a handicap and they soon found themselves performing at the best society venues and at private functions too.’

While her description of the SSO’s experience in Britain is not representative of those who were not part of a successful band, Kester’s family history reminds us that the experience of black people in Britain was not always one of exclusion. Nevertheless, the spectre of race looms large in the newspaper reviews of the SSO’s performances, and illustrates how the idea of racial difference was constructed in the interwar years; elements of fear and desire are evident in these reviews as the performers were described using terms that were already synonymous with black otherness in the white imagination.

The popularity of the SSO illustrates an increasing awareness of black culture on the part of white audiences as well as the ability of black performers to appropriate the successful aspects of minstrel acts for themselves. One of the chief attractions of the minstrel shows of the nineteenth century was the ‘negro spirituals’; these songs continued to be performed in the acts of black entertainers in the interwar years, even those as refreshingly modern as the SSO and contributed greatly to their success. As one review illustrates:

the ragtime is sickly pale compared with the old plantation melodies, which are revived. 
Hear the syncopated chorus sing
“Go down, Moses,
Way down to Egyp’s la hand

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38 Nott, Music for the People, pp. 231-232.
39 Kester, Under My Own Colours, pp. 20-22.
Tell de Pharaoh
Let my people go”
And you will get a sense of the indestructible faith of the old negro slaves which will bring a lump into your throat.\textsuperscript{40}

There is debate amongst scholars about the extent to which negro spirituals, with their overt biblical references, were songs of resistance and rebellion or a way for slaves to cope with their intolerable conditions through faith in a better life after death.\textsuperscript{41} Reviews of these performances during the interwar years emphasise the latter quality. In this review it is the ‘indestructible faith’ of the slaves that is illustrated by the spiritual rather than a more overt form of resistance. Similarly, a review in the \textit{Liverpool Echo} entitled ‘New Delights for Gramophone Lovers’ described Paul Robeson’s performances of spirituals such as ‘Steal Away’ and ‘Water Boy’, as ‘a record not to be missed’.\textsuperscript{42} The convict song ‘Water Boy’ is described as possessing a ‘curious blend of pathos and philosophic resignation’. By interpreting the song in this way the reviewer has not allowed for the fact that these songs were also songs of resistance and not merely of passive ‘resignation’. Robeson himself described spirituals as ‘the soul of the race made manifest’.\textsuperscript{43}

For white audiences spirituals contributed to minstrelsy’s ‘philanthropic appeal’.\textsuperscript{44} During minstrelsy’s early years the spirituals indulged the anti-slavery sentiments of its audiences while simultaneously helping to disseminate these ideals to a wider audience.\textsuperscript{45} The idea that slaves were the passive recipients of a freedom that was bestowed upon them, rather than active agents in the process of emancipation contributes to the notion of ‘paternalistic benevolence’, to use Andrew Porter’s phrase, that characterised religious discourses on race during this period.\textsuperscript{46} That this sentimental image of black people could be used to invoke sympathy amongst the general public into the interwar period is illustrated by the experience of the West Indian soprano Alyce Fraser who gave a performance of spirituals at a church in Runcorn in 1932, in order, according to the \textit{Garston and Woolton Weekly}

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Liverpool Echo}, 12\textsuperscript{th} February 1920, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Liverpool Echo}, 10\textsuperscript{th} February 1926, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{43} White, ‘Veiled Testimony’, p. 255.
\textsuperscript{44} Pickering, \textit{Blackface Minstrelsy}, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{45} Pickering, \textit{Blackface Minstrelsy}, p. 19 and p. 22.
News, to raise money for the women’s department of the missionary society (this source is referenced in Chapter One).  

While the rhetoric used to describe these performances in the press used paternalistic language and familiar stereotypes such as ‘the old negro slaves’, they were enjoyed and understood as part of an African-American musical heritage, in sharp contrast to the crude comic representations of black people portrayed in minstrel shows. The fact that the Southern Syncopated Orchestra incorporated the popular aspects of minstrelsy into their act also suggests that the popularity of minstrelsy did not necessarily rest on its characterisation of black people, as the spirituals were appreciated for their own sake, even if the language used to describe them in the press is paternalistic and often ignores the fact that they could be interpreted as songs of rebellion and resistance. Narratives on race were multiple, complex and often contradictory; celebrations of black culture were expressed using language and images that were based on positive and negative stereotypes that had already been established in the British imagination.

Part of this constructed black identity consisted of expressions and mannerisms that were perceived to represent African-American culture. These took the form of mimicry, as the physical appearance and language of black people was seen as open to derisive commentary, just as it had been when minstrelsy was at its height. Explaining that the SSO would not be able to perform one of their performances as planned the Liverpool Echo exclaimed ‘We Guess Dar Ain’t No Show!’ using the broken English commonly used to characterise black people from the American South. The same reviewer that declared ‘Liverpool is in for a jolly fortnight’, quipped, ‘We shall all be going about humming scraps of half-remembered plantation melodies, bursting out occasionally into loud, hilarious woops, greeting one another as “honey” and “chile,” saying “come over hyah,” and “not dis chicken,” and things like that.’ This form of impersonation was a popular item of entertainment in its own right at the music halls of the period. Known as ‘character studies’, they were a vehicle for impersonating people from various ethnic backgrounds. The act that appeared most frequently in the North-West during this period was Stewart Morton and Maisie Wood who performed their ‘coon character studies’ four times in 1920 alone. While these ‘studies’ of black character appear to have been the most popular, there were others: in

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47 Garston and Woolton Weekly News, 14th October 1932, p. 5.
48 Liverpool Echo, 18th February 1920, p. 8.
49 Liverpool Echo, 12th February 1920, p. 4.
50 Liverpool Daily Post, 27th August 1920, p. 5; Manchester City News, 3rd April 1920, p. 8; Manchester City News, 24th July 1920, p. 6; Manchester City News, 9th October 1920, p. 7.
April 1920 the Manchester City News reported on a performance by Miss Estelle Rose who presented ‘some piquant studies of Italian and Hebrew characters’ at the Ardwick Empire.51

Newspaper reviews highlight that the ethnicity of black performers was not tangential to their performance, but an integral part of it. With their blend of jazz music and older songs familiar to audiences, the SSO found a middle ground that satisfied many tastes:

“The American Southern Syncopated Singing Orchestra”…has been the instrument of our conversion. This band of artists–so utterly unlike the “chocolate-coloured coons,” strumming on the banjo or rattling the bones, that one ordinarily associates with negro melodies; so unlike, too, the conventional “jazz” band, with its drummer grinning through a kind of frame hung with assorted ironmongery.52

This review seamlessly links blackface acts, jazz music and the performance of the SSO; the style of music has changed but the idea of race remains. The review, published in the Liverpool Daily Post of February 11th, 1920, began with the following proclamation: ‘Until last night we confess ourselves to have been both ignorant and indifferent with regard to negro songs and negro music. Negroes themselves did not interest us, but now our indifference must necessarily seem a mood of the past’.53 Successful black performers could transform perceptions of black culture and black people, defining themselves through popular entertainment, but they were also constrained by the limitations imposed on them by dominant social and cultural institutions; in this case newspapers imposed an identity on the SSO that, although positive, was imagined rather than an authentic representation of the experiences or views of the performers themselves.

According to the Daily Post’s reviewer the SSO were ‘true and sincere exponents of the humour and the pathos of the negro race.’54 This is a direct reference to the representations of black people constructed in minstrel shows and underlines the rigid nature of racial categories in this period.55 Character and skin colour were believed to be inexorably linked and the reviewer goes on to compare the ease with which the singers moved their bodies in time to the music, describing it as a skill that ‘is, in a sense outside our experience, a thing in which we have no share. We never make that simple surrender of ourselves to rhythm, to melody, which the negro does.’56 Similarly, a review of ‘two coloured cross-talk comedians’ in the Manchester Guardian in July 1936 asked ‘why is it that American negroes

51 Manchester City News, 17th April 1920, p. 9.
52 Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury, 11th February 1920, p. 10.
53 Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury, 11th February 1920, p. 10.
54 Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury, 11th February 1920, p. 10.
55 Pickering, Blackface Minstrelsy, p. 23.
56 Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury, 11th February 1920, p. 10.
can so easily radiate a kind of cheerful sunshine from the stage?’. Contrasting the perceived characteristics of white and black people, the review, of an act that was staged at the Palace theatre, Manchester, declared, ‘They are continually the ambassadors of a race who must know better than white people how to laugh and be happy.’

African-American music, be it performed by black entertainers or white entertainers in blackface, allowed audiences to experience a way of living outside of their normal experience. The popular appeal of minstrelsy in the nineteenth century rested on its respectable reputation and its offer of abandonment and release. Newspaper reviews reveal that this continued to form part of the appeal of bands like the SSO. As Marva Griffin Carter notes, for many people, the SSO provided ‘new and vital popular music that offered a way out of many of the limitations of early twentieth-century society.’

One of the ‘limitations’ of early twentieth-century society, was a profound concern about interracial relationships; racial disguise allowed these boundaries to be transgressed through the experience of a trip to the theatre.

The experience of the Southern Syncopated Orchestra highlights the complexities of understanding the way in which race was constructed at a particular historical juncture. The ways in which other peoples and cultures were imagined and constructed, be it within the entertainment world or otherwise, were not simplistic and were often founded on positive ideas. In addition an individual’s take on the subject could be equally contradictory rendering any attempt to define an era in terms of its attitudes to race incredibly problematic. This is an issue that confronted Suzy Kester when she saw her grandmother enjoying the Black and White Minstrel Show on television in the 1950s. Observing her grandmother’s Saturday night ritual Kester wondered how she could enjoy such entertainment when she had married a talented black musician:

I can’t say which was the most embarrassing-seeing those performers cavorting around the stage with their faces blacked up or watching Nan’s obvious pleasure. Even though Nan insisted that they were very talented singers and dancers, and that the shows were in the style of the old fashioned music hall, I felt very aggrieved that my own grandmother could watch something like that when she had been married to a black man.

The concept of minstrelsy belonged to an era when racial identities were fixed and the potential offence caused by such costumes was not considered. The use of blackface make-up by black artists was taken as a seal of approval rather than as evidence of the constraints

58 Pickering, Blackface Minstrelsy, pp. xii-xiii and p. 22.
imposed on black performers who wanted to succeed in the entertainment world. As Kester’s grandmother informed her:

Nan did her best to assure me that it was a compliment to the negro that these performers felt it necessary to wear blackface. She even brought out an old photo of Pete Robinson wearing similar makeup. I turned my nose up in disgust. It was a tradition she had grown up with and no amount of perplexed humiliation on my part could convince her that it just wasn’t right.\textsuperscript{60}

For Suzy’s grandmother, the blackface mask was an expression of admiration for black people in contrast to the obvious derision manifest in some contemporary reviews: ‘Mr. Jonson visualises the ingenuous nigger to the life.’\textsuperscript{61} The tension between fear and desire that characterised descriptions of blackface acts was also present in descriptions of black performers.

There was physicality to the SSO’s performances that impressed reviewers, but the same expressiveness in performance was a concern for contemporary critics of jazz music. Discourses on jazz during the interwar years underline how the field of entertainment became a battle-ground on which ideas about race were contested. Some condemned it and its African-American origins and yet its influence continued unabated during this period. The syncopated rhythms of jazz did not just change the style of performance on-stage, it influenced popular dances such as the Charleston, criticized in some quarters for its explicit sexuality and African-American origins.\textsuperscript{62} Amongst some of the critics of jazz there was nostalgia for more traditional forms of English music. Writing in the \textit{Liverpool Echo} in 1919, H.T.G. hoped that soon old English dances would come back into fashion as the ‘Successors to Jazz’. Lamenting the modern craze for jazz, H.T.G. declared:

\begin{quote}
Jazz is an epidemic of negroid origin. At the present moment the epidemic is at its height...But jazz is a jade that will soon die of exhaustion. It is part of the aftermath of war. The dancing revival, however, is likely to continue, and an attempt is being made to popularise the old English dances which were distinguished for their grace and charm.\textsuperscript{63}
\end{quote}

This article illustrates how critiques of jazz had strong racial overtones. One of the criticisms of jazz was that it was ‘primitive’ music. Of course, what this really meant was that it was primitive by virtue of its African origins and this attitude was displayed by H.T.G. when he

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{60} Kester, \textit{Under My Own Colours}, p. 135. \\
\textsuperscript{61} \textit{Manchester City News}, 28\textsuperscript{th} August 1920, p. 6. \\
\textsuperscript{63} \textit{Liverpool Echo}, 23\textsuperscript{rd} May 1919, p. 4.
\end{flushright}
disparagingly notes ‘jazz bands are banging the kitchen utensils with great vim and discord’. Referring to the instruments of jazz as kitchen utensils portrays the music as childlike and unsophisticated in contrast to the old English dances. In addition, by using the metaphor of disease to describe the origins of jazz and its popularity, H.T.G. echoes discourses on miscegenation. Interwar critiques of jazz music often reflect a sense of nostalgia for traditional English culture that was espoused by other contemporary social commentators, the most notable of whom was J.B. Priestley. Jazz music did not encourage debate simply because of its African origins; its American origins also compounded the anxieties of social commentators already concerned about the effect of American popular culture in Britain.

A particularly outspoken critic of jazz was the chorus master Sir Henry Coward who launched a seething attack on jazz while addressing the Sheffield Rotary Club in 1927. Coward declared that ‘jazz should be denounced and made taboo among the white races. It is a low type of primitive music, both in structure and performance.’ Interestingly Coward’s father had been a blackface minstrel and perhaps this goes some way to explaining his views on jazz. The nostalgia displayed by Henry Coward, Harry Reynolds and the *Times* commentator coincided with a period of increasing black achievement in the entertainment world and part of this reaction to a new post-war phase in entertainment was to reminisce about the ‘good old days’ of minstrelsy when black entertainers on the stage were confined to the representations of them performed by white men (and some women) behind the minstrel mask; these reactions were certainly wildly at odds with the popularity of bands like the Southern Syncopated Orchestra.

The views of men like Henry Coward show a desire to return to a time that is past, highlighting the fact that the interwar period saw a shift in public tastes. Black entertainers were making their voices heard and the British public were a willing audience. Harry Reynolds noted this shift in the public mood:

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64 *Liverpool Echo*, 23rd May 1919, p. 4.
67 *Manchester Guardian*, 20th September 1927, p. 3.
Quite recently, following the success made by the popular coloured songsters, Messrs. Layton and Johnstone, we had an influx of real coloured gentlemen from the States, usually possessed of presentable voices...and evidently to the entire satisfaction of many patrons who seem much impressed by the smart appearance of the artistes and the elegant cut of their evening dress suits. 69

The contrast between these new African-American performers and the idea of black people in the British imagination was so great as to confuse some reviewers who conflated the blackface minstrels of the past and black performers like Layton and Johnstone who sang modern music as part of their double-act. In an article titled ‘Negro Minstrelsy Up to Date’ a reviewer for the Manchester Guardian declared that Layton and Johnstone ‘make us marvel at the distance we have travelled from the tradition and method of Moore and Burgess’. The idea that black culture was somehow primitive or not compatible with modernity is illustrated in the same review: ‘Yes, negro minstrelsy is very much up-to-date; so much up-to-date that it has little, if any, relation to negro life at all.’ 70

For others African-American culture was the essence of modernity. 71 The sense that critics of jazz were out of touch with modern tastes is summed up in a letter sent to the Liverpool Echo in 1926. Jack Hylton was a jazz musician whose band had recently been criticised by Henry Coward and he launched an attack on jazz critics in general, for both their antiquated views on leisure and their views on race. 72 In response to Coward’s assertion that jazz ‘may be clever, but it is not elevating’, Hylton states:

There we have, opened out under our eyes, the gulf between the Victorians and ourselves. When the young people of to-day have finished the day’s work they quite candidly set out to amuse themselves without any of the old smug nonsense about “elevating” their minds, and they succeed with an honesty which rather scares the self-righteousness of an older generation. 73

The popularity of jazz was not simply a concern because of its African-American origins; it marked a fundamental shift in tastes from the pre-war generation.

69 Reynolds, Minstrel Memories, pp. 9-10.
70 Manchester Guardian, 26th April 1927, p. 14. The comparison made between Layton and Johnstone and ‘negro minstrelsy’ may also have been because black performers often used blackface make-up themselves. The black performers Scott and Whaley, a comic double-act, presented a routine in which Harry Scott would perform in blackface. See Pickering, Blackface Minstrelsy, pp. 198-200.
71 This was increasingly the case from the 1930s; see M. Nava, Visceral Cosmopolitanism: Gender, Culture and the Normalisation of Difference (Oxford, 2007), pp. 75-94.
72 Liverpool Echo, 17th February 1926, p. 11.
73 Liverpool Echo, 17th February 1926, p. 11.
Some felt that the war itself made jazz more popular. H.T.G. in the Liverpool Echo dismissed it as ‘part of the aftermath of war’.\textsuperscript{74} The popularity of jazz music extended beyond the parties of London’s ‘bright young things’. In June 1926 the Observer reported on a wedding ceremony in Blackpool that included a jazz band as part of the ceremony. According to the newspaper, the bride carried a bouquet of red roses in the shape of a saxophone and the vicar declared that ‘the band in church was most seemly and beautiful’. He added that ‘there was no divorce between religion and the great profession that entertained them.’\textsuperscript{75} The vicar’s defensive comments, as well as the fact that the newspaper chose to report on this wedding ceremony, emphasises that jazz remained a topic of controversy as its popularity grew during the 1920s. That the popularity of jazz appeared to contemporaries to mark a significant change from the tastes of the Victorian period is illustrated in one source from the Daily Mirror that also underlines the press’ increasing preoccupation with young, independent women, often portrayed in this particular feature in the guise of the flapper (see Figure 7). In the 1930s jazz clubs offered people more than just an experience of African-American music. These were venues where black men and white women (as it was predominantly the case) could meet and socialise; perhaps one of the more famous women to form relationships with African-American jazz musicians was the heiress Nancy Cunard.\textsuperscript{76}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure7.png}
\caption{‘Teachers of Youth: Yesterday and To-Day’, Daily Mirror, 10 November 1920, p. 5.}
\end{figure}

These venues tell us something of the lived reality of ‘race relations’ in interwar Britain, however, for the majority of white Britons, interracial contact was limited and the idea of racial difference was experienced within the imagination, nurtured by constructions emanating from popular entertainments; by the 1930s, these were likely to be Hollywood films.

\textsuperscript{74} Liverpool Echo, 23\textsuperscript{rd} May 1919, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{75} Observer, 4\textsuperscript{th} July 1926, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{76} Nava, Visceral Cosmopolitanism, pp. 81-82.
Black but not British: Paul Robeson and the Influence of American Popular Culture

By the 1930s and the rise of cinema as a form of popular entertainment, black actors followed in the footsteps of black musicians as they tried to succeed professionally while challenging the racial prejudices still prevalent at the time. The most successful black performer of the interwar period was Paul Robeson and his experiences underline the difficulties faced by those who had to balance their desire for success with their desire to see black people fairly portrayed on the screen:

In the early days of my career as an actor, I shared what was then the prevailing attitude of Negro performers—that the content and form of a play or film scenario was of little or no importance to us. What mattered was the opportunity, which came so seldom to our folks, of having a part-anything part-to play on the stage or in the movies; and for a Negro actor to be offered a starring role—well, that was a rare stroke of fortune indeed! Later I came to understand that the Negro artist could not view the matter simply in terms of his individual interests, and that he had a responsibility to his people who rightfully resented the traditional stereotyped portrayals of Negroes on stage and screen.77

When, for example, Robeson saw the final cut of his 1935 film Sanders of the River he was not impressed with its imperialistic overtones and his involvement with the film was a source of shame for the rest of his life.78

From the mid-1930s, after a visit to the Soviet Union, Robeson became committed to Communist ideals; as he became increasingly politically active he spoke out against fascism and racism.79 To most ordinary English people Robeson was the ‘single most significant black figure’ known to them.80 His fame was partly the result of and partly contributed to the idea of America that had been constructed in the British imagination, predominantly through popular entertainment. As Mica Nava observes, ‘His stardom and particularly his American accent…evoked for English audiences a compelling identification with American culture.’81

Robeson exemplifies the profound influence that African-Americans had on the British public’s idea of race. Tony Kushner’s work on the Mass-Observation Archive reveals the extent to which many British people imagined African-Americans when they were asked to visualise a black person.82 Entertainment was a vital source of images and ideas and Paul

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77 P. Robeson, Here I Stand (Boston, 1972), p. 31.
79 Chipley Slavicek, Paul Robeson: Entertainer and Activist, pp. 70-73.
80 Nava, Visceral Cosmopolitanism, p. 87.
81 Nava, Visceral Cosmopolitanism, p. 87.
Robeson often appeared in directive responses, either as an example of the possibilities for future racial equality or, more often, as the exception to the rule. A newspaper review of Robeson’s first appearance in Liverpool underlines that he was often compared favourably with other black people: ‘he retains that charm of the unspoilt—not always a characteristic of his race or colour—that is so difficult to preserve.’

Robeson’s film roles were also influential in cementing views about black people; one Mass-Observer noted that ‘negroes’ were ‘a simple, kindly people’ and that when she visualised a black person it was ‘Paul Robeson and Green Pastures’.

The 1936 film Green Pastures did not star Robeson but had a large cast of black actors in a biblical story that reinforced many negative stereotypes about black people. It starred the African-American actor Rex Ingram and recreated episodes from the Bible using images that were supposed to be representative of African-American life in the United States. In a review of the film, the Manchester Guardian described the characters as true representations of black character and culture. The review declared that black Africans and African-Americans (from the South) are very similar in their ‘child-like’ tendencies:

Though they develop quickly and, at first, are “smarter” than white children, there is some check at about the age of twelve, and they do not, as a rule, develop much mentally after that age. The highly educated Negro would no doubt feel that “The Green Pastures” is a caricature, but I believe that many of the coloured people, both in Africa and in the United States, would find it satisfying…It is a pity to reject “The Green Pastures” as irreverent or absurd when it throws so much light upon the mental attitude of an interesting and gifted people.

This review imagines black people as African or American, but not as British, and this was also a feature of responses to the Mass-Observation directive in 1939. This review underlines how popular culture reinforced dominant stereotypes and also how these stereotypes were so fixed in the British imagination that they were taken as fact. Films that starred black actors were not viewed simply as entertainment; they were also perceived to reveal certain truths about black people.

Kushner notes that in the June 1939 race directive Robeson ‘was used as a means of exploring ideas about racial difference.’ An opinion on black men given by one young

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83 Liverpool Echo, 25th November 1930, p. 9. This quote appears to be a reference to Robeson’s character, as in he has not been spoilt by fame.
85 Brief synopsis at http://explore.bfi.org.uk/4ce2b721bbdf0; accessed 16th December 2012.
87 Kushner, We Europeans?, p. 124.
female respondent underlines how desire for the racial ‘other’ could be justified when the figure in question was as popular as Robeson. The respondent stated that she liked ‘their looks but I don’t think I would sleep with one–unless it were Paul Robeson!’ This response displays an awareness of contemporary social taboos; she is attracted to black men but would not sleep with them. The exceptional status given to Paul Robeson reveals the respondent’s fantasies and the licence that Robeson’s position gave to them; interracial relationships were taboo but an imagined one was not. That Robeson was popular with female audiences has been well-documented and his on-stage relationships with white women, despite attracting some controversy, did not lessen his popularity. Indeed, given the response of this respondent, they appear to have enhanced his appeal, giving licence to fantasies that were restricted in practice by contemporary social mores.

The second part of this directive response underlines the dichotomy of fear and desire that lay at the heart of such fantasies: ‘I wonder if they are savage under the surface-ie whether in a given set of circumstances they would be likely to react in a way a European would not understand.’ Kushner notes that for this respondent, black people were ‘fascinating because of their physical difference but also potentially dangerous.’ This potential danger was also part of the attraction; the ‘allure of difference’, is suggested by the observer’s desire to know if black people behaved in the same way as a European. Mica Nava notes that, in the 1930s, at all social levels, interracial relationships could be a way for women to contest the confines of English society and their own ‘social marginality’ as well as a form of protest against contemporary racial prejudice. This Mass-Observer articulated her desire in terms of an attraction to something that was different and unknown. Her use of the term European to denote white identity suggests that this respondent did not only imagine blackness as un-British but geographically far-removed from her immediate experience. Kushner notes that this was a common feature of the directive responses: ‘Very few Mass-Observers…were

89 S. Tully Boyle and A. Bunie, Paul Robeson: The Years of Promise and Achievement (Amherst, 2001), p. 207 and p. 234. Robeson starred in Othello in 1930 alongside the white actress Peggy Ashcroft as Desdemona. Both received letters objecting to an interracial kiss in the play although no serious threats were made. See Boyle and Bunie, Paul Robeson, p. 224 and Chipley Slavicek, Paul Robeson: Entertainer and Activist, p. 59.
90 Kushner, We Europeans?, p. 125.
91 Nava, Visceral Cosmopolitanism, p. 21.
willing to accept that concepts of European identity and sense of belonging were in any way compatible with the black presence in places like Britain.\textsuperscript{93}

The image that many of the Mass-Observers had of Paul Robeson was generated by their contact with American popular culture and this is turn contributed to their own views on black people.\textsuperscript{94} American popular culture was viewed as modern and this was expressly linked to African-American culture through popular music and dance; this in turn led to an association between black men and modernity. This influence was largely felt by British women and would have a significant impact on race relations in the second half of the twentieth century precipitated by the number of interracial relationships between white women and black American GIs during the Second World War.\textsuperscript{95}

Nava’s work traces the importance of this notion of blackness in the British imagination from the interwar period:

“the negro” in Britain during the interwar period, although still discriminated against in multiple ways, was nevertheless associated increasingly with the modern and with the Hollywood landscape of the new world, rather than with narratives of empire or America’s internal memories of slavery.\textsuperscript{96}

This suggests that African-Americans successfully transcended the negative, paternalistic stereotypes associated with minstrelsy and actively defined a positive image of themselves that was desirable to the British public more broadly, and to women in particular. This view does obscure the impact that imperial and eugenic ideas about race had on the British imagination during this period. American popular culture did change the way that some British people imagined race and this did impact on the lived reality of race relations; for most people in the interwar years, however, interracial encounters were confined to the imagination, restricted by contemporary ideas about racial difference. This is exemplified by the Mass-Observation responses highlighted by Kushner and by newspaper evidence that celebrated Robeson as different from other black people.\textsuperscript{97}

Despite being stereotyped in his film roles, Robeson did speak out on issues of black civil rights and his popularity ensured that he would be heard. In June 1935 the Manchester Guardian published ‘A Talk with Paul Robeson’ in which he talked about the colour bar and

\textsuperscript{93} Kushner, \textit{We Europeans?}, p. 118.
\textsuperscript{94} Kushner, \textit{We Europeans?}, p. 126.
\textsuperscript{95} Nava, \textit{Visceral Cosmopolitanism}, pp. 75-78.
\textsuperscript{96} Nava, \textit{Visceral Cosmopolitanism}, p. 93.
\textsuperscript{97} Kushner, \textit{We Europeans?}, pp. 124-127; Liverpool Echo, 25th November 1930, p. 9.
racial prejudice. Robeson lived and worked in Britain from 1928-1939 and became popular amongst white audiences as well as with Britain’s black community. In later years Robeson would speak of his admiration for Britain’s working class; both black and white. In his own work, *Here I Stand*, originally published in 1958, Robeson recounted the importance of his time in Britain in imbuing him with a sense of his own African identity. For Robeson, his experiences with the black community in Britain, taught him not about the experiences of those who were Black and British, but an appreciation for his own African heritage through contact with Africans in Britain. Some of these were prominent members of The West African Student’s Union, but he also came to know what he described as ‘another class of Africans’, those seamen in London, Liverpool and Cardiff who, he noted ‘had their organizations, and had much to teach me about their lives and their various peoples.’

Some of Britain’s black community found work as extras in Robeson’s films. While they were often employed to play African natives in films that celebrated the Empire, the recollections of those involved indicate that they were British. For many people who came from places like Cardiff and Liverpool for work it was a welcome source of extra income. It was not just in imperial films that black people were employed; the orientalist films of the period also often required black actors. Esther Bruce remembered her father, Joseph Bruce, supplementing his income as a film extra in films including the screen version of *Chu Chin Chow* with Anna May Wong. Esther also remembered her father’s role in *Sanders of the River*, a film that included 250 black extras, and how the role required of him as an African native shocked her:

When Dad appeared in *Sanders of the River* he told me that the little children cried when they saw their Mums and Dads take their clothes off and pretend to be African natives…I could have been in *Sanders of the River*. They needed lots of extras for that film, and the money would have come in handy. But when my Dad asked me if I wanted to go with him to the film studio, I said no. I didn’t want to take my clothes off in public!

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100 Robeson, *Here I Stand*. Robeson stressed in the foreword that this work is not an autobiography.
101 Robeson, *Here I Stand*, pp. 33-34.
103 Bourne, *Black in the British Frame*, p. 43.
The contrast between the imagined Africa that was portrayed in Sanders of the River and the lived realities of the Black-Britons who played the part of the ‘natives’ is striking. Most of the audience may have taken for granted that the people on the screen were not British when in fact they were from their own communities; popular entertainment played a crucial role in obscuring the reality of Britain’s ethnic minority communities through the construction of racial difference.

In the British imagination, black people were constructed as exotic curiosities and rarely in leading roles (with the notable exception of Robeson). Crucially, they were also very often silenced in these roles. Before American popular culture was to exert a strong grip on the British public and the cinema had become the entertainment venue of choice, Oscar Asche’s plays entertained audiences using extras from Britain’s black community. These roles exploited older images of the exotic ‘other’. One of the most famous scenes in orientalist art, for example, is that of a black eunuch guarding the entrance to a harem. That this image was replicated in orientalist stage productions is verified by the following account from Josephine Florent, whose memories of her father Napoleon’s stage roles before the First World War illustrate both the limited roles available to black actors during this period and the way in which the idea of race was constructed on the stage:

I remember being taken to see my father on the West End stage in Kismet at the Garrick Theatre (1914). Another show he appeared in was Chu Chin Chow at His Majesty’s Theatre (1916). That ran for five years and kept father in work for a very long time. I was a very small child at the time, but I do vividly remember seeing my father on stage in those productions wearing the most wonderful, exotic costumes. Of course he didn’t have speaking roles. He was an exotic extra, usually a eunuch.

Josephine’s account highlights the way in which racial discourses can incorporate different peoples and cultures under one overarching theme. In this case, the discourse of exoticism, synonymous with descriptions of the Orient, can be applied to both the exotic oriental women of the harem and the black male guarding them. It also relates to the issue of the body and race in interwar stage productions. In this case both the eastern women of the harem and the black male eunuch are sexualised as part of the fantasy scenario of the harem and silenced as the guard is performing his duty and the women are denied a voice; they are there to be watched, both by the person viewing the painting and the black male guarding them.

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107 Two examples are Jean-Léon Gérôme, Le Garde du Sérail (1859) and Ludwig Deutsch, Le Garde Nubien (1895); see R. Kabbani, Imperial Fictions: Europe’s Myths of Orient (London, 2008).
108 Bourne, Black in the British Frame, p. 45.
Paul Robeson was not the only black American to receive an enthusiastic reception outside of the United States. Josephine Baker was a notable public figure between the wars and ‘America’s First Coloured Countess’ transcended contemporary racial boundaries with her unique brand of entertainment. Their success is testament to the fact that racial difference was not necessarily a disadvantage or a bar to achievement. This does not mean that popular appeal guaranteed immunity from contemporary prejudices or that racial difference was seen as unproblematic. Theatre, music and cinema are the focus of this chapter but other popular pastimes, notably sport, were placed under scrutiny in discussions about race and reveal both the level of anxiety about interracial contact in interwar Britain and the efforts of black athletes to challenge the colour bar in sport.

In November 1922 the Home Secretary banned a boxing match between the black Senegalese fighter Battling Siki and the British fighter Joe Beckett. The fight had been due to take place at the Albert Hall in London but it was prevented on the grounds that the fight might exacerbate racial tensions. There had already been a precedent set in 1911 when a boxing match between the white English boxer Bombardier Wells and the African-American Jack Johnson had been cancelled, according to the Manchester Guardian ‘purely on account of the colour question.’ The ban on the Siki-Beckett fight was reported in the press and the Manchester Guardian gave details of the reasoning behind the Home Secretary’s decision:

It was added that the meeting of black and white combatants was likely to arouse passions which it is most important to avoid, especially in view of the fact that coloured men were numerous in some parts of the British Empire. The possible rousing of the passions referred to would have repercussions throughout the Empire which it was desirable to avoid, and the Home Secretary was determined to avoid them to the best of his ability.

The language used in this statement echoes that of the Bishop of Liverpool in the wake of the 1919 riots (see Chapter One). Interracial violence, whether it was an official sporting event or unofficial acts of violence was perceived as a direct threat to the stability of the Empire. The Home Office’s reasoning that it was ‘coloured men’ who would be emotionally affected by the outcome of the contest illustrates a racialised outlook that perceived black men as irrational and unable to control their emotions. The statement does not reveal what outcome would cause such passionate responses, but the implication is that a victory for either men would lead to violent clashes between the races; Beckett had his own theory: ‘If the opinion

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109 The headline is from the Manchester Guardian, 21st June 1927, p. 11.
110 Manchester Guardian, 10th November 1922, p. 9.
111 Manchester Guardian, 10th November 1922, p. 9.
of the authorities that in contests between men of colour and white men the temperaments of
the contestants are incompatible is interpreted as meaning that coloured men are superior as
fighters, I would like to get a chance to prove it otherwise (sic). The triumph of either man
was perceived to have profound implications, particularly in the colonies where racial
boundaries were closely guarded and transgressions or disruptions to these boundaries
viewed as a threat to the entire imperial project.

Stephen Bourne notes that in the Victorian era, the main form of contact that white
Britons had with black people was through sport (usually boxing) or entertainment. These
experiences continued to be a fundamental aspect of interracial interactions in the interwar
period at both the local and the national level. Governmental concerns exemplified by the
reaction to the Siki-Beckett fight were not necessarily paralleled at the local level, as the
following letter sent to the *Daily Mirror* in response to the banned fight indicates:

> When the Home Office forbade the fight between Siki and Beckett, did they realise that
> fights between black and white boxers are taking place all the time? In the provinces,
> especially, a great number of these fights have taken place during the last twelve months. I
> have not heard that they have led to any protest or scandal.

This response highlights both the importance of sport in facilitating interracial contact and the
government’s inability or unwillingness to intervene in events that were only of regional
significance.

The ‘colour question’ in sport was not confined to potential unrest provoked by
intersacial boxing matches. Black athletes who were celebrated for their sporting prowess had
to respond to racial prejudice that hampered their everyday lives. One of the most influential
black sporting figures to challenge such views was the cricketer Learie Constantine.
Constantine was from Trinidad and first came to Britain in 1923. In 1943 Constantine and
his family were asked to leave a London hotel that refused to host them on account of their
skin colour and Constantine successfully challenged the hotel in court. This case is
relatively well-known, but Constantine was also an active advocate of racial equality before
this incident occurred. Like Paul Robeson, Constantine was asked for his opinions on the
‘colour question’; for example, at the Balloon Street Luncheon Club in Manchester in 1934

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he spoke on the ‘Colour Line in Cricket’. In 1938 he made a complaint of racial prejudice against an umpire in the Central Lancashire League, supported by the Rochdale Cricket Club; the inquiry into his complaint was not reopened but Constantine’s objection to the offending remarks, made during ‘the course of a tea-room conversation’, underlines that even casual prejudice was challenged.

Entertainment and sport may have been two of the most important arenas where black people could succeed in British society during the interwar years, but the Siki-Beckett case illustrates that race was still problematic even in these areas. Like debates surrounding jazz, it was the impact that interracial contact had on established racial boundaries that concerned some commentators and government officials who feared the effects that such interactions had both at home and abroad. The success of black performers and sportsmen directly challenged such views, but it was arguably more difficult for black musicians and actors to challenge representations of themselves when, to a large extent, they relied on such images to draw in their audience.

The images and ideas about black people that were constructed and communicated within theatres, music halls and the cinema formed an important narrative on race that was widely disseminated to the British public in the interwar years. From the negative images portrayed by white people in minstrel shows to the more positive aspects of black achievement within music and cinema it was a forum where racial and cultural barriers could be crossed, and just like orientalist stage productions, they had multiple meanings for both audience and performer. The language and images constructed in popular entertainments were transmitted beyond entertainment venues in press reviews that reinforced them in the British imagination.

The interwar years saw changing tastes in entertainment, not least with the advent of cinema in the late 1920s. While blacked-up entertainers still appeared on the stage, black entertainers were bringing a taste of African-American culture to the theatres and music halls of Britain. Similarly, actors such as Paul Robeson gave a voice to the black community, not to mention much needed work. The example of black extras in the film industry illustrates that, despite the fact that the representations of black people were crude stereotypes, often black people themselves saw this work as a positive opportunity and it highlights the networks that existed between Britain’s different black communities in the 1920s and 1930s. The example of musicians like the Southern Syncopated Orchestra and performers like Paul

118 *Manchester Guardian*, 3rd September 1938, p. 17.
Robeson underlines the importance of black agency during the interwar years. Alongside other prominent black figures they challenged the dominant representations of themselves and black people more generally using the forums that were available to them.

For many white Britons the work of these artists changed their perceptions of black people and black culture, but newspaper reviews underline how black performers were characterised using established racialised language and imagery. Black people were constructed in the British imagination as different, both in terms of their physical appearance and temperament. This difference was eminently attractive to British audiences but it reinforced an idea of blackness as something exotic and other if not necessarily inferior. The construction of black people as American also created a distance that neutralized any perceived threat from actual contact with black people and there is a distinct contradiction between the experiences of black British people and the representations of black people constructed in popular entertainment; this is exemplified by the stories of the Black British film extras. An appreciation of African-American culture was a significant advancement in race relations in the first half of the twentieth century, but it did not undermine the power of racial stereotypes or the extent to which ideas about racial difference were fixed in the British imagination.

Popular entertainments had a broad appeal and the racial identities that were performed on stage and screen would have been familiar, with the exception of new acts such as the Southern Syncopated Orchestra, although, as this chapter illustrates, they were often imagined within existing frameworks for understanding race and racial difference. Many of the crude stereotypes disseminated through popular entertainment and reinforced in press reviews were also circulated in children’s literature and reinforced through other formative experiences, at school and in the home; this, in part, explains the persistence of these ideas over time. The final chapters of this thesis focus specifically on how children were encouraged to imagine racial difference.
Chapter Four
The Idea of Race in the Newspaper Children’s Page.

On 21st May 1921 a paragraph in the Daily Mirror’s children’s page reminded its young readers:

Children are just the same the world over, no matter if they are black, yellow, brown or white. They all, like you, love to play games of make-believe and have fun. It is only when they grow up that they change—into Chinese mandarins or Arab chiefs or respectable people like daddy, who goes off to an office every day. ¹

In interwar Britain, race was a fact and the immutable differences between the various races were believed to manifest themselves in both physical appearance and modes of behaviour. These ideas were disseminated, through social and cultural discourses, to children no less than they were to adults. In fact, the process of imaginatively constructing the racial ‘other’ so crucial to discourses on race during this period was particularly evident in discourses aimed at children. This chapter examines the dominant ideas about other peoples and places that were presented to children through the children’s pages of popular newspapers.

The idea of race and attendant images of the ‘other’ were deeply embedded in British society in the interwar period. By the interwar years, the concept of race became the concern of eugenicists and others concerned with the ‘state of the nation’. For those alarmed by such developments and to whom fell the task of understanding such ‘race feeling’, childhood seemed the obvious point at which ideas about race were formed. Since the beginning of the twentieth century sociologists and psychologists have posited many theories as to how prejudice is fostered in children from an early age. These early studies were carried out in the 1920s and 1930s, in Britain and the United States; those by Bruno Lasker and Sydney Herbert and George Green relied on questionnaires sent out to schools and other interested parties. Later studies, from the 1980s onwards, have observed children’s behaviour within their own environment; this work highlighted the importance of childhood in the formation of ideas about other peoples and cultures.² Historians have also focused on childhood in studies on race and national identity. Most of this work has privileged Empire as the vehicle through which ideas about race and identity were represented to children in the nineteenth and

¹ Daily Mirror, 21st May 1921, p. 10.
The impact of John Mackenzie’s *Propaganda and Empire* (1984) is notable in this field as historians have subsequently sought to assess how Empire was constructed for children. \(^3\) Studies of children’s literature have also underlined the profound impact of imperial discourses on the way children imagined racial difference and their own sense of identity: J.S. Bratton, for example, explores the importance of juvenile fiction in constructing conceptions of England and Englishness in the Edwardian era. \(^4\) Expanding beyond the influence of the British Empire, Stephen Heathorn uses school text books to illustrate how British history was presented as a series of triumphs won due to the characteristics peculiar to the Anglo-Saxon race. \(^5\) The historiography on children, Empire, race and national identity underlines the persistence of specific images and ideas of the racial other, not just over time, but across different social and cultural mediums; Kathryn Castle’s work explores images that were presented to children in both their school text-books and their popular magazines. \(^6\)

While the sources of popular culture available to children are accessible, it is harder to access the influences that children experienced in the private sphere. The fact that children’s voices are often silenced in accounts of childhood experiences is also a concern, although attempts have been made to circumvent these problems. \(^7\) Jennifer Ritterhouse has used oral testimonies and autobiographical evidence in order to reconstruct the processes through which black and white children in the American South learned race. \(^8\) Carolyn Steedman and Stephen Humphries have emphasised the agency of children in responding to the discourses dictated to them by adults and to the experiences that shaped their social lives. \(^9\)

While popular fiction and periodicals such as the *Boys Own Paper* have been afforded particular attention by historians of Empire, newspapers have been ignored, despite the fact that they represented Empire in different ways and to different audiences. The children’s

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\(^7\) On problems with the sources, see H. Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society, 1880-1990* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 3-6.


columns of the popular press were saturated with images of the racial ‘other’ from both within and outside the Empire. The fact that the national newspapers were being produced on a daily basis makes them an invaluable resource for the historian investigating how race was constructed in this period, and more specifically, how it was constructed for children. An analysis of the layout of newspapers helps us to realise the full extent of the impact that newspapers had in the construction of racial discourses.

The use of newspapers as sources necessarily means that it is difficult to know exactly how children responded to the material that they were reading, although the issue of reception can be explored using evidence from the newspapers. The stories submitted for children’s writing competitions, for example, illustrate how children constructed other peoples and places in their own imaginative writing. Newspapers provide evidence of how race was presented to children and this chapter builds on the current historiography to illustrate the pervasive influence of imperial discourses on race during this period.

In schools the glorification of Empire was a crucial means through which ideas about national identity were articulated to children and found greatest expression in the annual celebration of Empire Day. This chapter illustrates how discourses of race and nation were articulated to children in both local and national newspapers. It underlines the centrality of Empire to the construction of national identity and the importance of imperial discourses in the children’s pages of newspapers. The British Empire was constructed in the children’s imagination as a place where British national identity was tested and ultimately proved superior to all others.

A central aim of this chapter is to outline the language and imagery that were used to encourage children to imagine racial difference, although it will also detail how children’s own sense of identity was constructed in the process. Abdul R. JanMohamed’s essay on ‘the economy of Manichean allegory’ (the concept that the world is divided into a series of opposing ideals) is central to this chapter as the themes presented in the children’s pages of both the local and national press represent a series of dualisms that reinforced the notion of white, British superiority.

As Bill Schwarz argues in Memories of Empire, whiteness had to be imaginatively constructed in order for there to be a standard against which the ‘other’ was judged. Schwarz’s insights further highlight the importance of understanding the cultural processes

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that constructed imperial discourses on race, and their impact on the children who would grow up with their own memories of Empire that would do so much to shape race relations in twentieth century Britain. In addition, the world beyond the boundaries of Empire must not be ignored, as it too formed a crucial part of the narrative on race in interwar Britain.

Unlike most of the historiography on childhood, race and national identity, this chapter does not focus exclusively on the impact of Empire. In We Europeans?, Tony Kushner highlights the importance of non-imperial others to the construction of British national identity. The children’s columns provided non-imperial others for their readers’ entertainment and these characters reveal how the world outside of Britain’s colonies was imagined in the 1920s and 1930s; they reveal how politics and ethnicity could be conflated to define those who were not British.

The world that newspapers constructed for children, both within and outside Britain’s colonies, was an elaborate fiction. It was both frightening and fantastical; a place for adventure where ‘the natives’ serve as both friend and foe. Exotic destinations acted as settings were racial identities were configured and cartoon villains served to underline the virtues of an imagined notion of Britishness. Through cartoon strips and short stories, the newspaper children’s column reproduced stereotypes of other peoples and cultures that remained remarkably resilient to change throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The themes that were exploited often echoed popular narratives from Victorian and Edwardian juvenile fiction highlighting the important influence of nostalgia on those who wrote stories for children. The stories were not novel but the formatting was and is illustrative of the changing nature of newspapers in the interwar period. This chapter focuses on the children’s pages of the Daily Mirror, for the nationals, and for the local papers, the Garston and Woolton Weekly News and Liverpool Echo.

**Imagining Race in the Daily Mirror’s Children’s Page**

By the interwar years, newspaper owners were becoming increasingly aware of the size of their potential market, and in a bid to extend their readership, newspapers such as the Daily Mirror began to include pages specifically aimed at women and children. The Daily Mirror’s children’s column increased in size over the interwar period. Starting as a small section in the 1920s, it gradually expanded to two full pages by the 1930s, although it had contracted again.

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by the late 1930s. The column was structured around a comic strip that featured the exploits of a dog called Pip, a penguin called Squeak, and a rabbit called Wilfred (see Figure 8). Their adventures were relayed by Bertram J. Lamb, otherwise known as ‘Uncle Dick’ and drawn by his illustrator Austin B. Payne. They were joined by a regular cast of characters who often represented well-established racial stereotypes. The rest of the column was composed of the sort of general knowledge, facts, figures, jokes and puzzles, designed to appeal to children. These invariably included descriptions of other peoples and places; ‘facts’ designed to intrigue and appeal to their youthful sense of adventure.

By the interwar years the Daily Mirror’s average net sales fell from an average of 1210,354 in 1914 to 987,080 in 1931.14 This has been blamed on its refusal to keep up with changing times; it was politically reactionary, when women were granted full voting rights for example. Presided over by Harold Harmsworth, the first Lord Rothermere, who became chief proprietor in 1914, it was also a middle-class publication that served a heavy dose of pre-war nostalgia.15 Despite these setbacks ‘P, S & W’ were one of the paper’s success stories. They first appeared in the paper on 12th May 1919 and their fame grew with the production of annuals and other paraphernalia such as toys and games. The ‘Wilfredian League of Gugnuncs’ (W.L.O.G.), a charitable organisation, reached 100,000 members who held annual rallies at the Royal Albert Hall.16 In 1990 a collection of the comic strips was reproduced as part of The Nostalgia Collection, described as ‘a series of books designed to bring back happy memories of long lost childhood…the contents of each title in the series will provide a pleasant reading experience and a unique look at time gone by.’17 The literature of childhood is often viewed benignly; a process that belies the impact it had on the formation of ideas about identity.

Figure 8: ‘Witzkoffski “Hoist with His Own Petard”’, Daily Mirror, 4 November 1930, p. 14.

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15 Cudlipp, Publish and be Damned!, p. 44.
17 Cadogan, The Nostalgia Collection. This quote is from the description on the cover of the book.
The racial ‘others’ who feature in the adventures of Pip Squeak and Wilfred were encountered both at home and abroad and were very much the imaginary figures discussed in the earlier chapters of the thesis. They represented received ideas about a particular place and its peoples, and these characters are woven into the fictional narrative of the children’s stories. While these characters serve a particular creative purpose, acting as the catalysts for various plot devices whether it is humour, intrigue or suspense, the way in which their ethnicity was represented, reveals how children were encouraged to imagine the racial ‘other’.

Abdul R. JanMohamed has discussed the concept of the Manichean allegory in colonialisit literature and the subsequent ‘commodification’ of the native that takes places within this discourse. JanMohamed argues that the Manichean allegory is constructed of ‘a field of diverse yet inter-changeable oppositions between white and black, good and evil, superiority and inferiority, civilisation and savagery, intelligence and emotion, rationality and sensuality, self and Other, subject and object.’ Within the Manichean allegory ‘the native’ becomes a ‘stereotyped object’ that is used to describe all native peoples.\textsuperscript{18} The Manichean allegory is also crucial to imaginative fiction as in the simplistic conflict between good and evil, white and native; the other is always defeated in the end.\textsuperscript{19} The stories presented in the \textit{Daily Mirror’s} children’s column conform to this imaginative narrative as black and white, savage and civilised, the primitive and the modern are contrasted in various forms, from short stories to comic strips. Its simplistic form is perfectly tailored to the needs of children and it provides ample scope for the introduction of exotic foreign characters.

\textbf{The Orientalist’s East}

Take, for instance, the character of ‘Mee Too’, a Chinese magician who comes to visit ‘the pets’, as they were affectionately known (see Figure 9). Mee Too is a portly man who, complete with long flowing robes, is the epitome of ‘old world courtesy’, and while the pets are highly deferential to this mystical sorcerer, he was still used as an object of amusement, when he falls over for example, or uses the wrong spell.\textsuperscript{20} The introduction of characters such as Mee Too was often an excuse to provide some information on their country of origin, and this information, when it related to the Orient, invariably conformed to orientalist tropes. Mee Too debuts in the children’s column in 1934 and his presence is used to introduce children to

\textsuperscript{18} JanMohamed, ‘The Economy of Manichean Allegory’, pp. 82-83.
\textsuperscript{19} On the difference between imaginary and symbolic texts see, JanMohamed, ‘The Economy of Manichean Allegory’, pp. 92-93.
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Daily Mirror}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} May 1934, p. 20; \textit{Daily Mirror}, 4\textsuperscript{th} May 1934, p. 20; \textit{Daily Mirror}, 8\textsuperscript{th} May 1934, p. 20.
the orientalists’ China. In one particular edition, the comic strip in which Mee Too appears is labelled ‘Oriental Splendour’ and there is an accompanying article titled ‘Facts about China’. The ‘facts’ that were relayed promoted both China’s ancient heritage and its perceived lack of progress: ‘When Great Britain was a country peopled by savages, China was a highly civilised nation; there has been little change there for the last 3,000 years.’

The notion that the East had not changed at the same rate as western countries, leant itself well to literature, as imagined characters and scenarios could be repeated and attributed to the timeless nature of the Orient.

Figure 9: ‘Oriental Splendour’, Daily Mirror, 2 May 1934, p. 20.

In 1926, the pets visit China for themselves, and came face to face with a stock character of orientalist discourse, the Oriental villain. The pets are captured by a man by the name of Wung Fu Ching, who is distinguished by his Oriental dress and a ‘business-like sword’ (see Figure 10). Just in case the readers were worried that all Chinese people were out to capture innocent tourists, Uncle Dick’s accompanying letter reassuringly stated: ‘I am not quite sure in what part of China this extraordinary adventure took place. It must have been in some wild, lawless place miles from civilisation because, of course, the respectable Chinese don’t do these sort of things.’ In the children’s column the East is imagined as a place of contrasts, of exceptional violence, but also of luxury, hospitality and generosity.

After their escapade in China the pets visit Japan and meet two Japanese girls (see Figure 10). Dressed in traditional costume, the ‘charming little Jap children’ present the pets

21 Daily Mirror, 2nd May 1934, p. 20.
22 Daily Mirror, 1st November 1926, p. 11.
23 Daily Mirror, 3rd November 1926, p. 11.
with gifts. Although these images are not necessarily all negative, they serve to underline difference, in varying ways. The Oriental villain functions as part of an adventure story, therefore his looks and behaviour are necessary, not only to highlight his ethnicity but also to stress his role within the story. The Japanese girls represent the image of ‘old world courtesy’. Both images highlight the importance of difference, in physical appearance and dress, to representations of other peoples and cultures in the *Daily Mirror’s* children’s column. Difference was at the heart of how children were encouraged to view other peoples and places.

Figure 10

![Oriental Villainy, *Daily Mirror*, 1 November 1926, p. 11.](image1)

![Oriental Splendour, *Daily Mirror*, 4 November 1926, p. 11.](image2)

These images illustrate the dichotomy of fear and desire that characterised descriptions of the Orient.

Despite the many scrapes that they get into, it is always stressed that the pets were never in any real danger and the villains of the piece are consequently subjected to ridicule. In the imaginative narrative the dangerous ‘other’ is always defeated in the end. After the pets’ unfortunate capture at the hands of Wung Fu Ching, it was explained to the reader that: ‘The pets’ captors were probably bandits, or rebels, who cause such a lot of trouble in China. They are always capturing people, and holding them to ransom, or chopping off their heads; and their numerous battles and wars would be terrifying if they were not quite so comic.’

This explanation served to neutralize the threat from the foreign other while it simultaneously placed the British above the petty wars of other nations. The display of humour in the face of

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24 *Daily Mirror*, 4th November 1926, p. 11.
25 *Daily Mirror*, 3rd November 1926, p. 11.
danger is patronising and sets the tone of moral superiority so often used when describing other peoples and cultures.

The orientalist’s East is constructed based on a received set of language and images. This is nowhere more evident than in Uncle Dick’s musings on his own ideas about China:

The pets are now somewhere in China, that far-away and romantic country which (so the historians tell us) has “stood still” for thousands of years, and is still much the same as it was in the days before there was such a thing as the British Empire. China has always fascinated me, ever since I was a boy; it is a mysterious land of legends and fairy tales, where yellow dragons still flap their wings and breathe forth fire and smoke, and slave-boys become mighty Emperors.\(^{26}\)

This description of China reproduces dominant stereotypes of the East and the language used parallels contemporary entertainment reviews of Oriental plays and films. The East that is imagined is an attractive place, and purely fictional. The fantastical nature of the country that is imagined is highlighted by the heading to the piece: ‘China-Real and Unreal’. ‘Uncle’ even acknowledged the fact that it was a product of his imagination: ‘In fact, I don’t really believe in China! I mean to visit it some day, and make quite certain that it is really there. The China of my dreams is far too extravagantly gorgeous and splendid, and yet at the same time faint and hazy and mist-like, to exist in this solid old world.’\(^{27}\)

In his guise as ‘Uncle Dick’, Bertram Lamb constructed an imaginative narrative that engaged with the notion that the East was a source of both fear and fantasy; a common trope used in popular entertainments. His knowledge of the ‘real’ China is similarly constructed as well as relying heavily on stereotypes:

If I were asked what I knew about the real China, I suppose I should sum up my knowledge in the following list:-

| Chopsticks | Rice |
| Pigtailed | Revolutions |
| Junks | Birds’ nest soup |
| Tea | Funny shoes\(^{28}\) |

The simplistic nature of these ideas, in large part, has to be attributed to the fact that this piece is designed for children and it would be naïve to expect a more analytical or nuanced

\(^{26}\) *Daily Mirror*, 1\(^{st}\) November 1926, p. 11.
\(^{27}\) *Daily Mirror*, 1\(^{st}\) November 1926, p. 11.
\(^{28}\) *Daily Mirror*, 1\(^{st}\) November 1926, p. 11.
approach given the target audience.\textsuperscript{29} On the other hand, it is significant that much of the language and many of the images used to describe the Orient in the children’s column are identical to those that surface in other sections of the newspaper and that were present in other forms of popular culture.

The splendour and opulence of this imagined East is juxtaposed with its perceived cruelty in children’s columns in the same way that it was on the stage in productions such as \textit{Chu Chin Chow}. In addition, while reading their comic strips children were confronted with Oriental stereotypes in the form of adverts about forthcoming stage productions; the \textit{Fu Manchu} series is a particularly relevant example (see Figure 11). The pervasiveness of images that imaginatively constructed the Orient in the interwar years, especially in entertainment, render the mysterious eastern visitors that are imagined in this children’s column unsurprising in their form and type; they are typical of the way in which this part of the world was represented in the press, in literature and on stage and screen.

![Figure 11: 'Dr. Fu Manchu', \textit{Daily Mirror}, 9 May 1923, p. 11.](image)

The Non-Imperial ‘Other’

One of the characters who appears most frequently in the children’s page during the interwar years and ‘the pets’ constant nemesis, was one Otto Petrovitch Wtzkoffski. Known occasionally as ‘Uncle Otto’ but primarily as just ‘Wtzkoffski’, he is described as a ‘notorious Bolshy’ and characterised by his long beard, ‘famous high-heeled boots’ and his penchant for throwing bombs.\textsuperscript{30} A figure similar to that of Wtzkoffski is introduced in 1922. He is introduced as a political agitator and it is his side-kick, a dog named Popski, who is the central character.\textsuperscript{31} By at least 1928 Popski and Wtzkoffski appear together as a comedy duo

\textsuperscript{29} The content of the children’s page ranges from material suitable for very young children such as short comic strips with simple dialogue to more detailed short stories suitable for older children.

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Daily Mirror}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} November 1931, p. 14; \textit{Daily Mirror}, 27\textsuperscript{th} November 1930, p. 14.

\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Daily Mirror}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} November 1922, p. 13.
whose attempts to ‘bombski’ the pets are constantly thwarted (see Figure 12). It is made clear that Wtzkoffski and Popski are of Russian origin and the reader is left in little doubt as to their political allegiance. Their status as ‘bolshy’ agitators is outlined from their first introduction. We are told, for example, that Popski, ‘the notorious Bolshy dog’ was ‘born in one of the reddest spots of all Red Russia. As a puppy he was trained to fetch and carry bombs just as an English dog is taught to retrieve walking-sticks or carry shopping baskets in its mouth.' Their status as conspirators is underlined by their propensity to appear in the children’s column on the 5th November (see Figure 13). Indeed, on Bonfire Night 1931 Uncle Otto was ‘allowed’ to edit the children’s column himself. Uncle Otto’s page, ‘for the tiny totskis’ contained, amongst other things designed to praise his character, an ‘Ode to Otto’. In the following edition, Uncle Dick described it as ‘the weirdest children’s page ever printed’ and warned readers that ‘everything in it is in praise of Wtzkoffski’.

Figure 12


33 Daily Mirror, 5th November 1924, p. 11.
35 Daily Mirror, 6th November 1931, p. 12.
The appearance of Wtzkoffski reflects the *Daily Mirror*’s political allegiance during the 1920s and 1930s. By the 1920s Rothermere’s politics were ‘fervidly anti-Socialist’ and the paper is described as having conducted ‘a violent anti-Socialist crusade from 1920-1934’.\(^{36}\) The on-going skirmishes between ‘the pets’ and the ‘bolshy’ feed into a classic Manichean allegory between good and evil although the characters involved are distinguished by their political beliefs rather than their race. Wtzkoffski’s appearance and accent is held up for ridicule and his politics define him in opposition to British values. His lack of democratic values, illustrated by his violence and attempts to paint himself as ‘Otto the Brave’, are used, in various different settings, to reveal his deceitful nature. The fact that these devices were used so frequently, particularly in conjunction with events that even young children would have learnt about in school, indicates that their significance would not have been lost on the children exposed to them. The language used in the children’s page suggests that the joke was shared between editor and reader; when reflecting on Wtzkoffski’s character reference presented in ‘Uncle Otto’s page’ the reader is told, ‘we can smile—we know better’.\(^{37}\) The link between communism, subterfuge, and violence is further underlined when Wtzkoffki is summoned back to Russia by ‘the dreaded Bolshy secret police’ because fails in his mission and ‘he blows nothing up’.\(^{38}\)

![Figure 13: “Please to Remember The Popski Guy!”, Daily Mirror, 5 November 1924, p. 11.](image)

Kushner argues convincingly in his work on race in the Mass-Observation Archive that ‘the reaction to the presence, real or imagined, of minority groups who do not originate

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\(^{37}\) *Daily Mirror*, 6\(^{th}\) November 1931, p. 12.  
\(^{38}\) *Daily Mirror*, 26\(^{th}\) May 1930, p. 13.
directly from the British Empire has been central at both individual and collective levels in the makings and remakings of identities.³⁹ The fact that Wtzkoffski is so firmly connected to Russia prompted an unusual article to be published in the children's page in November 1931. A letter was printed addressing the concerns of an English woman living in Finland, who worried that the country’s former association with Russia may have led to some misconceptions about its people. The letter stresses that ‘The Finns are a most cultured and intelligent people, so please do not allude to them disparagingly as relations or friends of Wtzkoffski.’⁴⁰ Finland is described as ‘a charming little country’ that ‘no longer has any connection with Soviet Russia’. The reader is left in little doubt that the character’s politics is not incidental but rather it is explicitly connected to his ethnic background. Wtzkoffski is a prime example of a non-colonial subject who is held up as the archetypal other, in both his appearance and his values.

The representation of such political ‘others’ is certainly different to that of the racial ‘others’ that this chapter and my thesis more broadly is concerned with. That is not to say that there is not a racial aspect to the portrayal of Wtzkoffski. In one particular edition of Pip, Squeak and Wilfred there is a revealing reference to the 1911 Siege of Sidney Street. The Siege of Sidney Street or the Battle of Stepney, as it is also known, was the climax of a robbery in which 3 police officers were killed by a group of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe.⁴¹ The alleged perpetrators were surrounded in a house in Sidney Street in London’s East End and a gun battle ensued between the men and hundreds of police officers.⁴² The men accused were branded as Anarchists and this incident focused unwelcome attention on the Jewish population of London’s East End, as their Eastern European origins were highlighted by the press and newspaper reports saw the event as a result of Britain’s immigration laws.⁴³

Wtzkoffski is never described in the children’s column as Jewish but his appearance, his long hair and exaggerated nose, parallel Jewish stereotypes in contemporary popular entertainments. His Russian nationality and political allegiance also reflect common contemporary assumptions about Jewish people. As Susan Kingsley Kent notes, in post-world war one terminology, ‘‘alien’, ‘Bolshevik’ and ‘Jew’ were often synonymous with

³⁹ Kushner, We Europeans?, p. 31.
⁴² Rogers, The Battle of Stepney, pp. 86-98.
each other. The assumption that Wtzkoffski is Jewish is further supported by an edition of the children’s page in which he takes part in the ‘Rag St. Battle’ (see Figure 15); this comic strip is accompanied by a brief description of the real events that took place at Sidney Street in 1911.

Figure 14: ‘Bank Holiday “Snaps”’, Daily Mirror, 21 May 1934, p. 16.

The character’s ethnic background and criminality are inexorably linked throughout his appearances in the children’s page; in one particular image, Wtzkoffski is depicted ‘infesting’ a traditional rural British idyll (see Figure 14). Included as a series of ‘Bank Holiday “Snaps”’ this image juxtaposes a traditional bank holiday activity with the suspicious activities of an alien ‘other’. After the First World War, the English countryside was imagined as a blissful retreat after the mechanised horror of the trenches and the dichotomy portrayed in this image between the pure countryside and the dirty villain underlines the importance of rural England as an expression of national identity.45

The character of Wtzkoffski is constructed in opposition to supposed British values. When he appeared in comic strips on or around the time of Bonfire Night celebrations, this gained added significance as the event’s anti-Catholic sentiment and the veneration of Britain’s parliamentary democracy made it a potent expression of a Protestant conception of

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Englishness. By using Bonfire Night as a backdrop to many of Wtzkoffski’s schemes the Daily Mirror was asserting, not only its own political allegiance, but a limited view of English national identity. Although references to events like the Battle of Stepney would have meant more to the children’s parents than to the young readers, the use of anti-Semitic imagery and stereotypes underline how the representation of difference was not confined to non-white peoples. Wtzkoffski is constructed as the ‘enemy within’ but the idea of blackness that is constructed in the children’s page is one largely confined to Britain’s overseas colonies.

Figure 15: ‘Rag St. “Battle”’, Daily Mirror, 24 November 1933, p. 18.

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Coloniser and Colonised

The two communist agitators, ‘Popski’ and ‘Witzkoffski’ are classic cartoon villains, down but never out; they highlight the virtues of ‘the pets’ through their own villainy and incompetence. Their values are also contrasted with those of the English characters that they encounter. The most prominent of these is the budding imperial adventurer Tom Pippin, a young greengrocer who is married to the pets’ maid and friend, Angeline. Tom’s character is crucial to ‘the economy of Manichean allegory’ that defines so many colonial adventure stories. Tom, for example, is always defined in opposition to the natives that he encounters; while they are childlike, he is masterful and in control (see Figure 16).

Tom takes up the offer of, we are told, ‘a very good post’ in Africa, and he leaves in order to make his fortune. We later learn that Tom’s job involves him ‘trading in ivory, rubber, precious stones and other interesting goods.’ The reader is assured that ‘whatever Tom does he will be just and ‘play the game’.

The natives that he encounters are usually faithful servants.

Figure 16: ‘Jungle Comedy’, *Daily Mirror*, 31 May 1932, p. 14.

It is through Tom that the reader is introduced to one of the most infamous representations of black people from this period in the character of Sambo, a naïve but intensely loyal subject who is often used as the butt of jokes but regarded with affection by his “massa”. Sambo may have already been familiar to children during this period through the work of Helen Bannerman; her *Little Black Sambo* books were reproduced in different formats throughout the twentieth century. In ‘the pets’ comic strip, Sambo is Tom Pippin’s

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47 JanMohamed, ‘The Economy of Manichean Allegory’, p. 82.
49 *Daily Mirror*, 31st May 1928, p. 15.
‘black boy servant’. In terms of his personality, Sambo is the epitome of a loyal colonial subject. On 2nd May 1935, Sambo arrives in London for the Silver Jubilee; described as ‘a loyal little nigger’, we are told that ‘Sambo is determined, even if he has to wait for days, to see the King and Queen as they ride to St. Paul’s and cheer them on their way.’

![Image](image-url)

Figure 17: ‘Sambo Arrives–On His Head!’, *Daily Mirror*, 2 May 1935, p. 20.

Sambo’s loyalty and patriotism serve to underline the success and unity of the British Empire. That the British monarchy was presented to children as a symbol of that Empire is illustrated by a feature in the children’s page entitled ‘God Save the King!’ Alongside images of peoples from different parts of the Empire, this piece had ‘God Save the King written in all the languages of the Empire (see Figure 18). Children were reminded, not only of Britain’s role in the world, but of the relationship between the Empire and its peoples, and it was one portrayed as mutually beneficial in the most paternalistic tones. When Sambo worried that his black skin would make him stand out from the crowd on Jubilee day, ‘Uncle Dick’ has to reassure him: ‘Of course not, Sambo. There will be many different coloured faces in the crowd–brown faces from India, yellow faces from China, chocolate faces from Ceylon–nobody will notice you.’

It is a notable feature of descriptions of black colonial subjects in the children’s column that their loyalty is not seen as intrinsic to their nature, rather it is inspired in them by their encounters with imperial authority. This further underlines the superior position of the British characters in relation to the ‘native’ subjects. The British are viewed as natural leaders

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and the natives as natural servants. In this way, the image of the native that is presented is actually less concerned with reflecting their character, than with reflecting the values and self-image of the coloniser.\textsuperscript{57}

When Sambo first arrives in London, the headline reads ‘He’s Black But Very Loyal’.\textsuperscript{58} Crucially, Sambo is the servant of Tom Pippin, the firm yet fair colonial adventurer. Black people are only described as loyal when they are in the service of whites; those who are not are more liable to be labelled as savage. Further evidence of this can be inferred when Tom Pippin suggests that his wife Angeline join him in the jungle. This request resulted in the following exchange:

Angeline: I should hate to live in a place where I might be eaten up any day by cannibals!

\textsuperscript{57} JanMohamed, ‘The Economy of Manichean Allegory’, p. 84.
\textsuperscript{58} Daily Mirror, 2\textsuperscript{nd} May 1935, p. 20.
Tom: Cannibals! ...Why there aren’t any cannibals left in Central Africa. All the black boys who work for me are most respectable.  

The implication here is that Tom, as a white man, is not only in command of his servants, but also the environment around him. Just as orientalist discourses claim to know the East, Tom knows Africa; its people and environment are under his control and therefore he can reassure his wife that she has nothing to fear. The black characters are stereotyped and represented to the reader in quite typical ways; Tom refers to the ‘boys’ who work for him, a term that infantilises them and underlines their subordinate status.

With regard to his physical appearance, Sambo is a familiar caricature within the context of the interwar years. His wide ‘saucer-like’ eyes and toothy grin were the stuff of many a blackface act during this period. Investing the black body with certain characteristics and connotations was also a feature of racial discourses and these ideas were widely circulated in the children’s column. When we first meet Sambo, he falls out of a train and hits ‘his woolly head’, although the reader is reassured that he is fine as ‘they have very hard heads!’ (see Figure 17). The privileged position given to whiteness is highlighted when Sambo’s brother Curly joins the cast of characters. In a series of ‘Bank Holiday “Snaps”’ from 21st May 1934, there is a drawing of Curly at a fair under which is the line, ‘Curly will probably get mistaken for one of the “freaks” at a fair’ (see Figure 19). In an earlier edition, from 18th May 1934, Curly is painted white as he wants to look like an English boy. He is

Figure 19: ‘Bank Holiday “Snaps”’, Daily Mirror, 21 May 1934, p. 16.
depicted explaining: ‘Ah wanna look like English boy-don wanna be black!’ (see Figure 20).  

When Curly returns to Africa, it is reported how much he liked London and the ‘white faces and white hands’ of the “chillun”; he thinks that ‘Lon’on chillun are de prettiest chillun in de whole wide-world’.  

Figure 20: ‘Wilf Whitewashes Curly’, *Daily Mirror*, 18 May 1934, p. 20.

Perhaps some of the more novel adventures of ‘Pip, Squeak and Wilfred’ are those that include more than one racial ‘other’. In a curious twist, Uncle Otto and his faithful hound find themselves on the trail of Sambo. The reader is informed that Sambo has stunned Wtzkoffski ‘with a club’ and that the ‘bolshy’ villains are out for revenge. This further highlights the loyalty of Sambo (he is protecting the pets at the time) and establishes the ‘bolshy’ as the enemy. Unlike Sambo, Wtzkoffski has no connection with Britain through imperial ties making him the ultimate ‘other’. Of course, the rogue’s plans are scuppered by good old Tom Pippin and order is restored.

The black characters in the *Daily Mirror*’s children’s column are not only used to represent the dichotomy between black and white or leaders and followers. They are also introduced as savage tribes who represent a direct threat to the white, usually male, protagonist. *Cannibal Creek* was a serialised story that ran in the *Daily Mirror*’s children’s page in May and June 1924 and its style was suitable for older children. The reader is invited to imagine an island in the South Seas inhabited by savage natives and ripe to be claimed for the British by intrepid young explorers. The relationships between the British and the natives

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63 *Daily Mirror*, 18th May 1934, p. 20.
64 *Daily Mirror*, 23rd May 1934, p. 20.
are slightly more complicated than those presented in the adventures of ‘the pets’, as the main protagonists negotiate an island inhabited by both friendly and hostile ‘savages’. The premise of the story is that Dick Weatherstone and his friend Alec have crashed their plane over a ‘cannibal’ island. There they meet a sailor named Sam Smiler who joins them on their quest to rescue some Englishmen who have gone missing on the island. The inhabitants of the island are divided into two tribes, the ‘blue-faces’ and the ‘white-faces’, so-called because of the streaks of paint that they have on their faces (all the ‘native’ characters are black). The loyal ‘white-faces’ are contrasted with the enemy ‘blue-faces’, illustrating the restricted roles available for black characters in these adventure stories. There is a classic Manichean allegory at work here; if the black characters are not loyal servants then they are savage enemies. Perhaps predictably the ‘white-faces’ turn out to be allies to Dick and his friends and in turn Dick shares with them the benefits of his western knowledge, specifically in medical matters.

The justification for colonialism in this story is two-fold as the virtues of the young hero Dick Weatherstone are juxtaposed against the backwardness of the natives who, divided into two tribes, are at war with each other. When Dick is captured, he is rescued by his father, with the help of ‘the good old British Navy’. They plant a British flag on the island and Dick’s father praises him, stating, ‘you have helped, Dick, by your escapade, to put another little bit of red on the map of the world!’ (see Figure 23). The image of the British Navy is significant. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries school readers celebrated men such as Lord Nelson associated with famous victories, men perceived to have ‘done their duty’. The image of the British Navy was important in evoking ideas of duty and personal sacrifice. It was also ‘the material as well as symbolic link between the mother country and colonies.’ To use Bratton’s term, the Navy provides the ‘activating link’ between the fantasy world of the island and the reality of life at home. The adventures to be had in far off lands are permissible only while the characters have the support of their home country. The success of the Empire is linked to the success of the British nation, not just in the plucky

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66 Daily Mirror, 3rd May 1924, p. 12.
67 Daily Mirror, 3rd May 1924, p. 12; Daily Mirror, 10th May 1924, p. 12.
68 Daily Mirror, 7th June 1924, p. 12.
69 Daily Mirror, 7th June 1924, p. 12.
70 Heathorn, For Home, Country, and Race, p. 51.
71 Heathorn, For Home, Country, and Race, p. 184.
character of Dick, but in the strength of Britain’s Navy. This is emphasised in the final instalment when the natives run away terrified at the mere sound of the Navy’s guns.\(^{73}\)

In *Cannibal Creek*, the primitive state of the island and its inhabitants are emphasised and contrasted with western modernity. This is evident not only in Dick’s superior medical knowledge, but also in the weapons at the disposal of the English characters. When Dick is taken to the ‘white-faces’ camp he warns one of the natives named ‘Ne-Ke-Tee’, ‘Now, none of your monkey tricks, mind! You see this shiny little thing in my hand? It’s called a revolver and can make itself very unpleasant when it takes!’\(^{74}\) Similarly, when the British Navy arrives to rescue them, the idyllic, peaceful environment of the island is contrasted with the brute force of the warship; indeed it is no match for it: ‘The crashing noise of the mysterious shell, which appeared to have been fired from somewhere at sea, seemed to make the whole island tremble…Parrots, birds of paradise, monkeys and other creatures filled the air with their screeches and cries.’\(^{75}\) In fact, despite initially describing the island as ‘a lovely spot’, it is the sight of the British warship ‘grey, majestic-looking’ that was most welcome for the boys.\(^{76}\) After their adventure on the island they are able to reap the rewards of Empire; in the case of *Cannibal Creek* the gold that it has in abundance. Just as the character Tom Pippin makes his living abroad, the colonies provide them with their income, but there was certainly no place like home.\(^{77}\)

In the children’s page as a whole, black characters are introduced into stories in a variety of ways, though the representations are familiar. A dominant image was that of the fearsome savage, usually to be found in the heart of Africa or on a far-flung island, they are depicted as ugly figures that practice cannibalism. The tell-tale cooking-pot, with several natives dancing round it in triumph at finding their next victim, is one of the stock images of the colonial adventure stories printed in the children’s pages of the *Daily Mirror*. Indeed, when the pets’ old acquaintance Wtzkoffski is captured by cannibals in Africa ‘Uncle Dick’\’s’ response highlights the familiarity of the scene that has unfolded:

The pictures do not leave the nature of the natives in the least doubt. That large, blackened cooking-pot can mean only one thing. The Bolshy and his hound have fallen among cannibals, and, by the look of things, no time has been lost in celebrating their capture in the manner usual to savages of this particular kind.\(^{78}\) (see Figure 21)

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\(^{73}\) *Daily Mirror*, 7\(^{th}\) June 1924, p. 12.

\(^{74}\) *Daily Mirror*, 10\(^{th}\) May 1924, p. 12.

\(^{75}\) *Daily Mirror*, 7\(^{th}\) June 1924, p. 12.

\(^{76}\) *Daily Mirror*, 3\(^{rd}\) May 1924, p. 12; *Daily Mirror*, 7\(^{th}\) June 1924, p. 12.

\(^{77}\) *Daily Mirror*, 7\(^{th}\) June 1924, p. 12.

\(^{78}\) *Daily Mirror*, 17\(^{th}\) May 1932, p. 14.
These natives are a direct contrast to the loyal workers described by Tom Pippin; they are the fearsome savages of Angeline’s imagination. Young readers familiar with imperial adventure novels would have been receptive to such images and readily able to imagine Wtzkoffski’s fate.

In Cannibal Creek the physical appearance of the natives is referred to as a point of difference, both in positive and negative terms. The black body was portrayed as statuesque, strong and ultimately desirable. When ‘Ne-Ke-Tee’, a local ‘white-face’ and ally of Dick and his friends, saves Dick from the clutches of a Python, he is portrayed as an impressive figure; Dick is pictured cowering in the background. Conversely, blackness could also be used to signify cowardice and an inherently weak nature. When the British warship arrives to rescue the young explorers, the natives who have captured them run scared. Sam states: ‘I was never more pleased in my life to hear shells explode! When they went off the blessed savages were so scared that their black skins nearly turned white!’ The descriptions of the native islanders in this story underline the complexity of representations of black people. Just as in blackface performance, the black body is at once something to be feared and admired.

One comic strip underlines how images that strengthened the association in children’s minds between blackness and dirt, and blackness as something to be feared, could easily be diluted into even the most simple of children’s stories; the white kitten suddenly appears

79 Daily Mirror, 17th May 1924, p. 12.
80 Daily Mirror, 7th June 1924, p. 12.
more ferocious after being turned black with dirt (see Figure 22). Through these images the black body is denigrated as something fearsome and ugly and serves to strengthen the dichotomy between whiteness as something to be desired and blackness as something to be rejected. Such associations are also expressed in Mass-Observation responses to the 1939 ‘race’ directive. Tony Kushner found that children’s early experiences of black people were based on either negative or positive ideas about their physical appearance.


These ranged from a fond recollection of the ‘ten little nigger boys’ to the belief that black people had an unusual smell. One response from a laboratory assistant recorded in the Mass-Observation directives in Kent highlights the tension between desire and fear that characterised the way in which black people were imagined: ‘Harking back to childhood days, I have vivid recollections of regarding black men with fascination, awe and anxiety all at the same time.’

The black characters in *Cannibal Creek* are divided between those who are fierce cannibals, yet ultimately cowards in the face of British fire-power, and those who are brave and loyal, yet ultimately docile and servile. Contrast the description of Ne-Ke-Tee tackling a python with this closing description of him running after Dick and his companions begging to be allowed to come home with them:

Just as they were leaving the shore in the pinnace (sic) a brown-skinned fuzzy-haired savage came running down to the beach. It was Ne-Ke-Tee! “Take me! Take me!” he implored, holding out his arms. Dick explained who he was, and in the end Sir John

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82 Kushner, *We Europeans?* pp. 113-114.
allowed Ne-Ke-Tee to come aboard. Dick made him his servant, and a more faithful servant would have been very hard to find.\textsuperscript{84}

The image of the strong native is replaced with this image of servility; the fearsome natives have been defeated and those that are left such as ‘Ne-Ke-Tee’ live to serve the conquering British. Ultimately, any perceived threat from ‘the natives’ is neutralized.

The world that is imagined in the stories and comic strips produced for the \textit{Daily Mirror’s} children’s page is one where the British people are superior to all others. In a series of dualisms, black is contrasted with white, civilized with savage, the primitive with the modern and leaders with those whom they lead. In all of these scenarios the imaginary narrative allows the white British character, or in the case of ‘the pets’, British values, to triumph.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure23.png}
\caption{‘Cannibal Creek’, \textit{Daily Mirror}, 7 June 1924, p. 12.}
\end{figure}

\textbf{‘In Britain or Overseas’?}\textsuperscript{85}

Perhaps the ultimate duality presented to the reader of children’s pages in both the local and the national press is that between home and abroad. This reflected a common device used in nineteenth-century fiction. As Bratton notes:

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\textsuperscript{84} \textit{Daily Mirror}, 7\textsuperscript{th} June 1924, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{85} Headline from the \textit{Liverpool Echo}, 28\textsuperscript{th} November 1930, p. 8.

The tension between Old England, its beauty and cultivated fertility, its security, its beloved associations with family or sweetheart left behind, and the new lands of promise, which are exciting, but also hard and masculine, dangerously unfamiliar, lawless and lonely, is a deep structured polarity in the fiction of the second half of the nineteenth century.  

This polarity is also evident in the children’s pages of the local and national press. Newspapers appropriated techniques from popular culture and reproduced them in the form of comic strips and short stories; in short, formats that suited the newspaper. Newspapers informed people about world events and they were also a crucial part of the process through which the world outside Britain was imaginatively constructed for the British public. In the interwar years, by far the most important part of the world represented to the British public through popular culture was the British Empire.

Newspapers were instrumental in constructing an idea of the colonies in the British imagination. This was often achieved through the inclusion of letters, both real and fictional. Outside of the children’s column these letters ‘from abroad’ often served as travel narratives describing life and customs in various parts of the world. They were also included as a propaganda exercise to indicate that that particular newspaper was being read and appreciated abroad. These examples were found throughout the newspapers sampled for this thesis, but they were a particularly popular device in the children’s page.

Always a cause for great excitement, even the process of letter writing itself was imbued with a sense of mystery and adventure:

There is hardly anything more exciting, I think, than receiving a letter from some distant part of the world. The postman usually pops it in the letter-box without a thought of the wonderful journey it has gone through. What an exciting story some of these letters could tell-stories of storms in mid-Atlantic, of journeys across lonely deserts and adventures in tropical jungles! And the letter, with its unfamiliar stamp, arrives quite calmly at the house in company perhaps with the butcher’s bill and a letter from Aunt Jane who lives at Clapham!

The act of correspondence is described in a way that reinforces, not just the geographical distance between home and abroad, but the imagined differences between home and exotic faraway lands.

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87 Daily Mirror, 12th November 1921, p. ii.
Letters were used frequently in the children’s pages of both the local and the national press as a means of communicating news and information from other parts of the world. In the *Daily Mirror* Tom Pippin’s letters provided an opportunity to make comparisons between home and abroad: ‘It has been terribly hot out here. The skeeters and tsetse-flies have been worse than ever this season, and the monkeys are a perfect pest. It will be quite a welcome change to feel a good old English east wind again!’  

When Tom wrote to the pets before a visit home he thanked them for sending him the *Overseas Daily Mirror* and declared: ‘They have been a real boon and helped to keep me in touch with dear old Blighty’. The paper’s attempts at self-promotion were not confined to an adult audience (newspapers of the period encouraged readers to send copies to their loved ones overseas, as a way of keeping them in touch with home).

The descriptions of abroad in Tom’s letters reveal how both black and white identities were constructed, as he is a man in control of his environment, both the geographical space and its inhabitants. His letters are described as, ‘packed full of exciting stories of life in the wilds, of lions roaring at night, of camp fires and hunting expeditions, rubber plantations, natives, wild birds and wonderful flowers.’ The letters reinforced the lowly status afforded black characters in the paper’s adventure stories as the ‘natives’ are simply part of the landscape.

From articles written by readers’ overseas, to advertising that promoted imperial produce, newspapers took an active role in constructing an idea of Empire for their readers. Articles were often included that provided readers with geographical, historical and ethnographic information on countries both within and outside of the British Empire. This type of content transformed itself easily into content that was suitable for a young audience and there is ample evidence of this sort of educational content in the *Daily Mirror’s* children’s section alone. In addition to the images constructed through the adventures of ‘the pets’ the children’s page also contained information about other parts of the world, often sent in from readers abroad. By far the most important part of the world that children were connected to through their children’s page was the British Empire. Knowledge of the Empire was already well-established within the experiences of British children, through school and Empire Day celebrations (see Chapter One). The idea of Empire also permeated children’s

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89 *Daily Mirror*, 17th April 1937, p. 18.
literature. In this respect newspapers were utilising a tried and tested subject and simultaneously reinforcing the notion that Empire was central to British national identity.

J.S. Bratton’s work on Edwardian juvenile literature underlines how closely the Daily Mirror’s children’s page of the interwar years echoed this genre. Bratton notes that Englishness and England itself were presented as the epitome of all that was virtuous, and that these conceptions underpinned justifications for Empire in children’s literature. Bratton also observes that the idealised image of England that was presented to children served to link the imaginative narrative with the real business of colonial expansion:

For the imperialist writer, the extension of this Englishness overseas is a cogent reason for colonial expansion. I also find in much Victorian and Edwardian fiction a feeling that, while readers enjoy exotic adventure stories set in distant corners of the Empire, no significant transference of their messages can take place unless there is some bridge provided between that fantasy world and the everyday. The presentation of an idealised England as the motive and reward of the Empire-builder provides this activating link.\(^\text{91}\)

The argument that an idealised version of England and the national character were necessary in order for young readers to invest in a story and absorb its imperial sentiment is compelling in light of the evidence from the children’s pages of the Daily Mirror. Bratton asserted that it was an idealised image of home ‘as the motive and reward of the Empire-builder’ that provided the link between fantasy and reality. The character of Tom Pippin illustrates this connection when, despite all the adventures that he has in Africa, he longs ‘to feel a good old English east wind again!’\(^\text{92}\)

While Tom’s life in Africa is described as exotic and exciting, the young readers of ‘Pip, Squeak and Wilfred’ are not allowed to forget the difficulties of life in the colonies, especially the homesickness that was viewed as an inevitable result of being away from England. In one of his letters home to his wife Tom writes: ‘I often think of you, my dear, as I sit here by my camp fire at night. I long for the sight of Dover cliffs and a sniff of good old England.’\(^\text{93}\) ‘Uncle Dick’ responds to this by informing the reader:

Like other Britishers in far-away parts of the Empire, I am sure he often dreams of home. A friend of mine in Australia sent me a line the other day to say that if ever I mentioned the smell of wood smoke again he would—well, he would have to stop buying the Overseas Daily Mirror.\(^\text{94}\)

\(^{92}\) Daily Mirror, 17\(^\text{th}\) April 1937, p. 18.
\(^{93}\) Daily Mirror, 25\(^\text{th}\) March 1935, p. 22.
\(^{94}\) Daily Mirror, 25\(^\text{th}\) March 1935, p. 22.
In contrast to the stark image of the Navy’s gun-ship in *Cannibal Island*, it is the sights and sounds of rural England that are constructed as a link with home.

The relationship between Britain and her Empire that was presented to children in newspapers echoed information that they received in school, especially on Empire Day. Throughout the interwar years, both the local and the national press reported on the involvement of children in the annual celebrations; in 1919 the *Daily Mirror* noted that it was ‘primarily a children’s festival’. The link between Empire and national identity was brought home to children through speeches and the customary saluting of the Union Jack (see Figure 24). In honour of the celebrations in 1922, Uncle Dick told his readers, ‘I am sure… that, today of all days, you will feel immensely proud of being a little Britisher’.

![Figure 24: ‘Empire Day’, *Daily Mirror*, 25th May 1922, Front Page.](image)

For the children who were not privileged enough to be chosen to go on the School Empire Tours organised by the School Empire Tour Committee, a privilege reserved for boys, events like Empire Day and the attendant images to be found in books and newspapers were the central means by which they learnt about Britain’s overseas colonies. Cinemas also played their part; children watched educational propaganda films that informed them about life in the colonies and Dominions. Newspaper reports on the British Empire

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97 On the ‘School Empire Tours’ see *Manchester Guardian*, 7th June 1927, p. 11.
Exhibition at Wembley underline that this was another opportunity seized upon by schools to instil children with a pride in the British Empire. In July 1925 the Manchester Guardian reported that 10,000 London schoolchildren visited Wembley in just one day.\textsuperscript{99} The exhibition was publicised in schools through colour posters and souvenir pamphlets that included information on Britain’s overseas Empire. According to the Manchester Guardian, by November 1923, 2,000 school authorities had applied for more than 400,000 such pamphlets.\textsuperscript{100}

Newspapers also contributed to children’s understanding of Empire through connections with other children living overseas. One of the key ways in which the Daily Mirror connected children to their peers living abroad was through letters. In a letter sent from the Fiji Islands in May 1926, a young girl gave an account of her life there, and while she stressed the differences with Britain (namely the abundance of sharks and bananas!), she also noted familiar things such as the games played by the children.\textsuperscript{101} Although it is difficult to verify the authenticity of these letters, in terms of whether they were genuinely sent in from readers, they do underline how children were encouraged to imagine other peoples and places; in this respect it does not matter if the children wrote them or not. Of course, if they are authentic, and we have every reason to suppose that they are (children were encouraged to correspond with ‘Uncle Dick’ and ‘the pets’ and the newspaper’s address was regularly offered to the readers of the children’s page) they give a valuable insight into the relationship between children and the newspaper. They show that children actively engaged with themes from the newspaper and incorporated them into their own writing.

Another letter sent in by an eleven-year-old girl from the Isle of Wight in May 1929, told of her parents’ life in Karachi. In what was described as ‘a letter about a letter’, she recounted the contents of the letter and after describing the wildlife, weather and houses, the young girl noted the concluding line: ‘Please give my love to the pets, and tell them that lots of children in Karachi enjoy their adventures.’\textsuperscript{102} An explicit connection is made between life in the colonies and the pursuit of adventure. The actual journey from Britain to distant lands was sometimes recounted for the amusement of young readers; the Daily Mirror’s children’s page endeavoured to provide children with information about British children in the process of moving abroad. On 18\textsuperscript{th} May 1929, a section entitled ‘Letters from Young Emigrants

\textsuperscript{99}Manchester Guardian, 23\textsuperscript{rd} July 1925, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{100}Manchester Guardian, 13\textsuperscript{th} November 1923, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{101}Daily Mirror, 21\textsuperscript{st} May 1926, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{102}Daily Mirror, 28\textsuperscript{th} May 1929, p. 14.
Bound for Australia’ included letters from children who described their experiences at sea en route to a new life on the other side of the world.  

As early as 1925 the Daily Mirror had encouraged its readers to establish links with children living abroad. On 27th November 1925 letters were published from children in Australia, Singapore, California and France, under the heading ‘Letters from your Overseas “Cousins”’. Schwarz notes that the use of such familial terms had a variety of purposes:

‘Mother country’–‘family’–‘the bond of blood’. This set of interconnected terms, although signifying the possibility of inclusion, did not apply to all nations of the empire equally. The metropole –the ‘mother country’–was located at the centre. ‘Bonds of blood’ applied exclusively to the white colonies. And ‘family’ indicated a variety of possibilities–encompassing both the idea of siblings, for those deemed to be of the same race, and the notion of offspring, for those more backward races in need of the firm hand of authority.

The use of a familial title in the children’s page underlines the fact that these letters are predominantly from British children who lived abroad or at least those whose families had emigrated from Britain. Even the term overseas is used, as it often was, to describe the empire. Letters that were supposed to be from children from a different ethnic background were not represented in the same way.

On 12th November 1921, a letter was printed in the children’s column supposedly from an African boy named ‘Sammy’. We are told that Sammy is not the boy’s real name and the invocation of the derogatory title ‘Sambo’ is evident. The reader is informed that the letter had come from the Gold Coast of Africa and, unlike other letters printed in the column that are designed to give a flavour of life abroad, ‘Uncle Dick’ stated that ‘I thought you might like to see exactly how a little black boy writes.’ The tone of the piece is mocking and the letter is clearly fabricated in a way that the other letters do not appear to be; if they were, at least the children involved were given appropriate names and spared the ridicule afforded ‘Sammy’:

He writes in this way—all these Gold Coast letters are the same:—“I hope you shall be very gratification to get a friend in Africa or in such a long country. By coming next mail I will describe you how Africa is. My ages is 13 years. By coming next mail I will send you tiger-nut or cocoa-nut.” (sic) Rather a quaint letter!

104 Daily Mirror, 27th November 1925, p. 11.
105 Schwarz, Memories of Empire, p. 62.
106 Schwarz, Memories of Empire, pp. 53-55.
107 Daily Mirror, 12th November 1921, p. ii.
The extension of ‘friendliness’ to other peoples did not mean that they were viewed as equals. The images of other places and peoples constructed through such letters not only contributed to the way in which other peoples and places were imagined; through direct comparison with home, children were encouraged to imagine the role of Britain in the world, and their place within it. Direct comparisons between home and abroad were not only a feature of the Daily Mirror’s children’s column. The local press paralleled the enthusiasm of the national papers. In the Garston and Woolton Weekly News on 5th April 1935, the beauty of an English spring was contrasted with the harshness of the Indian climate. The article, from a column aimed specifically at young female readers, stated:

My dear Girls,—Doesn’t this little picture (below is a picture of three birds perched on the branch of a tree) give a charming glimpse of an English springtime? The three little birdies do not seem to mind the rain at all for it is fresh and not too cold, and brings out the delightful perfumes of the earth and grasses, hedges and flowers. A young niece of mine is on the way home from India, and you know that many nieces are living in lands where the climate is very different from the English climate.  

In the same column there was an account given of the Archbishop of Liverpool’s visit to Australia. The extremes of the country are contrasted with the ‘lovely spot on Merseyside’ that was the Archbishop’s home:

Some time ago I was interested to read what the Archbishop of Liverpool said about his visit to Australia. He said that he had been scorched by the sun and chilled to the marrow by biting winds, all in one day. He had seen floods in Melbourne which enabled him to visualize the days of Noah. He had motored through flying squads of grasshoppers till finally they blocked the radiator and brought the car to a standstill. To his amazement he had found beautiful butterflies a pest second only to grasshoppers in impeding one’s progress by road. From an aeroplane he saw sharks on the prowl just outside the surf-line hard by the coast of Sydney and had been decorated by representatives of every State in the Commonwealth—namely by mosquitoes!

In both these descriptions, physical geography is used to differentiate between England and abroad. The temperate English spring is contrasted with the dramatic nature of life in Australia; home is quaint and safe while the colonies are constructed as a setting for the more adventurous in spirit.

When the Liverpool Echo’s ‘Auntie Muriel’ asked children where they would prefer to live, ‘In Britain or Overseas?’, the results were deemed of sufficient interest to be printed
outside of the children’s column on 28\textsuperscript{th} November 1930.\textsuperscript{110} Of those who wanted to live in Australia, it was the job opportunities, open spaces and wildlife that were the main attractions. A ten year old boy from Wavertree stated that he ‘would take a ranch out there…and keep sheep, as it is a great occupation now.’\textsuperscript{111} An eleven-year-old girl from Waterloo chose Australia because ‘there are such lovely spaces and no crowded cities; the air is not spoiled by smoke, the orchards are filled with delicious fruits, the fields with waving corn, and there are strange animals such as kangaroos and ostriches.’\textsuperscript{112} This response supports Schwarz’s assertion that it was not just England that was viewed as the ‘reward of the Empire-builder’. Schwarz argues that, after the Second World War, white settler colonies were imagined as ‘the idyll of fantasized white homes, uncompromised by the complexities and chaos of modern life’, including immigration.\textsuperscript{113} The views of this young girl indicate that such images were formed at an early age.

The impressions that stereotypes of particular places made on children is highlighted by the response of a fourteen-year-old girl from West Derby who stated that she would like to go to Amsterdam, the ‘land of tulips’, in order to ‘walk and see everywhere fields of red, yellow, and pink tulips swaying in the breeze and to walk along the dykes and see the ships gliding along the canals; to be wakened by the clickety-clack of wooden shoes and see the workmen in their wide pants and tophats (sic).’\textsuperscript{114} The response of a thirteen-year-old girl from Warrington illustrates the importance of visual images to the construction of children’s ideas about other places: ‘If only I had a chance to live in Venice…I should go at once, for I love rowing. Perhaps I may have a chance some day, but until then I must be content with my pictures in Warrington.’\textsuperscript{115} According to the paper one young boy who wanted to live in America showed ‘a great spirit of adventure’. Aged just nine years he wanted to go ‘to the part of America where the cowboys live’ and ‘live on a ranch’.\textsuperscript{116}

At least half of the responses that the newspaper published were from children who wanted to stay at home in Britain. Patriotic sentiment was evident in these responses. A ten-year-old girl from Bootle wanted to stay in England ‘because it is my country and the land of the free’.\textsuperscript{117} Another, slightly more elaborate answer, came from a sixteen-year-old

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\textsuperscript{110} \textit{Liverpool Echo}, 28\textsuperscript{th} November 1930, p. 8. \\
\textsuperscript{111} \textit{Liverpool Echo}, 28\textsuperscript{th} November 1930, p. 8. \\
\textsuperscript{112} \textit{Liverpool Echo}, 28\textsuperscript{th} November 1930, p. 8. \\
\textsuperscript{113} Schwarz, \textit{Memories of Empire}, p. 56. \\
\textsuperscript{114} \textit{Liverpool Echo}, 28\textsuperscript{th} November 1930, p. 8. \\
\textsuperscript{115} \textit{Liverpool Echo}, 28\textsuperscript{th} November 1930, p. 8. \\
\textsuperscript{116} \textit{Liverpool Echo}, 28\textsuperscript{th} November 1930, p. 8. \\
\textsuperscript{117} \textit{Liverpool Echo}, 28\textsuperscript{th} November 1930, p. 8.
\end{flushleft}
Birkenhead boy who believed that ‘one is bound in duty to support one’s mother country, which, in its present troublous (sic) times, needs the help of every loyal citizen ready and willing to do his bit for the nation’s good.’ The responses of the older children suggest the influence of their education, particularly when it came to how they perceived their own country and its history. A fifteen-year-old girl from Mossley Hill, Liverpool displayed a keen pride in the country’s capital and a belief in the relative safety and comfort of England in comparison to the rest of the world: ‘England is my choice for ever–no fearsome animals or poisonous snakes; no revolutions or gunmen. Wonderful scenery and towns–London, which Americans would love to possess, but cannot buy for all their money.’ An eleven-year-old boy revealed a deeply practical nature when he extolled the virtues of his home town:

Though I had all the world to choose from I do not think I could find a better place to live in than my present home. Penketh is a pleasant village; we have no serious storms and floods, as many places do, but many pretty walks, good roads, drains, and houses, and the whole village is lit well by electricity. The local elementary school I attend is one of the best anywhere, and one’s education can be continued elsewhere-providing, of course, one has the necessary brains.

Scotland, the Isle of Man and Paris are amongst the other places favoured by the children featured in this article. The responses that were chosen highlight a rich variety of ideas and images that children held about places both at home and abroad. People hardly feature in the children’s answers as they are much more preoccupied with physical geography; practical considerations are also stressed which seems most peculiar for children of such a young age. A ten-year-old boy from Wallasey preferred New Zealand, ‘because it is not too hot or too cold all the year round.’

It is impossible to know the extent to which children were influenced by their parents when they were fashioning the answers, or by things that they had learned in school. The answer given by the young boy from Penketh certainly appears unusually adult in tone. Carolyn Steedman’s work, however, warns that although children try to please adults through their writing, they are capable of actively constructing their social world through the things that they see and hear. These responses provide an insight into how children constructed

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118 Liverpool Echo, 28th November 1930, p. 8.
119 Liverpool Echo, 28th November 1930, p. 8.
120 Liverpool Echo, 28th November 1930, p. 8.
121 Liverpool Echo, 28th November 1930, p. 8.
122 Steedman, The Tidy House, p. 72 and p. 91.
other parts of the world in their imagination. They also highlight that children actively engaged with newspapers, and were encouraged to do so.

Another element to the children’s page further illustrates that children were active participants, not just passive readers of newspapers. In the *Daily Mirror*’s children’s column, children were sometimes encouraged to enter writing competitions and the results of these competitions highlight the impact that the dominant themes from children’s stories had on their young readership. Their stories were imaginative adventure tales in which the racial ‘other’ is represented as both fearsome savage and loyal servant. Frances Mannsaker notes that in imperial fiction ‘the native people tend to become one more variety of object against which the boy hero’s ingenuity, courage or uprightness can be measured. Savage tribe, mighty waterfall, terrible precipice…all serve the same function in the story.’¹²³ The examples given here illustrate how children utilised these same themes in their own stories; and it was not only young boys influenced by such tales.

The theme of one such story, written by a twelve-year-old girl is evident from the title. In *Cannibal Island* a family bound for Australia are ship-wrecked on an island inhabited by cannibals. The protagonists are instantly aware of their predicament by virtue of their surroundings: ‘They got out of the ship and went to see if there were any wild people about, for they knew that no English people could live on such a beautiful island.’ Inevitably, the cannibals are defeated, except one that ‘they kept’ and the family return to England.¹²⁴

Another short story by a thirteen-year-old boy features ‘Jan, the nigger’, a character whose sole purpose is to assist two boys on their adventures. Jan is described as ‘a massive negro, clothed in furs and about six feet in height’.¹²⁵ Both these examples are adventure stories and they both required the black ‘other’ in order to complete their narratives. In a tale of the American frontier a nine-year-old boy produced a different narrative, although with a similar outcome. In ‘Fighting the Indians’, a man and his teenage son engage with a group of ‘Blackfeet Indians’, killing ‘two half-breeds’ and eventually the chief. They are rewarded by the ‘men from the fort’ and are each given a mustang and revolvers and are destined to become ‘two of the best fighters’.¹²⁶

At this point it is worthwhile considering the appeal of the adventure story. In his study of the British ‘soldier hero’, Graham Dawson notes that ‘circumstances that can be

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called ‘adventures’ in this more active sense provide a challenge to assert human will and test human capabilities against the vicissitudes of a world that remains deeply uncertain." This definition explains the appeal of one particular aspect of the adventure story and illuminates our understanding of the children’s choice of theme. In imperial adventure stories, both those produced by and for children, the white characters, after initially being placed in danger, regain control of the situation, both of their setting and the people within it. This aspect of the stories may have been comforting for children on many levels, providing a sense of familiarity and continuity. The fact that the people they control are almost always of a different ethnic background underlines the unsettling impact that racial difference had in the British imagination and the way in which this was fostered in children from a young age.

From literature, as well as from theatre and the cinema, children already had a stock of stereotypical figures that they could draw on in their imaginative writing. In the children’s column black characters appear in many forms, but, from black-faced minstrels (see Figure 25) to Sambo, they are always in a supporting role. The way in which the children assigned roles to their characters reflects this bias. In the cannibal story, the natives are portrayed as both fearsome and yet easily tamed. In The Bear-Hunters the black character is in a completely subservient role, referring to the young boys, in his pigeon dialect, as ‘sar’.

Figure 25: ‘The Nigger Minstrel’, Daily Mirror, 18th July 1919, p. 13.

The racial ‘others’ of the children’s imagination were formed by the images that they already associated with these characters; images from their school-books, magazine, novels, and, as this chapter has highlighted, the popular press. Graham Dawson includes an

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127 G. Dawson, Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities (Abingdon, 1994), p. 53.
autobiographical section in his work that examined his own childhood games and the
influence that popular culture, specifically comic books, had on his imaginative play.
Dawson’s reflection underlines the way in which children absorb language and imagery from
different cultural mediums, and the impact that this has on their imaginings:

Adventure stories also furnished me with ideas that I could incorporate into my own play
fantasies…Characters, too, could be transferred from public narratives into play. The
visual imagery of combat in a comic like The Victor, being strikingly similar to the
representational form of my own toy soldiers, facilitated their identification with the
qualities of comic-heroes and their enemies…Contributing in this way to the imagining of
the characters and adventures of my soldiers, cultural forms produced for mass-public
audiences came to inform my ‘own’ fantasies, by literally ‘giving form’ to my investments
in play.128

It is important not to make too simplistic a link between the stories that children told
and their own beliefs or feeling towards people from different ethnic backgrounds. Steedman
asserts that:

Children’s writing…is massively influenced by adults and is nearly always the result of
some kind of adult intervention. Children clearly perceive writing as a task, by virtue of the
physical activity involved as well as by their interpretation of adult intention and in
performing it children try to please adults and to adopt models of narrative and ways of
working that they divine will be praised and appreciated.129

The children who wrote these stories wanted to do a good job, and this meant reproducing
narratives that they themselves had enjoyed and that, more importantly, were a dominant
feature of the most popular children’s literature of the period. Given that they were applying
for the Daily Mirror’s competition, they presumably would have taken inspiration from the
children’s column itself. These stories may indicate that children were utilising popular
themes in order to be successful in a particular situation and therefore they do not give a full
account of these children’s ideas about race; if for example they were questioned about their
own class-mates or neighbours they may have given a different response. Nevertheless, the
fact that these images could be so readily conjured up by children when they were asked to
produce a story does underline the importance of popular culture in shaping how children
imagined the racial ‘other’. It also highlights the relationship between reader and newspaper
and the importance of newspapers in constructing the ‘other’ in children’s imaginations.

129 Steedman, The Tidy House, p. 91.
Beyond the Empire: Internationalism in the Children’s Page

Imperial themes pervaded children’s pages, but newspapers were not only concerned with fostering imperial citizens. A distinctly internationalist tone can be detected in some of the articles aimed at children. Alongside a glorification of imperial ideals and the reinforcement of notions of white superiority, was a concern to produce citizens who would promote international co-operation and perhaps prevent a future war. On Friday 9th November 1934, the Garston and Woolton Weekly News quoted some of the writings of W.E.B. Du Bois in its children’s page, ‘Young Citizens’ League’. Under the headline ‘a world-worthy creed’ the article began:

My dear Young Citizens:- For a long time now the daily newspapers have been reminding us that the world is drifting towards another war. Everywhere we look to-day we find nations thinking about themselves and forgetting that, if the world is to make progress, they must all work together for peace and prosperity. While I have been thinking about all these difficulties I came across the writings of a negro, and amongst some of his writings I found what he called his creed of life. It is such a wonderful creed that I wish every boy and girl, the wide world over, would make this creed the watchword of life.

The publication of the words of such a prominent civil rights activist is of course significant. The selection chosen for the children’s column, however, are emphasised, not in the context of promoting racial quality, but in order to promote a spirit of internationalism. This piece encourages children to think of themselves as citizens of the world as opposed to little ‘Britishers’ and the ideal of universal brotherhood that it promoted parallels the ethos of Baden Powell’s scouting movement during this period. Such noble aspirations, while appearing to promote racial harmony, actually reveal a ‘paternalistic benevolence’ that characterised even the most progressive attitudes towards people from different ethnic backgrounds. The ‘young citizens’ are told ‘I am not going to say anymore about it, but just pass it on to you, reminding you that a black man wrote it. Let us who are white be glad because of such men’; we can infer much about the newspaper’s readership from this statement.

One quote that is reproduced is the following:

I believe in God, who made of one blood all nations that on earth do dwell. I believe that all men, black and brown, and white, are brothers, varying through time and opportunity in

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form and gift and feature, but differing in no essential particular, and alike in soul and the possibility of infinite development.\textsuperscript{133}

It is difficult to know what to make of an article like this; the combining of a spirit of internationalism with an active promotion of civil rights is certainly unusual in this context. Although the piece reproduced the quote above, Du Bois’ work is highlighted at a time when another war seemed inevitable and it is doubtful whether his creed would have seemed so attractive had the international context been different. Nevertheless, it is a departure from the more imaginative conceptions of black people usually presented to children in their children’s page. Examples of such an internationalist sentiment were not confined to the local press as the national press was also keen to promote such ideals in the turbulent political atmosphere of the 1930s.

Readers of the \textit{Daily Mirror}’s children’s page were encouraged to interact with children all over the world through the ‘World League of Friendliness’, first mentioned in May 1932. The ‘league’ encouraged children to acquire pen-friends abroad, and explicitly echoed the aims of the League of Nations Union in its bid to ‘help towards the biggest thing of all—the abolition of war.’\textsuperscript{134} The \textit{Daily Mirror} used very similar language in its promotion of the ‘league’ to that used by the League of Nations Union in its publications aimed at

\textsuperscript{133} Garston and Woolton Weekly News, 9\textsuperscript{th} November 1934, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{134} Daily Mirror, 4\textsuperscript{th} May 1932, p. 14.
educating children in ‘World-Friendship’ (see Figure 26). The use of the term ‘league’ itself is significant; the ‘world league of friendliness’ and the ‘young citizens’ league’ all suggest organizations united in one cause as well as indirectly referencing the League of Nations.

Constructing a Narrative on Race: Newspapers, Advertising and the Children’s Page

The themes covered in the Daily Mirror’s children’s pages exploited children’s natural curiosity and sense of adventure. The ability of children to use their imagination is arguably greater than, and certainly different to adults. The restricted spaces they inhabit, and the limits of their knowledge, mean that the images and stories that they consume assume significant importance in informing them about the places that they have never experienced, and maybe never will. If these images and ideas are never corrected or altered by first-hand experience, then they will affect their perceptions of other peoples and places right through to adulthood, especially if they are reinforced through other cultural mediums such as the cinema.

Newspapers are comprised of different sections of both text and images and this means that there are many ways that specific messages can be transmitted. By the interwar years popular newspapers were no longer filled with columns of lengthy text; pictures and advertising began to be incorporated into pages that also included one or more articles. By examining the material that is not the direct object of this study, the ubiquitous nature of images of the racial ‘other’ is evident. In the Daily Mirror’s children’s page for example, children were presented with various examples of the racial ‘other’ while the advertising that ran on the same page reinforced these ideas. In one edition of Pip, Squeak and Wilfred the pets’ friend Curly is visited by his ‘Mammy’. On the same page as the children’s comic strip there is an advertisement for floor polish that uses the image of ‘five little nigger boys’ who are drawn in native costumes with large thick lips and pierced ears (see Figure 27). The tag-line reads, ‘5 little nigger boys, polishing a door one’s on the other side you only see 4’. The advertisement was part of a series entitled ‘Nigger Boy Advertisements’ that customers were encouraged to collect in order to obtain a free atlas.135 Both the ‘little nigger boys’ and ‘Curly’ present the reader with a familiar stereotype of the smiling, happy-go-lucky piccaninnies that would not have been out of place on the music-hall stage.136

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135 Daily Mirror, 22nd May 1934, p. 20.
Children were presented with images that they could relate to in terms of age, but who were portrayed as inferior to them. The fact that this advertisement appropriated a theme that was popular in children’s nursery rhymes, that of the ‘ten little nigger boys’, lends it further significance. This set of advertisements reveals how language and images from popular culture were appropriated in order to attract readers’ attention. Even event advertising aimed at children and their parents worked to reinforce an imaginative notion of the exotic ‘other’ and children who did not attend such events could be exposed to the language and imagery used to promote them through their newspaper (see Figure 28). In the case of advertising, the enduring legacy of such images, for both the children confronted with them for the first time, and for the adults for whom they rekindled nostalgic memories of their own childhood is highlighted by the following response from a Mass-Observing who remembered where his own ideas about black people had come from: ‘A negro always reminds me (pleasantly) of chocolate dolls and the fate of [the] ten little nigger boys’. Another respondent recalled, ‘One advertisement that annoys me is…for Lyon’s Coffee…showing a horrible grinning flat-nosed black creature called ‘Kaffey’.

In addition to forming ideas about other peoples, a child’s own position in the world was reinforced by imperial advertising that stressed the importance of the relationship between Britain and its colonies. In one edition of Pip, Squeak and Wilfred, a young reader describes her parents’ life in Karachi and on the same page an almost equal amount of space is taken up by an advertisement for ‘Australian Sultanas’ that appealed to the reader to ‘Help Australia to Help You!’ Advertisements for sultanas and floor polish were aimed at adults but the vocabulary used, not to mention the illustrations, are easily accessible to children; especially the children literate enough to be reading the children’s column in the first place.

Carolyn Steedman observes how children often use lines from popular songs in their stories, thus demonstrating the impact that popular culture has on children, and their ability to reference it for their own purposes. The stories produced in the children’s column could also weave cultural references into their narrative. One example, from November 1926, told the story of the ‘Sad Darkie who “went back” to Tennessee’ (see Figure 29). The comic strip is based on the popular war-time song and in it the stereotypical ‘darkie’ goes back to his old Tennessee home, only to be hen-pecked by his domineering ‘Mammy’ and regret his decision.

137 M-O A: DR 1267, June 1939 quoted in Kushner, We Europeans?, p. 113.
140 Steedman, The Tidy House, pp. 127-128.
Figure 27: ‘Curly’s “Mammy” Arrives!’, *Daily Mirror*, 22 May 1934, p. 20.
Figure 28: ‘By Speedboat to Africa!’, Liverpool Echo, 4th November 1932, p. 13.
This example illustrates the importance of the ‘American Negro’ as a stereotypical black person in the British imagination. Like popular entertainments, newspapers did not only rely on the British Empire as a setting for the construction of racial identities and in this comic strip the *Daily Mirror* engages with contemporary discourses that linked African-Americans geographically to the Southern United States and culturally to the popular music of the period.

![Comic strip](image)

Figure 29: ‘Sad Darkie who “went back” to Tennessee’, *Daily Mirror*, 9 November 1926, p. 11.

Not only is the story an opportunity to reproduce dominant ideas about black people, it is also used, paradoxically, to remind children that sometimes their ideas about other places were based on false impressions, an explanation that relied on popular music to emphasise this point:

Have you noticed what a lot of popular songs there are in which the singer is always wishing he were somewhere else—some far-away place like Tennessee or Kentucky or the Swanee River?...Now, why should these wonderful places always be so far away?...I suppose the reason is that we are always deeply interested in places that are so far away that we are never likely to visit them. Perhaps it is just as well. Like the poor darkie in to-
day’s pictures, who actually went back to Tennessee, we might find these wonderful places quite ordinary and rather dull. Here the fantasies of other exciting places are deliberately exposed while children are simultaneously presented with an imaginative narrative that reproduces familiar stereotypical images of black people. When used alongside popular images, the language of popular culture could be used to influence young minds and to fashion a narrative that incorporated many different aspects of popular culture.

Children’s pages are rich sources that reveal the multifarious nature of racial images that were presented to children during the interwar years. They underline the centrality of imperial conceptions of Britishness and the relationship between Britain and the rest of the world, and how this was explained to children through fictional stories that extolled the virtues of both. In addition, various devices used to inform children about other parts of the world, including pictures and letters, illustrate how children were encouraged to imagine other peoples and places and the recurring themes that may have influenced their imaginings. The characters that provide the adventure, particularly in the stories of Pip, Squeak and Wilfred, are drawn from both inside and outside the Empire, thus extending our understanding of attitudes to race during the interwar years, and the extent to which we have to look beyond imperial connections in order to fully understand how British children understood their position in relation to the rest of the world.

The children’s pages of newspapers distilled many of the dominant ideas about other ethnic groups and national identity into a form suitable for children. Understanding the role of adult society in disseminating these ideas to children is crucial as the vicious cycle that this inevitably produces goes a long way to explaining the resilience of these stereotypes over time. Of course, newspapers were just one of many influential factors, but the fact that they were read on a daily basis makes them an invaluable source that enhances our understanding of the language and imagery on race that children were presented with on a regular basis.

The responses that children gave when asked about different ethnic groups and other places in relation to Britain indicate that, especially for young children, visual images were very important. In this respect, the children’s column was perfectly placed as its limited size and reliance on short comic strips and short stories made visual images one of its key features. Children were encouraged to imagine the world outside Britain, including its peoples, as different from them in essential ways such as their values, customs and

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141 Daily Mirror, 9th November 1926, p. 11.
appearance. These differences underlined the superiority of British values and emphasised the importance of Empire to British national identity.

On 23rd May 1924, ‘Uncle Dick’ wrote a letter to his faithful readers on the subject of ‘Beyondy-Places’. He explained the phrase in the following terms:

The word “beyondy” is not mine –it is used by our little neighbour Bendy. When Bendy sees a place she has never visited –a distant hill or wood in the country or the end of a long street –she calls it a “beyondy-place”, and she is always frightfully curious to see those places and find out what they are like.142

Reminiscing about his own experiences of ‘beyondy-places’, Uncle Dick noted that:

There was a certain region near our house in the country which I was never able to explore. From a tree-top one could see old farmhouses, hop gardens and mysterious woods. I never went there. To this day that “beyondy-place” still haunts me; I’m quite sure it is an enchanted piece of land.143

The unknown, whether it was at home or abroad, was filled with mystery and therefore had to be represented, explained and thus become a little more ‘known’. This world was purely fictional, occasionally some facts were thrown in for good measure but the visual representations of ethnic difference that were often incorporated into these stories were imagined in ways that suited the narrative. Despite attempts at promoting ‘friendliness’ between different nations, this was a distinctly imperial sentiment, as the friendship extended to other countries did not diminish Britain’s political or racial dominance. Children were encouraged to imagine the world in a variety of ways, as a place to conquer, a place for adventure and sometimes as a dangerous place, but their own superior place within that world was never in doubt.

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142 Daily Mirror, 23rd May 1924, p. 11.
143 Daily Mirror, 23rd May 1924, p. 11.
Chapter Five
Formative Influences on Ideas about Race: The Imagined Jew in the Mass-Observation Archive.

The previous chapters of this thesis illustrate that although there were opportunities for interracial contact in interwar Britain, for the majority of British people, experiences of those defined as racially ‘other’ were limited to the realm of the imagination. Ideas about other peoples and places were constructed through various cultural and social experiences, in churches, in schools and in entertainment venues. Evidence from the Mass-Observation Archive supports this argument; it reveals both the variety of discourses on race and the importance of different social and cultural influences on the way that British people imagined race in the interwar years.

Tony Kushner’s exploration of the Mass-Observation Archive reveals interesting insights into, what he terms, the ‘origins of ‘race’ attitudes’. Kushner’s use of the M-O directives on race reveals important areas for further study, including the influence of the United States on race relations in Britain.¹ The M-O directive posed questions to respondents on a wide range of issues but race was a significant theme. In fact, from January to June 1939, half of all directives focused on the issue of race.² Tony Kushner argues that all the directives have been neglected as sources of information on specific topics and as a way of examining ‘literacy and autobiographical practices’³ Race was a specific concern: ‘Mass-Observation put immense energy into ‘racial research’ through the directives, a focus that has not been recognised.’⁴

Kushner’s own work on the subject of race and Mass-Observation is detailed and extensive but it does afford opportunities for further research. In We Europeans?, Kushner concludes that childhood influences had a significant impact on some of the Mass-Observers, specifically those answering the 1939 directive on ‘negroes’.⁵ Kushner’s conclusions reveal the importance of the archive as a source for understanding how the British public imagined racial difference and his exploration of the 1939 directive on black people raises important questions about the role of childhood experiences in the formation of ideas about race. This chapter builds on Kushner’s work by examining the February and March 1939 directives on

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² Kushner, We Europeans?, p. 105.
³ Kushner, We Europeans?, p. 105.
⁴ Kushner, We Europeans?, p. 105.
⁵ Kushner, We Europeans?, p. 113.
Jews and anti-Semitism in order to investigate how childhood experiences shaped how people imagined the racial ‘other’. In the February and March directives respondents were asked to detail factors that had shaped their attitudes towards Jewish people and their answers reveal a variety of influences.6

The growth of anti-Semitism was the central concern of Mass-Observation’s racial research and their work on this subject was more extensive than that on black people.7 The anti-Semitism directives reveal the importance of childhood experiences in forming ideas about Jewish people, both positive and negative. The responses of the observers highlight how people attempted to overcome their prejudices in the face of personal experiences and their own growing political awareness. The responses to the directive reveal a wide range of formative influences from the social experience of the home and school, to cultural influences from religion, literature and the theatre.

Mass-Observation

The concept of Mass-Observation was first pronounced by its founders, Tom Harrisson, Charles Madge and Humphrey Jennings in the New Statesman in 1937.8 Mass-Observation consisted, in part, of a panel of volunteers who completed monthly ‘directives’.9 These directives covered a variety of topics that illuminate our understanding of everyday life in Britain. The volunteers who worked for M-O were engaged in a variety of occupations and were drawn from across the social spectrum, despite a large number who could be described as lower-middle-class.10 Politically, the Mass-Observers were often ‘left of centre’, and many were members of the Left Book Club.11 This connection has significant implications for the anti-Semitism directives discussed in this chapter, as the Left Book Club’s pre-occupation with the rise of fascism is mirrored in the questions and responses to the February and March directives.

Mass-Observation became involved in the issue of anti-Semitism through its work in London’s East End. The area was a focus of attention as a result of its poverty and deprivation but the plight of its Jewish community soon attracted the attention of its founders. The inception of Mass-Observation occurred at a time of increasing activity by the British

6 Kushner, We Europeans?, p. 109.
7 Kushner, We Europeans?, pp. 110-111.
Union of Fascists (BUF) in the East End and drew the attention of a team alive to the ‘dangers of racialism at home’. An important source of funding for this work came from the Board of Deputies of British Jews. The money given to Mass-Observation by the Board was a vital source of income and was granted in order for them to investigate the nature of Jewish/Non-Jewish relations in London’s East End. The resulting ‘Anti-Semitism survey’ was based on the findings of three observers who had lived in Whitechapel, observing the day-to-day lives of both Jews and non-Jews. In addition, the directive responses were collected, forming an archive that Kushner describes as ‘by far the biggest ever amassed on antisemitism (sic) in Britain.’

Kushner’s study illustrates the value of the M-O Archive for a study of attitudes to race as well as its importance for understanding the nature of the racial ‘other’ that inhabited the British imagination. It is the latter feature that this chapter examines and in this respect the February/March directives were particularly instructive. Kushner notes that Harrisson’s analysis of the directives in the interim report on anti-Semitism ‘failed to deal in any depth with what was one of the most innovative aspects of the February and March 1939 directives: how individuals, using an admittedly sketchy life history approach, constructed their past and present attitudes towards Jews.’ Kushner’s study deals with the June 1939 and 1943 directives on ‘negroes’ and ‘coloured people’ in greater depth than the February and March 1939 directives, and he addresses anti-Semitism in more detail using the Mass-Observation diaries. Kushner summarises the findings of the interim report of the anti-Semitism survey in the following way:

It revealed, for example, the difference between the articulation of private and public views, the simultaneous unease about the persecution of the Jews and their presence in Britain, the liking of individuals and hatred towards the “race as a whole”, and how many Observers were “ashamed of their covert hostility” towards Jews.

This chapter examines the detail contained within these broader assumptions by exploring the processes that informed such complex understandings of Jewish people. It illustrates how diverse factors, from religion to schooling, parental influence to employment, politics and

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12 Kushner, *We Europeans?*, pp. 82-83.
13 Kushner, *We Europeans?*, p. 84.
14 Kushner, *We Europeans?*, pp. 84-85.
15 References to how the racial other was constructed in the British imagination were particularly important in representations of black people given in the June 1939 and 1943 directives. See Kushner, *We Europeans?*, p. 128.
popular entertainment constructed ‘the Jew’ in the British imagination. The often ambivalent responses provided by the observers are indicative of a desire to reject anti-Semitism while simultaneously reflecting on negative feelings that they could not ignore, even if they wanted to.

The directives, of course, are not an unproblematic source. The terminology used in these race directives is criticised by Angus Calder; he argues that the terms ‘race’ and ‘nation’ were used imprecisely and caused confusion in the responses. Kushner does not think that this needs to be seen in a negative light; rather he argues that ‘Mass-Observation was mirroring the complexity of attitudes amongst ordinary people when dealing with difference.’

The various ways that the Mass-Observers tried to come to terms with racial difference reveals a tension between their contemporary political ideals and the influence of older more established anti-Semitic stereotypes. The responses highlight the importance of personal experiences with Jewish people, more so than with any other ethnic group. They also reveal stereotypical images and ideas about Jewish appearance and character that have deep historical roots and that have since been subject to historical investigation.

Anti-Semitism in Britain

Historians such as Colin Holmes have examined the historical roots of anti-Semitism and its evolution up to the Second World War; this includes a focus on the experiences of Britain’s Jewish communities, many of whom fled persecution in other countries only to once more find themselves cast as ‘a race apart’. Although anti-Semitic attitudes were not confined to the modern era, they took on a different aspect in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that reflected the hardening of racial attitudes and the move towards ‘scientific racism’ that characterised this period. This change also followed in the wake of Jewish emancipation in the nineteenth century when there was a backlash against Jewish power and

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19 Kushner, We Europeans?, p. 144.
20 Kushner, We Europeans?, p. 144.
22 The term ‘scientific racism’ is used by E. Barkan, The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States between the Wars (Cambridge, 1992). On the increasing importance of race as a category of difference during this period, specifically its impact on Jewish people, see Holmes, Anti-Semitism in British Society, p. 221 and Lebzelter, Political Anti-Semitism in England, pp. 5-6.
influence that, in some cases, lent itself to hysterical conspiracy theories, perhaps the most infamous being that propagated in the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (1903: English translation 1920), a text which ‘exposed’ a Jewish plot to take over the world. The text itself was exposed as fraudulent in *The Times* in 1921.²³

After 1876, anti-Semitism, that is ‘hostility towards Jews as Jews’, was centred variously on the poor Eastern European immigrants who had settled largely in London’s East End, and those Jews who had advanced socially and economically into the realms of finance, politics and the press.²⁴ These two groups were characterised differently and the discourses surrounding both illustrate the nature of anti-Semitic attitudes during this period. The debate over the immigration of poor Jews from Eastern Europe was laden with metaphors of disease and degeneration, while wealthier Jews were perceived to be at the centre of a global Jewish conspiracy; both groups were represented as fundamentally opposed to the British ‘way of life’ as well as a direct threat to it.²⁵

Although anti-Semitism in Britain never reached the proportions that it did in Germany, by the interwar period political anti-Semitism manifested itself in the emergence of several Fascist organisations, most notably Oswald Mosley’s British Union of Fascists (BUF) founded in 1932.²⁶ These organisations found themselves in direct opposition with socialist groups, in particular the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). Socialist organizations, or to be more specific, organizations guided by socialist principles, were key forces opposing anti-Semitism during this period, although Lebzelter stresses that, particularly in the case of the CPGB, this was not one of their primary concerns, rather their vehement anti-Fascism led them to oppose all Fascist policies; their anti-Semitism therefore was more or less coincidental.²⁷ The responses given to the Mass-Observation directive on anti-Semitism highlight the fact that, amongst those who rejected anti-Semitism, their political persuasion was often to the fore in influencing their ideas. Nevertheless, the same respondents could readily affirm their dislike of Jewish people. This correlates with the argument put forward by Holmes and Lebzelter that, for Socialists, a rejection of anti-Semitism went hand-in-hand with their anti-Fascism and was not a specific concern in itself; hence some Mass-Observers

declared that anti-Semitism was wrong while simultaneously professing a dislike of Jewish people.\textsuperscript{28}

The role of Socialism is not just important to this chapter in terms of the background of the Mass-Observers and the role of the CPGB in opposing fascism. Politics was central to the way in which Jewish people were imagined in the interwar period. The CPGB itself had a large number of Jewish members, largely attracted by its anti-Fascist policies during the rise of the BUF.\textsuperscript{29} Since the 1920s, Russian Jews in particular had been viewed as allies of Germany, working internationally to subvert governments.\textsuperscript{30} After the First World War, Jews were believed to have taken control of Russia, especially after the Treaty of Brest Litovsk (1918), thus there was an explicit ‘association of Jews with Bolshevism’.\textsuperscript{31} This further fuelled the notion that Jewish people were ‘a race apart’ with divided loyalties and ‘the cry of Jewish Bolshevism…echoed in anti-semitic circles throughout the 1920s and 1930s.’\textsuperscript{32} This political context is crucial to understanding both the views of many of the Mass-Observers and one of the key ideas that shaped representations of Jewish people between the wars.

\textbf{Mass-Observation and the Imagined Jew}

When asked about the formation of their attitudes towards Jewish people, the Mass-Observers often cited early experiences at school, especially their religious education. The way in which the Mass-Observers had imagined Jewish people in childhood varied from specific representations, to a vague knowledge of people whose only difference was their religion. A twenty-five-year-old Mass-Observer remembered how her childhood experiences of Jewish people were unremarkable and that she viewed the difference between them as no more marked than ‘being Catholic or Protestant’.\textsuperscript{33} In fact being Catholic or Protestant between the wars often had strong implications for one’s perceived ethnicity. For this respondent, however, the differences were either not pronounced, or she simply viewed Jewish difference purely in terms of religion. This perception of Jewish people did not last; when she left school at sixteen she first considered that they were ‘racially different’. Before this realisation, she imagined Jewish people as ‘inhabitants of Palestine at the time of the Bible’.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{28} Holmes, \textit{Anti-Semitism in British Society}, p. 199.
\textsuperscript{29} Lebzelter, \textit{Political Anti-Semitism}, pp. 156-162.
\textsuperscript{30} Holmes, \textit{Anti-Semitism in British Society}, p. 142.
\textsuperscript{31} Holmes, \textit{Anti-Semitism in British Society}, p. 142.
\textsuperscript{32} Holmes, \textit{Anti-Semitism in British Society}, p. 143.
\textsuperscript{33} M-O A: DR 1019, February 1939.
\textsuperscript{34} M-O A: DR 1019, February 1939.
The image of Jewish people as located in an ancient biblical past is a recurring theme in the February/March directive responses. A forty-seven year-old Mass-Observable from the Wirral stated that, apart from having a Jewish teacher at school, ‘my ideas about Jews were vague imaginings based on scripture stories and illustrations.’ A sixty-three-year-old volunteer from Wilmslow also stated that he had first been aware of Jews ‘in Sunday School’. That the Mass-Observation team expected religion to have played an important role in people’s early ideas about Jewish people is evidenced later in the race directive. The fourth exercise presented to respondents was a set of words that they were then expected to provide instant reactions to. The first word was ‘Golgotha’, the site on which it is believed that Christ was crucified. At its most polemical, Christian teaching blamed Jewish people for the crucifixion of Christ and Mass-Observation’s attempt to prompt a response on this issue illustrates how leading questions were used in the directives. This may have encouraged the observers to recollect specific memories, or to avoid memories that they feared may expose them as anti-Semitic. In either case the teaching of scripture features heavily in the recollections of the Mass-Observers.

In his response to the question about the early formation and influences on his attitudes towards Jewish people, one volunteer struggled to remember specific ideas and influences but he did have vague recollections based on his religious instruction:

I really cannot say, but Jews received a certain amount of prominence through “Scripture” at school. It seems to me that it is through Christian teaching that one first becomes aware of the Jews, e.g. Christ was Himself a Jew—crowned as King of the Jews etc. etc.

This response underlines the unique position held by Jewish people in the British imagination. The idea of ‘the Jew’ was intimately connected to Christian teaching and thus was introduced to people from a very young age. Religious instruction constructed the Jew as an ancient people, within the Christian experience but not of it, thus firmly confined to the imagination.

35 M-O A: DR 1052, March 1939.
36 M-O A: DR 1095, March 1939.
37 This idea had deep roots; see T. Renna, ‘The Jews in the Golden Legend’ in M. Frassetto, ed, Christian Attitudes Toward the Jews in the Middle Ages (Abingdon, 2007), pp. 140-141.
38 M-O A: DR 1108, February 1939.
One volunteer from Essex, dissatisfied with the original framing of the question, chose to answer the following: ‘When did you first become mentally aware of Jews and by what was that awareness caused?’ To this he replied:

Originally the notion of Jews as a separate race was forced into my mind by childhood contacts with religious bodies. Children don’t think very deeply about racial disposition and behaviour and it was not until the age of 12 or 13 that I first became aware of Jews as people.\[40\]

This response suggests that the observer did not have any real contact with Jewish people until he was a little older. The fact that he chooses the word ‘forced’ when describing the impact of religious groups suggests a desire to absolve himself of any responsibility for any negative impression he may have of Jewish people as ‘a separate race’. The rest of his response indicates that this notion of Jewish separateness persisted although for him it was a positive thing, despite being beyond his experience. He describes a Jewish friend that he met at secondary school as a ‘charming and accomplished lad’ and admits to ‘a certain amount of hero-worship’ when he followed him in learning to play the violin.\[41\] He also remembers the family in a positive light, while at the same time underlining their sense of difference, as to him they seemed ‘a really united group of people, friendly courteous, accomplished with a backing of racial pride which in some indefinable way kept them apart from us in the secret places of their hearts.’\[42\] This observer expresses the idea that Jewish people are a separate race; although he casts this supposed aspect of their personality in a positive light, he nevertheless reproduces a dominant stereotype of Jewish people. Despite having a close Jewish friend, his subsequent descriptions of the family express a vividly imagined construction of Jewish otherness.

Religious teaching sometimes imbued people with a sense of sympathy towards Jewish people at a young age. A seventeen-year-old volunteer remembered how he ‘went to Sunday School from the age of five to ten and heard story of the Jews’ uphill fight owing to victimization and persecution, and was vaguely sympathetic.’\[43\] For this Mass-Observer, his religious education was not the source of racial antipathy but understanding and he declared that ‘when I realised Christ was a Jew any idea of racial inferiority of the Jews completely

\[40\] M-O A: DR 1117, February 1939.
\[41\] M-O A: DR 1117, February 1939.
\[42\] M-O A: DR 1117, February 1939.
\[43\] M-O A: DR 1133, February 1939.
disappeared."44 This response is typically undeveloped; we do not know in what way the observer had imagined Jews as inferior before his religious instruction. The important aspect of this response is the emphasis on the role of religion in disseminating ideas about racial difference; in this case it formed, if not quite a positive impression, then at least a sympathetic one.

Education was an important formative influence on many of the Mass Observers. This was a result of both religious teaching and personal experiences with their fellow classmates. School was a place where many said that they first imagined Jewish children as different to themselves. One twenty-five-year-old observer from Sale notes that, ‘my first recollection of Jews is at school. Two or three boys in the form did not attend prayers with the rest of us and this seemed to cause a feeling of ‘not quite one of us’’.45 In the absence of being able to place exactly where their ideas about Jews had come from, the volunteers sometimes conclude that religious education must have been important, such was its significance in defining Jewish ‘otherness’. A twenty-four-year-old Analytical Chemist from Middlesex responds in this way:

As far as I am aware, I have not had any strong views on the subject of Jews at any time in my life. My early years–up to the age of seven say–were spent in an extremely secluded atmosphere, and further, no strong emotionally tinged ideas about the world outside penetrated through to me. From the age of seven to ten I came under the influence of an elderly female teacher with a strong religious bias, and I must have heard a good deal about the Jews from her in the course of the “scripture” lessons, but I cannot remember ever hearing any strong opinions about them. Nothing that is, that could be classed as anti-Semitic.46

This response underlines the fact that the respondents were aware of why they were being asked specific questions. This may have affected the answers given if they feared being exposed as anti-Semitic, or having ever harboured prejudices against Jewish people. The responses to this question, however, offer a much more interesting conclusion. The very fact that the volunteers were aware of the significance of the questions that they were being asked produced responses that tried to reconcile innate personal prejudices with anti-fascist sensibilities. Having first declared that he was not aware of ‘any strong views on the subject of Jews’, the respondent notes that he is afflicted with a prejudice that had vague yet deep-rooted origins in his childhood:

44 M-O A: DR 1133, February 1939.
45 M-O A: DR 1118, February 1939.
46 M-O A: DR 1130, March 1939.
I think my early ideas about the Jews were—not hostile exactly, but perhaps contemptuous is the nearest I can get to expressing it. There has definitely crystallised out from my earlier environment, this despising attitude which I know now well enough has no reasonable basis whatever, but traces of which I still recognize as persisting.\footnote{M-O A: DR 1130, March 1939.}

The volunteer’s awareness of the purpose of the directive and the sensitive nature of this issue in the political context of the time is further highlighted when he states, ‘But I do not wish to emphasize this too much, especially as this is a subject on which it is so difficult nowadays to attempt to be impartial.’\footnote{M-O A: DR 1130, March 1939.} The ‘secluded atmosphere’ of this volunteer’s childhood also reminds us that young children are often sheltered from the outside world and so their influences are more restricted. The Mass-Observers who recounted their teenage years often recalled different, more personal experiences.

Just like the volunteer who only perceived that Jews were ‘racially different’ after she left school, a volunteer from Wilmslow remembered that he had first heard about Jews in Sunday School, and although he ‘heard very little about Jews’ at home, by the time he entered the world of work it was a different story:

I may have heard occasional sneers outside, but it would be when I was 16 or so that I really heard the very usual comments about Jews—‘shindies’—in an architect’s office in London. As a matter of fact, my ideas about Jews are even now very limited; I think some of the charges have some basis, but it is grossly unjust to persecute all on this account.\footnote{M-O A: DR 1095, March 1939.}

This respondent moves from describing his childhood experiences to assessing his current views, further indicating the self-conscious way in which the volunteers often recount their childhood memories. Nevertheless, the memories that are recalled reveal a tension between imagined and lived experiences of Jewish people.

There is also a divide between public and private experiences that is revealed in the directive responses. Some of the Mass-Observers remembered that their first ideas about Jewish people were fostered outside the home but this was not the case for all. A twenty-six-year-old Mass-Observer from Newport cites his parents as key influences on his conceptions of Jewish people. He remembers how his first ideas about Jewish people ‘were derived from the contact with the Jew who became Manager of the Chemist shop owned by my parents...’
some time after the death of my father.\textsuperscript{50} This volunteer states explicitly the influence that this man had on him and his knowledge of Jewish people and culture:

As my father died when I was only five years old, this man came into my life when I was at a very impressionable age, and he has coloured my views about Jews ever since. His father was the local Rabbi, so that he was able to introduce us to various aspects of Jewish life which are not usually open to Gentile children.\textsuperscript{51}

It was not just the actual presence of a Jewish person in his life that informed this volunteer’s opinion of them; the views of his mother were also significant. He stated that, ‘In her childhood, my Mother had had many Jewish friends, and I had always heard her speak of them with sympathy and understanding.’\textsuperscript{52} This young man had clearly had a lot more contact with Jewish people throughout his childhood than some of the other volunteers, and his memories all recount actual experiences rather than imagined concepts. He also notes how ‘there was quite a large Jewish colony in the district, so that I was soon accustomed to meeting Jews, and did not think them different from anybody else.’\textsuperscript{53}

Not everyone’s home-life was educative in terms of helping them to understand Jewish customs. The seventeen-year-old Mass-Observer from Margate details one particular joke performed by his father:

When very young father waved hands mockingly, and then his nose: “Do you vant to buy a vatch? No? Then take your snotty nose off my window!” Was never amused personally—father is a bad mimic, but it goes down well with younger brothers.\textsuperscript{54}

This response provides a valuable insight into how ethnic difference was caricatured and the importance of these caricatures to people’s memories; one of the questions on the anti-Semitism directive asked observers to recount funny stories that they had heard about Jewish people and a variety of these were remembered by the Mass-Observers. The respondent asserts that he ‘was never amused’ by these impressions and while this may have been the case, his subsequent empathy with Jewish people may have coloured this memory somewhat. This respondent was only seventeen, and it is worth pondering the effect that this may have had on his desire to appear mature and above the childish stories that had so amused his younger siblings. Conflicting with the views of one’s family was not a unique experience in

\textsuperscript{50} M-O A: DR 1122, March 1939.
\textsuperscript{51} M-O A: DR 1122, March 1939.
\textsuperscript{52} M-O A: DR 1122, March 1939.
\textsuperscript{53} M-O A: DR 1122, March 1939.
\textsuperscript{54} M-O A: DR 1133, February 1939.
the directive responses. One seventeen-year-old observer from Hemel Hempstead declared that, aside from his Socialist principles, the ‘blind anti-Semitic prejudice’ of his uncles had caused him to lose ‘all racial prejudice’. The fact that both these respondents were seventeen highlights an important point, and that is that early childhood influences could be rebelled against; establishing their own ‘independent’ views may have been an important part of their personal development. Whether they had made a lasting impression or not, it is significant that these observers, like many of the others sampled, were keen to distance themselves from these early experiences. Not only do these responses provide evidence of how racial difference was portrayed to children, they show how subsequent influences counteracted these experiences.

The imagined concepts that people had about Jewish people often clashed with the reality of their first-hand experiences. The response of one forty-nine-year old Mass-Observer reveals a curious contrast between her imaginary image of Jews and the reality that confronted her when a Jewish family moved into her street:

I suppose my first views on the Jews were obtained from the Bible, and I think I had a vague idea that they were an important if tiresome people. But I was lucky in that when I was quite a small child an eminent and very cultured Jewish family came to live in my road.

She suggests that positive first-hand experiences could outweigh the negative influences that may have affected children’s first impressions of another people. Crucially, the family that she encountered were ‘eminent and very cultured’. That she is thankful for this is telling, and forces us to question what the consequences would have been for her conceptions of Jews as an adult had the family that lived in her street been less desirable neighbours. As it transpired, this volunteer was shocked when, at school, ‘I heard, for the first time…complaints about having to mix with Jewesses’. Of course this raises the problem of the extent to which those defined as racially ‘other’ were expected to attain to a higher standard of behaviour in order to avoid censure. One Jewish Mass-Observer summed up this problem when she declared that, ‘Jews are expected to have so much higher standards than non-Jews, because each one is—willy-nilly—held responsible for all.’

56 M-O A: DR 1080, March 1939.
57 M-O A: DR 1080, March 1939.
58 M-O A: DR 1081, February 1939.
Some of the Mass-Observers were Jewish themselves. Their responses provide us with an insight into how those defined as racially ‘other’ responded to the representations of their supposed character and the factors that influenced these representations. It also illustrates how Jewish people themselves acquired a sense of Jewishness and how this imagined identity was constructed in childhood. All Mass-Observers were asked the same questions and when a thirty-nine-year-old Jewish woman from London was asked about how she formed her opinion of Jewish people, she replied that it was through, ‘my parents and grandparents–my whole environment.’\textsuperscript{59} When asked about how negative attitudes towards Jewish people had developed she asserted that:

Ignorance, hearsay, jealousy, newspaper propaganda and the child-impressions of “the Jews crucified Christ” taught in schools and churches, and now, the organised Fascist movement and the subterannean (sic) Nazi propaganda add fuel to the fire of unreasoned vilification, hatred and personal violence.\textsuperscript{60}

The influences that this respondent cites correspond with those given by the Mass-Observers to explain the formation of their early ideas about Jewish people. What the responses do reveal, however, is that the logical conclusion of such influences was not necessarily ‘vilification, hatred and personal violence’.

The response of this Jewish observer is also a valuable account of how children perceived as racially ‘other’ experienced the British education system, and how this impacted on their image of themselves:

As a Jewess, I have an inferiority complex. This was fostered in me as a child. My headmistress was anti-semitic and sadistic. She was nice to my younger sister who is fair and ‘aryan’ in appearance. I am dark and more ‘Jewish’ looking.\textsuperscript{61}

This woman’s experience underlines the centrality of physical difference in defining a person’s ethnic background. The idea of racial difference was largely premised on exteriority; modes of dress as well as physical attributes, most notably skin colour, were crucial in defining the racial other in the British imagination. In describing another incidence of anti-Semitism, this respondent also shows an acute awareness of the construction of racial identities and the distortions that underlined them:

\textsuperscript{59} M-O A: DR 1081, February 1939.  
\textsuperscript{60} M-O A: DR 1081, February 1939.  
\textsuperscript{61} M-O A: DR 1081, February 1939.
A friend was walking along a main Hendon Road with her little boy…A man, coming from behind them, knocked the child over sharply. Not stopping to pick the child up or apologise even…Naturally annoyed, she commented-“it would have been courteous at least to say you were sorry.” The man (to all appearances well-bred + middle-class) half-turned-“I’m not at all sorry—we’ve no room for you people here—I’d like to see you all knocked out in the gutter!!” A perfect Christian gentlemen…a perfect Englishman and a real sport…62

This observer uses her directive response to expose prejudice towards Jewish people; by juxtaposing the image of an innocent woman and child against the image of an aggressive male she undermines a potent English stereotype, that of the refined, fair-minded English gentleman.

Immediately before recounting this story, this respondent addresses a contemporary stereotype of Jewish people. Addressing the notion that Jewish people were inherently ‘loud’ and ‘offensively mannered’, she argues that this was borne out of feelings of inferiority.63 By detailing this incident of anti-Semitism she highlights not only contemporary racial stereotypes—the middle-class Englishman as gentleman—but also the importance of religion in defining concepts of national identity; the Englishman is first described as a Christian gentleman. By implication she indicates that Jewishness was not just constructed in opposition to British, but also to Christian values; this thesis illustrates that in discourses on race between the wars these identities were explicitly linked.

Jewish identity was constructed in the British imagination in terms of both racial and religious differences. Religion was also a key element of understanding one’s own Jewish identity. A twenty-two-year old shipping clerk from London confidently asserts the origins of her own Jewish influences: ‘There is no doubt at all that my first ideas about the Jews came from the Bible. Starting as an orthodox Jew as a child, I was brought up fairly strictly on this and the standard Jewish prayerbook (sic), and these were my first sources of Jewish influences.’64

In the directive responses, religion is an important element of Jewish identity as well as being crucial in forming ideas about Jewish identity amongst non-Jews. This distinguishes the imagined Jew from other ethnic groups where physical difference and imagined characteristics dominate representations. This is not to say that Jews were not represented in this way. The Jewish body and Jewish character were denigrated in some of the responses and although some people found that their early imaginings of Jewish people could change

62 M-O A: DR 1081, February 1939.
63 M-O A: DR 1081, February 1939.
64 M-O A: DR 1147, February 1939.
for the better once they had met Jewish people for the first time, for others the images that were formed in early childhood were too strong to be altered by experience.

A seventeen year-old accountant’s clerk from Redcar notes that his first impressions of Jewish people were based on two formative experiences:

The Bible, from which I gathered that Jews were hot-heads, with temperaments rather like the Arabs, and other racial and religious fanatics of Jerusalem today. A family of Jewish shop-keepers living at the end of the street where I lived until I was eight. From them I gained an impression of greasy dirt and yet a vainness, especially among the young men, which one does not find among English folk. And yet, from my knowledge of some Jewish school-fellows, I know this is not always the case. In spite of this, the earlier impression sticks.65

This observer does not try to divorce himself from the earlier ideas of his childhood. Like the volunteer from Middlesex who recognizes the negative images fostered in childhood, this young clerk admits the durability of such images despite all evidence to the contrary. His response also corresponds to racial discourses of degeneration prevalent from the nineteenth century, especially when he describes ‘an impression of greasy dirt’.66

While most of the Mass-Observers engaged with the question posed to them, and often replied with a view to understanding the origins of anti-Semitism, others evidently had less sympathy with the question that they had been posed. One volunteer from Wiltshire states:

I can quite honestly say that I have never thought of the Jews as a race apart, although now I come to think of it, I suppose they are the only ‘race apart’. I simply haven’t the patience or interest to study “the Jewish question”. There’s no such thing…Mind you, I don’t say I like the Jews; I just know people I like and people I don’t like, and what the hell does it matter which race they belong to?67

This statement is a classic example of how the question on influences led volunteers to soul-searching about their current views on Jewish people, as well as highlighting the frustrations many felt about the wording of the directive itself.68 Despite the confusion of the latter part of the answer, it is the light shed on the social and cultural factors that influenced people’s perceptions of Jewish people that help to further our understanding of how children were

65 M-O A: DR 1092, April 1939.
67 M-O A: DR 1210, February 1939.
68 For another example of criticism levelled at M-O from a respondent see Kushner, We Europeans?, p. 112.
encouraged to imagine the racial ‘other’. In the case of the Wiltshire respondent, entertainment is flagged up as an important influence:

My early ideas about Jews came quite late for “early” ideas. I remember seeing newspaper reviews of a film called “The Wandering Jew”…My knowledge of Jews is so hazy that I can never recognise them in films, photographs, or real life except where they are obviously made up to proclaim to the world “I am a Jew”, as on the music-hall stage.\(^{69}\)

This observer acknowledges, without perhaps realising it, the importance of stage representations in informing people’s ideas about those defined as racially ‘other’. He cannot recognise difference except when it is pointed out to him through the exaggerated caricatures of the music-hall. In order to proclaim that ‘they were Jews’, actors wore make-up that allowed them to effect this racial disguise. This was achieved by conforming to popular stereotypes of Jews as having long hair and exaggerated noses: Willy Clarkson, famous wigmaker and costume provider to London theatres provided, ‘nose-paste and crêpe hair for “all the stage Jews”’.\(^{70}\)

Fictional Jewish characters such as Shakespeare’s Shylock and Dickens’ Fagin were some of the first encounters that children had with the idea of ‘Jewishness’. Jewish literary stereotypes are perhaps some of the most enduring; the respondent who remembered the film the Wandering Jew highlights how a figure from medieval mythology could persist into the age of cinema. One seventeen-year-old clerk from Reading cited ‘Dicken’s (sic) Books, and a little later Shakespeare’s “Merchant of Venice”, and the film “Jew Suss”’.\(^{71}\) This respondent then reflects on the exact impact that these mediums had had on his views: ‘On thinking this matter over I find that though these things gave me ideas about what Jews were like they never gave me the idea that all Jews were evil or undesirable. I did not draw general conclusions from them.’\(^{72}\) Although he concedes that he gained ideas about Jews from these books and films, he was careful to state that they did not impact on his views of all Jewish people; whether this was his own genuine experience, or an attempt to detach himself from any associated anti-Semitism is difficult to say.

All of the literature, and the film that he mentions have been associated with anti-Semitism, in particular the character of Shylock in the Merchant of Venice. In his 1929 study of Race Attitudes in Children Bruno Lasker asserted that American children were greatly

\(^{69}\) M-O A: DR 1210, February 1939.
\(^{71}\) M-O A: DR 1143, March 1939.
\(^{72}\) M-O A: DR 1143, March 1939.
affected by literary representations of people defined as racially ‘other’: Shylock is highlighted as an important example: ‘Often a single character of fiction suffices to fix for many generations popular attitudes toward a racial group. The outstanding example, probably, is Shakespeare’s Shylock.’\textsuperscript{73} Before the First World War Shakespeare’s Shylock was often invoked to describe Jewish people as ‘the personification of capitalism and materialism.’\textsuperscript{74} The role of Shylock in shaping Jewish stereotypes was taken into account in the race directive, as section four, which lists words that respondents were asked to react to, included Shylock, before also asking for a response to the word moneylender. This suggests the importance of these representations in constructing ‘the Jew’ in the British imagination. That the respondents may have included these in their answer on formative influences after being prompted by the directive does not lessen the importance of them as cultural stereotypes; the fact the respondents understood the connotations of these words underlines the influence that they had. These cultural stereotypes were also more likely to be cited by those who had not had any direct personal experience of Jewish people.

Many of the observers simply state their early recollections without any attempt to analyse the impact that this had on them. One observer notes, for example:

The whole memory is very vague, but think through reading ‘The Merchant of Venice’ at school, when the character of Shylock took hold of the imagination. Apart from this can recollect nothing about them.\textsuperscript{75}

The observer does not reflect on the consequences of the literature on his later ideas about Jews, but the final sentence is telling. The fact that this is all that he can recollect about ‘them’ strongly links the literary representations to an imagined image of Jewish people and suggests that this observer had no lived experiences of Jewish people as a child.

The fact that Shylock is so associated with a negative image of Jewish people may have led some observers to pick this out of their childhood memories as an obvious source of their ideas about Jewish people. The directive responses that cite popular culture as an influence do not necessarily reflect on whether this was positive or negative. The seventeen-year-old clerk who did not remember drawing general conclusions about Jewish people from popular culture reflects the lack of development that often characterises the responses. They


\textsuperscript{74} Holmes, \textit{Anti-Semitism in British Society}, p. 112. For more specific case studies on the representation of Jewish people in literature see B. Cheyette, ed, \textit{Between “Race” and Culture: Representations of “the Jew” in English and American Literature} (Palo Alto, 1996).

\textsuperscript{75} M-O A: DR 1184, February 1939.
do not say whether these images had a strongly positive or negative impact on their ideas and are reticent about giving their opinion on Jewish people in general. This may have been because they were merely answering exactly the question that was set, without elaboration, or that they did not want to reveal their true beliefs for fear of judgement. It may also suggest that the impact of characters such as Shylock was ambiguous, not eliciting strong responses and perhaps not even being wholly negative.76

In November 1919, the Liverpool Echo reported on a theatrical production of the Merchant of Venice and the praise reserved for the portrayal of Shylock reveals that this character was not one-dimensional and could represent different ideas of Jewishness depending on the actor playing the role. The reviewer notes of the performance by Mr Maurice Muscovith, a Russian Jew: ‘at times he seems the very embodiment of the passionate protest of his whole race.’77 Fictional characters such as Shylock have contributed to negative ideas about Jewish people, especially with regard to his profession as a money-lender, but the characters were subject to interpretation and the agency of Jewish actors such as Muscovith in portraying the role should not be ignored.

The transmission of stereotypes such as the Jewish moneylender could take place through books and films, but they are also often remembered by the Mass-Observers through the stories they were told as children. These stories were described in both their answers to the question about early influences and in response to a direct question about ‘funny stories’ they knew about Jewish people. One of the common characters in these stories was the money-conscious Jew. A fifty-year-old mechanic from Southampton, for example, re-told a story he had heard as a boy in which a Jewish person checks fowl in the market place to see whether they have an egg inside them. The punch-line was that, ‘they were supposed to select the one with an egg to get something extra for their money.’78

This type of story, that depicted the grasping, mercenary Jew, always out for a bargain, recurred frequently in the Mass-Observation directive replies. Another common charge levied at Jewish people in these ‘jokes’, as well as in the memories of the Mass-Observers themselves, was that they were very loud. In fact, this stereotype was so pervasive that to some observers it was noteworthy when they met Jewish people who did not live up to the characters that inhabited their imagination. This is illustrated by the response of a forty-one-year-old man from London who recalls indistinctly how his early impressions of Jewish

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76 Martin Yaffe challenges the assumption that Shakespeare is ‘unfriendly to Jews’ in M.D. Yaffe, Shylock and the Jewish Question (Baltimore, 1997), p. 1.
77 Liverpool Echo, 21st November 1919, p. 7.
78 M-O A: DR 1148, March 1939.
people must have come from his father, ‘whose attitude was that of tolerant contempt’. His own experiences, however, counteracted this earlier influence:

My idea was subsequently altered by contact with a Jew in one of my earlier jobs. He did not fit in with the pre-conceived idea of most people of a Jew except for his facial outline. He was mild mannered and somewhat indolent. The next I met was a Jewess on holiday. She was utterly unlike any Jew I had ever imagined: tall, willowy, and except for occasional bursts of disconcertingly blunt remarks, of impeccable manners.

This response emphasises the range of stereotypes, regarding Jewish character and physical appearance that had shaped the early experiences of the Mass-Observers. While the stories recounted about Jewish people were often repetitive, there was seemingly no end to the ways in which they could be moulded to serve as both comedy and cautionary-tale. It also illustrates that, despite the difficulties inherent in trying to define Jewish ethnicity, for respondents who had grown up at the end of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth, Jewish people had been presented to them as racially ‘other’. The mechanic from Southampton who recalled the story of the fowl in the marketplace, concluded thus: ‘from my earliest impressions Jews seem to have always been a race apart from us.’

The concept of the ‘race apart’ evokes an image of Jewish people as a mysterious ‘other’ whose customs were different and therefore curious, especially from a child’s point of view. The seventeen-year-old Mass-Observer from Hemel Hempstead remembered:

I was about 8 or 9, I suppose, when I was first confronted with the “Jewish Problem”. In a café one of our party whispered, “Look, Jews over there.” A well dressed group was talking away rapidly round a table. I got the impression that they were a close-knit people, a people apart. They were like a multitude of other things for a child-just beyond the horizon, like Germans.

As a child, this observer could not conceive of Jewish people as belonging to his neighbourhood, or even as British citizens, despite having encountered them as part of his daily routine. Experience, therefore, did not necessarily make Jewish people any more ‘real’ and they remained, for this observer, firmly located within his imagination, ‘just beyond the horizon’ in the ‘beyondy places’ of his child’s mind (see chapter four). It would seem that direct contact such as through friendship was the best way for children to construct ideas about Jewish people that did not rely on imagined concepts although even recollections of

79 M-O A: DR 1135, February 1939.
80 M-O A: DR 1135, February 1939.
81 M-O A: DR 1148, March 1939.
82 M-O A: DR 1141, March 1939.
actual relationships could merge with imaginative constructions of Jewishness, as in the case of the observer who remembered the family of his Jewish friend as ‘a really united group of people…apart from us in the secret places of their hearts.’

Locality was important to the constructions of ideas about Jews. London’s East End was synonymous with poor Eastern European migrants who were represented using metaphors of disease and the presence of whom contributed to the middle-classes’ fear of and fascination with life in ‘darkest Britain’. The spaces that Jewish people inhabited often became firmly associated with them, especially in the absence of other forms of contact. For those living just outside major areas of Jewish settlement, their first ideas were often based on hearsay and their first encounters such that there knowledge always remained vague and their images of Jewish people one-dimensional. This is illustrated by a directive response from a twenty-eight-year-old observer from Lancashire:

As a boy, I lived in Heywood (Lancs), about 10 miles north of Manchester. In Manchester there is a large Jewish community residing, for the most part, around Cheetham Hill. Stories of Cheetham Hill Jews were my first introduction to their racial peculiarities. Every Friday afternoon and evening a Market was held, on an open space, in the town. Many of the traders were Jews, from Cheetham Hill, selling china, drapery and greengrocery. It was there that I first saw Jews and on whom I founded my later ideas of the Jewish race.

Unfortunately, the observer does not proceed to give his ‘later ideas’ and it is not possible to ascertain whether these formative experiences had had a positive or a negative effect on him. This highlights one of the frustrating aspects of working with directives as though the directives initiated a dialogue, it was a truncated one, which did not encourage respondents to develop their responses sufficiently. This observer does not display any strong feelings towards Jewish people beyond noting their ‘racial peculiarities’, yet his response provides a valuable insight into how representations of large Jewish communities were disseminated in the surrounding regions; in this case it was through stories, whether positive or negative is not known but based on the other examples given so far in this chapter it is reasonable to assume that they were based on stereotypes.

This observation of Manchester’s Jewish community is particularly significant as it was the largest in England outside of London. Kushner has commented on the ‘spectacular rise of Manchester Jewry in the mid-nineteenth century’; indeed the population increased

83 M-O A: DR 1117, February 1939.
84 M-O A: DR 1151, February 1939.
85 Kushner, We Europeans?, p. 145.
from approximately 10,000 in 1875 to approximately 35,000 in 1914.\textsuperscript{87} Given this rise, Manchester must have had a special significance to popular ideas about Jews. The Cheetham Hill Jews mentioned by the Mass-Observer were most likely ‘upwardly mobile families’ who had migrated from poorer areas first inhabited by East European immigrants; this may have coloured the observer’s ideas somewhat, although in what way is not certain.\textsuperscript{88}

It is a feature of the Mass-Observers’ responses that when Jews are mentioned as a collective, it is usually as traders, certainly their relationship with money is key, rather than the images of poor immigrants that featured so heavily in representations of London’s East End. The language of racial science is also present in some of the responses, most notably that of the seventeen-year-old observer who associated Jews with Arabs and ‘other racial and religious fanatics of Jerusalem’.\textsuperscript{89} The same observer made a connection between Jews and dirt, an association that has its roots in the language of degeneration used to describe poor East European immigrants, as well of course as other ethnic minority groups. The same association is made with black people by many of the Mass-Observers.\textsuperscript{90} While many of the responses do not use such crude language, some observers attempted to explain feelings of revulsion that they themselves did not understand. One observer who worked at the BBC noted, ‘I’ve never heard Anti-Semitism expressed among my friends or at the BBC…I often feel a difference from Jews and a repugnance which I can’t explain and can’t do away with however unwilling I am to feel it.’\textsuperscript{91} Another Mass-Observer stated, ‘Am strongly anti-anti-Semitic (sic) intellectually, but cannot help acknowledging an equally strong blood-dislike of Jews.’\textsuperscript{92}

These acknowledgements from the Mass-Observers that they considered Jewish people to be racially ‘other’ are not necessarily reflected in all the responses to the anti-Semitism directive, specifically the question on early influences. On this topic the answers given tend to reflect what Tony Kushner recognises as ‘ambivalence’ towards Jewish people: ‘The directive responses exposed the importance of ambivalence in confronting ‘racial’ difference but did not provide sufficient space for those writing them to explore that ambivalence sufficiently’.\textsuperscript{93} Ambivalence is described by those such as Kushner, who have analysed the attitudes of non-Jews to Jews but also by those exploring Jewish identity. Eric

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{87} Kushner, Anglo-Jewry since 1066, p. 179; Kidd, Manchester, p. 122.
\item \textsuperscript{88} Kidd, Manchester, p. 122.
\item \textsuperscript{89} M-O A: DR 1092, April 1939.
\item \textsuperscript{90} Kushner, We Europeans?, p. 113.
\item \textsuperscript{91} M-O A: DR 1086, February 1939.
\item \textsuperscript{92} M-O A: DR 1030, February 1939.
\item \textsuperscript{93} Kushner, We Europeans?, p. 145.
\end{itemize}
Homberger described Jewish ambivalence as ‘the burden of being of two minds about Jewishness itself.’ It is a term that encapsulates the tone of most of the directive responses on anti-Semitism:

Ambivalence is an undignified attitude, betraying indecision and regret in equal proportions. It is what one feels about ideas, institutions, and also people, one knows all too well. Unqualified admiration is long gone, yet these things, these people, are too close, too much a part of our inner landscape, to jettison without misgivings.

The Mass-Observers’ ambivalence about their feelings towards Jewish people was often borne out of a desire to reject anti-Semitism and yet reconcile this with their own negative (often described as innate) feelings towards them. This was also a feature of the responses about black people. These feelings are often attributed to childhood experiences and particularly through information passed on at school or at home, often in the form of stories. The stories that were recalled by the observers have the most repetitive quality of all the recollections noted in the directive responses and reveal the importance of this type of hearsay in perpetuating stereotypical ideas about different ethnic groups. One observer notes, when asked about anti-Semitism in his area: ‘The Jewish problem is not at all prominent in our district. In fact Jews are seldom mentioned, only occasional stories get round mostly of the accepted Jew-story standard.’ These stories not only indicate prevalent ideas that circulated about Jewish people, they also illustrate the unchanging nature of these stereotypes across the generational divide. These stories were often told by parents to their children, thus highlighting how ideas about other peoples and cultures were disseminated within the home; of course these stories may not have had the same resonance for children as they did for their parents. It must be remembered that such ideas are reproduced in specific historical contexts, in the 1930s, for example, and for some Mass-Observers in particular, the rise of Fascism was central to the development of their political awareness, and as a result their rejection of anti-Semitism.

The tension between the earlier experiences and the Mass-Observer’s political beliefs is evident in some of the examples, but all the responses present strong themes on the influences that formed their ideas about Jewish people in childhood. Some observers stated their political beliefs explicitly. Two of the youngest observers sampled (both seventeen)...

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95 Homberger, ‘Some Uses for Jewish Ambivalence’, p. 165.
96 Kushner, *We Europeans?*, p. 113.
97 M-O A: DR 1006, February 1939.
cited their politics as key to their awareness of anti-Semitism and their own aversion to it. The Margate observer mentioned his ‘political consciousness’ last in a list of events that had shaped his awareness of Jewish people’s plight.  

Similarly, an observer from Hemel Hempstead stated that while he had ‘never felt more than mild sympathy for them’, it was not his knowledge of their plight alone that had influenced him, rather, ‘being a Socialist, I lost all racial prejudice, and became indifferent to language, religion and stock. Socialism has been the deciding factor.’ For others politics had the first and final influence on their ideas about Jews: ‘My first influence was in the propaganda of the Communist Party; my earliest ideas came from the same source.’ The brevity of this response raises more questions than it answers, although it reminds us of the political background of many of the Mass-Observers, as well as underlining the importance of propaganda in constructing ideas about identity in the public’s imagination.

Racial science was crucial to the development of ideas about race during this period and this had an impact on anti-Semitism as Jewish difference was increasingly assigned to their race rather than to their religion. Despite this, the Mass-Observation directives offer a striking variety of influences on the development of an individual’s conceptions of the Jewish other that defy easy categorisation. The ‘imagined Jew’ has been conceived of as a literary construct, but what is interesting about the responses to the Mass-Observation directive is the variety of processes that contributed to the construction of the Jewish ‘other’ in the British imagination. They also highlight how these ideas were circulated, emphasising the importance of religion, the school and the home, as well as popular entertainment. Personal experiences sometimes challenged received ideas but often people had to make a conscious decision to reject anti-Semitism; where people were unable to rid themselves of existing prejudice it was blamed on an innate or inherent dislike of Jewish people.

Anti-Semitism has long historical roots and its persistence into the twentieth century was a result of established stereotypes as well as its adaptation to new theories about race promoted by the eugenics movement. In whatever way and by whatever means the Mass-Observers came to imagine Jewish people, they were cast as a ‘race apart’. This could be viewed positively but generally it was viewed with suspicion; negative ideas ranged from supposedly funny stereotypes to outright repulsion. Jewish people were constructed as

98 M-O A: DR 1133, February 1939.
100 M-O A: DR 1181, February 1939.

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racially inferior and this was demonstrated in the responses of both Jewish and non-Jewish respondents. Jewish religion also marked Jewish people apart in a way that other ethnic groups were not; in an era when expressions of British national identity were inexorably linked to supposedly Christian ideals, being Jewish was fundamentally incompatible with prevailing notions of Britishness.
Conclusion

This thesis has explored discourses on race that were expressed through a variety of social and cultural processes. All of these discourses had long roots, but they changed over time, acquiring particular emphases and specific content according to changing historical circumstances. Imperial discourses on race and the discourse of orientalism can be traced back to at least the nineteenth century and continued to inform how British people imagined themselves and the rest of the world in the interwar years. Similarly, anxieties about interracial relationships that crystallized in the discourse of miscegenation were a product of imperial concerns about the fundamental stability of British rule and the threat that ‘race-mixing’ posed to the racial hierarchies believed to be central to Britain’s imperial dominance; this was not a new concern in the interwar years, but it was pursued with increased zeal by social scientists influenced by the eugenics movement.

This thesis explores how British people imagined racial difference through three separate but interconnected themes: religion, childhood and entertainment; the role of childhood experiences in particular is a theme that intersects all the chapters as children were a key audience targeted by missionaries, popular entertainments and, by the interwar years, the popular press. These themes enable an investigation of how race was disseminated to a broad range of publics and the variety of factors that influenced their ideas about racial difference. Newspapers reveal a wide range of discourses on any particular subject, and race is no exception; content aimed at both children and adults used racialised language and imagery that underline contemporary notions of race and racial difference. Newspapers reveal many of the ways in which the idea of race was disseminated to the public and enable particular narratives to be traced through other sources. This is most notable in the field of entertainment as theatre and film reviews were used in this thesis to highlight popular productions that had heavily racialised themes or in which particular discourses on race were circulated. This was then supplemented with research from the Lord Chamberlain’s Archive and used to begin to unpack specific narratives on race that were disseminated to the British public; this is particularly evident in the emphasis this thesis places on the discourse of miscegenation.

The issue of miscegenation illustrates how ideas about race and racial difference changed depending on the specific historical context. In seventeenth-century India, sexual relationships between the British colonisers and Indian women were common and often
encouraged by the colonial authorities.\(^1\) In twentieth-century Britain, relationships between black men from Britain’s colonies and white British women were viewed as a transgression of racial boundaries that would weaken Britain’s Empire and the race as a whole.

Although the biological classification of racial characteristics was not a new concept, eugenic theory gave ‘scientific’ validity to these claims and intersected with the rise of Fascist politics in continental Europe with disastrous consequences. At home in Britain, eugenic principles were brought to bear in investigations that focused on ethnic minority communities in cities like Liverpool and Cardiff. Here the conflation of imperial and eugenic discourses on race is most evident as discussions about these communities focused on the potential threat to imperial relations posed by their presence as well as the effect on the indigenous population. During the 1919 riots, for example, the violence was condemned by religious leaders because of the resentment it might have generated amongst colonial populations. On the other side of the debate, it was interracial relationships that were condemned as a threat to Britain’s Empire. By the 1930s, the children of interracial relationships were the subject of Muriel Fletcher’s infamous report and portrayed as a population to be pitied by virtue of their mixed-parentage.\(^2\)

Eugenic discourses responded to a particular set of concerns arising after the First World War about the condition of Britain’s working class as well as the social changes arising after the conflict. Something of this spirit can be gleaned from the following address given on 17 June 1919, by Sir Alfred Dale, Vice Chancellor of the Liverpool University Settlement Council:

Strange stars of menace blaze in our sky…The shadow of the unknown future darkens the humblest homes…With the gigantic forces of nature–the earthquake that engulfs a city…we cannot strive. But here we are pitted against forces of another kind, the conditions of a society that man has made, that man can unmake, that man can re-make.\(^3\)

These comments illustrate, not only the general sense of fear and uncertainty engendered by four years of war, but also the desire underpinning these anxieties, to regain control of society and to repair a nation perceived to be changed beyond all recognition. Dale went on to call for the creation of a School of Social Science at the University that would be the means


\(^3\) Liverpool University Settlement, Report and Statement of Accounts, 1918, pp. 10-11, University of Liverpool Special Collections, D7/3/1/5.
through which the ‘condition of society’ could be investigated; this would be the school that would train Muriel Fletcher. In the interwar years then, race was not just an idea that underpinned the hierarchies of colonial rule; it also became a key component in debates about the state of British society.

The interwar years also saw the emergence of a discourse on race that conflicted with imperialist sentiments. The establishment of the League of the Nations and the prospect of a second war with Germany encouraged a spirit of internationalism that promoted racial equality as a means to prevent future conflict. This was very much of its time, although the language of ‘international brotherhood’ also had an imperial dimension as religious leaders sought to quell racial tensions that hindered their efforts to convert colonial populations to Christianity. Discourses on race were varied and flexible; established discourses could be adapted depending on the historical context and new debates emerged in response to current events.

The political, social and cultural context of the interwar years affected dominant racial stereotypes. In terms of how the Empire and its peoples were constructed in the British imagination, there was a high degree of continuity with the past and this was particularly evident in representations of black people. The idea of black people as an inferior race was disseminated in diverse ways and from diverse venues. Through missionary exhibitions, popular entertainments and in the popular press, British people were encouraged to imagine themselves as physically, socially and culturally superior to other ethnic groups; crucially, this sense of superiority was attributed to their ‘whiteness’. The concept of white superiority was constructed in different ways, from explicitly biological racism to the ‘benign paternalism’ advocated by religious groups. In either case ‘race’ was an essential method of defining difference in interwar Britain.

It was not just the Empire that provided British people with ideas about racial difference. Chapters Four and Five underline the persistence of Jewish stereotypes into the 1920s and 1930s and the way in which these stereotypes adapted to the political context of the interwar years. The editors of the *Daily Mirror*, capitalising on and stimulating anti-communist feeling, as well as popular anti-Semitism, published Bertram J. Lamb’s comic strip depicting Wtzkoffski, a Bolshevik villain constructed as the archetypal alien other. Conversely, the rise of Fascism in Europe prompted challenges to anti-Semitism that forced people to address their own ideas about Jewish people. The specific historical context then was important in initiating a discussion about anti-Semitism in which people expressed opposing and often contradictory views on the subject; this is evident in the nature of the
Mass-Observation responses. Black and Asian people themselves also took an active role in constructing their own identity and challenged fixed assumptions about racial difference.

Chapters One to Three and to a certain extent Chapter Five, all provide examples of how black and Asian people defined their own experiences, both positive and negative, through the same cultural mediums that constructed them as inferior; this is particularly evident in the realm of popular entertainment. Despite struggling to escape from the dominant stereotypes emanating from stage and screen, artists from the Southern Syncopated Orchestra to Paul Robeson provided the British public with powerful and positive images of black people that directly challenged their stereotypical assumptions. Prominent black figures such as Robeson were, however, often referred to as the exception to the rule, and while they were instrumental in making many British people aware of African-American culture, they simultaneously helped to construct black people as American in the British imagination, a process that underlines the fact that being black was viewed as fundamentally incompatible with being British.

These various discourses emanated from both the public and the private sphere, from churches, schools, entertainment venues and the home. Personal experiences were sometimes influential in determining how an individual understood the idea of race, but for most British people the concept of racial difference was one constructed in and confined to the imagination. Racial difference was imagined through a series of binary distinctions that essentially juxtaposed white superiority against black/Asian/Jewish inferiority. These binary opposites were comprised of a broader dualism such as civilised and savage which then included a variety of other dualisms such as Christian and heathen, ancient and modern and master and servant.

The duality that was fundamental to the construction of the idea of race more broadly was that of fear and desire. Racial difference was constructed as something that could be both attractive and dangerous; often the danger was part of the allure. This is illustrated in Chapter Two by the contrast between exoticism and barbarism that characterised orientalist discourses. The East was constructed in the British imagination as a place where their deepest fantasies could be explored—at a price. The dichotomy of fear and desire that permeated the narratives of orientalist productions exploited the British public’s fear of the exotic and the unknown and their simultaneous desire to explore this world and to know it and it peoples more intimately. Chapter Three emphasises that the idea of blackness was constructed as something to be both feared and admired; this was articulated in discourses on the black
male, but also in reviews that celebrated the supposed happy-go-lucky attitude of black musicians as exemplary of black people in general.

The act of racial disguise evident in popular entertainments of the 1920s and 1930s highlights the importance of fantasy and desire to constructions of the racial ‘other’. Whether it was through the use of brownface or blackface make-up or in the exotic costumes of ‘the East’, there was something profoundly attractive about transgressing racial boundaries through dress. Through stage and screen productions fantasies of interracial contact could be explored. On the one hand contemporary discourses warned of the dangers of miscegenation, and on the other, racial difference was constructed as something exciting and eminently desirable. Through racial disguise and performance fantasies of racial difference could be explored without transgressing or disrupting contemporary social mores.

The setting of the theatre, cinema and mission hall, and the narratives of the stories in the children’s pages of the popular press restricted experiences of the racial ‘other’ to the imagination, thus neutralizing any perceived threat from interracial contact. The constructions that emanated from these settings varied from the image of the child-like heathen presented by missionaries, to that of the fearsome savage portrayed in children’s stories. In popular stage productions interracial relationships were presented as a folly that would ultimately corrupt both races. In this particular narrative on race, the pure, natural state of the noble savage that was so much a part of the attraction of distant lands and peoples was corrupted by western modernity. By contrast, metaphors of disease and degeneration afflicting white people as a result of contact with those defined as racially ‘other’ expressed fears about bodily contamination from races perceived as physically and mentally inferior.

Desire and aversion were also expressed simultaneously by those answering Mass-Observation’s 1939 race directive. The ambivalent responses to the anti-Semitism directive were often a result of the respondents’ concern to reject prejudices that they knew to be inherently wrong. The replies to the Mass-Observation directive suggest that formative experiences were crucial in determining how people imagined the racial ‘other’ but that such experiences were in some cases challenged and even reconsidered during the life course of an individual; with varying degrees of clarity and coherence.

This thesis illustrates not only how British people imagined those defined as racially ‘other’, it also illuminates our understanding of how the concept of Britishness was constructed in relation to those perceived as fundamentally un-British. Ultimately, the perception of Britishness expressed through the dominant social and cultural institutions of the 1920s and 1930s was white and Protestant. To be British was something to be celebrated
and children were encouraged to understand how fortunate they were to be born a member of a race charged with such responsibility towards those who were perceived to be behind in attaining the same standard of civilization. In newspaper children’s columns in particular the notion of white superiority was powerful and above all persistent, remaining unchanged across the period sampled.

The durability of the concept of white British superiority was inexorably linked to the continuing importance of Empire in defining British national identity. The continued supremacy of the British race was not taken for granted and this is reflected in the concerns of the eugenics movement as its members sought to preserve and improve the quality of British ‘stock’. This was a response to concerns about the condition of the British working-class dating from the Boer War but ‘the shadow of the unknown future’ cast by the First World War made the process of reconstruction a national imperative. Not only did the country have to rebuild itself politically and economically, but men and women had to reconstruct identities that would reconnect them with the comparative stability of the pre-war world.⁴

This sense of nostalgia for a world that was perceived to have been destroyed in 1914, can, in part, explain the continued success of traditional entertainments such as the orientalist productions of Oscar Asche and the popularity of blackface acts. These entertainments presented British audiences with simplistic notions of racial difference that reinforced notions of white, British superiority, offering a sense of security that defied contemporary social, political and cultural change. Popular entertainment underwent significant changes in the interwar years with the introduction of cinema and the pervasive influence of modern African-American musical culture. Nevertheless the most successful black artists blended modern popular music with older sounds in performances reminiscent of the popular minstrel acts of the nineteenth century.

The interwar years are an important period in the history of the idea of race and one that has been neglected in favour of the period post-1945. The conflicts that bracketed this period had a significant bearing on questions of race and national identity. The First World War prompted questions about the nature of British citizenship as white ex-servicemen reacted with violence to the presence of black men in Britain’s seaports. In the 1930s, the rise of Fascism in Europe forced the issue of racial categories to the forefront of public discourse, stridently emphasising the danger presented by racial and ethnic hierarchies. The end of the

1930s and the advent of the Second World War did not see a powerful challenge to these hegemonic constructions, although some questioning was provoked and some alternative ways of understanding race were voiced. Race was constructed as a category of difference in such a variety of ways that it remained a powerful idea and its social, cultural, political and economic impact are still being felt today.

The idea of race that was constructed and disseminated in the 1920s and 1930s, and with which a variety of publics engaged (churchgoers, children, theatre and cinema audiences) was a complex and contradictory discourse. Racial difference was perceived as a fact and was a crucial way of defining both self and ‘other’. Racial stereotypes were often crude and simplistic and they persisted across cultural mediums; representations of the Orient from theatrical productions, for example, also appeared in the comic strips presented to children in popular newspapers. Through these stereotypes, behavioural characteristics were linked to ethnicity, a central tenant of biological racism. In addition, physical difference, be it through skin colour, facial characteristics or hair type were importance signifiers of difference. National dress or costume was used to denote difference; this is most evident in depictions of the Orient. Through a variety of social and cultural processes, the outward appearance of difference was constructed as a sign of innate cultural and biological differences, thus in the British imagination, racial difference was largely premised on exteriority. Racial difference was constructed as a source of both fear and desire, but ultimately the idea of white British superiority was not challenged; in fact it was bolstered by the construction of a variety of racial ‘others’ as inherently inferior.

Discourses on race were circulated through a wide range of social and cultural institutions. Those selected for scrutiny in this thesis include churches and entertainment venues, but there were other important settings where the idea of race was disseminated to the British public and that require further investigation by historians. The Mass-Observation Archive reveals that the work-place and the home were also important in shaping people’s ideas about racial difference. It also demonstrates the importance of the circulation of popular stereotypes in the private sphere through, for example, the stories and jokes that parents told their children. As Laura Tabili argues, determining how racial difference has been ‘constructed and assigned meaning’ is a vital step in the process of understanding how conceptions of racial difference can lead to conflict in the first place.\(^5\) The interwar years are

an important era in the history of the idea of race and warrant much further study in order to enhance our understanding of its impact both before and after the Second World War.
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