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‘Somehow Getting Their Own Back on Hitler’: British Antifascism and the Holocaust, 1960–1967

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Abstract

This article considers the extent to which the Holocaust galvanized British antifascism in the 1960s. It explores whether the genocide surfaced in Jewish antifascists' motivations and rhetoric but goes beyond this to assess the Holocaust's political capital in wider antifascism and anti-racism. The article considers whether political coalitions were negotiated around Holocaust memory, for example, by analysing whether Jewish antifascism intersected with the black and Asian communities of Smethwick and Southall respectively who were targeted by the far right in 1964. Using archival materials and newly-collected oral histories, the article surveys organisations including the Jewish Board of Deputies, the 62 Group, Yellow Star Movement and *Searchlight* newspaper. It will argue that the Holocaust played a more important role in 1960s antifascism than has been recognised. Jewish groups fragmented around the lessons of the genocide for their antifascism. The Holocaust influenced race relations legislation and became a metonym for extreme racist violence.

Keywords

United Kingdom – antifascism – Holocaust – Jews – anti-racism – far right – Colin Jordan (1923–2009)

In 1965, British Nazi Colin Jordan disrupted a public meeting of the Labour Party's by-election campaign in Leyton, a district of east London. Jordan – leader of the National Socialist Movement (NSM) – climbed onto the stage but was sent reeling by a tremendous punch from Denis Healey, the Labour

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Government's defence secretary. Jordan was at once attacked by antifascists in the audience. The Board of Deputies of British Jews, a representative body for synagogues and other communal organisations, disapproved of what it saw as the antifascists' misplaced Holocaust-driven reaction, attributing this to the '62 Group' of mainly Jewish militants: 'Colin Jordan was beaten up at Patrick Gordon Walker's adoption meeting at Leyton. There are groups of militant anti-Fascists, such as the "62 Group" which believe in a most vigorous opposition to racist propaganda; some of these anti-fascists are Jews who act as if throwing tomatoes at a British racist speaker is somehow getting their own back on Hitler.'¹

Did British antifascists really mobilize around the genocide, invoke it rhetorically or draw on its 'lessons' in the 1960s? This article explores the influence of the Holocaust on Jewish antifascism as it confronted Jordan's virulent antisemitism. This was also a time when the far right attempted to gain votes through exploiting racism against Britain's black and South Asian communities.² The article also considers whether antifascist coalitions of ethnic communal defence formed around Holocaust consciousness, questioning whether Jewish antifascism intersected with these victimized communities.

The 1960s emerge as a key moment in the development of 'Holocaust-driven' antifascism. This was a time of transition when references to the Holocaust increasingly co-existed with patriotic antifascism and resonated in broader anti-racism. The Board, an older organisation, maintained an attitude against antifascist 'use' of the Holocaust. In contrast, the 62 Group and Yellow Star Movement (YSM), both formed in 1962, made the genocide a point of reference, even if the 62 Group's invocations were restricted to internal discourse and the YSM's symbolism was more focused on contemporary anti-racist solidarity than the experience of Jews under the Nazis.

Some historians attest affinity between Holocaust consciousness and British antifascism dating back to a fascist revival immediately after the Second World War. Writing about a march of Sir Oswald Mosley's Union Movement (UM) in 1948, David Renton wrote, 'taking place just a few years after the Blitz and the Holocaust . . . it seemed inconceivable that there were still people who thought fascism was right.'³ Richard Thurlow suggested that the 'chief accusation' against postwar British fascists was their alleged support for the

1 'Defence with responsibility,' Board of Deputies' Defence Committee (BDDC) to members of the Board (1966), *Searchlight* archive, University of Northampton, SCH/01/Res/SLI/04/001 62, Intell, JACOB, 13.

2 Robert Miles and Annie Phizacklea, *White Man's Country: Racism in British Politics* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), 50.

3 David Renton, *Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Britain in the 1940s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), 1.

extermination of European Jewry.⁴ And yet the literatures on British antifascism and Holocaust remembrance rarely intersect. The only dedicated study of the Holocaust and political activism in Britain is in the form of a book chapter by Tony Kushner, in which the author claimed that the Holocaust emerges 'in a critical manner' in British anti-racist politics. This centres on the 1970 General Election and anti-racist reactions to Enoch Powell, infamous for his 1968 'rivers of blood' racist anti-immigration speech, rather than directly on antifascism.⁵

For Kushner, Holocaust remembrance remained muted well into the 1960s because of the tiny number of Jewish survivors in Britain, liberal attitudes antipathetic to ethnic particularism, and British collective war memory which did not separate out the genocide.⁶ Andy Pearce argues that the Holocaust made no major impact on non-Jewish consciousness in Britain before the October 1973 'Yom Kippur War' and the resulting oil embargo, which generated a political discourse of 'economic holocaust'. Before this point, Pearce argues, even the Eichmann Trial of 1961–62, although it 'piqued interest' and sparked controversy, did not generate as much interest as other issues seen as being closer to home.⁷

The 'myth of silence' on the Holocaust before at least the late 1960s has been confronted in Britain. Richard Bolchover and David Wasserstein argued that the essence of the Holocaust was well understood and transmitted in the media even as the genocide unfolded. David Cesarani pointed to a 'flood' of what would today be termed Holocaust-related literature in 1945 and after, so that Holocaust consciousness filtered into both popular and intellectual life through the 1950s and beyond.⁸ Although there is no equivalent work in the British context, it is worth noting here Hasia Diner's interrogation of Jewish-American communal sources and her conclusion that the genocide 'infused every sector' of American Jewry in the 1950s and 1960s but was articulated using myriad terms such as 'Hitler times', 'Shoah', 'the six million' and 'The

4 Richard Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain: From Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts to the National Front*, second edition (London: IB Tauris, 1998), 206.

5 Tony Kushner, 'Offending the memory? The Holocaust and Pressure Group Politics,' in *Philosemitism, Antisemitism and 'The Jews': Perspectives from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Tony Kushner and Nadia Valman (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 246–62.

6 Ibid, 248–249.

7 Andy Pearce, *Holocaust Consciousness in Contemporary Britain* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 26–27.

8 Richard Bolchover, *British Jewry and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Bernard Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe, 1939–45* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979); David Cesarani and Eric Sundquist, ed., *After the Holocaust: Challenging The Myth of Silence* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012).

Great Catastrophe', at a time when 'the Holocaust' was not in widespread use.⁹ Such works provide a rationale for this investigation, precluding an anachronistic search for knowledge and terms of discourse that did not yet exist in the 1960s.

In the year 2000, Nigel Copsey's *Anti-Fascism in Britain* marked the first comprehensive history of British antifascism. Although not focusing on antifascist approaches to the Holocaust, Copsey did make some useful observations, including in relation to the 1960s. Analysing the YSM in detail, he noted the movement's evocative yellow star symbolism, chosen for its reference to the murdered Jews of Europe.¹⁰ Copsey described how the Jewish Aid Committee of Britain (JACOB), which advocated for the 62 Group, attacked the perceived timidity and inaction of the Board on the basis of lessons from the past: his sources reveal that this argument centred on the Holocaust.¹¹

There are few dedicated studies of postwar Jewish antifascism: what we have tends to focus on the late 1940s. Morris Beckman's retrospective account of the militant '43 Group' (1946–1950), published in 1992, emphasizes the Holocaust as antifascist motivation but needs to be set against investigation of the Group's archival materials to explore the extent to which its original rhetoric and active appeal made use of the genocide.¹² Recently, Daniel Sonabend's study of the 43 Group analyses direct and familial experiences of the Holocaust as motivation for the Group's activism.¹³ Max Kaiser argued that the Holocaust influenced a new-found sense of international Jewish solidarity, expressed through antifascist politics. Although focusing on Jewish-Left publications, including a pro-Soviet Anglo-Jewish magazine, Kaiser urged readers to readjust their framing towards 'antifascism' rather than 'communism', to see antifascism as a component of Jewishness in its own right at this time.¹⁴

This article uses mixed methods. It has interrogated the archives of a variety of antifascist organisations: the Board of Deputies, 62 Group, YSM, the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and *Searchlight*, then an antifascist

9 Hasia Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence After the Holocaust, 1945–1962* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 13 and 32.

10 Nigel Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 96.

11 Ibid., 103.

12 Morris Beckman, *The 43 Group: the Untold Story of their Fight against Fascism* (London: Centerprise Publications, 1992).

13 Daniel Sonabend, *We Fight Fascists: The 43 Group and Their Forgotten Battle for Post-war Britain* (London: Verso, 2019), 52–53.

14 Max Kaiser, "A New and Modern Golden Age of Jewish Culture": Shaping the Cultural Politics of Transnational Jewish Antifascism, *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 17, no. 3 (2018), 287–303.

and anti-racist newspaper. It also uses existing and newly-collected oral histories of 62 Group veterans. These sources enable antifascism to be viewed through a cultural lens, capturing the individual subjectivities involved in motivations for resisting fascism. While all sources, whether written or oral, must be approached with the same level of caution, skill and attention to their subjectivities, specific issues attach to analysing oral histories. Penny Summerfield observed that subjects' memories never reach us unfiltered by historical reinterpretation – in this case, the strengthening of Holocaust consciousness in the interval since the 1960s and today.¹⁵ Acknowledging this demands alertness to potential dissonance between oral histories that privilege the Holocaust as motivation for antifascism and institutional archival sources in which the genocide might be absent. If the Holocaust now serves as a vehicle through which subjects make retrospective sense of their engagement with antifascism decades ago, this in itself would be significant. Yet more significant might be occasions where antifascists do not tell a readily recognisable story of the Holocaust's influence but instead provide some startlingly new narrative that does not conform to now 'acceptable' explanations of their antifascism.

Using oral sources necessitates engagement with the complex interplay of history and memory. Pierre Nora sees the Holocaust as the principal catalyst for the proliferation of memory studies: he remarked that, 'whoever says memory, says *Shoah*'. For Nora, history and memory are inevitably opposed, since memory is 'perpetually actual'.¹⁶ Against this, and writing specifically about the impact of the Holocaust, Dominick La Capra argued that memory, even with – or sometimes specifically because of – its subjectivities forms a 'crucial source' for history; memory has sometimes called into question documentary sources.¹⁷ This is a vital point: any recently-collected oral histories which privilege the Holocaust are not necessarily 'distortions' fashioned in the light of recent consciousness, in comparison to 'true' institutional archival materials which might omit the genocide. Instead, both types of evidence must be read in full context, with knowledge of the social and ideological forces acting on their language production, to understand what each source foregrounds or elides, and why.

15 Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 10.

16 Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: "Les Lieux de Mémoire"', *Representations* 26, Special (Spring, 1989): 8.

17 Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1998), 19.

The inclusion of the Board points to this study's pluralistic approach. The Board spoke the language of 'defence', not 'antifascism'. The original remit of its Jewish Defence Committee (JDC), established as the Co-ordinating Committee in 1936, encompassed more than resisting Mosley to include anti-defamation generally: the organisation was not synonymous with antifascism. At the same time, however, the impetus for a dedicated defence organisation was fascist antisemitic propaganda, and resisting this remained central to the JDC's work in the 1960s.¹⁸ Dan Stone reminds us that antifascism was practised even by liberal protagonists who, in their aversion to communism, abjured the term.¹⁹ That the traditionalist, middle-class Board might have dissociated from a term so infused with communism in the 1930s is a reasonable supposition. More fundamentally, Copsey has played a vital part in widening the picture of British antifascism to be inclusive of 'liberal antifascist' organisations such as the Board. His pursuit of a definitional minimum of antifascism transcends not just left-wing and militant antifascism but 'the politics of hostile activism' altogether to take in intellectual, media, middle-class and passive (or 'liberal') forms. This liberal antifascism might manifest in literature, public meetings, petitions, lobbying and education: a rationale for including the Board here.²⁰ Stone's premise for understanding post-war Europe is the rise and fall of an antifascist consensus, encompassing varieties of antifascism. The antifascist narratives that emerged in Western Europe and the Eastern Bloc, although qualitatively different from one another and applied using vastly different methods, allowed both parts of divided Europe to lend meaning to the destruction and violence of the Second World War.²¹ However, the various forms of antifascism that developed in the West were not predisposed to invoking Holocaust memory. According to Stone, discomfiting memories were displaced in favour of stories that spoke to security, rebuilding and 'wholeness'. Both left-wing antifascism, which demanded social transformation in the memory of the war dead and partisans, and the 'conservative antifascism' of Europe's Christian Democrats, who saw civilisation threatened by the erosion of traditional values, decentred Holocaust commemoration because Jewish victims, 'were neither suitably heroic nor representative of national glory'.²²

18 Daniel Tilles, *British Fascist Antisemitism and Jewish Responses, 1932–40* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 136–137.

19 Dan Stone, *Goodbye to All That? The Story of Europe Since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 11.

20 Nigel Copsey, 'Preface: Towards a New Anti-Fascist Minimum,' in *Varieties of Anti-fascism: Britain in the Inter-War Period*, ed. Nigel Copsey and Andrzej Olechnowicz (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), xv.

21 Stone, *Goodbye to All That?*, 8.

22 *Ibid.*, 61–62.

The periodisation ends with 1967. The formation of the National Front (NF) in that year was a seminal moment for the British far right. The NF united disparate movements and went on to achieve relative electoral success in the 1970s. This decade, together with the 1930s, dominates the literature on British fascism—and consequently antifascism, so that the intervening decades have been neglected. However, some historians have demanded more attention to the middle period of the 1950s and 1960s. Graham Macklin described the UM as an ‘antechamber’ for later forms of fascism represented by the racial populism of the NF.²³ The 1960s appears to have at least an equal claim to this function. Rather than Mosley, it was the rabidly racist Arnold Leese, leader of the Imperial Fascist League in the 1930s, whom provided continuity between interwar and 1970s’ fascism. Although he died in 1956, Leese’s views influenced Colin Jordan and John Tyndall, two of the most important far-right figures in the 1960s: Tyndall would go on to lead the NF.²⁴

Antifascism was also undergoing change towards the end of the 1960s. In particular, British student radical antifascism in 1968 diverged to some extent from prior forms. ‘Fascist’ had become a central part of radical student lexicon, with a significantly expanded meaning since student radicals often saw Western capitalist states as latently fascist.²⁵ Still, antifascism after 1967 was not wholly qualitatively different from its predecessors. For D.A.N Jones, ‘the flavour of 1968 was antifascism’ in opposition to recognisable ‘open fascism’. According to Jones, Powell’s ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech represented ‘another facet of fascism’ in its active appeal to racial prejudice.²⁶ Moreover, much of the early opposition to the NF was led by the 62 Group, which was determined to expose the ‘Nazism’ behind the Front’s racial populism and, by revealing its esoteric fascist ideology, to show that nothing had really changed.²⁷ However, British antifascism in the late 1960s was changing significantly enough, in its complex intersections with student radicalism and broader anti-racism, to warrant that its relationship to the Holocaust be considered separately, in dedicated future research.

23 Graham Macklin, *Very Deeply Dyed in Black: Sir Oswald Mosley and the Resurrection of British Fascism after 1945* (London: IB Tauris, 2007), 53.

24 Nicolas Hillman, “Tell me chum, in case I got it wrong. What was it we were fighting during the war?” The reemergence of British Fascism, 1945–58; *Contemporary British History* 15, no. 4 (2001): 15.

25 Ben Mercer, ‘Specters of Fascism: The Rhetoric of Historical Analogy in 1968,’ *The Journal of Modern History* 88, 1 (March 2016): 97.

26 D.A.N. Jones, ‘When Students Ruled the Earth,’ *London Review of Books* 10, no. 6 (1988), 10.

27 Dave Hann, *Physical Resistance: A Hundred Years of Anti-Fascism* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2013), 6–7.

Back to Nazism: the Far Right, Antifascism and British Society, 1948–1960

The focus of fascist victimisation, and antifascist responses to this, was transforming before the 1960s in a way that spoke to wider developments in British society. This was a time when the Empire was in retreat, the sense of national identity was changing and ‘race relations’ were entering political discourse as a ‘problem’ – most dramatically in the aftermath of the Notting Hill ‘riots’ of 1958.

Fascist antisemitism lost traction after May 1948, when the creation of Israel removed Jewish attacks on British soldiers in Mandate Palestine as a source of fascist support. This is not proof of the decline of popular antisemitism but only that a pillar of fascist antisemitism had abruptly crumbled. Indeed, in his 1954 study of antisemitism in London’s Bethnal Green, James Robb noted the divorce between fascism and antisemitism so that few antisemites expressed support for fascism and others repudiated it emphatically; Robb attributed this to the strong public disfavour in which fascism was then held.²⁸ Clive Field has demonstrated that antisemitic sentiment was still strong as late as August 1959, when 34% of respondents in a Gallup poll judged Jews to hold too much power.²⁹ There was still a core of the UM that was bored with the new concentration on West Indians and wanted to keep ‘the Yids on the run’.³⁰

Nevertheless, far-right concerns were shifting, sometimes in reflection of wider trends. Just when the UM seemed a spent force, its members in Brixton were galvanized by anti-black racism. Under branch leader Michael Ryan, the UM campaigned with the slogan ‘Keep Brixton White’.³¹ A pivotal moment in injecting ‘race’ into British political discourse came in August–September 1958 with the Notting Hill ‘race riots’: two weeks of racially-motivated attacks on black people. Although emerging on the fringes of antifascist discourse and by no means representing the main thrust of antifascist rhetoric, the Holocaust was invoked in defence of black people. The Trotskyist Socialist Labour League, for example, warned that ‘fifteen years after Belsen, . . . the menace of fascism is once again raising its head in western Europe’.³² Claudia Jones’ *West Indian*

28 James Robb, *Working Class Anti-Semite: A Psychological Study in a London Borough* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1954), 171.

29 Clive Field, *Britain’s Last Religious Revival? Quantifying Belonging, Behaving, and Believing in the Long 1950s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 84.

30 David Butler and Richard Rose, *The British General Election of 1959* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1960), 181.

31 Macklin, *Very Deeply Dyed*, 68–69.

32 Gerry Healy, ‘Workers’ Defence Squads for Notting Hill,’ *The Newsletter* 3, no. 104 (30 May 1959), 157.

Gazette and Afro-Caribbean News (WIG) reminded its readers of fascism's links to the 'millions of Jews who were tortured and murdered in Germany and the rest of Europe . . . memories are short . . . If this were not so, the Mosley mob would not dare crawl out from under their stones!'³³

The 1960s would continue to witness fascist engagement with racial populism, especially during the 1964 General Election campaigns in Smethwick and Southall. It would also see widespread Nazi symbolism in the swastika 'epidemic' at the dawn of the decade, and overt Nazism in the form of Jordan's NSM. Such overt activity was not indicative of a quantitative shift relative to racial populism: the NSM was always a marginalized groupuscule: its public campaigns brought it a disproportionately significant amount of publicity.³⁴

'Never Heard of Dachau or the Gas Chambers': The Swastika Epidemic of 1959–1960

On Christmas Eve, 1959, two men daubed the recently rededicated synagogue in Cologne, West Germany with a swastika and the words *Juden Raus* ['Jews out']. They were revealed as members of the nationalist *Deutsche Reichspartei*. In the following weeks, similar incidents took place in thirty-four countries around the world.³⁵ To some extent, the Board framed its horrified reaction to this 'swastika epidemic' around the memory of the Holocaust. It wrote to the Home Office, urging Harold Macmillan's Conservative Government to condemn the incidents, 'bearing in mind that British Jewry includes many persons who . . . themselves or their families have faced persecution and suffering almost unparalleled in the world's history.'³⁶ The Board identified the roots of the epidemic in the 'half-hearted and sometimes ineffective process of de-Nazification' and reproached the West German government for attributing previous desecrations of Jewish cemeteries in the county to youthful 'high spirits'. For the Board, swastika graffiti was evidence that the spirit of Nazism had not been eradicated.³⁷

33 Harry Francis, 'The Lesson of Sammy Davis Jnr,' WIG 3, no 2 (September 1960).

34 Paul Jackson, *Colin Jordan and Britain's Neo-Nazi Movement: Hitler's Echo* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 136.

35 Sidney Liskofsky, 'International Swastika Outbreak,' *The American Jewish Year Book* 62 (1961): 209.

36 BDDC memorandum for Home Office, January 1960 (?), the Wiener Holocaust Library (hereafter: WL) 1658/9/1/17/16.

37 BDDC, Memorandum, Resurgence of Nazi Manifestations, January 1960, WL 1658/9/1/17, 1.

Generally, however, the Board displayed its traditional aversion to special pleading. By the time it was confronted with British fascism in the 1930s, the Board's middle-class composition was still ensured by its dominant practice of selecting synagogue leaders as its deputies, usually drawn from that social stratum, and its values and approaches correspondingly emphasized acculturation, Jewish patriotic contribution and maintaining the community's low profile by discouraging attendance at fascist meetings.³⁸ Daniel Tilles has demonstrated that from 1936–37, the Board did become actively antifascist – crucially once it had allowed that fascist attacks on Jews could be portrayed as part of a wider campaign against tolerance and democracy, although it still made sure to omit its name from most of its antifascist publications.³⁹ The drive to limit particularism was still evident just after the Holocaust, when the Board's JDC reminded the wider organisation that, 'the Jewish problem is not priority Number One in the present strained and chaotic condition of the world.'⁴⁰ Faced with the swastika epidemic, the Board appealed to a wider defence of democracy, generalized anti-racism and a narrative of the Second World War which did not publicly separate out the Holocaust. Anti-racism acted as code for antisemitism, providing a means of talking about anti-Jewish actions in West Germany without using the language of ethnic particularism. In a memorandum to the West German government, the Board was referring only obliquely to antisemitism when it said that in February 1959 it had passed a resolution declaring that, 'any legislation against racial or religious incitement could only be effective if speedy action were taken to remove from positions of influence in public life in West Germany those who had taken an active part in carrying out the policy of the Nazi Government.'⁴¹

Despite its refutation of 'high spirits' in West Germany, when it came to Britain, the Board shared the Federal German government's sense that many of the perpetrators were not dedicated far-right activists but young people who knew little about Nazism or the Jews but who were attracted to opportunities for causing offence and vandalism. For the Board, most manifestations of the swastika epidemic in Britain were not inherently a question of fascism and antifascism. It sometimes emphasized British perpetrators' political naiveté and ignorance of the Holocaust. In the case of two 18-year-old swastika daubers, Barry Davies and Roy Harper, the Board noted uncritically the police

³⁸ Tilles, *British Fascist Antisemitism*, 146.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 164–165.

⁴⁰ BDDC, Joint Committee - Open Air Campaign for Attacking Anti-Semitism, No.1 (1946), WL 1658/1/1/3.

⁴¹ BDDC, Memorandum, Resurgence of Nazi Manifestations.

conclusion that there was no political motive for the crimes: 'Davies had never heard of Dachau or of the gas chambers, and is said to have gone white when he saw the pictures in Lord Russell's book [*The Scourge of the Swastika*]'.⁴²

The CPGB's politicisation of the Holocaust, both as part of a national antifascist campaign and as means of winning Jewish support in areas such as London's East End, had ended broadly with the onset of the Cold War and Soviet suppression of Holocaust remembrance.⁴³ However, German rearmament provided a thread, from the CPGB pamphlet *Stop Arming the Nazis!* (1950) onwards, tying West Germany to the Nazis in communist rhetoric. John Gollan's *The German Menace: a Damning Exposure* (1960) linked the swastika epidemic, German remilitarisation and Nazi violence during the Second World War: 'Hitler's storm-troopers first attacked the Jews. Today in Adenauer's Germany, the swastika is daubed on synagogue doors'.⁴⁴ Gollan dwelt on the racist origins of Nazi Germany's expansionist policies, the war itself and the consequences for specific victim groups: 'The Nazi philosophy of the "master race" corrupted a whole nation. As a result six million Jews, seven million Russians and countless other millions died, among them all our own people killed in action and in air-raids'.⁴⁵

Antifascists generally linked the swastika epidemic back to the source of its outbreak in West Germany. Their dominant reaction highlighted the martial problem of a remilitarized Germany and appealed to patriotism, not Holocaust memory. Communist invocation of the Holocaust recalled its earlier, confident politicisation of the genocide. In sharp contrast, in its determination to avoid special pleading, the Board effectively denied that the epidemic signalled resurgent fascism. As the following section will demonstrate, the Board was similarly reticent and lacking in confidence at the time of the arrest and trial of Adolf Eichmann and so even in this context did not wield the Holocaust against fascism.

The Eichmann Trial, 1961–62

Adolf Eichmann was captured by Israeli intelligence agents in Argentina in May 1960. In the following months, the Board feared an antisemitic reaction.⁴⁶ It was driven to defend the resulting trial in the first instance, only then being

42 BDDC, untitled, undated, WL 1658/10/37/1/27.

43 Joshua Cohen, 'Never Forget? The Holocaust and British Communist Antifascism, 1945–51,' *Twentieth Century Communism* 14 (2018): 132.

44 John Gollan, *The German Menace: A Damning Exposure* (CPGB: 1960), Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick, MSS.164/2/2/4, 2.

45 Ibid., 3.

46 BDDC minutes, 7 December 1960, WL 1658/1/1/4/20, 3.

capable of reflection on the proceeding's potential for insight into the motivations and dynamics of the Nazi genocide. The Board decided not to produce a pamphlet explaining aspects of the trial. Instead, it briefed community leaders firstly on how to defend Israel's extra-territorial seizure of Eichmann. Then, it tried to ensure that Jews were prepared to explain the legitimacy and necessity of Israel's decision to prosecute Eichmann on behalf of Jews exterminated before the state's formation in 1948 and whom had, in the vast majority of cases, never set foot in Palestine. Only as a last point did the Board seek to equip its members with the means of countering Eichmann's, 'anticipated defence that he was merely carrying out orders'.⁴⁷ The ways in which the trial has subsequently been remembered as a documentary source on the Holocaust and for the controversy over the personality and 'obedience' of Eichmann, were not focal points for the Board at the time.⁴⁸

The Board located the Eichmann trial in the context of Jewish defence, and with good reason, given fascist reactions to the events. The far right went on the offensive, denouncing Israel's actions as illegitimate and piratical. For John Bean's British National Party (BNP), the largest far-right group of the mid-1960s (although still with only about one thousand members in 1967), Eichmann was a victim of Jewish vengeance propaganda.⁴⁹ The party produced a special supplement of its *Combat* magazine entitled 'The Eichmann trial – what about Jewish atrocities?' with Colin Jordan attributed as the main author. This reminded readers of attacks on British soldiers by the Jewish underground *Irgun* movement in Mandate Palestine and the Deir Yassin massacre of Arab civilians by the *Irgun* and other Jewish paramilitaries in 1948. It identified Menachem Begin, the former *Irgun* leader, as ultimately responsible and demanded his arrest.⁵⁰ The supplement denied the Holocaust ('The Great Lie of the Six Million') and called the Eichmann trial 'a Jewish propaganda stunt'.⁵¹ The BNP thus managed to question the legality of Israel's actions in defence of Holocaust victims while simultaneously challenging the memory of the genocide. Notably, the Board did not counter the BNP's Holocaust denial or the threats the movement made in connection to the Nazi genocide. On 30 April 1961, BNP leaders Jordan, Bean and Tyndall appeared at a rally in Trafalgar

47 BDDC, 'The Eichmann Trial,' 4 January 1961, WL 1658/1/1/4/22.

48 For an overview of these remembrances, see Christian Gerlach, 'The Eichmann Interrogations in Holocaust Historiography,' *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 15, no. 3 (2001): 428–452.

49 Estimate of BNP membership in Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, 231.

50 Jackson, *Colin Jordan*, 97.

51 *Ibid.*, 98.

Square. Jordan declared that Eichmann must have been 'brainwashed' in order to confess to his part in the killing of six million Jews. He ended, ominously, with the promise that, 'We will hold our own Eichmann trial. And in the dock will be the Jews'.⁵²

It would take the emergence of overt British Nazism for antifascists to rally around at least a symbol of the Holocaust. The following section analyses the antifascist response to Jordan's NSM, focusing mainly on the Board, the 62 Group and YSM.

'I Decided That Afternoon to Be a Jew Myself': Resisting the NSM

On 1 July 1962, the NSM held a rally in Trafalgar Square. When Jordan claimed in his speech that 'Hitler was right', he did not explicitly endorse the Holocaust. Instead, he legitimized German National Socialism through analogy between Jewish domination over Weimar Germany and Britain in 1962. He identified Jews as a shared racial enemy that Hitler had first exposed, concluding that National Socialism was as vital now as it had been in 1933: 'The Jews and their minions are now beginning to realise, to their horror, that National Socialism, which they thought they had destroyed, is alive today'.⁵³ Nevertheless, Jordan's speech had an implicitly understood value that connected to the Holocaust, as the *Observer* pointed out when it said that Jordan was, 'in favour of racial purity, and by implication at least, Hitler's policy of Genocide'.⁵⁴ Moreover, by the time of the NSM's formation, the antifascists who would soon form the 62 Group and YSM had witnessed Jordan's belligerent stance on the Eichmann trial and his Holocaust denial, thereby having good reason to see that the Nazi genocide was bound up in his attitudes towards Hitler's 'rightness'. Meanwhile, the pedestal of Nelson's Column bore two NSM slogans: 'Britain awake!' (evoking the Nazi imperative '*Deutschland Erwache*') and, on a very large banner, 'Free Britain from Jewish Control'. Antifascists stormed the NSM stage; in the aftermath, the 62 Group and YSM formed to confront Jordan's movement.

The two organisations differed markedly in their antifascism. The 62 Group used violence to confront fascists and intelligence work to undermine its opponents. The YSM eschewed violence, adopting peaceful protests (although

52 Reported speech in BDDC minutes, March/April/May 1961, WL 1658/1/1/4/40, 6.

53 Colin Jordan, 'The Speech the Jews Rioted Over,' reprinted from *The National Socialist* (London: Phoenix Publications, 1962).

54 'Comment,' *Observer*, 8 July 1962, 8, cited in Jackson, *Colin Jordan*, 111.

individual members were involved in violent confrontations) and a mass petition campaign for anti-racist legislation.

The Board sought to decentre Jewish antifascists from the events in Trafalgar Square. It noted, approvingly, that although there had been an antifascist 'riot', 'the number of Jews in the square had been small'.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, in the aftermath of the rally, provocative rhetoric on the Holocaust alerted the Board to the limits of free speech. The Board's JDC, preferring to target fascism through legal means, instructed its observers to pay special attention to speeches that had led to successful prosecutions, including rhetoric that simultaneously praised and denied the Holocaust along the lines that, 'Hitler had the right idea about the Jews . . . 6 million is all lies but even if this is true, it is not enough'.⁵⁶ There was, however, little connection with the emotional responses of those antifascists who were provoked by the NSM, including on the emotive issue of the Holocaust. John Dight, the JDC chairman, did conclude that it would be impossible to tell the community not to attend NSM meetings.⁵⁷ However, the JDC subsequently reflected with disappointment on the 'human element' of the antifascist response in the Square, disapproving of the involvement of Jewish antifascists in violence and how this was perceived to reflect negatively on the wider community.⁵⁸

The Board engaged with the question of the Holocaust as antifascist motivation in its response to JACOB. This organisation was formed by 62 Group members, marking an attempt by that movement to explain its cause, advocate for arrested members and finance their legal costs, and generally win respect in the wider Jewish community.⁵⁹ The Board took particular issue with the JACOB publication *With a Strong Hand* (1966), which criticized the Board's defence work and urged Jews to remember the lessons of the Holocaust as motivation for a militant response to the British far right. JACOB employed the by-then already contested victim trope of Jews meeting their fate 'like lambs to the slaughter' to argue that this time, Jews must be combative. The Board retorted that this idea implicitly put blame on the innocent victims 'instead of exclusively on the murderers'.⁶⁰ It refuted historical comparison between Germany in 1933 and Britain in 1966; JACOB's call to resist renewed extermination was, according to the Board, disproportionate and self-defeating: 'The "aid"

55 BDDC, 3 July 1962, WL 1658/1/1/4/68.

56 BDDC, 'Hints to Observers,' undated, WL 1658/1/1/5/70.

57 Ibid.

58 BDDC, Triennial Review (1964), WL 1658/1/1/5/86.

59 Gerry Cantor, interviewed by the author, 22 September 2016.

60 BDDC, 'Defence with responsibility,' 3.

committee should also realise that the Britain of 1966 is neither the Weimar Republic nor Germany of 1933. It should free itself from the habit of deliberately exaggerating the size and influence of fascist groups. That these exist at all is bad enough; but it is foolish to go on crying wolf all the time.’⁶¹ This argument demonstrated the extent to which Jewish antifascism fragmented over the legacy and relevance of the Holocaust for communal defence in the mid-1960s.

Despite the aversion to Holocaust analogy revealed in its argument with JACOB, the threat of the NSM did resonate with the Board as a warning from history. NSM members were linked to a series of arson attacks on London synagogues and Jewish property in 1964 and 1965. In March 1966, six members of the South Woodford NSM branch went on trial for attacking synagogues in the east London areas of Ilford and Clapton.⁶² In November 1964, a fire at a *Yeshiva* (rabbinical seminary) in London’s Stamford Hill killed one person. The JDC reported on ‘considerable apprehension’ in connection to the *Yeshiva* fire (fascist arson has never been proven in this case), especially since the incident took place on the anniversary of *Kristallnacht* (the Nazi ‘November pogrom’ in 1938).⁶³ In connection to the petrol bombing of a synagogue in Cardiff in July 1965 and a ‘wholesale swastika daubing’ at a Jewish cemetery in August 1965, Dight recognised the ease with which he could ‘instil a sense of fear into the community’ but worried that this fear ‘might become a disease which could not be checked’.⁶⁴

In this way, it was left to the 62 Group and YSM, the two organisations galvanized in the ferment of July 1962, to draw on emotional responses to British Nazism. The YSM formed after the Reverend Bill Sargent, vicar of Holy Trinity Cross in Dalston and a Hackney Labour councillor, had watched the NSM rally from the steps of a nearby church, wearing a large yellow Star of David in solidarity with Jordan’s Jewish targets. He was joined by Harry Green, a member of the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen and Women (AJEX). According to Copsey, the YSM was composed of both Jewish and non-Jewish elements, with most support coming from AJEX and the broader left.⁶⁵ Sargent explained that he adopted the yellow star as a means of achieving synthesis with the Jewish people: ‘I chose the Yellow Star as a symbol because on that day, it was the

61 Ibid., 21.

62 Jackson, *Colin Jordan*, 136–7.

63 BDDC, JDC minutes, 8 December 1964, WL1658/1/1/5/117.

64 BDDC, JDC minutes, 17 August 1965, WL 1658/1/1/5/169.

65 Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain*, 98.

Jewish community that was being vilified and I wanted to show my identification with it. I decided on that afternoon to be a Jew myself. [had black people been the target instead] I would probably have blackened my face to identify myself with the vilified coloured people in this country.⁶⁶

For individual Jewish supporters of the YSM, the movement enabled a similarly vivid public affirmation of the Holocaust's legacy for their antifascism. In July 1962, UM meetings in Manchester and Ridley Road, London led to violent disturbances involving antifascists.⁶⁷ Nearly fifty people, including several Jewish antifascists, would later appear at the Old Street and North London Courts in connection with the violence at Ridley Road. Many of them wore yellow stars. One of the accused talked about Nazi antisemitic persecution, if not demonstrably the Holocaust, when he told the court he had seen two of his parents and some of his family killed by the fascists in Germany.⁶⁸

However, the YSM's leadership projected the motivations and aims of the movement in ways that transcended Jewish experience under the Nazis. When Sargent, a Christian Socialist, explained the YSM's origins and aims to a meeting of the Stamford Hill ward of the Labour Party, he emphasized fascism's threat to the labour movement above that of its implications for minorities. Fascism, Sargent said, 'poses a threat not only to racial minorities, and democracy as a whole but *even more particularly* [my emphasis] to trade unionism and the workers' right to strike.'⁶⁹ In a letter to the *Jewish Chronicle*, Olga Levertoff, the movement's Secretary, acknowledged the yellow star as a metonym for the *ne plus ultra* of racial violence. However, she maintained that the yellow star resonated most vitally in the contemporary anti-racist struggle: 'While reminding us of the depths to which racialism has led, it [the yellow star] stands for rejection of *all* racial hate, not merely antisemitism, and unites people of all races and religions. It is being proudly and gladly worn by Africans, West Indians and Gentiles of all kinds.'⁷⁰ This was not a movement for expressing a particularly Jewish experience, and indeed Levertoff warned Jews that their best defence lay in demonstrating fraternity with anyone 'who may be slandered and attacked on racial grounds', although she upheld the right of Jews to assert their equality, 'within the nation as a whole'.⁷¹

66 *Jewish Chronicle*, 28 September 1962, 8–9.

67 *Ibid.*, 106.

68 'Anti-fascists charged,' *AJR Information* [AJR; Association of Jewish Refugees] XVII, no. 9 (September 1962), 3.

69 'In this fair land,' *AJR Information* XVII, no.11 (November 1962), 1.

70 *Jewish Chronicle*, 14 September 1962, 22.

71 *Ibid.*

The YSM re-appropriated the yellow star as an anti-racist symbol. The yellow star now meant commonality, not separation and the ghetto. It stood as an object lesson for what can happen when racial hatred of any kind is taken to extremes. The strategy of universalising the Holocaust, however, effectively separated the symbol from its specific historical context. The YSM applied itself so completely to an immediate resonance that it hardly envisaged the yellow star in the ghetto or the cattle truck at all. Its anti-racist alliance was paradoxically constructed around Holocaust symbolism even as the movement decentred the genocide from its active appeal.

There are few archival sources for the 62 Group. Analysis for this section has therefore been drawn from new and existing oral history interviews. Where veterans of the 62 Group remembered the significance of the Holocaust in their motivations – or, indeed, suggested polycasual explanations – there is little recourse to the archives to establish any official stance to which these memories conform or diverge. Nevertheless, the oral histories are invaluable in revealing how activists have reflected on and engaged with the significance of the Holocaust for their original antifascism, and, in some cases, their continued activism over a number of decades.

Gerry Cantor remembered the NSM rally as a sudden, dramatic catalyst for his turn to antifascism. He happened to be passing Trafalgar Square on a bus, on his way to a wedding. Cantor reflected that his reaction that day was angry, urgent and spontaneous: 'And as I'm going through Trafalgar Square, I see a big notice across Nelson's Column: "Hitler was right. Free Britain from Jewish control". And I decided that, "sod the wedding, I'm going to get off here"... And we smashed the platform up... and we tore the banner down and there was murder and I finished up going to the wedding with a torn bowtie and a torn jacket.'⁷² It is striking that Cantor remembered a 'Hitler was right' banner on the plinth when in fact this was the sentiment of Jordan's speech. This speaks to Cantor's more visceral recall of the indignation he felt on the day and how he connected this retrospectively to the NSM's provocative stance on the Holocaust. Indeed, Cantor constructed a coherent narrative around his reaction that emphasized his formative experiences of meeting Holocaust survivors while at school. Cantor grew up in Stamford Hill in London and first went to a non-Jewish state school. Then his father, an orthodox Jew, decided that Cantor should attend the religious Hasmonian Grammar School. This was founded by Rabbi Solomon Schonfeld, whom had personally rescued thousands of Jews from the Holocaust; he brought some survivor children to the school at the same time

⁷² Gerry Cantor, interviewed by the author, 22 September 2016.

that Cantor was attending. Cantor remembered that other members of the 62 Group similarly mobilized around the Holocaust. Here, he described the NSM rally as a seminal moment after which the Holocaust came to be openly discussed by antifascists: 'Well, I'll tell you, it [the Holocaust] was talked about after that banner went across, right after that banner: "Hitler was right". "Free Britain from Jewish control" was even just as bad. But the Holocaust: I was fortunate enough to go to the Hasmonean Grammar School and I saw what came out of the camps, these young kids, right, who were like skeletons.'⁷³

While still at school, through communist contacts, Monty Goldman had encountered the 43 Group. By the 1960s, Goldman was a member of the CPGB, which he claimed gave some assistance to the 62 Group.⁷⁴ Comparing the two Jewish antifascist movements, Goldman made a striking claim about the 43 Group's greater degree of emotional motivation, impacting on its strength and degree of militancy, as a result of its closer proximity to the Holocaust: 'You have to remember that the 43 Group were active just after the war and many Jewish people had lost relatives in places like Belsen or Auschwitz so they were outraged when the fascists reappeared The 62 Group never had the benefit of that. They were like the 43 Group in miniature. They played a part though.'⁷⁵ Cantor's reaction to seeing survivor children at the Hasmonean suggests that the emotional intensity of 'second-hand' experiences of the Holocaust was no less important to 62 Group motivations than direct or familial experiences of the genocide were for the 43 Group. On the other hand, some memories of 62 Group activism reveal a self-consciousness relating to the lack of a direct, emotional reaction to the Holocaust, in contrast to Cantor's sense of being 'fortunate' to have experienced this reaction. Mike Whine emphasized that his 'was not a family that suffered during the Holocaust my family, unlike many Jewish families, didn't directly suffer'. Whine's motivation was visceral nevertheless: what 'struck a chord' was the vivid story his mother told him of her being beaten up by Blackshirts on a Whitechapel tram in the 1930s.⁷⁶ Whether galvanized by the Holocaust or stories of interwar fascism, Jewish antifascism can be seen to express what Inna Shtakser calls 'an activist structure of feeling', an emotional basis, interpreted by activists as a manifestation of feeling.⁷⁷

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Monty Goldman, interviewed by the author, 15 September 2016.

⁷⁵ Goldman, quoted in Hann, *Physical Resistance*, 218–219.

⁷⁶ Mike Whine, interviewed by Ben Lee, 16 November 2015, *Searchlight* archive, University of Northampton.

⁷⁷ Inna Shtakser, *The Making of Jewish Revolutionaries in the Pale of Settlement: Community and Identity during the Russian Revolution and its Immediate Aftermath, 1905–07* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

Drawing on his mother's story, and despite not being a 'tough guy', Whine still felt he had to 'do something'.⁷⁸

62 Group veterans remember the emphasis the movement placed on exposing far-right links to German National Socialism. In 1971, the 62 Group attacked a meeting of the secretive, international neo-Nazi Northern League at the Royal Pavilion Hotel in Brighton. Cantor remembered that the Northern League invited three ex-Gestapo members from Cologne. Jules Konopinski, another 62 Group veteran, described, 'dealing with ex-Nazis from Germany, ex-SS men'.⁷⁹ A fight broke out in the hotel's dining room and, 'the one who accused me of hitting him over the head with a chair, right, he was ex-Nazi', remembered Cantor.⁸⁰

Through JACOB, the 62 Group specifically referenced the Holocaust, as did the YSM through its name and symbolism. The following section explores the extent to which the Holocaust surfaced in broader anti-racist campaigns. These took place at a time when political discourse increasingly linked race relations with immigration control, and when 'immigrant' was becoming code for 'coloured people' rather than for all people coming into Britain.⁸¹

'Who After Auschwitz Still Clings to Racial Politics': The Holocaust, Antifascism and Anti-Racism in the 1960s.

Little has been written about intra-communal relationships between British Jews and newer immigrant groups; there has been little consideration of the memories of antisemitism, the Holocaust, racism and colonialism as points of convergence or antagonism. This situation contrasts to that of the USA, where a distinct literature analyses black-Jewish relations, including what Cornell West considered their nadir in the late 1960s, amid mutual recrimination and perceptions of betrayal.⁸² However, James Jordan has recently analysed the influence of Holocaust memory on race relations in Britain. Primarily focusing on a 1968 television documentary about immigration to the East End called 'Who are the Cockneys Now?' alongside a number of earlier literary examples, Jordan reveals how Nazi persecution of the Jews was sometimes being compared to the racism faced by non-white British immigrants in the

⁷⁸ Whine, interview.

⁷⁹ Cantor, interview; Jules Konopinski, interviewed by the author, 3 November 2016.

⁸⁰ Cantor, interview.

⁸¹ See, for example, Miles and Phizacklea, *White Man's Country*, 21.

⁸² Cornell West, *Race Matters* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1992), 71.

1960s.⁸³ Through its focus on antifascism, this article complements Jordan's work; it assesses in the British context Michael Rothberg's hypothesis of the Holocaust as 'multidirectional memory': that in a pliable public space, memories of the Holocaust, colonialism and racism are not 'owned' by partisan groups but have informed and enriched each other through a complex series of dialogical encounters.⁸⁴

The politics of race surfaced in the run up to 1964 General Election. According to Robert Miles and Annie Phizacklea, the Smethwick campaign in the West Midlands was still atypical: its notoriety stemmed from its revealing the extent to which Peter Griffiths' Conservative campaign harnessed racist attitudes (Griffiths refused to condemn the racist slogan that attached to his campaign: 'if you want a nigger for a neighbour – vote Liberal or Labour').⁸⁵ In the months preceding the election, however, the Board was more focused on the BNP campaign in Southall, London. The far right was active in Smethwick, although most of the controversy there centred on the Conservative campaign: this was a factor that militated against a stronger interest from the avowedly apolitical Board.

John Bean stood as BNP candidate in Southall, targeting the area's Pakistani and Indian immigrant communities. He demanded that voters choose whether Southall became a 'multi-racial slum' or stayed 'Northern European'.⁸⁶ The Board tended to view fascist aggression towards black and Asian people warily, for signs that this racism might give way to renewed antisemitism. There was just enough codified antisemitism in Bean's rhetoric to alert the Board to this possibility, as when the BNP leader decried, 'the big money pressures that have always supported Negro immigration into this country for cheap labour'.⁸⁷ By this time, the idea that Jews were behind 'coloured immigration' was firmly established on the far right, and most crudely articulated in NSM propaganda. The Board was alarmed by BNP activism in Southall but some of its intelligence reports demonstrated a rather disinterested attitude towards Indian and Pakistani victims. The primary concern over antisemitism emerged in the observation that, 'their [the BNP's] main propaganda had been directed against Indians and Pakistanis who were alleged to have

83 James Jordan, 'Who are the Jews Now?': Memories of the Holocaust in Georgia Brown's East End', in *Holocaust Memory and Racism in the Postwar World*, ed. Shirli Gilbert and Avril Alba (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2019), 146–167.

84 Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 2–5.

85 Miles and Phizacklea, *White Man's Country*, 50.

86 Reported speech in BDDC, September 1964 (?), WL 1658/7/2/86, 2.

87 Ibid.

brought about very bad housing conditions. The extent of fascist support, was however, most disturbing.⁸⁸

The Board's cautious attitude towards Smethwick – a campaign which gained national and international notoriety – is in marked contrast to some of the strident comments that were recorded at time. This was especially the case where the treatment of black people in Smethwick suggested comparison with the Holocaust. The historian Michael Hartley-Brewer described the moment at a press conference when an audience member challenged Griffiths over his insistence that his policies merely reflected disinterested commitment to popular will: 'If his constituents were to put forward a proposal to put all Jews in gas chambers would Alderman Griffiths support this regardless? Doesn't he think an M.P.'s conscience comes in somewhere?'⁸⁹ Malcolm X, visiting Smethwick in February 1965, said he had come because he had heard that black people were being treated 'as the Jews were under Hitler'. He warned against inaction: 'I would not wait for the fascist element in Smethwick to erect gas ovens.'⁹⁰ The visit was widely publicized; Malcolm X travelled with the BBC and his comments were reported in local and national newspapers.⁹¹

The 1964 General Election saw the Board concerned with manifestations of racial hatred that for the most part had no explicit connection to anti-semitism. Board members were instructed to lobby property owners and local authorities for the removal of NSM 'don't vote' stickers whether these featured crude caricatures of Jews or black people.⁹² The Board's support for what became the 1965 Race Relations Act drew on this background of wider racism. It did lobby hard for the Act to protect Jews from fascist antisemitism.⁹³ Gavin Schaffer has questioned the extent to which legislators formulated the original bill to protect black people from discrimination in public places or whether other agendas, such as a broader desire to end fascist violence, played a more significant part than has been acknowledged. Schaffer highlighted how the Act's incitement legislation was first used to prosecute a fascist leaflet distributor in October 1966, and how this was swiftly followed

88 BDDC, 12 June 1963, WL 1658/1/15/22.

89 Cited in Michael Hartley-Brewer, 'Smethwick' in *Colour and the British Electorate, 1964*, ed. Nicolas Deakin (London: Pall Mall Press, 1965), 86–87.

90 Originally quoted in *Birmingham Post*, 1965. Cited in Joe Street, 'Malcolm X, Smethwick, and the Influence of the African American Freedom Struggle on British Race Relations in the 1960s,' *Journal of Black Studies* 38, no. 6 (2008): 939.

91 *Ibid.*, 942.

92 BDDC, 1 October 1964, WL 1658/7/2/7/120.

93 Gavin Schaffer, 'Legislating Against Hatred: Meaning and Motive in Section Six of the Race Relations Act of 1965,' *Twentieth Century British History* 25, no 2 (2014): 252.

by the prosecution of Jordan and another far-right activist, Peter Pollard, for distributing literature likely to incite race hatred.⁹⁴

Nevertheless, the Board made almost no attempt to privilege antisemitism or the Holocaust as special reasons for appealing for legislative protection. Indeed, a deputation to Home Secretary Frank Soskice pointed out that, 'Jews at the moment do not suffer from this evil [racial discrimination] except for occasional instances in hotels and employment.'⁹⁵ Where the Board did talk about fascist attacks on racial minorities (not specifically the Jews), this was to point out that such attacks were a precursor to the destruction of liberties for all citizens.⁹⁶

There is a striking disparity between parliamentary debate, which invoked the Holocaust, and the Board's arguments in favour of the new law. In parliament, the Conservative MP Quintin Hogg listed all the antisemitic attacks that had taken place in 1964, while fellow Conservative Anthony Buck claimed that fascist antisemitism was the primary motivating force behind the new legislation.⁹⁷ The Jewish Labour MP, Barnett Janner was unequivocal in linking the Nazi genocide to the race relations debate: 'I have just come back from Israel where ex-inmates of Bergen-Belsen and their children from all parts of the world are celebrating the 20th anniversary of the liberation of that camp. If this Bill does anything to help in the direction of preventing a repetition of some of the horrific events of the past, it will do extremely important work.'⁹⁸ Indeed, for Schaffer, the parliamentary interest in protecting both Jews and black people, 'rendered minimal the necessary imagination leap from Belsen to Brixton.'⁹⁹ Still anxious to avoid special pleading, the Board did not identify political capital in the Holocaust in terms of its own communal defence, let alone regarding the genocide as relevant to a broader campaign against racism.

Despite its consistent sympathy for newer immigrant groups (sometimes advocating for a generalized anti-racism that sublimated antisemitism), the Board shared some of the prevailing assumptions about the 'problem' of immigration: 'Their [the BNP] election address was almost entirely devoted to attacks on coloured immigration, the problem being emphasized in housing and health', and, 'there was particular concern that the BNP was able to

94 Schaffer, 'Legislating Against Hatred,' 258.

95 Mr S Taff, deputation to Home Secretary, 14 January 1965, BDDC, WL 1658/10/37/4/10.

96 BDDC, undated, WL 1658/10/37/4/55.

97 Schaffer, 'Legislating Against Hatred,' 252.

98 Race Relations Bill, Commons Sitting, 16 July 1965, column 1064, Hansard, available at <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1965/jul/16/clause-5-discriminatory-restrictions-on>, accessed 14 December 2018.

99 Schaffer, 'Legislating Against Hatred,' 260.

gain some support in the exploitation of problems caused by coloured immigration.¹⁰⁰ In this sense, the 'othering' of 'coloured' immigrants also acted to 'include' members of the Jewish population in the establishment in ways that were not previously possible. Political alliances around Holocaust memory were thus potentially impeded by such attitudes towards other communities.

Searchlight did make a deep connection between antifascism and anti-racism, established to a considerable degree around Holocaust memory. *Searchlight* began as a newspaper in 1965 and was sporadically published in this format throughout the rest of the decade. It was edited firstly by Reginald Freeson and then Joan Lestor, both of whom were Labour politicians. Gerry Gable served as the original newspaper's research director. In 1975, *Searchlight* was re-launched as a monthly magazine by Maurice Ludmer and Gerry Gable. The case of Ludmer represents perhaps the strongest, most obvious link between first-hand experience of the Holocaust and the imperative to build a broad-based campaign against racism in the early 1960s. Ludmer, of Jewish heritage, was an active anti-racist in the Midlands in the 1960s (he had resigned from the CPGB by the end of the decade, feeling that the party was not deeply engaged in anti-racism). He played a significant role in setting up the Co-ordinating Committee Against Racial Discrimination (CCARD) in 1961, alongside Jagmohan Joshi of the Indian Workers' Association (IWA). Ludmer had worked for the War Graves Commission during the Second World War and had seen Bergen-Belsen – an experience which he claimed informed his later activism.¹⁰¹ CCARD opposed both the ideological content of racism, emanating from colonialism, which it felt underpinned British society, and far-right activism. The establishment of CCARD was an important moment in the coexistence of anti-racism and antifascism: Ludmer wanted to confront both 'the fascist state' and emerging fascist parties such as the NF.¹⁰²

Searchlight declared itself 'against fascism and racialism'. From its first edition, the newspaper represented the Holocaust as a seminal moment in the struggle against racism generally, in a way that transcended opposition to antisemitism. For *Searchlight*, the Nazi genocide disgraced racists of the past, present and *ad infinitum*: 'he who, after Auschwitz, still clings to racial politics

100 BDDC, March-May 1961, WL 1658/1/1/4/38; 'Report on the defence workers' meeting, 23 June 1964, WL 1658/1/1/5/72.

101 Ambalavaner Sivanandan, *A Different Hunger: Writings on Black Resistance* (London: Pluto Press, 1982), 11.

102 Maurice Ludmer, 'A Critical Reply to Ian MacDonald's "Some Thoughts on Fascism Today"', *Race and Class* 16, no. 4 (1975): 418–421.

has rendered himself guilty'.¹⁰³ The newspaper made repeated and strong links between Nazi racial politics and the British far right, be it of the Mosleyite or overtly National Socialist strands. Jordan, Tyndall, Bean and Mosley all had to be resisted, so that, 'they never have the chance to bring the world the misery that their idol Hitler brought it'.¹⁰⁴

Searchlight printed photographs from Nazi concentration and extermination camps as a means of appealing against contemporary racism and fascist activities. In its first edition, the paper juxtaposed images of the camps with those of a modern fascist rally, showing a young man and woman giving Nazi salutes: 'Horrors such as Auschwitz, Dachau, Belsen and other Nazi concentration camps defy belief – and these pictures are not the worst on record. But the horror, sadness and pain must be remembered – a permanent reminder of what happens when people surrender to fascist and racist ideas'.¹⁰⁵

Daniel Levy and Natan Sznajder suggested that the Holocaust became important to American political discourse in the 1960s because of its relevance to contemporary racism.¹⁰⁶ Although the politics of race emerged comparatively more recently in Britain, and particularly after the 1958 Notting Hill riots, the Holocaust was also beginning to resonate with British anti-racist rhetoric in the 1960s. *Searchlight* presaged the antifascist campaigns of the 1970s, including the Anti-Nazi League's opposition to far-right groups on the basis of their being both racist and fascist and its use of the 'Never Again' slogan to confront the 'Nazi' NF.¹⁰⁷

Conclusion

The memory of the Holocaust was increasingly present in 1960s' British anti-fascism. What Andrzej Olechnowicz termed the 'Churchillian brand' of patriotic antifascism now co-existed with an emerging variant that sought to make the genocide resonate with contemporary anti-racism.¹⁰⁸ The central importance of this study lies in its revealing the 1960s as a transitional period in

¹⁰³ 'The truth about fascists,' *Searchlight*, no 1 (Spring 1965), 3.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ 'The face of fascism,' *Searchlight*, no 1 (Spring 1965), back cover.

¹⁰⁶ Daniel Levy and Natan Sznajder, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 114–115.

¹⁰⁷ Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain*, 131.

¹⁰⁸ Andrzej Olechnowicz, 'Introduction: Historians and the Study of Anti-Fascism in Britain,' in *Varieties of Anti-fascism: Britain in the Inter-War Period*, ed. Nigel Copsey and Andrzej Olechnowicz (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 18.

which invocations of the Holocaust were developing and strengthening within British antifascism.

At the beginning of the decade, both antifascism and anti-racism lacked a rhetorical framework linking them to the Holocaust. This framework would begin to be constructed around anti-racism as the 1960s progressed. During the decade, universalistic anti-racism could have negative impacts on Holocaust remembrance. The Board's response to the swastika epidemic decentred Jewish experience in favour of a wider anti-racist narrative. To some extent, the antifascism and anti-racism of the 1960s were leaving Jewish experience behind. This is evident in the Board's invocation of wider racism at the time of the 1965 Race Relations Act. There were orientations around the genocide's multi-directional memory, as Rothberg has claimed. The YSM sought a wide, non-sectarian mass movement that informed its anti-racism with Holocaust symbolism. However, the genocide was not a substantive element in that appeal, and the symbolism operated quite superficially. At the other extreme, the 62 Group was fighting the 'Jewish corner', although it began to negotiate intra-communal alliances; through JACOB, the Group emphasized the particular lessons of the Holocaust for Jewish defence.

The presence of the Holocaust in antifascism was overwhelmingly a reaction to the rhetoric and activities of a section of the far right. Antifascists still often lacked the confidence to wield the Holocaust proactively, for a number of reasons. The Board was ultimately not confident of the genocide's political capital: it was more worried about a potential antisemitic backlash triggered by the Eichmann trial than hopeful that the proceedings would elevate the genocide decisively in national consciousness. However, *Searchlight* did link fascists and racists to the Nazis, and the performative violence of the 62 Group in Brighton in 1971 was intended to expose the actual links between former Nazis and the contemporary British far right. These proactive strategies heralded the more confident antifascism of the 1970s, with its 'NF=Nazis' formulation.

In the 1960s, the Holocaust had immediacy both for fascists and antifascists. The genocide was suggested by swastika graffiti, Nazi salutes and speeches in Trafalgar Square, and the yellow star pinned to antifascist lapels. For antifascists, the Holocaust at first was spectral and haunting; it triggered fear, anger and reprisal. As the decade went on, the Holocaust began to solidify in campaigns that had contemporary relevance. The YSM offered a kind of shelter in solidarity. *Searchlight* applied the Holocaust in a more direct and final way, rendering the genocide the once and future condemnation of all racism.