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# The shaping of identities through childhood and adolescent schooling and non-compulsory education: a Northamptonshire Caribbean example

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# Outline of seminar

- Education as a form of social control
- Multiple identities: Black, British and/or Caribbean
- Construction of identities through and/or in opposition to compulsory schooling experiences
- Childhood and adolescent educational experiences influencing adult and learning

# 'Race' and racialisation in education

- Grosvenor: '*(In post-1945 Britain), education (was) a crucial agent in the racialisation process.*' (*Assimilating Identities*, pp. 8, 49)
- Ideas of race in Britain in the immediate post-War decades largely conceptualised Black and British as mutually exclusive
- Compulsory schooling reflected socially constructed views that purposefully relegated Black people to inferior streams within schools whilst hindering future opportunities as adults.

# Education as a means of social control

- Bourdieu: Education and compulsory schooling can be used to define and demarcate cultural and social differentiation. (*Distinction: The Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, pp.23, 80-81; *Practical Reason on the Theory of Action*, p.19)
- Bourdieu: Cultural consumption, as through compulsory schooling and other forms of state sponsored education, fulfils social functions of legitimising social differences. (*Distinction*, p.7)

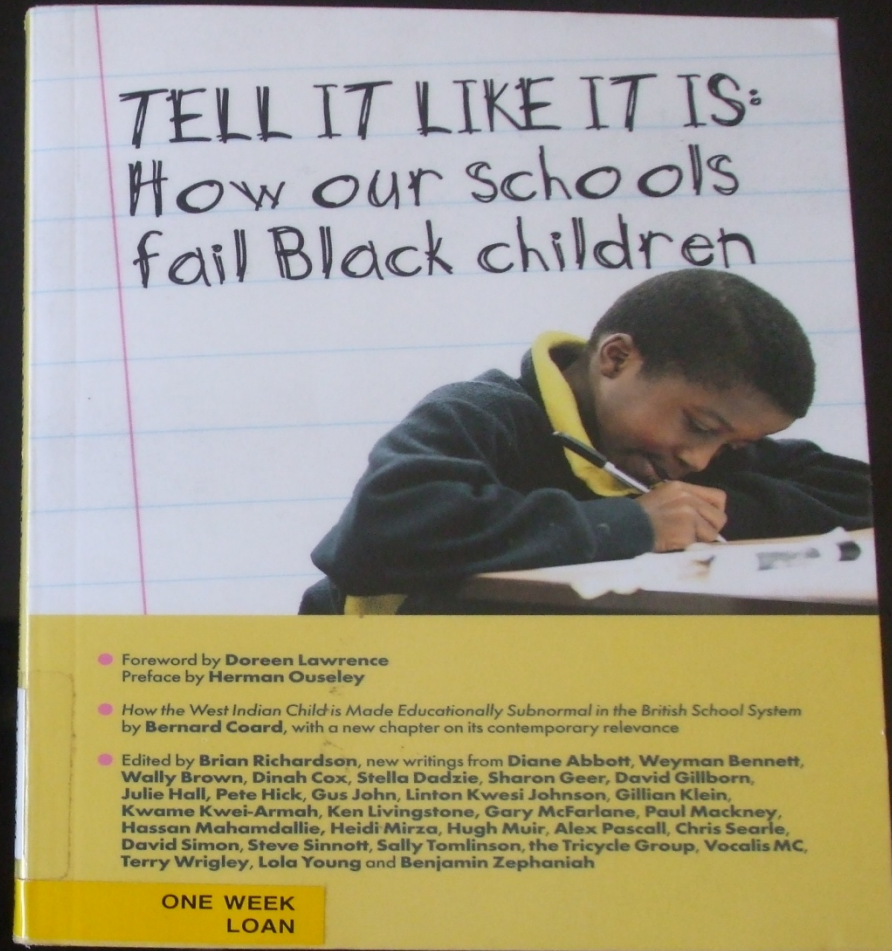
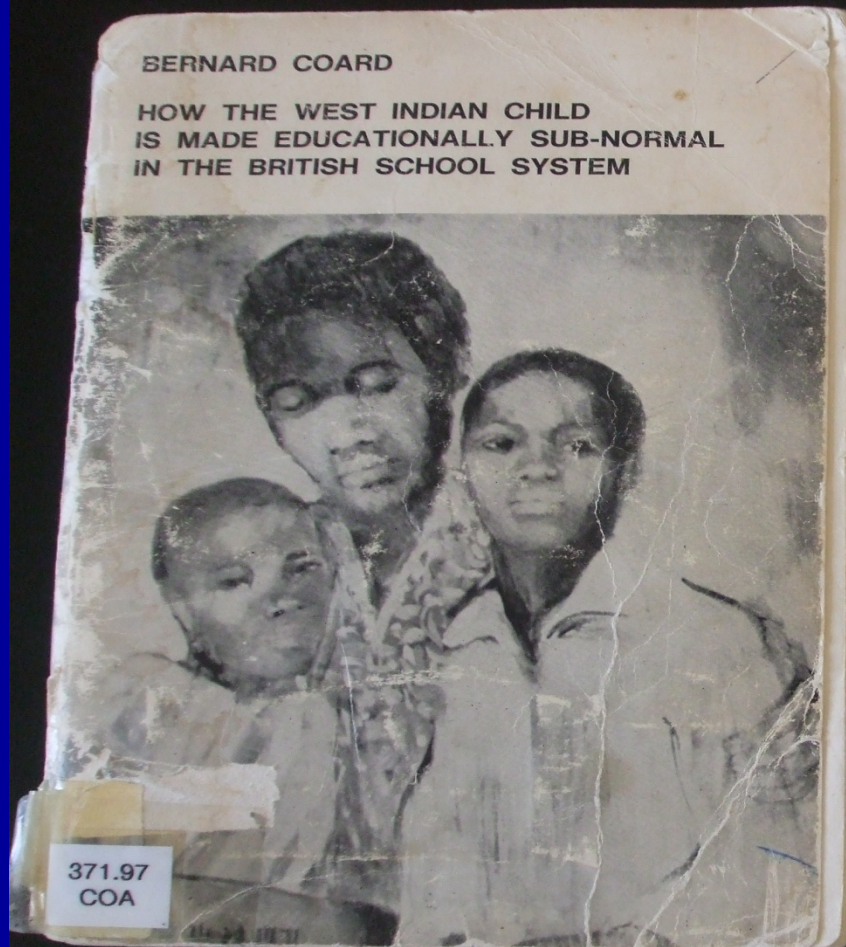
# Education as a means of social control

- Simmel: *The deepest problems of modern life flow from the attempt of the individual to maintain the independence and individuality of his existence against the sovereign powers of society, against the weight of the historical heritage and the external culture and technique of life.*

*(On Individuality and Social Forms, p.324)*



# Use of informal education as a means of resistance



# Use of informal education as a means of resistance: Northamptonshire's West Indian Parents' Association (WIPA)

- WIPA was part of a national trend of ethnic minorities developing supplementary schools
- Coard's book was an inspiration to those starting up supplementary schools
- Coard's message was crucial in WIPA's desire to start their supplementary school in 1974



# Use of informal education as a means of resistance: Northamptonshire's West Indian Parents' Association (WIPA)



- WIPA deliberately were, according to a co-founder, Morcea Walker, ‘ ... .. *looking for self-esteem that was the first thing. Be proud of yourself. Know your history. But we were concentrating on maths and English, that was our focus, but using Black literature or using texts that the parents could understand. ‘Cause we’re still talking about a number of parents who were born in the Caribbean, yeah, and that had Caribbean upbringing for even ‘til the age of 9 or 10.*’

# Use of informal education as a means of resistance: Northamptonshire's West Indian Parents' Association (WIPA)

- Using familiar books combined with concentrating on English and maths reflected pride in being Caribbean whilst attempting to fit in as British people
- Having an ethnically-centred educational environment combatted material of textbooks used in compulsory schooling in that era that covertly made ethnocentrism seem reasonable through making it appear logical that Europeans were smarter or more skilled than Africans or other non-European ethnicities. (Michael Syer, 'Racism, Ways of Thinking and School', p.89)



# Pro-Caribbean education did not exclude White people and British identities

- Caribbean pride did not exclude White people in WIPA
- There were simultaneous desires to be accepted by the White British majority alongside positive self-esteem related to Caribbean culture.

# Pro-Caribbean education did not exclude White people and British identities 📢

*'... White children that associated with the Black children were themselves coming from homes of quality, not richness, but where it was perfectly alright to be with that Black child. And therefore the parents was allowing that child because as you can see from the pictures here, it's a young child. So it would have been that his parents would have had to allow him to come. He wasn't sneaking in. So I can only think that in all the melee of what was going on in society, there was some very good people around.'*  
(Moricea Walker)

# Construction of identities through and/or in opposition to compulsory schooling experiences

- Lack of teaching Black and Black British history in schools led many Caribbean young people to not feel pride in being Black and/or Caribbean
- Recognition of this failure led many younger Caribbean people to resist racialised views of Black people in Britain through informal education

# Construction of identities through and/or in opposition to compulsory schooling experiences 📢

- Learning from Rastafarians led to the understanding of being Afro-Caribbean and Black, *'... in a country, predominantly White, being taught about White history, seeing images about White people all my life. All of a sudden these Black people (Rastafarians) were telling, and you listened to them and their kind of not only interpretation of history but what they knew about basic history. You are sitting there with your mouth open, your eyes widening. You know you going, you see that is interesting. I never knew that! 'Cause you wouldn't know, as a kid you wouldn't know. (Weekes Baptiste)*

# Construction of identities through and/or in opposition to compulsory schooling experiences

- Learning from co-ethnic peers helped many younger local Caribbeans to conceptualise the extremity of social and cultural oppression that worked to their detriment.
- Cultures perceived as non-British were considered '*alien*' in the 1970s. (Peter Browne, 'Rastafarians', *Northampton Chronicle and Echo*, 7 June 1978)
- Informal learning by relatively unorganised people led to the Matta Fancanta Movement (MFM)



# MFM: Youth resistance to Black racialisation

- Some young Black men, mostly young Caribbean men, wanted space for themselves, as they were frequently ostracised from youth clubs.
- The fight leading to eventually having a building for MFM resulted from ...

# MFM: Youth resistance to Black racialisation 📢

- ‘So we sort of like met for about 6-7 months, reading a lot of ... One book we read, the 100 Facts of the Black Man, amazing facts. We start to get a few books from America and that was one of the major books that we used to read, about realizing that wait, Black man invent this! Yeah! Don’t know, what’s going on? And that give me the strength, the strength to sort of like say well ok, we’ll be looking for building and we had guys in there who have the sort of like (pause) the law, who looked into the law, who did a bit of research and look into the law and said well if we took over a place, as long as we don’t leave it or we don’t break any locks, it’s within the law of Britain. So you know, we looked around and still consciously. Obviously when we made that move, it was kind of an embarrassment for the older Black folks in the town because the highlight, the newspaper, the camera, the, you know it splashed our newspaper up and down the country. I think it remind me of (pause) ... It remind me of a lot of Irish people was kind of like feel a way to accept that they’re Irish when The Troubles were going on. ‘ (Horace Cohen)

# MFM: Youth resistance to Black racialisation

- Cultural hegemony was resisted through not only fighting for defined physical space, but also through its educational and social activities
- Informal education was at the heart of both increased self-esteem as Black and/or Afro-Caribbean people, as well as leading to activism to help improve the learning opportunities for fellow co-ethnics

# Childhood and adolescent educational experiences influencing adult and learning

- Two quotations from the same person, one a recollection from childhood and one of a young adult experience, ties in her lack of learning Black and Black British history as a child with desires to learn this history as an adult

# Childhood and adolescent educational experiences influencing adult and learning 📢

- ‘So, like, say like in a class if there’s thirty in a class, if you come first in the annual exam, right, you will sit here and then who come second sit next to you. So you sit in a way that any teacher that comes in they always know and I, I averaged normally about eight to ten. Like, I was like, and this is when I realised that there was race, I didn’t know what it was, but as I got older I realised that there was institutional racism from that stage. They, they’ve already carved out where you’re gonna go. For a start like our parents came here and the jobs that they gave them, the wages that they got they could only afford to live in certain areas. And the, certain areas had certain schools so therefore when you go to certain schools you’re only going to get certain jobs and it just goes round like that.

# Childhood and adolescent educational experiences influencing adult and learning

- So like, at the junior school I was at we had to do eleven plus exams them days, I don't know if you've heard of the eleven plus? Right and, not being big headed, but I was supposed to pass my eleven plus without any problem because of where I was at. And like say for example each junior school so many from each junior school went to the grammar school, right, so if they said like the first fourteen from Military Road out of the 'a' class will go to the grammar school, so I come like eighth or ninth in the class, right, even if I came tenth. But I came like about eighth or ninth and the girl next to me was Carol Hubbard she come like tenth or 11th, and then the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>, they all went to grammar school but I didn't go. So I knew from then that something was wrong because if 14 of us, or 12 of us go, and I come in that, and they all went and I wasn't allowed to go. So from that age I knew something was wrong, something was terribly wrong and my parents was very shocked that I hadn't passed my eleven plus.' (June White Gulley)

# Childhood and adolescent educational experiences influencing adult and learning 📢

- *'I used to go to a blues. A blues is a party. They call it illegal party, but it not illegal. The party where we could go to that we weren't barred from. And I used to go to the Harrow Road Blues, they call it the graveyard blues. Why? Because it was next to Harrow Road Cemetery and then I found out after I qualified as a nurse, that Mary Seacole, who is Mary Seacole? You know what? And when I found out ... You know she's buried at the Harrow Road graveyard where I used to be at the blues without a headstone. My journey to London, to become a nurse at the Nightingale School, I've read everything on Florence Nightingale from when I was 7 years old ... I done home nursing, then I done pre-nursing, then I done orthopaedic nursing, then I done general nursing. I never heard about Mary Seacole ... So the music took me to Mary Seacole. (laughs) But it was Florence Nightingale that brought me down to London. Look at that!'* (June White Gulley)



# Childhood and adolescent educational experiences influencing adult and learning

- Inspiration to learn more about Black and Black British history resulted from retrospective understanding of not learning about it in school
- Perceptions of being wrongfully excluded from grammar school is consistent with 1968 statistics indicating that 1.58 percent of West Indians in secondary schools were in grammar schools in comparison to 20.33 percent of *'non-immigrants'* (H.E.R. Townsend, *Immigrant Pupils in England: The L.E.A. Response*, p.57)

# Childhood and adolescent educational experiences influencing adult and learning

- Responses to childhood failures to learn about Black and Black British history led to, in White Gulley's case, to support NBHA in various capacities
- In another case, Trevor Hall aka Ras Jabulani became a Rastafarian and moved permanently to Zimbabwe as a result of feeling ostracised in Britain

# Conclusions

- Northamptonshire Caribbeans generally sought to assimilate into British life whilst desiring to maintain and promote ethnic pride
- WIPA's included White children (particularly in its summer scheme), unlike many ethnically-based supplementary schools of the era

# Conclusions

- Childhood failures to learn Black and Black British history ruined the self-esteem of many Caribbean children
- Children and adults used informal education in various ways to resist formal education that negatively racialised Black and Caribbean people by omission or denigration