Homelessness And A Particular Response Among Young West Indians - in Handsworth, Birmingham

by

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SYNOPSIS

The phenomenon of homelessness among young West Indians in Britain has not been fully documented or carefully studied for obvious reasons, particularly the temporal one.

This attempt to understand and explain the problem is made by someone using the technique of Participant Observation. However, the study is placed within the context of race relations in Britain and the West Indies and makes reference to the historical roots of these relations.

An analysis is made of a community response to homelessness in Handsworth, Birmingham. The institution that emerged is shown to be the outcome of the visions, skills and shortcomings of the founder-members, tempered by the constraints imposed by external bodies and the needs of homeless youngsters. Some lessons have been learned from the encounters between these entities.

DEDICATION

To William and Gadsmine Henry,

Harambee and the Extended Family.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am much indebted to the Management Committee of the Harambee Project and the residents of Harambee House for accepting me into their private lives and allowing me to comment thereon.

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B.I. Henry

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INTRODUCTION

Recently the subject of "homelessness" - the situation of being without the physical and emotional security of a home - especially among young West Indians, has begun to receive serious attention. However, it would be unfair to say that no one foresaw that the experiences and actions of the children of immigrants would be different from those of their parents.

In the late 1960's E.J.B. Rose et al wrote:"In our original plan we assumed that we must concentrate research on the first generation of immigrants rather than on their children who were still in our schools when they were not, as often, left behind..... However, we were fully aware that this country would fairly soon reach the stage where the main question would be not about the reception of immigrants and their adjustments but about attitudes to coloured Englishmen and the future of a second generation"[1]. That time has come.

Also, the former Home Secretary, Mr. Robert Carr, later sounded a note of warning thus..... "if the present picture of the life of immigrants in this country is still largely conditioned by the "first generation" I have been speaking about, I readily accept that the expectations and aspirations of the "second generation" will be very different..... I have no doubt that we shall face increasing resentment in the future if the patterns that are typical of the earlier stages of immigrant settlement become entrenched in our society and if it is harder for a coloured person to make his way in the world than it is for his white counterpart"[2]. His predictions seem to be coming true.

Some people are now claiming that the problem of homelessness and related phenomena like unemployment among black youngsters has been exaggerated and set about proving this by quoting statistics. Inevitably others will be drawn into this argument using other figures. But the purpose of this dissertation is not to join this battle to determine how many homeless black youngsters there are: it is rather an attempt to understand this phenomenon and to record and analyse a community response to it. Understanding and some kind of sociological explanation are necessary here because this group has received a lot of publicity (some of it adverse) which can affect race relations in Britain and elsewhere.

Early in the enterprise I realized that studying homeless West Indians, especially those who pass through a certain institution - "Harambee House" - in Handsworth, Birmingham, would pose a number of problems concerning approach and method.

First, as a student of Sociology, I have been exposed to a variety of theories and methods, often in a proselytizing manner. I therefore feared that I would use concepts which implied that I belonged to a particular school of thought.

For example, I wanted to use some of the available material like statistics and certain theories current in race relations studies, partly to show that I am familiar with the literature. But I wanted to avoid being, and being seen as, the traditional empiricist or arm-chair theoretician who considers himself (as scientist) to be the ultimate or primary source of knowledge and who trusts his own senses and logic more than he would trust those of his subjects.

Second, at the same time I was emotionally involved in the functioning of "Harambee House" as a home for homeless youngsters. As a founder member I have invested much time and energy in it ever since its inception as an idea. I have participated in varying degrees in the lives of the communities living in the house from time to time.

I was therefore a "participant observer" from the start. Of the four roles of the "participant observer" described by S.T. Bruyn[3] the "Participant as Observer" and the "Observer as Participant" are the best to fit my positions during the first and second parts of study, respectively. If, as Bruyn says, the participant observer considers the interpretations of his subjects to have first importance, then I was compelled to subscribe to this approach periodically.

But the method of participant observation, problematic in itself, is often linked with the "theories" of Symbolic Interactionism and Ethno-methodology.

Symbolic Interactionism is an approach developed by G.H. Mead and other like Park, Dewey and Cooley. Some of its more recent exponents are, H. Becker and E. Goffman. It is a "theory" of society and the self as interdependent parts of the same process. In trying to answer the question "How is it possible for collective human actions to occur ?" it uses conceptions like "mutual adjustment", "meaning", "symbols", "taking the role of other", "society", and "self". The self is seen as an "emergent property" the meaning of which (like that of any object) resides not in the object itself but in the definition brought to it and hence must be located in the interaction process.

It is the outcome of negotiation by the actors in a situation.

This approach helped to understand and explain the conflicting behaviours of the same individual in different situations. But symbolic interactionism as an approach could not be embraced completely, because it typically (rather than necessarily) pays too little attention to the structural framework surrounding the groups and institutions in question.

Like Symbolic Interactionism, Ethno-methodology recognizes the complex role of interaction in shaping activities. This sub-discipline developed by H.Garfinkel and A. Cicourel takes as its major concern the problem of penetrating every day perspectives and giving them sociological explanation. It looks at the relationship between every-day taken-for-granted meanings and the organisation of these meanings into routine patterns of interaction. In a healthy attack on "Structural functionalism" it questions how actors know what is expected of them and what roles of the many possible are being evoked by different situations.

This approach helped to understand and explain the agreed meanings of objects, and actions emanating from them, and the difference between these meanings and actions and those of otheri ndividuals in groups and in situations (external to Harambee House), especially those with power and authority. However, in general, Ethnomethodology, fails to show the sources of meanings and definitions. Many of these are to be found in idealogies and experiences historically and geographically situated. It would not therefore fully explain what goes on in Harambee House with reference only to the "here and now".

These two approaches have been singled out for treatment (summarily though it may be) because they have been useful in the study and because, in a wider sense, they direct scientific interest to understanding the scientific process itself. They question the validity and reliability of certain scientific activities in survey methods, for example, which are often taken for granted. Also they highlight the fact that "social systems" approaches are fundamentally antagonistic to understanding the activities of communities attempting to change their own situation. By locating the unit of analysis in the individual and interaction, they offer a corrective to traditional sociology and its practitioners. This feeling is best summed up by N.K. Denzin as follows: "The Sociologist's belief in a perfect system of rationalities has led him further away from the world of social events. The sociologist has pursued his normative system at the expense of concrete behavioural analysis of face-to-face interaction"[4]

I am aware of the weaknesses and strengths in the ways these various approaches have been used. I have tried to keep them in mind throughout this study without embracing any single approach wholeheartedly and uncritically.

What follows is divided into five chapters and a conclusion.

Chapter I deals with some theories of Race Relations and looks at the social background out of which many West Indians migrated to Britain.

Chapter II reviews some of the literature about homelessness among certain groups in Britain and argues that there are disproportionate numbers of homeless black youngsters in connurbations like Birmingham.

Chapter III surveys the Handsworth scene out of which "Harambee House", a West Indian institution for homeless youngsters, emerged and shows what the house has to offer.

Chapter IV looks at the many interdependent factors which are both causes and effects of homelessness among the group in question.

Chapter V outlines some of the lessons learned and insights gleaned from experience at Harambee House. Some of these lessons can serve as recommendations for action.

The conclusion is a plea for greater understanding, compassion and respect for the members of this group in light of the strains and stresses outlined in this report. It also puts the case for support for the Harambee project and others like it.

Notes.

1. E.J.B. Rose et al, Colour and Citizenship , 1969, p.760.

2. Speech by the Rt.Hon. Robert Carr, Home Secretary, to the Race Relations Board Annual Conference, Nottingham, 21st September 1973.

3. S.T.Bruyn, The Human Perspective in Sociology , 1966, pages 15-16. The other two roles being "Complete Participant" and "Complete Observer".

4. N.K. Denzin, "Symbolic Interactionism and Ethnomethodology: A proposed Synthesis". American Sociological Review, Dec.1969, pages 922-934.

CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND.

Any unbiased history of Britain must clearly show the important part played by black people of African descent in the development of modern British society. More pointedly, Walter Rodney[1] has shown how the economic development of Britain depended on the systematic underdevelopment of Africa and the exploitation of her children in the continent itself and in various parts of the New World. Eric Williams[2] supported this analysis by showing the close links between slavery in the West Indies and the growth of British capitalism. The continued exploitation of the descendents of these slaves is shown by Stephen Castles and Goulda Kosack[3] and by John Rex.[4] Without necessarily embracing the theoretical perspectives of any of these writers one may still regard the economic contribution of the black population of the West Indies to the British system as substantial and may further agree that whether as slaves or migrants to metropolitan Britain, "Negroes" have been regarded as inferiors and allotted menial and unrewarding occupations.

Others argue that the origins of racism and racialism lay not in the economic relations of capitalism, colonialism and imperialism but in more distant historic periods. They argue that racist ideas and beliefs were deeply embedded in the culture of Western Europe long before there was any real encounter with black people. David Brion Davis[5] and Winthrop Jordan[6] writing seperately argue this case meticulously. Even an eminent and sceptical philosopher like David Hume[7] was certain of the natural inferiority of the "Negro". Beliefs like this were challenged and continue to be challenged by developments in scientific and

other kinds of research and knowledge but never have all sections of society been influenced uniformly and predictably by these developments. Familiar stereotypes survive.

Thus, when West Indian Negroes started settling in Britain after 1948 they were certainly not "strangers" as Sheila Patterson[8] would have us believe. Moreover, many who stepped off the "Empire Windrush" in June 1948 had spent the war years in the R.A.F. stationed in Britain. Together with the large numbers of American Negroes among the 170,000 U.S. troops stationed in the U.K. and the high mobility of people in war-torn Britain, black people must have been a familiar sight.

Since World War II and the resurgence of the British economy, large numbers of West Indians have settled in Britain for a multitude of reasons. The pattern of immigration up to 1961 and the introduction of the Commonwealth Immigration Bill is shown in table I below.

This pattern shows the simultaneous immigration of large numbers of women and men without their children in the early stages. Then the numbers of children often coming alone to join their parents increased dramatically. But many more had to wait longer to be re-united with their parents. Mr.F.Jeremiah estimated that between 1955 and 1960, over 100,00 children were left behind in Jamaica by emigrating parents. This separation of children from both parents for long periods of time had great implications for the future of these children in Britain.(This pattern which persisted until the present time shows a marked difference from that of Asian migration in which the men usually migrated first, followed by wives and children coming together. This is an area where further investigation would be fruitful).

TABLE I

Approximate Numbers of West Indian Migrants entering the U.K. in Substantial Parties. 1952 - 61.

Year[+]	Men	Women	Children under 16	Unclassified	Total
1952	1,500	700	———	———	2,200
	68.2%	31.8%	———	———	
1953	1,700	600	———	———	2,300
	73.9%	26.1%	———	———	
1954	6,600	2,600	———	———	9,200
	71.7%	28.3%	———	———	
1955	13,900	7,300	300	2,900	24,400
	57.0%	29.9%	1.2%	11.9%	
1956	13,900	9,400	600	2,500	26,400
	52.6%	35.6%	2.3%	9.5%	
1957	11,400	9,400	900	800	22,500
	50.7%	41.8%	4.0%	3.5%	
1958	7,700	7,800	1,000	———	16,500
	46.7%	47.3%	6.0%	———	
1959	10,100	8,200	2,100	———	20,400
	49.5%	40.2%	10.3%	———	
1960	29,600	19,900	3,200	———	52,700
	56.3%	37.8%	5.9%	———	
1961	28,900	27,600	5,100	———	61,600
	46.8%	44.8%	8.4%	———	
TOTAL	125,300	93,500	13,200	6,200	238,200
	52.6%	39.3%	5.5%	2.6%	

+ "The figures for 1952 - 54 are taken from an answer given in the House of Lords on 15th February 1956 (Hansard pp. 1038-9). The figures for 1955-61 are those published or kindly made available by the Migrants Services Division to the nearest 100" as quoted by Sheila Patterson 9.

All these West Indians, parents and children alike were coming out of a society characterized by conflict, repression and control, and in general overt or covert racial oppression. In the aftermath of slavery emphasis was put on controlling the populace. The Morant Bay rebellion in Jamaica in 1865 and its supression is an example of the long history of violence in the West Indies. F.R. Angier et al [11] explains: "five-hundred and eighty men and women were killed or hanged. Six-hundred were flogged and a thousand houses destroyed before Eyre declared himself satisfied that the rebellion was over".

Such barbarity in dealing with black rebels was nothing new. Winthrop Jordan[12] explained how in 1693, Alice Mills of Barbados was paid 10 guineas to castrate 42 Negroes who took part in the slave uprising that year in the island.

Later, phenomena like Garveyism or the 1930's riots which threatened the status quo were summarily dealt with.

At crucial stages in West Indian history, as R.T. Smith[13] pointed out, "Churches and schools were held to be the best instruments for the transformation of a rebellious slave population into a peaceful and obedient working class". There is some controversy over why and when the masters allowed their slaves to carry out religious practices. But many agree that in time religion was tolerated as a form of escapism, the opium of the people, and as such flourished especially in its "Pentecostal" variation.

As for the schools, R.T. Smith[14] comments: "What criticisms are levelled at the form and content of colonial education is not so much the technical adequacy that is in question (though this

has lagged a long way behind that of England during the 20th century) but rather the psychologically damaging effect of teaching people to value what is alien to their own being" (I found much evidence of this as a school teacher in a Secondary Modern School with a large number of black children in Handsworth).

The function of school in the West Indies was reputedly to suppress and to control, and generally sap initiative. This has made it possible for Ivor Morrish[15] to claim that "the West Indian child is used to being told what to learn and how to learn it.....mostly by simple repitition and in chorus with other children..... He is expected to respond to a heavy discipline with the threat of a flogging if he doesn't do as he is told or learn what he should".

By such and other means of social control most West Indians came to accept the domination of British culture or rather British culture of a particular period. This does not mean to say that there were no other cultures. Many argue that West Indian society has always been"plural". M.G.Smith[16]for example, has placed great emphasis on the existence within West Indian societies of a number of cultures which have deep historical roots. He has provided considerable evidence of significant differences in the beliefs, ideas, practices and "basic institutions" of various groups.

Polarization in this debate can be avoided by noting the difference between the ideal and the real. Take the structure of the family for example. For many West Indians, the ideal family is the nuclear one but in reality they live, especially if they are poor, in extended families[17]. Such families have

played an important part in the survival of certain segments of West Indian societies. They offered security and insurance against the anxieties and hardships of being a black peasant in a British colony.

Such then is one view of the background of many of the West Indians who hopefully migrated to Britain after 1948 in search of a better life. Life in England promised to be materially better for them. They were almost sure of a comparatively high and regular wage which compensated partly for any unpleasantness their jobs might entail. Their comparative quiescence and tolerance of conditions in Britain may be explained in terms of the "relative deprivation" conception used by W.G. Runciman[18] to show how inequality was so disproportionate to grievance among the British working class during the 19th and 20th centuries because of the "reference groups" chosen. It is logical to infer that older West Indians will remain content with their lot in England as long as their reference groups remain their brothers and sisters left in "Mocca" or "Orange Grove" back in the West Indies. My empirical evidence suggests that their reference groups are their peers back home if not their former "selves" in the West Indies.

Their children, however, have had a different socialization, have different expectations and different reference groups: and above all they have more reasons and opportunities for rebellion and real change.

Notes.

1. Walter Rodney, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa, 1972. This critique of "development" in certain Third World countries shows a direct correlation between the development of Britain (and Europe) and the underdevelopment of Africa.

2. Eric Williams, Capitalism and Slavery, 1944. This thesis is an economic study of the role of Negro slavery and the slave trade in providing the capital for the Industrial Revolution in Britain.

3. Stephen Castles and Goulda Kosack, Immigrant Workers and the Class Structure in Western Europe, 1973. This report shows the exploitation and abuse of immigrant workers throughout Western Europe.

4. John Rex, Race, Colonialism and the City, 1973, shows how racial conflict has finally arrived on the door-steps of Britain.

5. David Brion Davis, The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture, 1966, argues that there is something in the culture of Western Europe which inclined White men to look with contempt on the physical and cultural traits of Africans, as "black".

6. Winthrop Jordan, White Over Black, 1968, generally supports what Davis has to say.

7. David Hume, Essays Moral, Political and Literary, 1889, here departs from his usual scepticism in dealing with Negroes.

8. Sheila Patterson, Dark Stangers, 1963, predicted that race relations in Britain would improve with time when West-Indians became "less strange".

9. Op. cit . p 359.

10. F.Jeremiah of the Barbados Liaison Service speaking at a conference on the Education of immigrant children at Nottingham University Institute of Education, November 1962. (Quoted in Race Vol VII October 1965 No 2).

11. F.R.Augier et al, The Making of The West Indies ,1960 p 226, deals with the history of the West Indies.

12. Winthrop Jordan, 1968.

13. R.T.Smith, British Guyana, 1962 p 145

14. Op. cit. p 147.

15. Ivor Morrish, The Background of Immigrant Children, 1971, p89.

16. M.G.Smith, The Plural Society in The British West Indies, 1965, challenges the accepted view by showing the existence of a variety of distinct cultures in West Indian societies.

17. S.M.Greenfield, "Industrialization and the family in Sociological Theory", American Journal of Sociology, Vol.LXVII, November 1961, pp 312 - 322. Here Greenfield shows the nuclear family as the ideal in a non-industrial West Indian society. However, because the occupational system (in Barbados) fails to provide the male with the prestige or income necessary for the support of the nuclear family, many if not most families in reality, take the forms of "subnuclear" or "extended" ones.

18. W.G.Runciman, Relative Deprivation and Social Justice, 1966, gives an analysis of attitudes to social inequality in 20th century Britain.

CHAPTER II

THE CASE

For some time now social workers, probation officers, and other "grass-roots" workers have been aware of the growing problem of homeless black youngsters in large urban areas. What was new was not homelessness but the disproportionate numbers of homeless black youngsters who had passed through the educational system in this country and had found themselves alienated from society.

Homelessness has often been associated with the Enclosure Movement, The Industrial Revolution and migration to urban areas, and is well documented in British Social history. Dr.Barnardo, having decided to do missionary work in China, had to change his mind when he discovered so many homeless waifs in the capital city of London.

More recently, John Greve[1] showed that the problem of homelessness was increasing again in London after a lull lasting many years. He found that large numbers of families became homeless because of the housing situation and not necessarily because of moral failings. In particular, slum clearance, keener competition for scarce housing and the presence of desperate groups (like mature Commonwealth Immigrants) being prepared to pay extortionate rents were helping to cause low income families to become homeless.

However, the Greve report was concerned with homeless "families". For the purposes of the enquiry, the L.C.C. defined homeless people as "those who come to the attention or into the care of the services of the council by reason of being homeless"[2]

The figures were disturbing enough but they left out the husbands of homeless women who (with their children) entered L.C.C. reception centres; the thousand or so children cared for by the L.C.C. Children's Department because their parents were either homeless or could find somewhere to live only if they separated from their children. In addition homeless couples without children or whose children were sixteen though not yet adult, were not admitted to welfare accommodation, so they did not appear in the statistics of homelessness: nor did families which did not go to the Welfare Department for help but split up when it was no longer possible for the parents to house the united family. Single persons (the subject of this enquiry), were also excluded from the reckoning. So were people who qualified by age for admission to institutions for the elderly. Greve's investigation was thus confined to those homeless-mainly young couples with children - who were given shelter for one night or longer by the Welfare Department.

When B.B.C. T.V. screened Jeremy Sandford's drama-cum-documentary about a homeless family, "Cathy Come Home," on November 15th, 1966, it created a public uproar. Then "Shelter," the National Campaign for the Homeless, embarked on a programme of enlightening the nation about the plight of the homeless in Britain[3]. As a result of increasing public concern with the degree of homeless families in the Greater London Area, the Department of Health and Social Security set up a research project in 1969 to review the position. The subsequent report by John Greve et al[4] revealed much new information about the scale of the

problem and about the characteristics of the homeless. The major underlying cause of homelessness was quite clearly found to be shortage of cheap rented accommodation, a shortage which was most liable to render homeless the underprivileged - those on low incomes, coloured immigrants and the mentally and physically sick. Homeless families tended to come from extremely poor,overcrowded housing with few amenities, and many of them had been evicted by private landlords on previous occasions. The research also revealed that most authorities, particularly those in Inner London, scarcely had the resources to "contain" the situation. The report also noted that official statistics of homelessness give an extremely unreliable measure of the problem since they reflect not only different selection policies but also different levels of provision of temporary accommodation. Thus there could never be more homeless people in temporary accommodation than there is room for them there. To take this to its logical conclusion, "homelessness" (according to official definition) could be "abolished" by not providing temporary accommodation.

This study by Greve and his colleagues was carried out at the same time as a comparable study in South Wales and the West of England under the direction of Bryan Glastonbury[5]. This report differed from that of Greve in one fundamental way: in South Wales and the West of England,problems associated with personal inadequacy and social incompetence, poor payers and unsatisfactory tenants, play a larger part in preventing people from being allocated housing that is available.

These studies, though useful in placing homelessness in perspective, are of little use to the investigation of homeless black youths in Birmingham because of their terms of reference

and locations.

Then in the late 1960's and early 1970's grass-roots workers began to comment on the growing numbers of homeless black youngsters. Their writings were often dismissed as "journalistic subjectivity" by representatives of statutory bodies. Commenting on his early observations, Vince Hines, of the Dashiki Project, London, wrote: "My findings showed that black 16 - 21 year olds were at odds with their parents, who seemed to accept the contemporary status quo of British society, which the youths don't generally accept, and my figure of youngsters without a fixed abode in London alone was an estimated 700. Today that estimate has risen to a thousand and is still rising. Notting Hill, Paddington, Brixton, Islington and the West End areas of London are the high pressure points. The pressures are equally heavy in Birmingham, Manchester, Wolverhampton, Liverpool and Bristol.

"Consequently the youngsters end up sitting aimlessly during the days at amusement centres and bookies' shops; by night in all-night cafe's and restaurants, standing outside night clubs in Soho for likely 'favourable' events. At about 5.30 a.m. when the cafe's and clubs close, these youngsters disperse in the following ways:-

a) Some are lucky to find space to sleep on friends' floors.

b) Some get arrested and sent to remand centres.

c) Some head for the bus, railway and tube stations, empty houses, and the parks (in summer) snatching as much sleep as possible on the moving transport or park bench, poised to carry on the cycle.

d) Some just move about, perhaps finding drugs to keep them awake.

"Inevitably the majority of these youngsters get into trouble with the police, which often results in their being sent to penal institutions. On their return to society, still faced with their former problems - education, jobs, and housing - they continue their painful inheritance"[6].

In Birmingham, the Black Community workers, a group of three made up of social and detached youth workers were finding increasing numbers of black youngsters sleeping rough. They wrote: "In the day time they hang around the arcade and amusement centres of Soho Road or drift into town, in groups to their favourite haunt, the Bull Ring Centre, where they hang around aimlessly until evening when they begin to drift into the all-night cafe's both sides of the city: Moseley, Sparkbrook and Handsworth. Some youngsters, when they become "fed-up" with hanging around the all-night cafe's drift back into the Bull Ring Centre at night to sleep. In the summer months others head for the local park.

"In Handsworth, in the early hours of the morning, groups of six or more youngsters can be seen entering the backs of houses, What usually happens is that one youngster, (if he is lucky), gets himself a room, or a youngster, living at home with his parents, who has a room for himself, whichever the case might be, lets his friends in, while his parents or the landlord are asleep, to share his meagre facilities. They can sometimes get away with it for weeks, coming in last thing at night and leaving early next morning, but eventually they are discovered resulting in their being thrown out. This is still adding to the ever-growing homeless situation.

"Inevitably many of these youngsters are forced to drift into petty crimes as a means of survival. As a result they get into trouble and are sent to remand homes for "training", but on returning to the community, nothing has changed: the degree of homelessness is probably greater, the housing problems no different and their prospects of employment greatly reduced. In effect the vicious circle is worsened"[7].

These very similar findings quoted above, were made known some years before the statutory bodies took notice. Perhaps it was in their interest to play down such failures of the Welfare State. Eventually the Community Relations Commission (partly due to the efforts of a few out-spoken members of staff) took up the issue in its annual report for 1971/72 thus: "A matter which is both serious and disturbing is the fact of homelessness among young people.....from all the larger cities of this country and particularly from London we have had reports that the number of young people from 14 upwards who have either left their families or been ejected by them from their homes has increased and is increasing"[8]. No mention of the race of these youngsters was made. The same concern was expressed by the Parliamentary Select Committee in its report on Police/Immigrant Relations thus: "The number of homeless West Indian youths in this country is relatively small.....Our evidence suggested that the problem is likely to increase, and that it is at the moment intractable.....The first step is to measure the problem more accurately, particularly in London.....There is a case for a special enquiry both in London and the Provinces by a social unit"[9].

The subsequent report - Unemployment and Homelessness - by the C.R.C. found that there was a higher incidence of homelessness among black kids than among white working class kids. During the investigation, some said the figures for blacks ran into hundreds, others said thousands (in Birmingham alone). In Handsworth itself the number was estimated to be between 200 and 300.

This report is useful in showing the very close links between inadequate education, unemployment and homelessness. From a priori reasoning it assumed that the homeless were also likely to be unemployed. However, this report is too preoccupied with "measuring the problem" in terms of numbers and so could be criticised for implying that its detailed statistical tables explains the problem or even measure it adequately.

An example of "missing the point" is the study and report by David Brandon in which he concluded: "In the traditional sense there seems to be little evidence of large numbers of homeless coloured immigrants....."[10] Mr. Brandon visited such places as Centrepoint, a reception centre in Soho, London, and found little evidence of single black people there. The reason was simply that these institutions "do not offer an acceptable means of support to young immigrants" as James Watson said in his dissenting note to Not Proven. Such places are the resorts of trusting migrant British homeless and unemployed. None of the homeless young blacks I got to know would resort to such established institutions willingly.

Many of the C.R.C. reports recommendations are the expected platitudes and would certainly do a lot of good if they were ever implemented. They are reminiscent of the National Assistance Act 1948 which requires every local authority to provide "temporary

accommodation for persons who are in urgent need thereof, being need arising in circumstances that could not reasonably have been foreseen"[11]. If that duty was carried out, there would be no need for this dissertation.

However, some of the C.R.C's recommendations show a gross misunderstanding of the problem. For example recommendation 22 states: "The first priority for youth workers should be given to trying to reconcile the young people and their families: Reconciliation is indeed to be attempted but changes in the circumstances causing or leading up to the rift must first take place, otherwise efforts at reconciliation would be a waste of time and energy, or only temporarily successful.

In the Report's conclusion it claims: "finally we would stress that any programme designed to deal with the situation described in this Report, depends for its success on the overt support of H.M. Government. Only the Government can provide the leadership that is required and the resources that are needed to make the recommendations we propose effective"[12]. Government certainly have the resources that are needed. Government support is also required to help this deprived section of the community which legally has the same civil rights as any other section of society. But experience has shown that Government, through the normal bureaucratic channels cannot adequately deal with alienated members of society, particularly alienated black youngsters. Government agencies and officers (e.g. teachers, youth employment officers, policemen etc) are often seen by these youngsters as the "cause" of their problems. Community initiative, that is, action by people who are closest to these youngsters would seem to me to be necessary to find out the needs of these individuals and to experiment with some of the ways of satisfying these needs.

Two other reports (unpublished) specifically dealing with homeless single people in Birmingham were made by people at Birmingham University.

The first one by Greta Sumner entitled "Hostels for Single Men in Birmingham" (August 1973) found 24 hostels in the area providing accommodation for 1,550 single people, mainly male. Many of these places were reserved for people coming out of mental or penal institutions. About half of them, the larger ones, did not take people under 18 years and others were reluctant to take in homeless black youngsters.

The Report also showed the dwindling provision of accommodation in the privately-rented sector in Birmingham. Attention was drawn to the fact that between 1961 and 1971 the numbers of households in this sector fell from 88,936 to 64,950 (census figures). Many people who had no real alternative to privately rented accommodation had to sleep rough. As the Report said: "In 1970, the TOC H volunteers tried to estimate the scale of the problem and counted about 60 people sleeping rough within a two-mile radius of New-Street Station"[13]. As this area covers the most public parts of the city, this figure underestimates the real numbers of people sleeping rough.

The other report was by Valerie Karn of the Centre of Urban and Regional Studies and was entitled "No Place that's Home: A Report on Accommodation for Homeless Single People in Birmingham". It pointed out that in 1971, 1,014,670 people lived in Birmingham and that 12 % of these (118,180) were unmarried people between the ages of 15 and 24. The average weekly earnings of boys under 21 in manual work was £14.21 after tax (for girls in the same category £10.07). Reinforcing the findings of other bodies it was found that the unemployment rate for young West Indians was 16.5%, double the Birmingham average.

The Report also recognized the difficulty in finding out how many people were actually homeless in the city. However, from a priori reasoning it was easy to predict that among the homeless would be a disproportionate number of the unskilled, the unemployed, the black and the emotionally unstable, or people with combinations of all these characteristics.

The researcher showed much understanding of the problem in her recommendations that "two or more West Indian hostels be opened as soon as possible, probably in the Handsworth area. They should either be mixed or one should be for girls. Girls with children should be accepted until more suitable housing can be found for them"[14].

She continued: "It became quite evident that there is a desperate need for more West Indians to become involved in the running of hostels, "Community Homes", or whatever name the accommodation is given.

"There are two reasons why this is important. First, though many West Indians are homeless, they are not coming into White-run hostels in any numbers apart from the "Boot" night shelter. Even if they do come to white-run hostels, the managers feel ill-at-ease with them and there is often hostility from other residents. On the other hand, if a black person runs a hostel, whether or not it is his intention to run it for young black people, it turns out that the majority of the young people who come there of their own accord or are referred there, are black. Thus, in order to help more young black people it is essential that there be more black people involved in the running of hostels".[15]

The second and more important reason for having black hostels was given as follows: "So many of the problems being experienced by young West Indians stem from a history of racial oppression, now as much psychological as physical, that one of their greatest needs is to live in an atmosphere in which their self-esteem, and in particular their pride in being black is fostered and rebuilt"[16].

These reasons are identical to (some of) those given by the founder members of the Harambee Project for setting up Harambee House for homeless youngsters.

Notes.

1. John Greve, London's Homeless, 1964.

2. op. cit., p.12.

3. The "Shelter" campaign included publications such as Notice to Quit, 1968, A Home of Your Own, 1969, Face the Facts, 1969, Happy Christmas, 1970, plus wide coverage of their activities in the mass media.

4. John Greve et al, Homelessness in London, 1971.

5. Bryan Glastonbury, Homeless Near a Thousand Homes, 1971.

6. Vince Hines, "Of No Fixed Abode", Race Today, January 1973, p.9.

7. Black Community Workers unpublished report.

8. C.R.C. Annual Report 1971/72 p.3.

9. Select Committee Report on "Police/Immigrant" Relations. p.73.

10. D.Brandon, Not Proven, 1973.

11. National Assistance Act 1948 Part III.

12. C.R.C. Report, Unemployment and Homelessness, 1974, p.57.

13. Unpublished report by Greta Sumner "Hostels for Homeless Single Men in Birmingham", 1973. p.3.

14. Unpublished report by Valerie Karn "No Place That's Home: Accommodation for Homeless Young Single Men in Birmingham" 1973, p.69.

15. op.cit., p.40 B.

16. op.cit., p.40 C.

CHAPTER III

HANDSWORTH AND THE "HARAMBEE" RESPONSE

Unlike those who do not know Handsworth, my experiences in that area confirm those of Augustine John, a social worker, who knows the people and the area intimately. This section therefore draws heavily on his books Because They Are Black[1], and Race In The Inner City[2], both written in conjunction with others. The area in question is that Handsworth which lies to the South and East of Handsworth Park, parts of Lozells adjacent to Handsworth on the East and stretching down towards Winson Green Prison in the neighbouring constituency of All Saints to the South. Local history has it that this was once a prosperous and residential area, and indeed pockets of relative prosperity still exist in it. But it is reputed to have "deteriorated" in the last few decades. From being a staging post for Irishmen on their way to London or into better housing on Birmingham's council and private estates it has become an area of settlement for various ethnic groups from the Commonwealth and elsewhere. It is now an area characterized by poor housing, a severe lack of social amenities, lack of good employment opportunities and a growing number of disillusioned, discontented youngsters who may feel that the area has little to offer them. As Gus John pointed out, there is much to be desired in this area in terms of Education and Youth facilities housing, work, police/ immigrant relationships, and general support for any real community initiatives. The social deprivation of the area has been held responsible for many of the problems of the area including homelessness.

But for many people "Handsworth" means a place where a black person can feel at home. West Indian foodstuff is sold in many of the shops and it is only in areas like Handsworth that services like West Indian hair cutting are to be found. It is also an area of entertainment for many West Indians. Specialized record shops, night clubs and numerous public houses with WestIndian landlords and a West Indian atmosphere are frequented by people living within and without the area. For example, on Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights at a certain pub in the area a West Indian band makes music. People dance alone or together between the tables expressing themselves in an uninhibited and emotional way. Some of these people come from as far away as Wolverhampton, Coventry and Leicester.

Handsworth is also known for its West Indian Pentecostal Churches. Situated there is the Headquarters of the New Testament Church of God where ministers are trained for Churches throughout Britain. I have attended many of the services at these churches, especially the Church in Gibson Road. What is striking is the similarity between these Services and those I remember in the West Indies. There is some controversy over the function of these services, but on many occasions I have looked out through the windows of these churches in Handsworth and expected to see Sugar Cane fields.

In general, Handsworth is an area where few West Indians can walk without recognising and greeting someone they know. Many flock there to satisfy certain needs and more particularly when there is a crisis in their lives, like being homeless.

It is in such an area that the Black Community Workers worked and came together in 1972 after a period of individual enterprise. In comparing notes they found that one of the most pressing

problems was that of homelessness among black youngsters. In the course of their work they were constantly being approached for accommodation by youngsters, by social workers, probation officers and parents who found it difficult to cope with their black adolescent wards or children. In the courts they saw many young blacks being sent to penal institutions because they had no real home. They constantly met impoverished youngsters who could get no state assistance because they had no real address. (Many overcame the latter problem by using, or "buying" friends' and acquaintances' addresses). In many cases they took some of these youngsters into their own homes for varying periods of time. In other cases some youngsters broke into their offices every night, sleeping there until they were caught.

Eventually they thought that something positive had to be done - collective community effort was necessary. The first problem was sorting out differences between themselves. The group of three varied from the extra-radical to the ultra-conservative. The conservative member was afraid of making a leap into the unknown and has had to be "carried" ever since. However, this member has brought certain bureaucratic "skills" to the group which are invariably appreciated.

Then there was the problem of recruitment. People like school teachers, bus-drivers, nurses, mechanics and secretaries, with varying degrees of commitment, education, articulation, time for meetings etc were invited to come along to the meetings. One gentleman thought the meetings were the activities of a debating society and nothing else. Others thought they were good opportunities for "ego trips" and lost sight of the point that they were really for collective action. The meetings were there-

fore battles over meanings, definitions and plans for action. At all t imes they triggered off silent battles in the minds of many participants. However, by October 1972 some kind of mutual adjustment had taken place and some decisions were recorded as follows:

"All of us are in some way involved in various aspects of community work and are in close contact with many who are victims of the broad effects of homelessness. We know young people who are temporarily or permanently alienated from parental or home situations. Each day we see those who are victims of these problems: rejected from their families, unable to obtain bail due to having no permanent or stable address, footloose and drifting from town to town, unemployed, unable to find sympathetic help from existing agencies and generally in need of a new and different type of support.

"We appreciate that several statutory and voluntary agencies are concerned about the acute needs of such people. However, we feel that the time has come to take a positive initiative in order to begin to relieve the situation and provide real alternatives to the syndrome which often starts with the separation from home and leads to crime, police, courts, frustration and alienation. e discussed the issue with several councillors, Local Authority department officials and sta f of housing associations and it became clear that our work should begin with the formation of a housing association with the specific purpose of providing hostel-type accommodation. In this way we would be able to attract 100% mortgages from the city in order to purchase suitable properties and to obtain grants from the Home Office and city departments. We hope that when the first hostel is opened, the city will allow us the use of short-term housing which could be made tenable, by

self-help and some skilled tradesmen" [3].

After many more meetings, it was possible to write in early 1973: "We have therefore formed "The Harambee Housing Association" ("Harambee" is a Swahili word meaning "let us work together"). On the 2nd January the founder members met to elect officers and apply for registration with the Federation of Housing Associations. We understand that it will take up to 3 months to formalize the registration but we are advised by our Solicitors (D.Morris & Co.) that this delay should not prevent us from entering into negotiations for property and grants.

We are confident that the founder members possess the skills necessary to develop a valuable hostel project. We believe that our links with the community will be a great help to homeless young people and look forward to the full support of the city, charitable trusts and foundations and others in commencing this initial task"[4].

The founder members envisaged tackling the problem of homelessness on several fronts. These were outlined as follows:-

"Stage 1: Providing Short-Stay Accommodation.

"This type of accommodation would be for people who leave home or are thrown out of their homes or lodgings and have no place to sleep. They would be able to stay for short periods until they could find suitable alternative accommodation. It is envisaged that in this type of "community house" rooms would be available at all times for people in urgent need of accommodation. Duration of stay would normally be limited to a 4-week period, but we hope in due course to supplement the short-stay community house with an intermediate community house providing long-term accommodation for those with continuing need for support.

"Stage 2: Intermediate Community House.

This type of accommodation would be made available to people who had stayed in the short-term accommodation and found it impossible to find alternative accommodation. The time-limit in this sort of house would be much longer than in the short stay accommodation, probably for an indefinite period. In both the short-stay and intermediate community houses we would encourage residents to participate in the day-to-day running of their homes. We would help the residents to find permanent homes and employment.

"Stage 3: Permanent Homes.

We intend to convert properties into self-contained flats/ maisonettes, which would be used as permanent accommodation. This third stage would also be directed towards eradicating the acute shortage of accommodation that exists in the community. Such accommodation would not be reserved exclusively for young people but would provide for different needs and age groups"[5].

Up to this point the reaching of decisions was facilitated by the strong personality of one or two committed members who so happened to be closest to the problem, that is, who spent much time with homeless youngsters. They were able to impress on the meeting a sense of urgency and in effect to recognize them as prime movers. Then more and more people became personally involved with the project while a few dropped out. Later, battles with other bodies (to be discussed in Chapter 5) were to weld the group closer together, evoking a sense of solidarity in the face of conflict.

Soon after these plans were made, a large Victorian 3-storey house at No.2 Hall Road, Handsworth was acquired from the King Edward VI Foundation through the City Housing Department, and leased to the Group for an initial period of one year. It was relatively easy to get this building because a) it was previously used as a hostel for girls and needed no real alteration or "change of use"; b) it was leased for only a year; c) it was agreed to use it as a short-stay hostel for boys only; d) funds from a trust were made available. "Harambee House", the name given to this old building, thus came into existence.

However, before the house was opened further investigations into the problem of homelessness among black youngsters were made. After visits to the Dashiki Project in Notting Hill, the Harambee Project in North London, and the George Jackson House in Manchester, the draft plan was altered to incorporate the following decisions:

" i) To make the Project available to both males and females between the ages of 16 and 21 years. It is felt that by having both sexes, one is getting much closer to making the community in the house a real-life situation.

" ii) To extend the period of stay from a 4-week to a 12 week maximum, thereby giving the individual a much more reasonable chance of adjusting, henceforth being more able to cope with his/her particular situation." 6

It was also decided to allocate the premises to make provision for a small 'bed-sit' for the Director/Warden, a small bedroom for his deputy (who might not live on the premises but sleep there sometimes), a central kitchen/dining room area, a common room, a lounge, a small office, 3 bathrooms, 4 W.C's. The remainder of the house, (7 bedrooms of various sizes) was to be used as bedrooms, most of which would be shared. In addition there was to be a washroom for laundry and a cellar which could serve as a games room or store-room. It was hoped to house 15 youngsters.

There was to be a House Committee to meet weekly with the residents and to be responsible to the Harambee Housing Association Management Committee which would meet monthly.

The aims of the venture were to:-

" a) House and feed homeless youngsters.
b) Create an atmosphere which is non-authoritarian and which has as few restrictions as possible, yet at the same time provide some degree of security.
c) Make the youngsters more aware of themselves, their situation, and the role they can play in society.
d) Offer opportunities to black adults to regain the trust of the younger generation". 7

With help from Charitable bodies like the Barrow and Geraldine S. Cadbury Trust (especially), the British Council of Churches, the C.R.C., the City (nominally) and members of the community, Harambee House was made ready for use.

Within a week of its opening in May 1973, and without any advertisement, all 15 places in the house were taken by homeless youngsters.

Since then there have always been more male than female residents. On average the ratio has been 12:3. Because fewer females come forward for help it is easy to believe that they do not suffer as much as their male counterparts. The fact that they do not commit the crimes that males commit could make their problems go unnoticed. But homeless young females form the most vulnerable group in Handsworth society. Racism and Sexism together ensure that when they do come to Harambee House, there is a child involved and there is no safe alternative to Harambee House taking them in.

The growing number of unmarried black mothers can be explained away in terms of a West Indian culture pattern. But it must be remembered that this is the culture pattern of the crisis, of extreme pressure and insecurity, perfected during the period of

slavery and its aftermath. Without the support of the extended family in Britain, this weak group is left exposed. Many of the single mothers (with children) who have lived at the house have used the residents as members of the extended family leaving their children with them to go shopping, looking for work, etc.

In general, the youngsters who have lived at Harambee House can be divided into two groups:-

A. Those who have been driven from home by emotional deprivation and seek security in the house.

B. Those who are in the process of rejecting society and are therefore rebellious.

Members of the first group follow the rules and are very co-operative. Such youngsters recognize the need for rules (especially it they are made and reviewed by group decision and not imposed), and are very critical of those who break them. Stages two or three may be ideal for such individuals.

Members of the second group are much more difficult to handle. They often leave home because of rows with parents. They often see the Director and other adults at the house as being cast in the same mould as their parents and so react predictably. However, their rebellion can be seen as a process of creating a counter-culture or sub-culture that enhances their status and brings greater self-respect. This group has taught us that youngsters do not necessarily become homeless because they live in over-crowded or inadequate housing. Many of the houses they come from are impeccably clean and tidy. This is so perhaps because in some West Indian houses, certain rooms are definitely out of bounds and there are strict rules about the use of others.

Understandably, it is difficult to deal with both groups

in the same building with one set of rules. In the initial stages, tension builds up between them.

The rapid turn-over of residents during the first 10 months certainly increased the tension. Up to late March 1974 seventy people had lived at the house for periods varying from one night to 10 months. These could be broadly classified as follows:

Older males	-	2
Females	-	10
Male Adolescents	-	58
Total		70

The two older males (aged 27 and 28) used the house as a staging post. One stayed over-night and the other, one week.

The 10 females who stayed at the house were invariably older than the majority of males. Their average age was 20 years. Five came with at least one child and two were pregnant when they arrived. In most cases they were asked to leave their previous residences and had little alternative to Harambee House. Two had a history of living in public institutions and two others came to Harambee House after their flat was gutted by fire.

The average age of the male adolescents was 17. Most were born in the West Indies and invariably came over to Britain after many years of separation to join their parents in very changed circumstances.

They came to Harambee House by mainly 3 means:-

I <u>They heard about it on the "grape-vine" and applied in person.</u>

The grape-vine in Handsworth is rather efficient. When a crisis looms with parents, the youngsters put out feelers to locate places where they could live when they finally leave home or are thrown out. A little over a third of the residents have come to Harambee this way.

II <u>They were referred by Social Workers or Probation Officers.</u>

The workers at Harambee House have built up close working relationships with social workers and probation officers in the area. In this way they learned that the social services find great difficulty in "placing" West Indian youngsters. Probation Officers also find great difficulty in getting sup ort groups for their wards. Quite often west Indian parents wash their hands clean of their children when they get into "trouble". They reject them for having brought disgrace to the family. The result is that many young west Indians find themselves staying longer than necessary at assessment centres or remand homes live Forhill House, Kings Norton, Birmingham. Discussion with Mr. Reid, the warden, and his assistant Mr. Philips, brought home to me the magnitude of the problem. Since 1972, at any one time, between 20% and 50% of the residents there would be West Indians, average age 17 years. After looking at their case records, many wardens of approved schools and hostels refuse to take these youngsters. There is evidence to support this: In the National Survey of Single Homeless People carried out by the then National Assistance Board in 1966,[8], it was found that a quarter of all establishments providing accommodation for single people said they would not take in coloured people. The Race Relations Acts have now made it unlikely that hostel managers would be as frank as they were in 1966. However, there is little evidence that attitudes have improved (to be shown in Chapter 4). Statutory workers and agencies see Harambee House as the most likely place to take their black wards in the Birmingham area.

III They were passed on by Staff at the "Boot" Night Shelter in the City.

This third source, the "Boot" night shelter, also has close links with Harambee House. Since the opening of the "Boot" in October 1972, nearly 800 homeless young people have stayed there using its mean facilities in the evenings only. During the last year or so, young West Indians have comprised 20 - 25% of the people staying anytime up to a maximum of one month. In their latest annual report, the warden wrote :- "The young West Indians - who a year ago were hardly present in the night shelter, have become a regular part of it, and in many ways have provided us with the most serious challenge of communication, understanding and help that we have had to date.

"Their exuberant patterns of behaviour have so often spilled over into misunderstanding and violence. The more rigid controls which are not necessary for most of the white sleepers, often have to be imposed more quickly in the case of these young West Indians, and the combination of these two factors has sometimes led to accusations of prejudice, frustration and misunderstanding on both sides.

"Relationships between this group and the white users of the night shelter seem to become very critical indeed, and we have had the mind-blowing experience of one side of the shelter being occupied by white, and the other side being occupied by black, with on the one occasion, two half-caste kids sleeping in the middle at either end".[9]

Needless to say, the warden is happy to pass on black youngsters to Harambee House, and has done so regularly.

Each week there are at least two new applications for places at the house. The waiting list gets longer and longer.

Those who are lucky to get in, find a relatively relaxed atmosphere at the house. The Director/Warden, his Deputy, members of the Management Committee, (who have a duty to spend time regularly at the house) and voluntary workers, take time to talk with the youngsters and to advise them. Meetings are held regularly to pass on information, to air grievances and often to give warnings.

The facilities at the house include a library, table-tennis, small games and a television room. Night classes teaching Mathematics, British Constitution, Black Studies and English - up to 'O' level standard - are held in the library four evenings a week and are followed by residents and people from the community outside. A spontaneous "Kung-Fu" club flourishes among the residents. Though most of their spare-time is spent within the house, the youngsters go out together to dancing clubs, the cinema, roller skating, ice-skating and sports clubs. During the week, they must be in by 12 midnight. Over the week-end they can stay out until later if the warden is told or asked beforehand.

For bed,breakfast,a main meal at 6 p.m., and supper/tea at 9 p.m. those unemployed and on social security pay £7.55 per week. Those who are working pay considerably less (about £5). This policy was introduced as an incentive to work.

The first thing the residents have to learn at the house is to eat together, and generally share things. Even the chores in the house are shared. When they first arrive at Harambee House, their greediness is suprising. When breakfast is put out early for those who go to work, some take morethan their rightful share.

However, they change after living there for some time.

The vast majority of ex-Harambee House residents have found alternative accommodation locally. Many of them have kept in close touch, coming back frequently to use the facilities there, especially the library (and the fire in the library) with books specializing on the cultures and history of black people. All this is making the house a true community house.

It is now becoming more and more difficult for youngsters to find accommodation locally and the turn-over at the house is much slower. Since March 1974 only 7 places have been made available for new people. This has certain implications for the function of the house. However, a house at 23 Nail Road has just been acquired for the second stage and certain chosen residents at Harambee House are preparing to move in. This will bring about interesting changes at Harambee House. Will the departure of stabilizing residents and the arrival of new people disrupt the community in the house ? Or will the "tradition" of the house prevail ? If so how long will it take new people to adjust ? And will they ever get a chance to put their stamp on the life of the house ?

Notes.

1. Derek Humphrey and Augustine John, Because They Are Black, 1971. This book gives a careful description of what it feels like to be black in Handsworth and elsewhere in Britain. It also deals with one way out of this impasse.

2. Augustine John, Race In The Inner City, 1972, is a supplement to 1 above.

3.4.5.6.7. - Taken from the minutes of several meetings of the Harambee Housing Association Management Committee.

8. National Assistance Board, Homeless Single Persons, H.M.S.O. 1966, p.2.

9. Unpublished Annual Report of The St. Basil's Centre (Boot) 1974, Pp 2 and 3.

CHAPTER IV

FACTORS, CAUSES and EFFECTS :

The many factors involved in making a person homeless are so interwoven that it is difficult to argue causally. All the following taken together, account for much of the homelessness so far described.

i) Housing

It is obvious that if more than a million people come into a country where there are already more households than required living accommodation, due to natural growth and bad planning, that the demand will increase and some will suffer over-crowding or homelessness. John Rex and Robert Moore[1] showed how immigrants, because of their lack of economic and political power, gravitated towards the worst areas of cities where jobs were most available. In these "twilight areas", immigrants were forced to solve their own housing problems. High mortgage repayments and loyalty to fellow country-men made it necessary for them to sub-let their premises and so change the tone of the neighbourhood (reputedly). In doing so, they upset the natives living nearby, who felt threatened, and the newcomers thus became the scapegoats of society.

It is true that at a later stage, some immigrant entrepreneurs chose to sublet their premises and rent out others for pure profit after they had solved their own housing problems.[2] But this is beside the point. The point is that black immigrants live in worse housing conditions than others. Many with teenage children live in furnished rented accommodation in multi-occupied houses.

E.J.B.Rose et al [3] using data from the 1966 census results,

pointed out that in 1966 in the West Midlands, the average number of people per room in coloured immigrant households was 1.10 compared with 0.58 for people born in England. Forty-four percent of coloured immigrant households were sharing their dwelling with at least one other household. This compared with 6.6% of English born people and 26% of the Irish. As a result of this, 26% shared baths while 31% had none and 39% shared W.C's. A similarly high percentage shared kitchens. These are the conditions in which many of today's homeless youngsters grew up.

The 1971 General Household Survey[4] shows that there has been an improvement since 1966, but the situation for black people is still very much worse than it is for white people. In 1971 nationally 24% of coloured households were renting furnished accommodation compared with only 2% of white people, born in the U.K. and 8% of white immigrants. The lack of privacy and breathing space alone can account for children fleeing home as soon as they leave school, if not before. Cramped conditions can also build up pressure for parents causing them to be irritable.

But poor physical housing conditions cannot account wholly for homelessness. In fact it was found that there is room at home for at least 8 of the present 16 residents at Harambee House. In some cases their families live in very well-kept and comparatively spacious houses. It was often the ultra-respectability of their house-proud, owner-occupier parents which drove them from home. One boy had to take his shoes off as soon as he entered the house, and eat things like biscuits with a newspaer spread underneath for the crumbs.

Such youngsters leaving home find that there are fewer and fewer places for occupation at short notice. As pointed out before, the privately rented sector in Birmingham has decreased from 88,936 households in 1961 to 64,590 in 1971. Figures from

the Government Statistical Service show that whereas in 1951 44% of dwellings were rented from private owners the number was 14% in 1971, nationally.

ii) Poor Wages

School leavers are usually the worst paid members of society. The Department of Employment Gazette, February 1973[5] showed this clearly as in Table 2 below.

TABLE 2

Average Weekly Earnings in October, 1972.

	Boys Under 21		Girls Under 18		Men 21/over
Manual Workers	Before Tax	After Tax	Before Tax	After Tax	
All Manufacturing Industries	£ 17.73	£14.21	£11.83	£10.07	£36.20
Average hours worked	40.7		38.4		
Transport & Communications	£ 19.21	£15.23	£11.72	£9.99	£37.97
Average hours worked	42.6		38.8		

As the average age of homeless youngsters I have met is 17 years, this group earns less than the average for boys under 21 shown above. However, the Department of Employment "Family Expenditure Survey, Report for 1971"[6] showed that for conurbations outside London the total expenditure on necessities for one person households was £12.90. Many youngsters cannot afford this even if they could find the jobs and accommodation.

iii) Political Powerlessness

One important contributing factor is the political powerlessness of young single persons. Even though they now have the vote at 18 instead of 21 they are unlike other groups like students because they have no collective body to fight for improvements in their housing conditions. There is not even any housing waiting list for which they could qualify, thus drawing attention to their housing needs. They have no way of registering their collective dissatisfaction. When people begin to worry about this problem, particularly among young West Indians, it is often the result of the publicity given to cases of mugging rather than a concern about the plight of the homeless youngsters themselves.

As one youngster at Harambee House put it, if only all the boys who wore the distinctive woollen hats favoured by young West Indians belonged to an organisation then they would have made some progress in the direction of solving their problems.

iv) Youthful Rebellion

As Stuart Hall[7] reminded us, adolescense is a period of great metamorphosis. It is a period of "allowed rebellion, of permissiveness and experiment". Many get the urge to leave home. If they are middle class, as the majority of students are, they can look forward to going away from home for 3 years to study and to live in pleasant Halls of Residence (not all realize this dream). NO similar facilities exist for working class school leavers, the majority of youngsters. The most daring leave home to compete unfavourably for scarce housing. Many end up being homeless.

The above 3 factors apply to the subjects of this paper as youngsters. The fact that they are black introduces other exacerbating ones.

v) Separation

As pointed out above, the common pattern of immigration from the West Indies was for both mother and father or the single parent to travel to England leaving children behind, with members of the extended family, invariably the maternal grandmother. Then at or just before the age of 12, the children are sent for because a) they are giving grandmother a bit of trouble, or b) parents are trying to avoid paying the full fare for the child after the age of 12 or c) Both. The stresses and strains to which the newcomer is subjected are well described by Augustine John [8] like this: "Usually the most distressing situation is one in which parents decide to have a child in the West Indies join them here after what, to the child, is half a life-time. A child of 8 whose parents left the islands when he was 4 is joining a new household, in which every one including his parents, are virtual strangers. New members may have been added to the family. The child had now to learn to establish new relationships with his parents and with his new brothers and sisters. His parents will expect him to relate to them with the same amount of affection as the other children, without taking cognisance of the fact that the child has just been broken of strong emotional ties with some relative in the West Indies, who has been closer to the child (in his terms) than they, given the length of separation between them."

Of the 16 residents at Harambee House, 8 came between the ages of 10 and 12, 2 came at 13 or over, one at 3, one at 8, while 4 were born in England. All those born in the West Indies came after many years of separation. One boy lived with his grandmother from birth and did not know his mother until he came to England. Such long periods of separation and then living

together in cramped quarters aggravate tensions and anxieties, especially those associated with the Oedipus Complex. Fleeing home is one way of reducing them.

But what about the growing number of children of West Indian parents born here ? They also suffer long periods of separation from their parents. The 1966 census figures show that on average 66% of West Indian females are economically active compared with 16% of Indian females and 48% of the total female population. Many of these West Indian mothers are forced to leave their children with child minders. Child minding conditions are vividly described by Gus John[9] as follows:-

"Because his mother must join his father in earning enough money to live, the child has to be looked after during the day. He is herded with 6 to 12 others in a paraffin-heated room and from Monday to Friday knows no mother love, enjoys no personal attention, never learns from communication and play. At night his mother collects him and puts him to bed early so that she may relax. Her weekends are spent cleaning, shopping and relaxing'

Also, many parents have to work awkward shift hours, many mothers doing night duty in hospitals or cleaning offices in the evening - jobs which take them away from their children when they are most needed. This separation can prevent the establishment of close emotional bonds between parent and child. When a crisis emerges the non-existent or fragile bonds snap and the youngster has to leave home. In one case, a youngster I know came home to find his suitcase packed and placed at the door after having a row with his mother. Most youngsters whom I have met have both parents working.

vi) Broken Families

Invariably there is a step-mother or step-father involved. The "Cinderella Complex" and its ramifications are well known. Half the present residents at Harambee House came out of such a situation. In many cases, much effort is put into trying to establish some kind of relationship between the child and his natural parent as the relationship with the step-parent deteriorates. When a crisis develops the real parent is given an ultimatum - "Either that child goes, or I go". There is usually little choice.

In one particular case I came across a boy whom I had taught at school for some years. I remembered his changing from a co-operative and hard-working pupil to an evasive and difficult adolescent, and then finally "disappearing" from school. I later discovered that during that period his father and mother separated the mother having to go to All Saints Mental Hospital for psychiatric treatment and then deciding to return to Jamaica. The boy soon fell out with his father and left home to live with his aunt. But his aunt's house was "overcrowded" and he felt guilty about making things worse there and about leaving his younger brothers and sisters (he was the oldest). Eventually he stole something from a shop and got sent to a remand centre and from there came to Harambee House. His brothers and sisters now visit him there.

In other cases there is no father in the household. In the West Indies where other members of the extended family play this role, there is no real problem. But in England it is very difficult for a woman to bring up children on her own. One of the residents at the house was asked to leave home when he

humiliated his mother by taking away from her a stick with which she was about to beat him. When she called in the police to put him out (which they couldn't do) the boy realised that she really meant what she said.

vii) Parental Attitudes

As shown earlier, West Indian parents grew up in a society characterized by "oppression" in their public lives. Of course, there was much more freedom in their private lives, a freedom about which many West Indians are nostalgic. But there was much spill-over of oppression into their private lives. The society was also one with a dual morality, one for the rich and one for the poor. This is best expressed in the saying, "Do what I say but not what I do", directed to dependents. Meaning well and wanting their children to escape the traps they themselves fell into or saw others fall into, they have often been very authoritarian. Their Victorian sternness and high expectations of children were bound to clash with the reality of children's experiences, and alienate one from the other. Without the necessary support and facilities, they still expected their children to excel in, for example, education. When the children leave school with few or no qualifications, don't find a job or get into trouble or all three, they wash their hands clean of them.

In many cases religious zeal on the part of the parents makes them less understanding. One resident summed up the problem like this: "My parents always told me what I should not do but never what I should do. From quarrels I realized they wanted me to go to Church every Sunday, all day, and to make friends only with the children of the pastor and elders of the Church. By the time I left school, I had had enough. When we fell out over

coming in late I was told to leave home. I was expecting it to happen. I went straight round to my friend".

Before the situation reaches breaking point there are many scenes or mini-rebellions like refusing to help with the housework, of which many young West Indians have to do a great amount. The problem is made worse as they see their English school mates as having no housework to do. Parents in turn see this behaviour as ingratitude on the part of their children. They shout at them about how hard it is to make ends meet and how they cannot work "at work" and at home too. Then, when this has no effect, parents begin to think about getting rid of the child. Often they see this as one way of minimising the effect of this deviant behaviour on younger siblings. They then ask social workers to "put away the child in some home", seeing such homes as boarding schools. But the child sees this as the fruition of the rejection which he senses all along.

viii) Racial Prejudice and Discrimination

One does not have to read E.T.B.Rose et al[10] to know that there is racial discrimination in Britain. But it is interesting to see such hard figures as -

"Tolerant - 35%
Tolerant inclined - 38%
Prejudiced inclined - 17%
Prejudiced - 10% "

Many have criticised these figures on the grounds that "tolerant" and "tolerant inclined" are dubious terms. However, W.W.Daniels account[11], based on the P.E.P. Report, provides incontrovertible evidence of the extent of discrimination, gleaned from a) individual interviews with immigrants, b) personal interviews with people in a position to discriminate and c)situation tests.

Young West Indians leaving home are further restricted by this racial prejudice in competing for an already scarce good. Wardens and landlords are reluctant to take in people who have earned the notoriety of being troublemakers. The National Assistant Board [12] found in 1966 that 36% of all private commercial establishments discriminated against coloured people. The "generation-gap" and over-crowding ensure that even some coloured house-holders would be reluctant to take in homeless black youngsters. White students find it bad enough, so one can expect that a group which has a worst image than students would find it worse.

The residents at Harambee House, being aware of this, did not waste time or court insult by knocking on doors to ask for accommodation.

ix) Unemployment and Work Dissatisfaction

The C.R.C. Report on Unemployment and Homelessness [13] showed the very close links between the two. The 1971 Census figures showed that 8.1% of all boys aged 16 - 20 in Great Britain were unemployed compared with 16.2% of boys in that age-group born in the West Indies. This is certainly an underestimation of the amount of unemployment among black youngsters because a) These figures apply generally and not specifically to areas of high employment in the conurbations where most blacks live; b) many unemployed black youngsters were born in Britain; c) Many do not register at the Employment Exchanges or Careers offices.

Many of the jobs available are the types not wanted by the youngsters. One boy at the house, who got a job in the metal manufacturing industry, came home on the first day to show the damage done to his hands and to his clothes. He did not go back. Another boy changed jobs five times in one week because

he was dissatisfied with the poor conditions and the nature of the work he was given. Without the higher wages which adults get to compensate (partly) for the negative aspects of work, the youngsters get little incentive to work.

With their parents it is different. One of the reasons why they migrated to Britain was to find regular work. An unemployed son is anathema to them and understandably so. Many of these parents (as they readily narrate to you) have had to struggle to make ends meet and hoped that when their children grew up they would work and help with the upbringing of younger children in the traditional West Indian manner. A grown-up child not working is seen as "ungrateful", "spiteful", "lazy", if not plain "evil". Persistent nagging is undertaken and in the last resort the child is thrown out.

This gross misunderstanding between the two groups is evidence of the generation gap that exists.

At Harambee House, everyone is encouraged to work and incentives are given, like less board and lodging charges and fewer domestic chores. Yet there is never full employment among the house population. At the moment, 5 out of 16 residents are unemployed.

x) Crime

John Lambert[14] in commenting on police/immigrant relations has shown the many ambiguities and role conflicts in what local policemen do. Their training tends to stress the legalistic law enforcement aspects and underplays the extent to which they are involved in complex inter-personal relationships.

Gus John[15] has shown on many occasions how Handsworth is associated with "crime", "violent black men", delinquent immigrants and bad police/immigrant relations. More recently, the area came to be identified with "mugging" after the incident involving Paul Storey, a product of Handsworth. John writes[16]: "It has to be said that no one can set foot in Handsworth without sensing the tension between the police and black people. It takes no time at all to hear complaints of police harassment, police brutality, of men reluctant to go and complain at the police station for fear of being beaten up, of youngsters who are stopped and searched, apparently indiscriminately "because the police have launched a campaign to disarm black men of knives"." The select Committee Report on Police/Immigrant Relations did not find anything to really challenge this picture.

In a situation of distrust like this, it is inevitable that youngsters in the area would be charged for petty offences which would be dismissed elsewhere as adolescent pranks. A.Cicourel[17] shows how background expectations have a direct influence on criminal statistics.

Some of the youngsters get into trouble while at home and are rejected by their parents for having brought "disgrace" to the family. Many of the children see it as succumbing to temptation and blame the temptors.

The "Street corner gang" is a traditional West Indian institution for learning the facts of life and hearing the local news. When West Indians come to England and try to form such groups, they are bothered by the police who are often suspicious of groups hanging around outside. Peer group pressure leads to confrontation and questions being asked in the police station ("Babylon") or worse.

Other boys resort to petty pilfering when they become homeless and unemployed. In explaining why they "steal" food many reply - "A man has got to live". Five of the boys at Harambee House were involved in these kinds of offences before they came.

xi) Identity and Education

Any black person growing up in 20th century Britain must at some time ask himself "Who am I?" Parents who have been brought up elsewhere, in a "majority situation", with many enclaves for positive ethnic reinforcement, so vital for the development of self-respect, can offer little help to their children in a "minority situation", where there are endless reinforcement s of the stereotype of the black man. If identity includes all things a person may legitimately and reliably say about himself then it is mainly within the peer group that the black youngster can find his identity.

Ideally, schools should be able to help in reconciling this crisis in identity. In fact the opposite is most likely to happen. The same material, with its racist "hidden messages", so necessary in the period of British colonial expansion, is still being used in schools. The West Indian child is often taught that his history started with slavery which was an act of saving his ancestors from barbarity. The child learns to despise his roots in Africa. The distorted history of the West Indies causes him to denounce his ancestors as "coward, lazy and stupid". He will come to see the world through "White eyes". My experience of teaching black children in a secondary school in Handsworth brought home to me the danger of this education. One black boy was terrified to look at himself in the mirror for fear of seeing a black face. Many black children "insulted" other

black children by calling them "black". Another black boy rejected West Indian pupils, avoiding them at all times, but spent most of his energy in gaining acceptance to a white group, the members of which invariably dropped him as soon as they got out of the school grounds.

At the same school a Black Studies Course was introduced by the Social Education Department. At first some pupils reacted predictably to this phenomenon (to them) of showing the "true" history of black people involving the past glories of Africa and the heroic resistence of the Slaves in the New World. They said it was "made up". Then when the course got established and began to receive publicity the authorities acted ruthlessly. With the collusion (or prompting) of the headmaster and all other members of staff, the Social Education Department was thoroughly investigated. A special visit was made by the Chief Education Officer and his deputies to question members of the department about their work at an impromptu and formal staff-meeting. One of the decisions made was that members of the Social Education Department were not to communicate with bodies outside the school without the approval of the headmaster. Since [illegible] he was against the teaching of Black Studies in his school, this in effect gave him the go-ahead to dissolve the department. Hence members of the department were harassed by him throughout the second and third terms of 1973. The result was that, by the end of the academic year in 1973, of the four members of the department, one, a probationary teacher, had asked for a transfer and left many months before; another, the school councillor, was in hospital with a strain-induced illness; a third had decided to return to full-time studies at the University; and the Head of Department had successfully applied for a post in Leicestershire. The

Social Education Department ceased to exist.

Many youngsters continue to come out of school with a poor self-concept, like Huey P.Newton. This Black American wrote [18]: "During those long years in the Oakland public schools (U.S.A.), I did not have one teacher who taught me anything relevant to my own life or experience..... all they did was to try to rob me of the sense of my own uniqueness and worth, and in the process they nearly killed my urge to inquire".

Or they are like Chris Mullard [19] a Black Briton who got his real education "by slow involvement with people of my own colour, with more or less the same kinds of personal problems... It gave me a platform on which to build my own identity".

Pre-occupied with the problem of identity, over-anxious to be accepted by his peer group, and relying on conversation as the only vehicle of his reality, the young West Indian presents a problem to his teachers. Many, because of behavioural difficulties, get placed in schools for the Educationally Sub-Normal as was shown by Bernard Coard [20].

Those who remain in normal schools account for what Farrukh Dhondy calls the "Black Explosion in Schools"[21]. Poor teaching facilities and rebellious children ensure that the majority come out of school without the qualifications necessary for the jobs they or their parents want. There are many like one youngster at the house who wanted to be a mechanical engineer and left school with one C.S.E. in woodwork.

But parents see England as a land of opportunity especially in the field of education. Traditionally, West Indian scholars have had to travel to England to further their education. Children living in Britain and failing to take the opportunities

are seen by parents as "lazy" and "good for nothing". Misunderstanding leads to disagreement's and evicition or departure. At the house, the best qualified person has 5 C.S.E's and at the other end one is almost illiterate.

xii) Opportunities

Homelessness for many young blacks is simultaneously a form and consequence of rebellion. The fact that they have more reasons and opportunities in England for rebellion accounts for the growing numbers of the homeless among them. The reasons, including the inheritance of a culture in which rebellion was simmering and long overdue, are outlined above. The opportunities are due to the breakdown in traditional forms of social control and the changed circumstances of an urban environment in 20th century Britain. A spring that is held down for a long time can either be released slowly, or suddenly with devastating consequences. For many of these yongsters, the change from a "Gemeinschaft" in which few misdemeanors went unnoticed, to a "Gesselschaft" characterized by anonymity, was too rapid, in most cases after a few hours airflight. In Handsworth, a youngster can live half a mile or less from his parents without their knowing it. In fact, one female resident "ran away" to a neighbour's house and stayed there for 3 weeks before she was reported. Most people I have talked with said they went to live with friends living in the same district, often friends with whom they went to school. Their parents seldom knew of their whereabouts.

xiii) Mental Illness

Social workers in the neighbourhood are warning about the growing incidence of mental illness among black people. (They are also warning about the growing number of old and lonely West

Indians without families). A visit to All Saints Mental Hospital in nearby Winson Green, Birmingham bears this out. Social problems seem to be the cause.

Many youngsters I have talked with, describe their parents as "Barmey" or "Round the Bend". Is this a case of rejecting one's "rejectors" as a form of self-preservation ? In any case parents of at least 3 residents in the house have had treatment for mental disorders. One mother I visited said plainly that her son's getting into trouble and then not wanting to come back home after a period in a detention centre drove her "out of her head". She was also very religious and quoted extensively from the Biblical story of the Prodigal Son.

The youngsters themselves suffer in this respect. At least five of the 16 residents at the house have displayed symptoms and/or have had treatment for mental disorders, schizophrenia, depression. Some relationship between this stigma and homelessness has been found but needs further investigation.

xiv) <u>The Vicious Circle</u>

Homelessness occupies an important segment of the vicious circle observed among disadvantaged groups. It is relatively easy for young West Indians to slip into the circle through any of the segments of unemployment, homelessness, alienation etc. For example, homeless youngsters have very little chance of holding down a job, and it is also more difficult to obtain unemployment or social security benefits if one is unable to give a permanent address. With no money it is all but impossible to find accommodation or even to live normally. Many resort to petty pilfering which could lead to bigger crimes. Many have found a place at Harambee House to be a tangent out of this circle.

Notes.

1. John Rex and Robert Moore, Race, Community and Conflict, 1967, on the housing situation in Sparkbrook, Birmingham.

2. J.G.Davis and J. Taylor "Race, Community and No Conflict", New Society, 9th July 1970, pp. 67 - 69.

3. E.J.B.Rose et al, Colour and Citizenship, 1969 pp.120-138.

4. The 1971 General Household Survey, H.M.S.O. 1973, pp. 143 - 146.

5. Department of Employment Gazette, February 1973, vol. LXXXI, No. 2, Tables 2 and 3, p 149.

6. The Department of Employment's Family Expenditure Survey Report for 1971, H.M.S.O. 1972, p.64.

7. Stuart Hall, The Young Englanders, 1969. p.6.

8. Augustine John, Race In The Inner City, 1972. p.30.

9. Derek Humphrey and Augustine John, Because They Are Black, 1971, p. 11.

10. E.J.B.Rose et al, op. cit. pp 551-604.

11. W.W. Daniel, Racial Discrimination in England, 1968, based on the P.E.P. Report.

12. National Assistance Board, Homeless Single Persons, H.M.S.O. 1966, p.2.

13. C.R.C. Unemployment and Homelessness, 1974.

14. John Lambert, Crime, Police and Race Relations; a study of Birmingham, 1970.

15. Augustine John op. cit.

16. Augustine John, op. cit. p. 28

17. A.Cicourel, The Social Organization of Juvenile Justice, 1968.

18. H.P. Newton, Revolutionary Suicide, 1973. p. 21.

19. Chris Mullard, Black Britain, 1973, p.24

20. Bernard Coard, How the West Indian Child Is Made Educationally Sub-Normal In The British School System, 1971 examines the machinery by which black children find themselves classified as sub-normal.

21. Farrukh Dhondy "The Black Explosion in Schools", Race - Today, February 1974, pp. 44 - 47. It would be worth investigating how this feeling of rebellion is communicated from school to school.

CHAPTER V

LESSONS

Harambee House is certainly not a "total institution" like the hospital studied by Erving Goffman[1]. There is no planned "de-culturization" of the residents as they come in nor are they cut off from the outside. In fact, as a community house there is much coming and going of people, including the residents. Yet, distinct "sub-cultures" are capable of developing from interaction located within the house. However, these are not immune to pressures from external structures nor from ideas historically situated.

Board and lodging at the house are subsidized and so the house depends on grants from other bodies. Some of the funds received are given without strings but others are used as weapons. A case in point is the relationship between the Harambee Housing Assocaition and the Birmingham Social Services Committee. Initiall the relationship was good with Harambee House taking in children "in care" and receiving a grant of £500 from the City. Then from research before the house was opened, and from experience in meeting particular needs, it was decided to have both girls and boys living in the house and to extend the maximum period of residence from four weeks to twelve weeks. Certain Councillors took offence to this and demanded that the house be run as a single-sex institution and that the maximum period of residence be four weeks.

Things took a turn for the worse, When the Deputy Director of Social Services and a Councillor visited Harambee House early in 1974. They were shown around the public parts of the house, allowed to see the records, introduced to the residents but NOT

given permission to inspect the bedrooms of the residents. It appeared as though they were less concerned about the actual work being done at the house than with the politics surrounding the situation within which that work was being done, and so thought it extra-ordinary that they were not allowed to inspect the residents bedrooms. They argued that they had a right, to investigate thoroughly how tax payers' money was being spent (as though black people did not pay taxes) and implied that further grants to the house would be withheld, as they had previously threatened.

The Harambee workers gave the following arguments in justification of their refusal:-

a) The Social Services Department for many months prior to the visit in question had placed young people at the house. There was an agreement among the Social Workers with responsibili for those young people that the quality of caring and physical standards maintained in the house were as high as could be expect given the resources the Assoctiation had at its disposal.

b) Given the nature of the work and the situation of the young people whose home the house was, it was necessary to create and maintain an atmosphere in which the young people felt secure and which allowed for the building of confidence between young people and staff.

Essential to that was the attitude of young people towards themselves and others in the house towards them, that they were normal young people with certain disadvantages and social problem which the house was in business to help them solve. A situation where the house itself and the residents in it were treated as

curios was therefore not conducive to the above.

c) There was a general understanding between Social Workers and Harambee that they could visit any part of the house, and interview the young people for whom they were responsible either in bedrooms, in the library, in the lounge or in the office.

d) If the Social Workers, who after all were responsible for the young people and worked directly with them were satisfied with the provision and continued to place young people at the house, then, as far as Harambee was concerned, "reasonable access to inspect the premises to ensure standards are satisfactory" was not an issue.

e) These principles, viewed against the general understanding of the Association as to the sensitive nature of its work, could not be readily compromised for the sake of £500 from the Social Service.

There followed stiff written exchanges between the Director of Social Services and the Secretary of the Harambee Housing Association until a meeting was arranged by an intermediary, the well-respected secretary of a local Trust. At this meeting which took place on Friday 14th June 1974, at the Council House there was a confrontation between the two bodies. The issues were thrashed out with Social Workers of the Social Services Department supporting the Harambee Workers. The fear of the Social Services Committee of the development of "Black Social Services" and their attitude towards the Harambee workers as "irresponsible, incompetent trouble-makers" became clear. It was also discovered that the communication between the social workers in the field and the Social Services Committee was poor.

The Harambee Workers having been given time to prepare their case and present a united front, argued that social policy in the end is good or bad, functional or dysfunctional, creative or

repressive only in so far as it could be seen to relate in a meaningful way to the lives of individuals in the society which such social policy governs. Local inhabitants therefore have a stake in revitalizing and reviewing the governing process, not simply by re-electing Local Government Administrators, but by intepreting to Government how social policy and the provisions subsumed under such policy meet or fail to meet the needs of the community. They pointed out that a major gap in the process of government in our society is that such interpretation is not fed upwards adequately so that those who determine social policy and direct it downwards might take cognisance of changing demands and encourage participation on the part of the community in the process of caring and governing.

In my role of participant in these proceedings (rather than observer) I begged, towards the end of the meeting, that the work of the Association and the lessons learned at Harambee House be recognized. In summing up, I explained that because of the vulnerability of young girls we could not turn them away when they came to Harambee House and that in effect, the presence of girls was having a good influence on the male residents, teaching them to relate normally with women, and so we intended carrying on this practice. I also showed how a four-week period of residence could be seen as only a slight respite on the way to something worse for black adolescents. Therefore we thought it wise to extend the period and intended doing so.

The outcome of these long deliberations was seen as a success (by the Harambee workers) and a compromise (by the Social Services Committee). The grant (by then £1,000) was to be released and our proposals accepted. However, there was the

rider that the Harambee workers should begin looking for alternative accommodation for the female residents (which they were doing anyway) and that no new female residents be admitted without the notification of the Social Services Committee. Promises of further financial support by the Committee were also made.

The conflicting images of Harambee House were made clear in relationships with other agencies and their representatives. For example, when it was decided to teach 'O' level classes at the house, we decided that Black Studies should be on the curriculum. When we approached a local Institute of Further Education for registration to take examinations in future and for financial support of the teachers, they took objection to the title "Black" Studies. Fears of inciting "revolution" and violence were voiced. However, after "converting" one very aware representative, a field worker, they decided to support us, with Black Studies remaining autonomous for examination purposes.

On another occasion a Probation Officer demanded a place for one of his wards. He was under the impression that the house was set up by the Home Office and that Harambee were paid to keep five beds reserved, that is, vacant. He learned otherwise and had to wait his turn like other applicants.

An interesting incident occurred when a white student attended the Black Studies class. He thought that the presentation of some of the material was 'biased' and that the reactions of the students in discussion were extreme. In referring to South Africa, one resident asked him what he would do if black people "took over" Britain and relegated the British to the position of "under dogs". He gave an answer

in terms of "I wouldn't really mind" and was put down for being a "liar" and a "hypocrite". As a particular symbol, he had an unsettling effect on the class. He never came back.

People in the area have also got some fixed ideas about the house. One neighbour seeing me go in, asked if I knew that it was "a place for bad boys" and asked me if I was "one of them".

Parents themselves have got mixed feelings about the place. Harambee workers make an effort to get the parents of residents involved in the running of the house. Letters of invitation are sent and visits are made to their homes. In one particular case parents were told that Harambee workers would be visiting their home at a certain time. We knocked and knocked but no one answered. When we were leaving we looked back and saw a woman staring from behind the bedroom curtains. Some parents do visit the house and make contributions and others receive Harambee workers as visitors to their homes but many blame our existence for "causing" their children to become homeless.

Many residents in reaction, do "reject their rejectors" perhaps as a form of "self-preservation". One youngster, 14 years old, gained admittance to the house as a resident by telling lies about his age (no one under 16 is admitted) and about his address (parents are visited soon after admission to determine whether or not the person is really homeless). By pure chance a visitor recognized him at the house and told us the truth. Without telling him, his mother was brought around to the house. When he was brought before her in the office he was dumbfounded, not uttering a word for half-an-hour-

When he did speak, he said that he had never seen "that woman" in all his life. After long arguments and his mother's threat to fetch his father, he decided to return home.

Within the house, the role of the Warden is becoming clearer with experience. The first warden in his behaviour alternated between the "Warden" of a penal institution and the manager of a firm. He created a social distance between himself and the residents and neglected the socially supportive aspects of his job. When he was cautioned by the Management Committee, he reacted by doing nothing, letting residents do as they liked. Eventually he was asked to resign by the Management Committee.

There was also some conflict over the role of the Deputy Warden. He saw his role as that of "Education Officer" relieving the warden in domestic and other duties only on his days off. He therefore spent most of his time in the library making it out of bounds to the residents at certain times. When he was criticised for this, he handed in his resignation.

The present Warden, despite his shortcomings, must be credited for helping to create a relaxed informal atmosphere that is more akin to that found in an extended family than in a "hostel". He has given, and continues to give the residents much social support and invariably gets a good response from them. The reasons for his success are many.

First, he has had much experience in dealing with people. He spent his early life in the West Indies, migrating to Britain in his late teens. At 37 years of age he has spent an almost equal number of years in both countries. He can "rap", with the youngsters (nostalgically) about life in the West Indies as well as about life in England. In England he served in the Army, he has been a bus driver, a conductor, a bar-man and the manager

of a club, among other things. Most of his jobs involved getting on with people in face-to-face, informal situations.

Second, he has a young son living with him in the house (his is a single-parent family). This appealing 8 year old boy has evoked some good responses from the residents, most of whom treat him like a little brother. He gets innumerable presents from the residents on festive occasions.

Third, the Warden is responsible for sharing out the meals (cooked by a part-time worker). I believe that feeding someone helps to establish a bond between the feeder and fed. It also amounts to a secure, satisfying routine.

Fourth, the Warden finds jobs for the residents. The fact that he has so many contacts in the area helps him to do this. For example, he has found jobs for three boys in public houses run by West Indians who are close friends of his. On his days off he can drop in for a drink with any of these boys.

Fifth, the warden's room is always open to residents and he is available 24 hours a day. Youngsters go there to use the phone, (if the office is closed and the Warden is upstairs), to watch television (if they want to watch a programme on a channel other than the one being watched downstairs), to play records, to introduce their boy-friends or girl-friends or just to pass the time. They also go there to borrow money or to ask the warden to keep money safely for them.

But it is also here, on this "back stage"[2] that other "selves" are revealed. In public places downstairs, especially when there is an "outsider" about, they co-operate with each other, to offer a "definition" of the situation" . The person who comes into the warden's room alone late at night to pour his heart out is a different actor to the same person who played his part on

the "front stage" in the sitting room earlier. In relieving the warden once, I was surprised to hear one fellow, who had the reputation of being care-free and happy-go-lucky, confide that he was really depressed and had thought about committing suicide.

The female warden is much closer to some of the girls. One girl at the house avoided her for a long time, because, in her own words "she remind me too much of me mum". The boys in general also like her very much. Perhaps this is because she is often making "goodies" in the kitchen and giving them away - things like cakes, sweets etc. But one boy who has been there a long time does not "hit it off with her" partly because he is envious of her power and partly, as he said, because "she is always in the kitchen". This same boy, at one time, lived alone with his father.

Among the residents, two groups have been noticed to emerge, the "rule-breakers" and the "law abiders". Initially these rules were imposed but are now usually negotiated. However, the "rule-breakers" tend to be transient, displaying some "aggro" for a period and then moving on. The "long-stayers" soon establish a tradition. Out of this group, two "leaders" have emerged. The one is tolerant, sensible and responsible while the other is "arrogant" and "authoritarian". The latter has been at the house for a long time and thinks that this should give him some authority over the others. Though he has gained the respect of some of his peers for throwing out noisy outsiders, he has alienated the majority by his "stroppy" behaviour. At the moment, this youngster is "in the docks" for shouting at the female warden and for pulling out the television plug when he was not allowed to

turn over to another channel.

This does not mean to say that residents do not in general "work the system". Breakfast is put out in bulk for the early risers and quite often people get up early and take more than their rightful share. This "loot" is then "stashed" in various parts of the house. Many times I have found eggs etc hidden in up-turned saucepans. This food is then used for a mid-day meal. Also some boys who are unemployed claim to be going to work just to avoid doing extra chores. When questioned at the end of the week, they usually say that they were "looking for work". They also get around the rule of going to bed at 12 midnight by playing cards in their rooms until early in the morning. They also leave back windows or doors open so that other residents and their friends can come in after 12. Even though the warden checks to see that every opening is locked up at night, they usually unlock them after him.

Within the house specific sub-cultures are created[3]. In observing them, reality seems to be a social constrict. Many of the words used like "beef" (sex), "sussing out" (find out what a person is really like) have distinct meanings only to the initiated. Boys plaiting each other's hair, making sound systems that distort music, and "Kung Fu" games, play an important part in their lives at the house.

They also have peculiar attitudes to work, property, female residents and homelessness itself. All of them want to work, and make varying degrees of effort to find jobs. The local evening paper taken at the house is thoroughly searched every night for suitable jobs. They normally want to do "interesting" jobs and not the dead end ones many end up with. The boys want to be apprentice mechanics, carpenters, plasterers

and community workers. The girls want to be nursery nurses, telephonists, and in one case, a model. One female resident said that she wanted to be a nursery nurse to give to children the affection she never got herself. The same girl has worked voluntarily in this capacity in local nursery projects. Harambee House could offer a greater service to them by setting up a multi-purpose work-shop and a nursery. At the moment, the Management Committee, after months of research, is prevented from doing more due to lack of funds.

Their attitude to property is enlightening or frightening according to how one takes it. They lend things to each other especially their room-mates. Some things are common property in rooms. I remember one boy being teased for hours one night because he did not share his "fags". On a trip to town he bought some fags. While they were walking along he dropped back every time to have a smoke and caught up with the others when he had finished. Later he got a full box and an empty box. Then when he wanted to smoke he put one cigarette in the empty box and took it out to smoke it in front of his mates saying, "Sorry, last one".

On two occasions this attitude was extended towards my property. After fetching a group from a sports club, I noticed that the transistor radio in my motor car was missing. I later discovered this in one room. When I found out who had taken it, after much questioning and deduction, he told me that he had "borrowed it to fix it". When I looked at it I noticed that some parts were missing. It was "fixed". On another occasion I came out of the house to find four boys seated in my car (I hope they weren't "fixing" it). One boy had a key that could

open the door but not start the engine. They wanted me to teach them to drive. I said that I was too busy. They decided to put "pressure" on me to give in. I had to get somewhere else in Handsworth and decided to walk, going into the house through the front door and coming out through the back. When I came back they were still in the car. I came up to them and told them that they had won. The ring-leader retorted "Don't give me that bull-shit psychological stuff I am not leaving until I get a lesson". I decided to appeal to the others to get out. When I was left alone with the ring-leader he shouted at me for humiliating him. He got more and more excited as he got out of the car. I got in without saying a word. When I started the engine, looking as fierce as possible, he came closer, and asked as I drove off, "aren't you joking with me any more ?" I felt like a "capitalist swine" as I sped away.

The female residents have in general presented themselves as (big) sisters. Playing this part to virile young men must not be easy. One girl had a crush on a fellow resident and was in the habit of showing affection to him in public places in the house. The other boys reacted by calling her insulting names. She got the message when she followed her "boyfriend" and all his mates to a dancing club one night. They decided to ignore her. It was pitiful to see her running up to each boy asking him for a dance or offering to buy him a drink only to be met by stony stares. The relationship soon broke off.

Their attitude to homelessness is not the same as that of the "dosser" or "vagrant". They do not like sleeping rough in public places. When they are forced to sleep rough they choose spots that cannot be easily found. One youngster told me that

he slept in out-houses, and concealed parts of shops. Invariably they avoid the public locations of tramps or telephone booths which are the hideaway of some runaway school children. Hence there is great difficulty in discovering the real numbers of homeless black youngsters. They despise places like Salvation Army hostels. One girl was found a place at such an institution by her social worker but ran away after sleeping one night with inebriated "old" women. Many are convinced that they are doing the Harambee Housing Association a favour by being homeless, and maybe they are. They have helped to decorate the house and see it as a permanent residence. In defence of some of these youngsters it must be made clear that they have brought a stabilising influence to the house.

These youngsters in general have taught us that they are not "Second Generation Immigrants". They do not have the "immigrant mentality" of dreaming of making a "pile", regardless, and going back to their countries of origin to spend it. They are "Black Britons" here to stay. And they have every right to Britain if this right is determined by the contribution one's fore-parents made to British Society. Many know no other home. Chris Mullard[4] describes some of the traumatic experiences of the Black Briton. By definition he proves that blacks are not transient immigrants. However, at present, this situation evokes feelings of fear, neglected responsibility and guilt on the part of some white people and creates anxieties for the youngsters.

Some youngsters transcend the local situation and see themselves not only as Black Britons but more significantly

as "Universal Blacks". They are learning to identify with "oppressed people" everywhere and with their efforts to overcome their problems. Many are keen followers of developments in America and Africa. Angela Davis, Stokeley Carmichael, Huey Newton, etc are household names. Recent events in Mozambique and elsewhere in Africa created some excitement in the house.

Unlike their parents, they see their salvation and destiny related to what happens in these places. Many "discovered" Africa at Harambee House.

In commenting on Harambee House in general they say that they like it because the warden is understanding and sociable and because there are boys and girls roughly the same age living there together. Volunteers who are authoritarian in their approach to management get an icy reception. Also, a resident, aged 35, found it difficult to get on with the much younger majority of the residents.

Implicit throughout this chapter are the many lessons learned from the Harambee "experiment". Some of these need to be explicitly stated.

First, in dealing with statutory bodies, the Harambee workers (and others like them) have to be aware at all times of the political implications of decisions made. We must keep in mind that the communication between individuals in statutory institutions leaves much to be desired. Also we must remember that there are stereotypes and assumptions held by members of the "host society" with varying degrees of tenacity. Those cut off from contact or meaningful involvement in "the community" and who often have great power, are <u>likely</u> to hold strongly,certain negative views

about black people. Therefore it would be sensible to cultivate good relationships with more sensitive and understanding grass-roots intermediaries but without ever sacrificing our independence of thought. At all times, in dealing with external (and powerful) bodies we must present collectively an unambiguous case.

Second, we must avoid alienating the community even though many of its members may be antagonistic to our efforts and objectives. In the last analysis our strength comes from the support we get from the local people. The Summer School staged annually by the Harambee workers and friends, the Christmas parties put on for children in the neighbourhood, the night classes open to the public and given at Harambee House, the legal advice centre and the occasional cultural exhibitions, are various ways used by the Harambee workers to gain and nourish support. These services must be expanded.

Third, Harambee must continue to learn from the youngsters and respond to their needs. Many of the residents find it difficult to articulate their expectations of ideal parents etc. However, because Harambee is flexible, it has been possible to piece together from their responses to the many individuals who help to make up the community at the house, what kinds of relationships they find most satisfactory. It is in this way that we have learned that they are happiest in the "extended family" in which there is an element of choice in who is to be "mother", "father", "brother", "sister". This may be because many of them remember nostalgically their early lives in extended families in the West Indies. Harambee must continue to emulate the extended family with its relaxed atmosphere and adults who

try to win the friendship and respect of youngsters.

We are still learning from experience at Harambee House and are willing to share this knowledge with others who are prepared to listen. Though we are doing a job by default our service is not readily appreciated.

Notes.

1. Erving Goffman Asylums , 1961 , This collection of essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates of total institutions gives some interesting insights, on the underlife of a public institution.

2. Erving Goffman, The Presentation of Self In Everyday Life, 1959, reminds us that life is a serious game in which co-actors co-operate to present different "selves".

3. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality, 1966, gives a refreshing account of how man produces himself and reality.

4. Chris Mullard, Black Britain , 1973, has produced the first book ever written by a Black born and bred in Britain.

CONCLUSION

As shown above, there are many factors which militate against young Blacks in Britain because they are young and because they are black. Becoming homeless seems to be an inevitable outcome for many and one way of reducing the strains and tensions they are subjected to. Many suffer when they become homeless and it is doubtful if any person would subject himself to such suffering if he could help it. A lack of understanding on the part of people with real power, invariably adult or white, or both, makes this suffering worse.

These homeless young Blacks do not comprise the majority of West Indian children. But they are certainly the tip of an iceberg attributable to much that is wrong and disturbing. They are also the spearhead that is a possible vehicle of real change. They have been and will continue to be the focus of attention of those that fear them and those that love them.

Members of the Harambee Housing Association and their supporters in an effort to understand and help these youngsters have put much work into making Harambee House a secure home for some of them. They see the house and what goes on there as an example of a way of arriving at solutions to some of the problems inherent in the present social situation of young West Indians. Traditional methods have been seen to fail and so new methods must be tried and, when successful, supported. Harambee House, despite structural and other constraints, is flexible enough to respond to the real needs of its users. But instead of support it has often received denunciation. Its workers have been branded as "misguiding

the youngsters" and often treated badly by people who should know better. In brief the support necessary for security, confidence and expansion has not been forthcoming.

At this point in time the Harambee Project has reached a crucial stage. Having received a little help and having become a reality in the community it is now vulnerable. It has raised the hopes and expectations of many. Without further support the project will stagnate and people involved in it could become inward-looking and self-destructive. The community could be littered with the bones of another skeleton of a good intention..

It is often said that new wine should not be put into old wine skins. And though the metaphor here may not be the most appropriate, the point is that discontent cannot forever be contained. It is likely that the frustrations of black youngsters could find other outlets that are more disruptive and destructive. And because they are black and live in a "White" society these developments could have international implications.

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