Introduction: Black politics and urban crisis

This introduction is in two sections. The first section provides a description of the scope and nature of this study set against recent literature on race and urban politics and the second section examines the general urban setting against which black politics can most effectively be understood and which defines the nature of the 'urban crisis' affecting black political action. The introduction as a whole, therefore, makes a case for examining black politics and race issues as part of the broader urban political environment.

The literature on race and urban politics

A comprehensive study of black political responses to public policy relating to race and community relations in Britain today presents the individual researcher with a mammoth task, made greater by the enormous diversity of organizations representing the various segments of the 'black community'. Patterns of political activity vary widely – what may hold as a reasonable statement about black politics in, say, Bradford may not necessarily hold true in Southall or Brixton. Britain's black minorities have tended to develop their own local varieties of political expression, producing a multiplicity of responses to issues relating to urban deprivation, unemployment, racial harassment and so on.

Despite this, it is important to begin to make generalizations about black politics in Britain. There are certain important commonly exhibited characteristics of black organizations in different cities which enable the researcher to study a number of selected situations which may produce worthwhile conclusions about the public policy and political setting affecting black access to government and attitudes to government initiatives. It is therefore important to look at political actions with a view to the broader context of black

political action and the activities of black political organizations. Given such a brief, this study concentrates upon political motivations which are set within a broad public policy environment. It therefore differs from the more common sociological approach to the study of black communities by stressing the impact of a range of policy settings upon the nature and extent of black co-operation with the state and private bodies and upon the consequent degree of 'integration' of black political groups into the British political system. The predominance of sociological studies highlights the need for the kind of political study which is offered here as a contribution to filling the long-standing research gap in British writings on race.

Ben-Tovim and Gabriel have suggested that one aspect of the 'under-development' of the field of political research relating to race in Britain concerns the attitudes of researchers and black organizations. The argument is that there seems to have been a reluctance by social scientists to engage in policy-related research and in empirical and analytical research about black political movements. Many have regarded research into black politics as a form of surveillance of benefit only to the state, while others have tended to regard the whole area of study as generally too sensitive for close analysis (Ben-Tovim and Gabriel, 1979).

There is some substance to this argument and some black organizations and researchers have indeed harboured genuine suspicions about such inquiry. In the 1980s, however, there seems to be emerging a change in attitude, as social scientists have come to regard such research as having potential benefits for black political activists who are keen to understand underlying political trends or who see the value of research which may be of direct relevance to policy makers.

British race research

The sociological studies of the 1960s and 1970s should in no way be undervalued in respect of their contribution to race-related research. The large literature about black communities has produced a greater understanding of many aspects of racism, racial disadvantage and urban deprivation. Some of this literature has dealt with many of the political consequences of social phenomena (Lawrence, 1974; Rex and Moore, 1967; Rex and Tomlinson, 1979) and has contributed to a fuller understanding of the characteristics of community-based black organizations and political associations, while other studies have provided vivid descriptions and analyses of the black experience (Bains, 1984; Banton, 1972; Berger and Mohr, 1975; Miles, 1982; Hiro, 1973). The literature also represents research into the sociological theory of race and ethnicity which has extended our knowledge of social structure and opened important debates about the relationships between race, class, caste and social action (Banton, 1972; Pearson, 1981; Rex, 1970; Rex and Tomlinson, 1979).

There is actually little in this literature, however, which provides the framework for a coherent analysis of black politics and interest groups in Britain. The same may be said for the literature which has, to date, concentrated on party political and electoral factors affecting blacks. Electoral studies have provided evidence of the lack of representation of blacks in British political institutions and have drawn attention to some of the difficulties faced by black politicians seeking office at national and local levels (Community Relations Commission, 1975; Deakin, 1965; Le Lohe, 1984). Fitzgerald (1984) has provided an excellent and detailed account of black participation in Britain's four major political parties, while Layton-Henry (1980) and Behrens and Edmonds (1981) have studied the relationship between blacks and the Conservative Party. Again, these studies have produced valuable insights into some major political issues facing blacks, but they have, nevertheless, failed to provide any general analytical framework within which black politics may be understood. Indeed, such works do not specifically set out to achieve such an objective, implicitly remaining content with descriptive and historical explanations of black responses to government policies and changing electoral conditions.

Katznelson (1973) probably provides the most comprehensive attempt to place blacks in the context of a wider political and administrative setting. Much of Katznelson's analysis of black politics in a hostile environment is policy-orientated and set within an analytical perspective, identifying a black political 'elite' which is becoming integrated into white political institutions. Katznelson's comparative research of Britain and the United States regards these political institutions as crucial in integrating blacks into what he regards as white racist societies. In Britain community relations bodies are seen to be instrumental in this process, blunting militant black demands and hindering the development of an independent black politics (Katznelson, 1970).

Despite some useful insights, Katznelson tends to deal in generalities and does not explain adequately *why* black political groups are prepared to play along with this close identification with community relations bodies. His study fails to provide an explanation of the process of integration by straightjacketing the analysis with an essentially passive conception of black organizations seen as victims of political isolation in a white power structure. This kind of analysis represents a view of black political participation emanating from the black-power period in the United States of the 1960s and early 1970s. The logic behind this thinking is that black politics can be either passive (accommodated within white society) or militant in defence of black interests. As will be seen in this study, such an 'either/or' choice is not relevant when viewing the relationships between black groups and governments in Britain in the 1980s.

More recent British works which have touched upon some of the broader issues considered by Katznelson have failed to meet the challenge raised by the position developed in the 1970s relating to black power and black

autonomy. In many respects the British attempt to research black politics in the 1980s has taken a step backwards either by maintaining the partial perspective characteristic of electoral studies or by manifesting a confusing theoretical eclecticism. Often such work is contained in edited compilations which adopt a variety of research methodologies and which, under one cover, present quite diverse perspectives and conclusions about black political currents, social developments and urban deprivation (Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1982; Husband, 1982). This is not to devalue individual contributions which are quoted elsewhere in this book, but it underlines the general lack of coherence and theoretical unity which still pervades British race-related political research. Only one compilation, edited by Miles and Phizacklea (1979), comes anywhere near to developing a coherent political perspective (see their Chapter 1 in particular), but success in this effort is limited, with contributions seeming to adopt both social-class and implicitly non-class frames of analysis. A much clearer class analysis does, however, emerge in Miles and Phizacklea's (1984) further attempt to link the race issue with a political analysis of the black experience under capitalism. Again, this approach fails to adequately examine the policy process and 'administration of race' within the urban context and leaves the reader with a rather generalized view of black politics.

Urban politics and race

In contrast to race-related literature, there is much to be gained, with respect to political analysis, from the large body of literature which has concentrated upon the urban context affecting city-based pressure groups and communities. Black politics in Britain is essentially the politics of urban-based minorities who express their political demands at national and local level in terms of issues which largely relate to urban problems. The 'atomization' of black politics and the lack of a single national black political pressure group underscores the localization of so much black political activity. As with white community groups representing the inner city, black organizations compete for resources within an urban environment and liaise with urban agencies and central government departments in the process.

Cockburn (1977), Newton (1976) and Saunders (1979) have all pointed to the significance of the urban context. Their research has tended to be broad in coverage, looking at the nature of government policies, characteristics of the state and the position of pressure groups in relation to policy processes at national and local levels. These studies have covered the difficulties faced by pressure groups in gaining access to political structures and have alluded to the ways in which groups attempt to gain access to political institutions (Dearlove, 1973; Saunders, 1979). Explicitly the search for various degrees of participation is an activity which involves the attempts of groups (taken here to refer to organized political and other interest groups) to achieve economic gains for their members and/or to achieve a degree of political representation

or access to the policy-making process. While there are many manifest differences between writers in the urban politics field, there seems to be wide acceptance of this question of access (explicitly or implicitly) as being of importance in providing one focus for research into the nature of urban policy processes and group interactions with governments. This book, therefore, follows Newton, Saunders and Dearlove in treating these interactions as a point of reference for explaining the dynamics of urban politics. Such an approach, related to black group activity and taking account of the useful areas of race-related research, will hopefully contribute to the meeting between urban political research and the field of race.

This meeting is one which is based on a selective acknowledgement of the contributions made in the urban field. Dunleavy correctly points out that there is no single coherent body of urban political analysis as such, despite the evident 'inter-action and common ground between different perspectives' (Dunleavy, 1980, p.21). Indeed, for Dunleavy, there has been debate over the precise scope and focus of 'urban' research and he quotes Williams (1971) who pointed to the 'catch-all' adjective 'urban', with respect to a wide variety of studies which have little theoretical affinity and which do not really exhibit anything intrinsically urban. The geographical focus of such urban analysis has thus sought to identify distinct urban characteristics which affect political activity and has de-emphasized the wider socio-economic and political environment in which these areas exist. Dunleavy calls for a redefinition of the urban field and a new approach to urban analysis which would break away from spatial or institutional definitions of the urban field and concentrate on a more broadly defined focus concerned with the impact of 'collective consumption'. The patterns of policy change in 'urban aspects of social life' could be explored more effectively by adopting such an approach (Dunleavy, 1980, p.163). Collective consumption here relates to the provision of public services (housing and transport, for example) by the state and analysis of this area would centre upon questions relating to the nature of the state and its class characteristics. Dunleavy alludes to Castells who argues that the urban spatial dimension is 'scarcely important' when looking at the development of production activities in advanced capitalist societies. Such a view expands the scope of urban analysis by relating urban political processes to the very nature of capitalism and the state.

By concentrating upon policy and the access question this study, however, immediately assumes a limitation. This is a study about politics in urban settings rather than a widely orientated urban study which treats the study of urban politics in the way described by Dunleavy. It does not set out to develop a theoretical argument which addresses Dunleavy's call for a broader analysis of these questions. This work is primarily concerned with policy questions and policy processes and not with the debate in urban political and sociological theory about the relationship between, for example, urban-based social movements and industrial or class-based politics.

Such questions are, of course, of immense importance in developing urban

analysis. Castells (1975), for instance, within his broad urban perspective, draws a distinction between an urban politics and industrial class politics. According to this view 'urban struggles' entered into by particular groups do not constitute class struggles (in the Marxist sense) but are characterized by a 'reformism' which, unless linked to class struggle, prevents the development of working-class consciousness and the political mobilization of class interests (see Saunders, 1979, for a full discussion of this view). Other writers on urban politics have disagreed with this line of argument (Clarke and Ginsburg, 1975; Mingione, 1977, cited by Saunders) and have suggested that there is a connection between urban and class struggles and that this provides a more accurate description of the nature of urban social movements. The evidence presented in this book would seem to favour the critics of Castells insofar as the analysis points to a black politics which involves groups in raising demands which cover both specifically 'urban' and 'class' issues, or more correctly perhaps, 'urban class issues'. The distinction between urban issues and class-related questions is thus impossible to draw (Rex, 1979), particularly when the questions of black leadership and representation are raised. An examination of black representation, electoral behaviour, participation, leadership interests and social characteristics could potentially contribute as much to the understanding of black politics in Britain as such research has done in America, since it could address the question of differing *class* accommodations in society (Coleman and McLemore, 1982; Preston, 1982, for example). Preston's Chicago research uncovered some very crucial class-related issues which affected black community attitudes and 'antimachine' votes in primary elections – the Reverend Jessie Jackson's support for the 1979 transit strike and minority views on the teachers' strike and firefighters' dispute are examples of such urban class issues.

Urban, black policy research

As stated above, there will, however, be no theoretical treatment of the debate on class in this present work. The analysis of the nature of the interests of the state and of black groups is beyond the scope of this book, which is concerned with mapping the pattern of black political activity, establishing the parameters of black political debate, viewing the nature and extent of black integration into public and private institutions and programmes and looking at the broad impact of black groups on public policy.

Recognition of the need for such urban-related *policy research* relating to race has long been evident in Britain, as policy studies are produced comparing public policy approaches towards blacks on both sides of the Atlantic (Glazer and Young, 1983; Jacobs, 1982, 1983). These studies have revealed important differences between Britain and the USA which have indicated both the potential for black representation and political influence (USA) and the relative under-development of black politics in representative

and representational terms (Britain). Even so, American studies have continued to concentrate on the relative disadvantage experienced by blacks even within a comparatively pluralist setting (Gilliam, 1975; Hillson, 1977; Levitan, 1980; O'Brien, 1975; Palmer and Sawhill, 1984; Perkins, 1975), which suggests that representation and access to governments are no guarantee that the special problems of blacks will be easily overcome. As these studies point out, the deeper societal problems of racism and discrimination intervene in political life to work against the 'equal' treatment of black demands and the 'equal' consideration by politicians and government officials of black needs.

An urban dimension for black politics

By adopting an urban overview in relation to 'equity' and other issues it may, of course, be argued that the urban context is one which affects black and white communities in the same way and that the concentration of research here upon ethnic minorities serves only to conceal this. The answer lies in a consideration of the distinctiveness of black politics and the fact that blacks experience certain problems which are not faced by native white or even white ethnic-minority communities (such as the Poles and Ukrainians). Racial discrimination on the grounds of colour is the most obvious problem special to black people in Britain. It adds a harsher edge to the urban condition by affecting employment and educational prospects and the political attainments of blacks seeking entry into the mainstream of British public life. Racial antagonisms may be covert rather than clearly manifest in society. Local politicians and government officials may resent black leaders and political organizations simply because they are black or because they are thought of as 'immigrant' (Reeves, 1983). Indeed, the 'alien' aspect of black politics is reflected in the need for special race-relations bodies designed to adapt black people to a 'host' society and 'native' political institutions (Hill and Issacharoff, 1971).

Adaptation is difficult, not only because of racist attitudes, but also because there exists a great ethnic and cultural diversity between black communities. The term 'black community' must be used with reservation, because there is no single 'black community' as such which could be taken to encompass all Britain's Afro/Caribbean and Asian minorities. The coverall term when used here is applied as a shorthand for describing all non-white or non-oriental ethnic minorities within the broader 'native' society. The 'black community', therefore, includes individuals, groups and organizations which represent an enormously diverse range of class, religious and cultural, racial and caste affiliations. This consequently exacerbates the difficulties for blacks relative to whites in attempting to come to terms with political practices and institutions in an urbanized society.

To illustrate this we may point to the so-called 'second generation' blacks who have never been to their parents' 'homelands'. They may be of Afro/

Caribbean origin, but may have spent all their lives in Brixton or Lambeth acting and speaking as Londoners. Cockney blacks from London and 'Scouse' blacks from Liverpool have little sentimental affinity with sunbathed islands across the Atlantic and focus their aspirations towards making a living in an urban environment beset with racial disharmony and social decline.

There are those who have emigrated to Britain, perhaps from the Punjab in India or from Jamaica. Many will have waited for years to arrive in Britain, playing a waiting game with the immigration authorities before being allowed to unite with families and relatives. They bring with them their own mother tongue, their religious beliefs and their cultural traditions, which are catered for by British-based immigrant groups, religious temples and churches and political and community associations. These associations place demands upon local authorities in attempting to promote the interests of their members and followers, but they do so in a society which is ill-equipped to meet the challenge posed by ethnic and cultural/religious diversity.

Government officials and politicians are at the receiving end of demands from black representatives, and it is highly unlikely that these demands will always be judged by those in positions of authority in a rational and dispassionate way. With planning applications, social welfare claims, housing and educational problems, blacks have experienced discrimination and have often been frustrated by the inequities of an administrative system which is at best bureaucratic and at worst lacking proper comprehension of the particular needs of black people.

Government and race: a problem area

Race and immigration have become interlinked with such social problems. Immigration, in particular, has been regarded as a 'problem' which is related to numerous tensions within urban communities (Humphry and Ward, 1974). Government's perception of race as a problem therefore provides a further distinctive characteristic of black politics, since it is within a framework where blacks are regarded in a *special* way that black political organizations have to operate. Black groups tend to be viewed by politicians as requiring special attention with respect to their qualifications to participate in community-relations institutions and as being in need of special allocations of money. Community-relations bodies, to some degree, thus exist in an environment which tends to separate blacks from government, with their own administrative arrangements, policies and minority programmes. This marks community-relations agencies out so that they can easily be criticized by politicians who may be seeking popular acclaim in the white community by attacking provisions for minorities.

Under such circumstances, government policy has reflected an apparent contradiction which in practice manifests itself as a 'dual' approach to policy affecting race and immigration. Firstly, central government has adopted

physical measures of control to reduce the number of immigrants coming to Britain. The immigrant 'problem' has usually been formulated in terms of a problem of numbers, concentrating upon the flow of black immigrants into the UK (Foot, 1965). Restrict numbers coming in, it is argued by the pro-immigration lobby, and thereby relieve internal problems associated with settlement and assimilation of black minorities. The support for such arguments effected a significant reduction in immigrant numbers by the late 1970s following, in particular, legislation designed to reduce the inflow of Asians expelled from African nations such as Uganda in 1972. About 35,000 East African Asians were admitted to Britain in that year and over the next five years around 7,000 a year came, reducing in 1982 to about 4,500. By 1979, the total number of so-called 'New Commonwealth' and Pakistani immigrants was about 30,000, or about half the level of the early 1970s (Brown, 1983).

The other side of government policy has been the more liberal 'assimilationist' approach applied to offset some of the consequences of immigration itself and also to reduce racial tensions, which tend to be worsened when blacks are treated as a 'problem' in the first place. It was perfectly consistent for governments to implement both immigration control ('physical control') and 'social control' measures simultaneously, since the accommodation of black leaders within government agencies was generally regarded as beneficial to governments (Mason, 1982). Black 'assimilation' legitimated community-relations bodies at 'grass roots' level and channelled black political demands into the confines of a relatively manageable and low-cost administrative framework. However, the increasing integration of leaders imperceptibly created its own problems. From the late 1960s a gulf began slowly to widen between an older generation of essentially middle-class black community leaders and a growing number of disaffected, young, working-class blacks. Leaders were generally articulate, well-educated and committed to the values traditionally associated with 'homeland' cultures. The young were more anglicized, with the experience of poor education, unemployment and social hardship which produced bitterness and hostility towards government agencies and programmes and even towards community leaders.

Co-operation with community-relations bodies, politicians and government appeared to many to have produced little in the way of economic returns for black communities and little which young blacks could readily identify with (Bridges, 1981). Community leaders had become ensconced in local authority committees, police liaison committees and in the Commission for Racial Equality. In London's Brixton, Liverpool's Toxteth and Manchester's Moss Side, the tangible results of such representation were often hard to distinguish as far as the young unemployed were concerned. Leaders perceived the benefits of participation differently because it afforded them an opportunity of access which led to the local town hall or to government departments in Whitehall. This may, indeed, have produced economic or welfare commitments from government, but that was a fine point to those at the lower end of

the social scale, experiencing the blunt end of racial antagonism and economic adversity.

In this situation the 'generation gap' was transformed into a credibility gap in which the 'unorganized' came to be frustrated with the slow-moving procedures of local government and the Community Relations Councils and in which a feeling of cynicism and rejection of the 'usual channels' developed. The 1981 'riots', which involved both blacks and whites, seemed to stem partly from this growing mood of pent-up frustration rather than from any concerted organized political design. Despite allegations made by some politicians that the disturbances were instigated by 'outside' agitators there was no evidence to support this claim (Scarman Report, 1981). It may also be argued that there was no hard evidence to support the argument that the events were the result of a process of disaffection which began many years prior to the communal disturbances. There is, indeed, little in the way of substantial research which points to this, but it seems reasonable to assume that such dramatic events do not simply happen by accident or purely as the result of isolated local incidents and that social tensions develop within a broader political, social and economic environment which shapes the preconditions for urban violence and which generates foundations for social conflict.

Urban crisis

These problems are part of an 'urban crisis' which also involves a crisis of political leadership in the black community, since these are issues which black leaders are forced to contend with but in which success has not always been dramatically forthcoming. This is instanced by reference to the problem of unemployment and the position of young blacks. The black population is, on average, younger than the population as a whole, with the majority of older blacks having been born overseas (Brown, 1983). Consequently, black youth has to compete for educational resources and housing within an urban environment that restricts access to these provisions. Community leaders are involved in a political process which limits expectations as to what is obtainable from the economic system and what can reasonably be expected from pressure-group activity. The 'realities' of the situation have tended to produce a cautious attitude on social issues, which many black leaders prefer to be handled in such a way as not to impair their good relations with officials and decision-making politicians. This relatively low-key approach simply throws into relief the overall lack of impact which black demands have had with respect to the elimination of inner-city unemployment. Blacks in the United States, by contrast, have effected significant social and political changes through community agencies and through effective representation in national and local government (Preston, Henderson and Puryear, 1982). In Britain blacks are still waiting to attain the influence which may help them to meet Britain's pressing urban problems more effectively.