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Black for a Cause … Not Just Because …
By WINSTON N. TREW (Derbyshire, Derwent Press, 2010), 305 pp. Paper £12.99.

A number of singular claims can be made for this remarkable book. It marks the full emergence of the foot-soldier intellectuals coming out of the UK's turbulent twentieth-century Black liberation era. It presents a visceral firsthand account of what it was like to be 'on the frontline' of the struggles that characterised those times, with Black Power a potent, international political driver for justice.

At its core it tells and retells the story of a truly disturbing 1972 incident involving the police, which led to the wrongful arrest and equally wrongful conviction of four young Black British men, the 'Oval Four'. It also tells of how those convictions were quashed as a result of a militant community campaign that embarrassed the police as well as the courts. It speaks, then, of the wickedness of state agents, of the courage of being at war with injustice at that time and of the imaginativeness and the felt righteousness of those who resisted and rebelled against the grossness of that injustice.

The first half of the book focuses on Trew's story as one of the Oval Four – of his arrest, trial and imprisonment on charges arising from a physical confrontation with undercover officers from the British Transport police at Oval underground station in London – followed by his release, on appeal in July 1973, from a two-year sentence. In his attention to detail, Trew, assisted by close reading of court transcripts, provides us with a kind of anatomy of an instance of institutionalised racism in policing and judicial practices in late twentieth-century Britain.

Although the report contained here is presented now some four decades later, the details feel fresh in Trew's memory: outsmarting the agents of the state; literally blocking police attempts to cripple his movement by knee-kicking him in the groin; preparing for the blows that would bash his head against walls. In 1972, Trew inhabited a different reality to that which was reported in official accounts.

Trew takes us back to London in mid-March 1972, where, only a few months earlier, the 'Mangrove Nine', Black community activists who had led a street demonstration against police harassment, had famously successfully defended themselves against incitement to riot charges brought by the police. Trew was then a member of the Fasimba, the youth wing of the South East London Parents' Organisation (SELPO), one of the many self-help initiatives formed by new Caribbean populations settling in Britain in this period. SELPO's aim was to counter the effects of schools failing Caribbean (then termed West Indian) children. The Fasimba were a particularly 'conscious' bunch of young men, determined to make something special of themselves by way of preparing to take up the political challenges related to the marginalisation of, and injustice suffered by, their communities. The failure of the schools to educate Black children had become a constant disappointment to recently migrated parents, who had travelled in hope of much better.

Returning from a political meeting late at night on 16 March, and using the underground at Oval station, Trew and three of his mates were approached by some white men (plain clothes policemen, as it turned out), who blocked their path and manhandled them against a wall while abusively shouting instructions at them. The Fasimba pushed and shouted back. The white men got more and more in their faces, demanding ID, reaching into their pockets, insisting that they turn them out and snatching at their bags. The Fasimba's martial arts training kicked in. One policeman was floored by a 'Gyakuzuki' reverse punch; another went down from a 'Maegeri' front kick. All hell broke loose. A multitude of police officers appeared. The Fasimba were eventually overpowered and bundled into a van, all the time with menacing threats about the beatings that would be handed out back at the station. (A bystander – a middle-aged white woman who had tried to intervene on behalf of the Fasimba young men – was also arrested and slapped about in the van on the way to the station.) Further police intimidation, physical violence and accusatory interrogation about a variety of thefts from the person provoked Trew to adopt a smart-arsed strategy of falsely confessing to an elaborate string of thefts, purportedly committed over several weeks across south London, and which could not hold up under time and place scrutiny – all made up to make fools of the police. And, so, to court.

Initially, Trew's strategy failed. The court did not properly scrutinise the charges and evidence, and the four Fasimba members were found guilty of crimes and given two-year sentences.

This experience reported by Trew in his book was, at the time, an everyday story of young men in any and every British town and city – fitted up and framed on theft or assault or 'conspiracy to' charges. In London alone, the case of the Fasimba, who became known as the Oval Four, joined those of the 'Metro Three' and the 'Islington Fourteen' and, before that, the 'Brockwell Three', the 'Cricklewood Twelve', the 'Waterloo Four', and so on and so on. Clearly, something was rotten in the state of Babylon, as the Jamaican Rastafari termed it.

What is heartening about this period, though, is that for every one of these police frame-ups, there was a vigorous community-based campaign in response. And so it was in Trew's case. Indeed, the sheer number of these defence campaigns on behalf of criminalised young Black men itself signalled that these must have been 'set-ups' to criminalise – 'conspiracies' devised by agents of the state. In other words, these cases were evidence of systematic, institutional and institutionalised malpractice allied to racism.

Within months, the appeal case of the Oval Four was back in court. This time, police and judicial malpractice were exposed, so that, after just nine months in prison, Trew's conviction was quashed and he was released. What's more, six years later, Detective Sergeant Ridgewell, the main policeman who had fitted up the Oval Four, was revealed to have done the same to a number of other young Black men in the early 1970s. Along with others, he was eventually prosecuted and convicted for fabricating evidence and inflicting violence. Coincidentally, it

turned out that he had once been in the British South African police in Rhodesia; a colonial chicken had come home to roost. Ridgewell died in prison in December 1982 while serving a sentence for 'conspiracy to steal'.

With this book, Trew has made sure that that was not the end of the story. His intention, as historian, is to go well beyond the forensic re-examination of his epic tangle with the law. In the second half, he takes up a greater intellectual ambition – to bring together the history, sociology and politics of the African Caribbean experience in Britain in the second half of the twentieth century. He attempts to build a picture of the broader landscape of political struggles in 1970s Britain, where struggles for the Black community coexisted with insurrectionary and armed Irish anti-colonial struggles and with other radical and revolutionary anti-imperialist forces of the time. Trew's personal journey and history are caught up in a wider political journey and history 'from resistance to rebellion', as Sivanandan has termed it.

The real strength and value of this book are in this background story, detailing the dialectics of resistance to oppression in 1970s Britain, where every state insult or injury was met by a re-energised community counter-offensive, turbocharging a spirit of rebellion. Trew recalls the migration of Caribbeans of his parents' generation from New World plantation society to the industrialised UK. He writes of the hopes that they harboured; the shock of finding prejudice in the schools, which resulted in them failing to educate masses of their children to normal expectations; he recalls the new generations combating a certain fatalism and compromise in the 'don't trouble trouble' stance of parts of the 1950s/1960s migrant settlers faced with marginalisation and alienation; worse, the self-loathing of those who had accommodated themselves to humiliated histories; and then the finding of Black Power, and the personal and political triumph that resulted from rebellion.

Along the way, Trew identifies a specifically British Black Power, related to, but different from, that of the US. And he connects this with the emergence of the new, UK-born Black youth, existentially different from their 'one foot here, one foot there' parents.

In his more sociological and academic vein, Trew effectively asserts that a fresh paradigm has to be developed to describe and analyse the Black UK youth experience, which is, he feels, the context out of which he emerged and of which his life experience is an expression. Central to this experience, from the 1960s through the 1970s and beyond, was the malicious policing/media construction of 'mugging' as a new Black crime and its use as a defining feature of Black youth. Trew nails this. He also demonstrates the ways in which expressive culture, and particularly music and art, served to meld the spirit of that youth culture. The book is rich with references to Jamaican popular music.

A quibbler would note that, restricted to his experience of the African diasporan scene, Trew includes little reference to the Asian diaspora's place in the Black British, twentieth-century, anti-racist story. While Black nationalism undoubtedly galvanises group action, it also tends to segregate. Clearly, this is

not the central concern of Trew's analysis. And, yet, one particularly intriguing sentence buried in the middle of the book stays with this reviewer: 'Black identity needed to move from being a Place of Habitation to become a Place of Action.'

London COLIN PRESCOD

Red, White and Black: cinema and the structure of US antagonisms
By FRANK B. WILDERSON III (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2010), 388 pp. Paper £15.99.

African American Actresses: the struggle for visibility 1900–1960
By CHARLENE REGESTER (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2010), 408 pp. Paper $27.95.

These are two illuminating, but frustratingly flawed books. Their approaches are different, although both frequently quote Frantz Fanon and Jacques Lacan. Frank Wilderson utilises the iconic theoreticians within the context of a study that concentrates on a conceptual ideology that, he claims, is based on a fusion of Marxism, feminism, postcolonialism and psychology. He uses a small number of independent films to illustrate his theories. Charlene Regester has a more practical framework. She divides her book into nine chapters devoted to individual female actors and then weaves her ideological concepts into these specific chapters. Both have a problem with clarity. Regester uses less complex language than Wilderson, but still manages to be obtuse at times. Wilderson starts from a position of using ontology and grammar as his main tools, but manages to consistently misuse or misappropriate terms like fungible or fungibility.

Wilderson writes as an intelligent and challenging author, but is often frustrating. Although his language is complicated, his concepts are often oversimplified. He envisions every black person in film as a slave who is suffering from irreparable alienation from any meaningful sense of cultural identity. He believes that filmmakers, including black filmmakers, are victims of a deprivation of meaning that has been condensed by Jacques Lacan as a 'wall of language' as well as an inability to create a clear voice in the face of gratuitous violence. He cites Frantz Fanon, Orlando Patterson and Hortense Spiller as being among those theorists who effectively investigate the issues of black structural non-communicability. His own attempts to define 'what is black?', 'a subject?', 'an object?', 'a slave?', seem bound up with limiting preconceptions, and he evaluates neither blackness nor the 'red' that is part of his title in any truly meaningful way.

Wilderson describes as 'slave films' all those that have a black director or are focused on narratives that deal with black people. This makes the one big omission in his book even more odd than it already seems. Why does Wilderson not