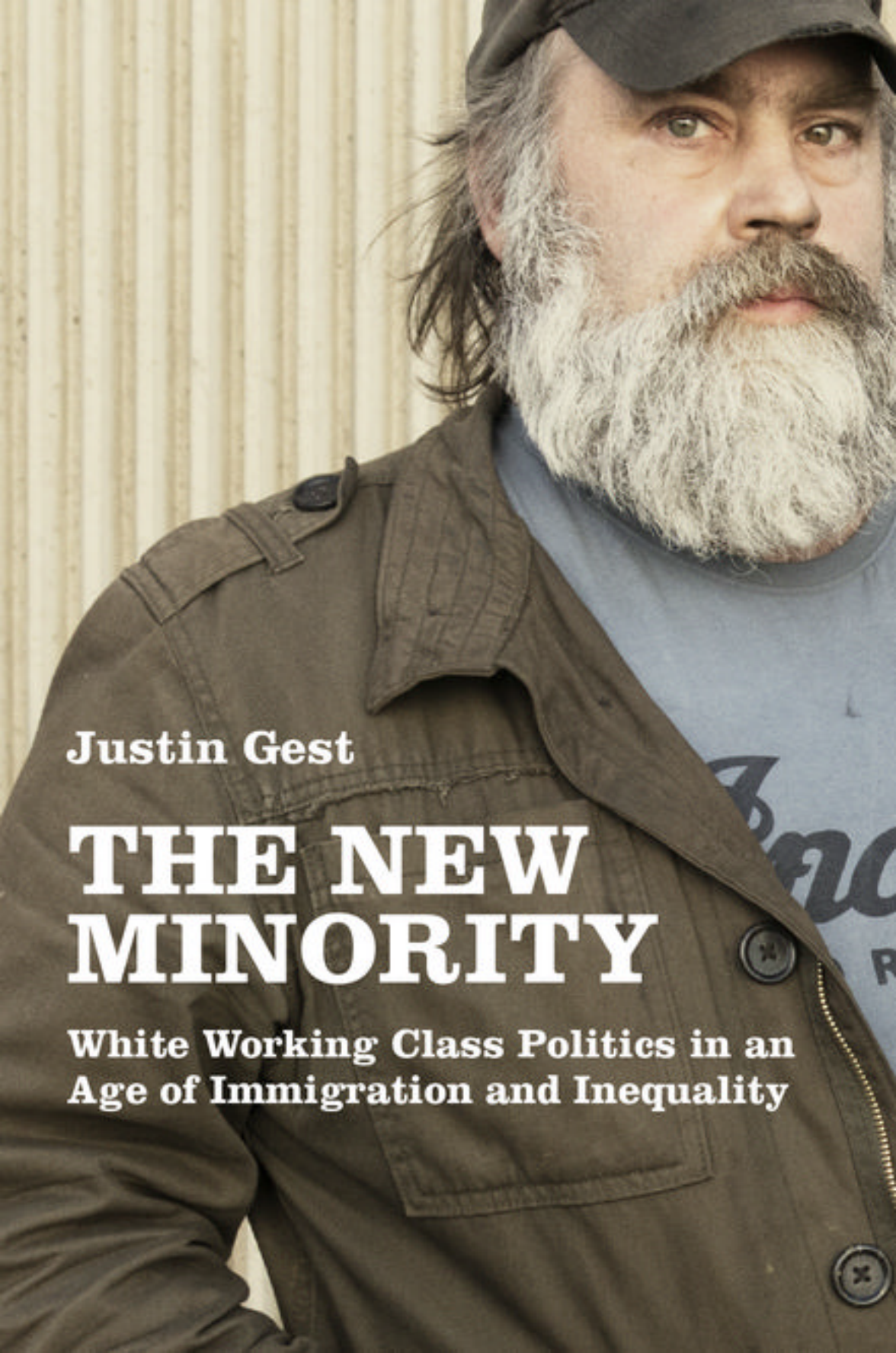

Justin Gest

THE NEW MINORITY

White Working Class Politics in an Age of Immigration and Inequality

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3

Peripheral Visions

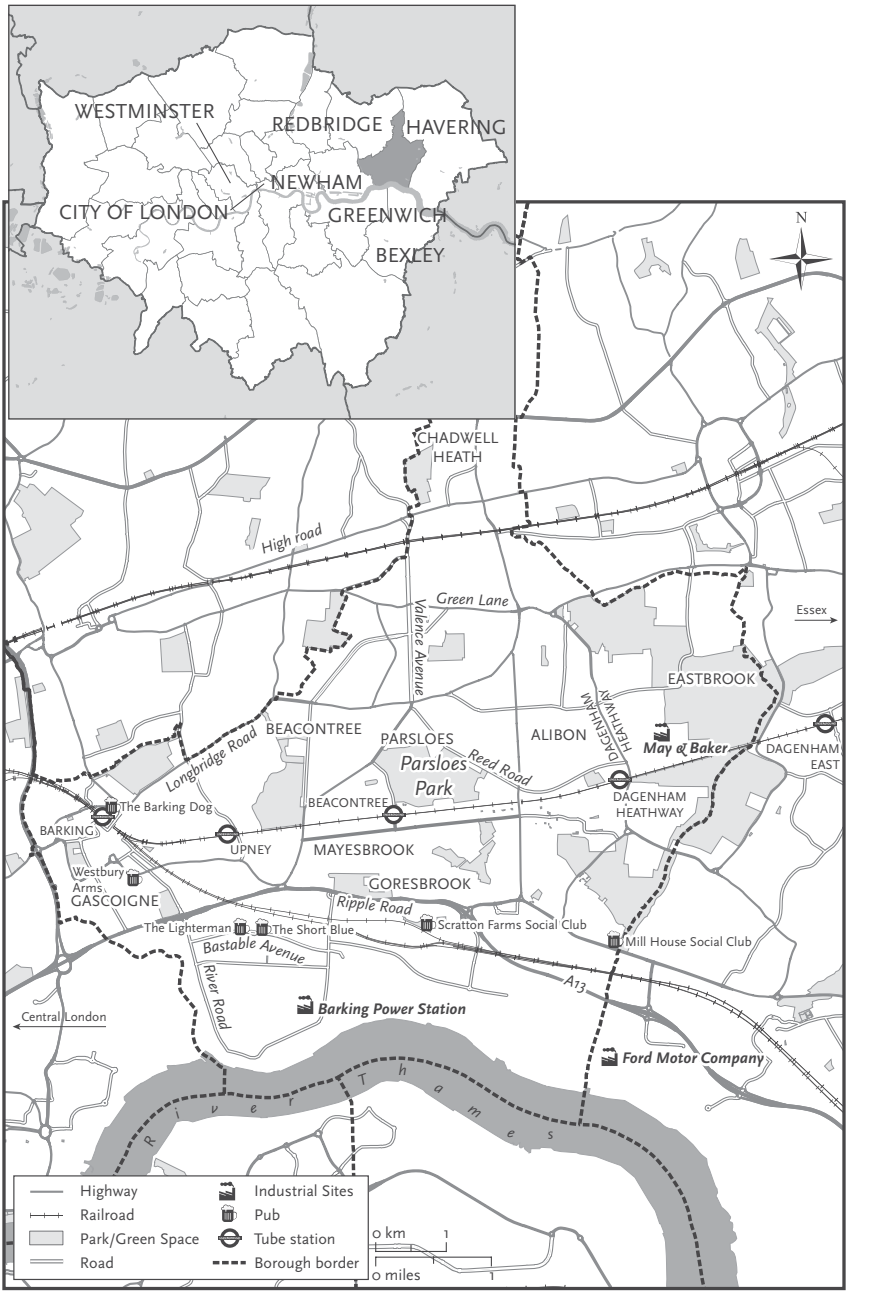
THE POLITICS OF DISPLACEMENT IN EAST LONDON

There is a harshness about Barking . . . Here a native population seems to have maintained its presence, with a kind of bleakness or hardness of attitude . . . It remains a strangely isolated or self-commuting neighbourhood, where the London accent seems particularly thick.
—Peter Ackroyd

This chapter examines white working class political behavior and its context in Barking and Dagenham, East London. Based on interviews with 55 people—15 of whom are elites—and ethnographic observation during three months of immersion, it undertakes an analysis of subjects' attitudes and actions. I begin with a discussion of Barking and Dagenham's history and its narratives of memory amid dramatic demographic change. I then explore the externality of the state government and the legacies of class and social hierarchies that condition observed political behavior. I conclude by outlining the nature of white working class subjects' marginality.

History Told

The story of Barking and Dagenham gets told countless times, every day of every week, in every house and meeting place in the borough. From a nan to her grandson, from a mum to her daughter, from a barmaid to her regular, from one man smoking cigarettes in front of a betting shop to the passerby. Each time it is told, it changes ever so slightly. The storyteller is that much more distant from the account he recites, that much more moved by what she witnesses today, that much more influenced by the nuances of the same stories as heard from others.



Map 3 Map of the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham.

Historians chronicle the extraordinary emergence of Barking and Dagenham as a feat of urban planning during London's modernist expansion to the east, and as a landmark of Prime Minister David Lloyd George's creation of Britain's contemporary welfare state. The core of the borough is the Becontree Estate—the largest single residential estate ever constructed. In 1920, the London County Council's architect said that "the proposal to convert a tract of land, three thousand acres in extent, at present covered chiefly with market gardens, into a township with a population of 120,000 is something altogether unparalleled in the history of housing" (Tames 2002). The public housing complex symbolized George's promise to reward servicemen returning from World War I with "homes fit for heroes." At the time, Walter Long, president of the Local Government Board, regarded this pledge as the redemption of a moral obligation to those who had endured the horrors of the Western Front: "To let them come home from the horrible, water-logged trenches to something little better than a pigsty here would, indeed, be criminal . . . and a negation of all we have said during the war, that we can never repay those men for what they have done for us." Others, more cynically, saw government-subsidized housing as "the antidote to Bolshevism" (ibid.).

From 1921 to 1932, 27,000 cottages were constructed on the farmland east of Barking town center. Inspired by the American "Garden City" concept, the development was the product of precise central planning. Main arteries were split by tree-lined center medians. Concentric side streets curled and joined a greater suburban labyrinth, featuring dedicated spaces for petite shopping parades, verdant parks, plazas, and cul-de-sacs, which residents would call "banjos." Initially, a special tramway was envisioned to bifurcate the sprawling suburb, but instead, London's County Council merely extended the Underground's District Line five stops east of Barking Station to reach Upminster—its current terminus. Designed to surpass working class accommodation of the day, houses were structured based on a few templates with little variation. The attached cottages each featured luxuries such as indoor lavatories, fitted baths, electric furnishings, telephone lines, and front and back gardens. To emphasize the self-sufficiency of the new living standards, developers even planted privet hedges in residential front yards.

New opportunities for work accompanied the government's infrastructural investments, and together attracted thousands of transplants. Initially, the first tenants were so poor, the estate came to be known as Corned Beef City, after the only meat they could afford. However, May & Baker's chemical plant relocated to Dagenham from Wandsworth in 1922, the Barking Power House electric station was established in Creekmouth in 1925, and in 1931, the Ford Motor Company built a factory on several square miles of Dagenham's riverfront that Edsel Ford (Henry's son) had purchased for £167,700 in 1924 (Hudson 2009). These employers, especially Ford, provided dependable jobs for the residents of

the new estate. Through the 1930s, a series of new cars were introduced at Ford Dagenham including the 8-horsepower Model Y in 1932, the 10-horsepower CX De Luxe model in 1933, the first Prefect model in 1938, and the 8-horsepower Anglia in 1939 (Ford News 2011). By 1940, the factory was converted to war production and over the next five years produced 360,000 fighting and transport vehicles (e.g., light vans, army trucks), 262,000 V8 engines, 34,000 Merlin aero engines, as well as a significant proportion of Britain's tractors (Neville 2009). At the time, employee numbers had reached 34,000 (Ford News 2011). The plant continued its expansion after World War II with the Pilot, Consul, Zephyr, and Zodiac ranges, with employment peaking in 1953 at 40,000 workers onsite producing more than 3,000 cars every day on four million square feet of land (Hudson 2009). Further housing developments followed labor demand after World War II, when the construction of the Thamesview Estate brought another several thousand public housing facilities onto the expanses of reclaimed marshland to the south of Barking and Becontree in 1954. The census population of Dagenham soared from 9,000 to 90,000 between 1921 and 1931, and the combined populations of Barking and Dagenham increased another 50% before 1951.

However, people did not relocate to Barking and Dagenham in this era solely for economic opportunity. For the working class men and women who migrated mostly from London's congested, tumultuous East End, the original move was also about personal reformation—greater independence, greater dignity, greater simplicity. Leafy Dagenham was pleasantly separate from the distractions and competition of central London, the population of which was rapidly growing and diversifying with Britain's imperial and industrial transformations. At that time, the East End was populated and commercialized by upwardly mobile Eastern European Jewish immigrants and, as early as the 1960s, by South Asians fleeing the contentious politics and poverty of the Indian subcontinent. The neighborhood's docklands were closing, and a way of life was altering (see Dench et al. 2009).

A homogenous refuge for London's white working class where nearly all were employed by a few key industries, the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham resembled a present-day university campus for incoming East Enders. Employers encouraged residents to develop associations around billiard clubs, bowling leagues, and competitions for chess, cricket, football, tennis, and shooting. The Power House supported a horticultural society, a staff magazine, and a superannuation fund (Tames 2002). The local council institutionalized the New Jerusalem "cradle to grave" vision of the Labour government elected in 1945. Tames notes that the headings of the 1960s "Official Guide" exhibit these paternalistic ideals and objectives. The importance attached to children, health, welfare, and the disadvantaged is attested by an impressively lengthy list of departments, agencies, and programs: Adolescents, Adoption, Blind and

Partially-Sighted Persons, Chess Clinics, Child Care Officers, Child Guidance Clinic, Childminders, Children's Homes, Chiropody, Day Nurseries, Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Dental Clinics, Disabled Persons, et cetera (ibid.). Barking and Dagenham's Council estates were a white working class haven.

However, Barking and Dagenham could not insulate itself from more profound trends in global economics and demographics portended by the East End's earlier transformations. After the mid-1970s, East London's economy went the way of the Ford factory, which endured successive downsizings coinciding with increasing competition in the European car market and Ford's gradual loss of market share. Facing growing financial and overcapacity issues, Ford restructured the company's European operations and, in turn, stopped car production in Dagenham. The plant's number of employees dropped from over 28,000 in 1975 to 7,300 in 2000 (UK Parliament 2000), and in February 2002, the vehicle assembly line stopped for the last time (Neville 2009). As that market declined, unions weakened, labor laws liberalized, and industrial jobs followed a more global move offshore. Britain's postindustrial economy had little use for Barking and Dagenham's tradesmen, as it shifted to high technology and a broader service sector.

Today, the borough's biggest businesses are in logistics and transport, along with some crafts. Manufacturing in the borough is light (fuel nozzles, beds, staircases, flooring), cheap, and in decline. There have been proposals to establish a recycling industry and more housing along the dilapidated river region south of the Thamesview Estate. The river is a makeshift industrial park, a junkyard of multipurpose warehouses, import clearinghouses, parking lots, piles of rubbish, and empty plots of land. The semicircular River Road is a decrepit promenade of rusted metal and garages behind chain-linked fences in front of bare, marshy landscapes littered with plastic wrappers and discarded auto parts. To the east sits what remains of the Ford factory and the electrical power station that still produces nearly a third of London's power.

Alongside the economic changes, the borough's demographics have also altered. Since the Thatcher government's shift to privatization in the 1980s, many of Barking and Dagenham's pensioners and buyout beneficiaries chose to purchase their council flats and sell them off at sizeable profits. When jobs were eliminated, any remaining members of the working class who owned their homes also sold and left the borough. A new generation of residents entered the closed campus that Barking and Dagenham's estates once composed, to take advantage of mortgages and rentals that were a fraction of those in inner London. While some purchased the homes, many new immigrants were assigned to council-owned row houses and tower blocks. Some were highly skilled members of Britain's increasingly diverse middle class, seeking to settle their families in a quieter environment. Others were unskilled laborers seeking work in London's

construction or service sector, or joining family members from abroad. Still others were refugees simply seeking a fundamental upgrade to their quality of life. By 2000, East London was diversifying, modernizing, and joining London's globalizing city.

History Retold

Behind these structural trends reflected in demographic statistics, production numbers, and economic charts, a fundamental and wholly unexpected lifestyle transformation was taking place. East London was suddenly subject to the very cultural changes from which it had sheltered earlier generations of EastEnders. It was not that people of immigrant origin supplemented members of the white working class; the newcomers were actually in the spaces once occupied by—and forever associated with—working class white people's former neighbors, friends, colleagues, unionists, and drinking partners. The smells of exotic foods pervaded hallways, unfamiliar music was amplified through nearby windows, and foreign languages were spoken on buses. Corresponding to different demands, import grocers opened on local high streets, neighborhood pubs closed, and empty commercial spaces were renovated to create makeshift mosques and other houses of worship. Though Barking and Dagenham's remaining working class white people have been witnessing these changes for 30 years, they are still revising their narratives of them, reinterpreting their meaning and, in so doing, reimagining their past.

"Everything's gone straight to hell," said Nancy Pemberton, as she reached to stroke her dog, Molly. At 59 years old, the Pembertons had lived in the Thamesview Estate almost since its initial construction. Nancy is a busybody retiree, who is an avid gardener and political activist. Her husband is a retired fireman, and while they own their home, they chose not to sell as a matter of principle. She brought us both steaming hot tea, and sat alertly in her living room listening to the music of the Beatles and Credence Clearwater Revival on the ambient radio. Fixed to the gas fireplace chimney was an award of recognition Ron had won from the fire brigade years ago; above it hung an analog clock that had stopped at just past 12 o'clock. The living room's glass cabinets contained hundreds of hand-painted figurines.

"It was a community back then. It was predominantly English. There was an Asian girl. And there was one black boy whose mother was a big, fat lesbian who didn't live the quietest of lives. But we always got on, and the English were the majority. It has always been diverse what with us living so near the river. But I remember when we went around the houses for a Christmas charity about 10 years ago, and I noticed all the black faces. Now it's a million times worse."

She continued, "The immigrants who came in the fifties all worked, they learned the language, crunched in a small house until each of them could afford their own. They were English, or as English as could be. These people in the 1950s didn't expect something for nothing. They integrated. They didn't try to change us into Africa."

We moved to Nancy's front yard, which featured five Union Jack flags. An enormous one fluttered from the top of a 12-foot pole, while another was fixed to the cottage's façade, draped over a window box of primroses. Three more small flags were pinned to a vine-covered terrace to the left of the front door, emerging from the leaves like they had blossomed from flower buds. There were also two planter boxes which—planted with strategically placed red, white, and blue flowers—would bloom in the design of two more union flags.

"The schools used to be 90% English, and now they're 90% African. The Asians live more like we do, but the Africans are different."

Pemberton went on, "The EU is actually promoting migration to England. It's the best place for benefits. And we've already got enough of our own who are too lazy to get off their asses. I got off the train in Barking one night and there were dozens of Romanian women with children, and it's clear they had been on the nick [thievery]. Vile people, Romanians. Then you walk outside, and it's so loud with all the halal shops and rubbish in the streets. We look like a suburb of Nairobi."

"What can you do about it?" I asked.

She shook her head disappointedly, and reached down to pick a few weeds from the moist planter boxes. Straightening her posture, she stared pensively across the street and yearned with a hand on her hip.

"If I could just bring back Maggie Thatcher. She would never have let all this happen."

Further north in Dagenham, Lou and Maggie Griffiths live in a rented home in the middle of the old Becontree Estate. They invited me into their cramped living room, a cup of tea waiting on the coffee table. Every other flat surface in the room was covered with ceramic statuettes of dogs, cats, and other large felines. The air was heavy and thick with cigarette smoke, and the sofa was covered in a layer of white dog hair. Lou and Maggie are retired. He is a darts aficionado with a raspy, bass voice and appeared tough as old boots.

"This borough was full of East Enders," Lou proclaimed loudly. "People were very friendly. It was easy to settle in. People had come in after wartime, and the neighbors were good. There was a sense of community, more so than there is now. Since about 2004 or 2005, there was change in the borough that came with the influx of other cultures. Goresbrook Ward was previously 5% foreign; now 50% or 60% of the ward is foreign. It was a massive change that happened too fast for people to cope with. There's a heavy Muslim population. Africans have

flooded in. They don't seem to mix with the existing community. There's no infrastructure to deal with it, so everything got fragmented."

He went on, "We live in a multicultural society and I think that's good. But when it happened so quickly, the existing community feels threatened. In the 1960s when the West Indians came in, no one area was taken over and they mixed in. But the way we've been flooded, it inspires the animosity of right-wing groups. It's a matter of adapting, but some of these people don't speak English or make any attempt to fit in."

Lou paused to light the cigarette he had been rolling. His voice was raw from a pack-a-day smoking habit, but he maintained a booming laugh that seemed to shake the wall behind me and jitter the Persian cats on the shelf nearby. Maggie looked on with a visible sense of enchantment. They were a warm couple, who remained active in their local Tenants and Residents Association—Barking and Dagenham's most local form of authority and civil society.

"Years ago, you used to look out for one another. People used to go around with a collection if someone died," Lou says. "A lot of the new communities don't want to mix in. I think we can learn a lot from each other, but they don't want to learn. Look at Dagenham Heathway! Sixty percent of it are those African shops, and they don't sell nothing to anyone else. Immigration should have been stopped years ago, and now people are thinking the worst: 'They're taking our jobs' and things like that. We don't go out hardly, and I can't get settled [financially]. This house is a rental, and we've been on the Council's [public housing] list for three years. We just had so much debt that we had to sell our old house before it got repossessed or fell apart around our ears!" he roared with some sorrow.

In interviews with a variety of the borough's residents, there was very little variation in their depictions. As I moved from venue to venue, ward to ward, each new narrator seemed to pick up where the previous storyteller had left off.

"In 1971, Barking and Dagenham had full employment," said Fred Toulson, a seasoned schoolteacher. "You could move from one job to another—from the print to the factory to the dig to the drill. There were close-knit families."

He continued, "In the first class I taught in 1971, every single kid's parents worked at Ford's. Nobody left Barking and Dagenham. Ten years ago, there were no black kids in my school."

"It was a friendly place," said Harriet Johnson, a resident of Thamesview for 42 years. "Everyone knew each other, until all the bigots came. We got overrun by Indians, blacks, Lithuanians and Polish people and all that. Before that, it was a beautiful estate. It was reclaimed land. We used to have cows and horses walking down the roads."

"Back then, you could go out at night and parents didn't worry," said Norma Davies, a pensioner and activist. "Ford's was down the road."

Davies went on, "The kids used to play in the streets and used to respect their elders. The people have changed. You don't feel safe. Everyone used to look

after one another, knocking on each other's doors. Since Ford's moved and May Baker's tablet factory shut, it's gone down. There are no jobs and that's why the children are hanging about in the streets. They've got nothing else to do."

"People don't talk no more," said Pam Reed, a bartender at the Mill House Social Club, one of the borough's few standing working men's clubs. "Kids don't come to your house and have a sleepover. You used to always have friends around, kids' parties, you know? All the people who were brought up here have moved out. I've worked all my bloody life and I'm going into banks and seeing Africans come in with thousands of pounds in their hands, sending it back to Kenya or wherever they come from. And you wonder why we have a recession? Bleeding hard to work out! None of their money that they earn here is going back into our country."

Each rendition offers alternative perspectives of the same narrative, and occasionally apocryphal details about livestock, employment, and demographics. The 2011 census calculates that 50% of the borough is white British, 22% is of African or Afro-Caribbean origins, 16% is of South Asian origins, and 8% is of Eastern European origins (Office for National Statistics 2012). The more the borough changes, the rosier the memories become.

Social Displacement

Over time, the working class whites of Barking and Dagenham have developed an increasingly refined—even if not necessarily accurate—collective memory. To a large degree, this unified narrative is indeed a product of an ever-shrinking population—a population selected for their lower material well-being (vis-à-vis departed homeowners), now with fewer stories to go around and a more easily amalgamated perspective.[1] However, perhaps more importantly, this smaller population is increasingly funneled to interact in the borough's few remaining venues of cultural life—none more prominent than the public houses.

Public Houses

Pubs are endangered in Barking and Dagenham today. Their primary consumers, white working class men and women, have less and less disposable income. With the loss of basic warehouse and manufacturing work, they can no longer afford to spend precious pence on pints at the pub, let alone tickets to local football matches. Meanwhile, the cost of pints has steadily risen thanks to a wave of government taxes on alcohol, and many regulars have been further deterred by the United Kingdom's 2007 national smoking ban. Given the adverse circumstances, at least 20 Barking and Dagenham pubs have closed since 1999 (Closed

Pubs 2012). Some were demolished and replaced, like the Church Elm on Dagenham Heathway; now, a public library with new public housing upstairs sits on the site. Others sit dilapidated and condemned on unsold land. The Short Blue on Bastable Road still has signs touting "Disco Friday Night" hanging from the second floor, taunting regulars who pass by en route to the nearby shopping parade. The Westbury Arms sat dormant on Ripple Road for 10 years, until rioters torched the abandoned building during the London uprising in August 2011.

The arson was not random. The Westbury Arms had been a Barking fixture since 1899, and was built on the site of an alehouse called the Hand-In-Bowl, which dated to 1736. Its closing in 2001 removed the Gascoigne ward's primary social outlet. "Men, mainly men, would stand around in their cloth caps and sup a pint with friends," wrote one local about the pub (Vickers 2012). "Old folks who could sit quietly and enjoy the ambiance and be accepted as part of the furniture; they were alone, but they were never lonely." During Barking and Dagenham's recent transformation, pubs serve as the last bastion for working class whites to convene in a relatively homogenous environment to meet, crack inside jokes, make obscure references, and retell stories to each other—and in doing so, to preserve a situated sense of solidarity. For East Londoners frequently complaining about people "not talking anymore" and "being a community," pubs are precious.

While in Barking and Dagenham, I frequented the Lighterman, the Thamesview Estate's only remaining pub. It was named for the tugboat operators who pulled barges on the River Thames. Inside the single-story, 20-seat lodge, light banter is typically exchanged between the loquacious barmaids and charismatic regulars at the bar, while gruff, older gentlemen slouch in a booth against the side wall. There is a single slot machine, where people frequently invest the change they receive after purchasing a few £2.80 pints of Carlsberg. The washroom is bare, with a dysfunctional faucet and a seatless commode connected to a pullchain. House music reverberates at moderate volumes, except in the back of the pub, where it echoes off a cinderblock wall painted with an eight-foot-long, eight-foot-high union flag. Before I visited, I was advised to bring a local escort. Even then, when I first entered, the banter quickly dissipated and the house beats felt louder amidst the scrutiny. "We don't really get strangers in here," Jessi Bowen, the barmaid, later explained. "It's a community, and don't get me wrong, we serve anyone. But all these guys are on the estate. It's like a family." As the last pub in Thamesview, the Lighterman is subtly treasured. Fifteen years ago, the pub's local owner drove an acquired Rolls Royce sedan onto the pavement in front of the pub, where it has been left untouched ever since. "That the hood ornament is still attached tells you what people think of this place," Kieran Turner said to me, while he smoked outside in an early May drizzle.

As with extended family, not all who frequent the pub are well known or particularly well liked. Regulars greet each other, some more hardily than others,

with a nod or a jab at their preferred football team. Either salutation is more acknowledgement than they typically attract on the streets of Barking and Dagenham, where the wrong look or attire can lead to a mugging by hoodlums. "People come to the pub to have a rest from the outside," said Terry Hammonds, an 18-year-old from Becontree whom I met at the Barking Dog, one of the borough's largest pubs, which is run by the national chain J. D. Wetherspoon. "This is where they have their time together. They're just looking for a beverage and a chat with other Englishmen. They can't get that outside. Here, you can play darts, watch sport, and talk." As more pubs have closed, regulars have had to shift loyalties to new institutions, leading to social mixing that previously did not take place. While this has brought different people into new interaction, it has also enfeebled the sense of cohesion in consolidated clienteles.

Outside the Barking Dog, a dozen people leaned against metal barriers, smoking cigarettes and occasionally commenting on passersby along Barking's station parade. Hayden Thomas, an unemployed 28-year-old, admired the scenery: "I know who she's talking to," he said, tilting his head toward a young blonde woman shouting into her mobile phone. "She's a shithead. I can't stand her." He drew in smoke from his cigarette and surveyed pedestrians coming and going. "Who's that? I don't know that cunt. There's no unity because there's not enough of us anymore. There's more of them [foreigners], and I think you just get used to it."

Thomas continued, "You say 'alright' to them [fellas at the pub], but you're not going to say much more. If anything happens, you know they'll be there. You see them around." In this way, with sometimes the weakest of ties, the pub recreates the norms of reciprocity and implicit solidarity that the regulars like to think once existed in their borough. And when each pub closes, a particular sociocultural milieu—once recovered everyday—is lost forever.

Private Houses

As public houses have declined, the cookie-cutter cottages and uniform tower blocks of Barking and Dagenham's estates have become not only the venues for the preservation of working class British culture, but also the site of many social problems. As many East Londoners have children at an early age, homes tend to bring together three and sometimes four generations of a family on a regular basis. While two- and three-bedroom accommodations only hold a limited number of people, families tend to be tightly knit and congregate regularly if for no other reason than childcare. In old age, grandmothers are often looked after by their children. However, as many nans are only in their forties and fifties, they frequently help their daughters with their children and household chores. For this reason, young working class women are reluctant to leave their Barking and

Dagenham neighborhoods. A move to another ward mere blocks away is viewed as significant, let alone a move to another borough in London. When I asked Jessi, the Lighterman's barmaid, whether she still lived in Thamesview, she replies, "Oh God no. I've moved away." I ask her where. "I'm over in Goresbrook now"—a five-minute bus ride, or 20-minute walk, from the pub.

Ironically, the early pregnancies that bring mothers and daughters so close are often the consequence of an initial desire for greater separation. Like other British municipal authorities, Barking and Dagenham's Council housing administration prioritizes claims made by expecting or recent mothers over almost any other resident. As a result, many teenaged men and women have children in order to gain greater privacy from their parents and family members. Since they cannot afford their own rental, pregnancy appears as an easy shortcut for young lovers. Alas, only a few of these relationships last and lead to long-standing marriages. The result is an epidemic of single mothers and absentee fathers. Tellingly, the conception rate per 1,000 women under the age of 18 years in 2010 was 19.6 percentage points more for Barking and Dagenham than the mean conception rate for all of England and Wales (UK Office for National Statistics 2012). Once settled in a council flat of their own, young women have little choice but to return frequently to their parents' homes if they want to pursue work, further education, or maintain any sort of a social life.

This close interaction between generations facilitates the inheritance of oral histories and identity constructions by younger generations who remain in close contact with grandparents and great grandparents. "My nan is like me world," says 24-year-old Harry Carlisle. "I don't know me dad, I don't talk to my mum. She's never really been there, after having me at 17. My nan is a proper, old-fashioned, East End lady. It's people like that who put this country together. She looks around and can't believe the sorry state we're in. My granddad would be turning in his grave. There were bombs all around, and my nan was getting up at 5 am to get this country working. It's true what she says: 'This country can't support itself this way. We have enough bums here already without flying more over.'" With Harry's immediate connection to his grandmother, less is lost in translation across the generations. This preserves communal self-understandings about white working class people's role in British society, their collective ideals, and their understandings of propriety.

Indeed, in households, traditional norms endure in the contemporary era. There is strong value placed on neighborliness in Barking and Dagenham's white British households. If I called ahead, every resident of each home I visited invited me in for tea. Many offered biscuits. Several people asked me over after meeting in the pub or shopping parade. In interviews, residents frequently faulted others for not greeting each other on the street, making small talk on the bus, and contributing to local charitable campaigns. That is not to suggest that such actions

are conventional today, if they ever were. But that they are not conventional provides substantial fodder for conversations and gossipy condemnations over propriety. Families remain almost invariably matriarchal. While this is indubitably connected to fathers' absenteeism and high levels of imprisonment, it is also true in two-parent households. Gloriously fulfilling stereotypes about their East End ancestors, Barking and Dagenham women tend to be loud, brazen, garrulous and nosy, but with a keen interest in family life and social affairs. They are strong, petulant, but inevitably long-suffering characters quick to recapitulate the most personal of tragedies.

In light of the departure of so many key members of Barking and Dagenham's white British community over the past 30 years, old bonds of communal interdependence have also been re-centered at the level of nuclear families. Surviving small businesses tend to be family-run, with employees who are exclusively kin. Jessi, the Lighterman's barmaid, is married to the owner's son. The other bartending shift is held by her sister-in-law. Elsewhere, Fiona Harrison is the 23-year-old owner of a flower shop. She works six days a week, relieved only on weekends and during her doctor's appointments by her sister and boyfriend, respectively. The shop was previously owned by her father's boss's wife, whom she always referred to as "Nan." "I wouldn't call a random person 'Nan' anymore," she explains. "But that's what she was. Today, people have just moved in from different areas, and people just keep to themselves more. You used to know everyone from somewhere or from someone's family. The older people still know a lot of the other older people, [. . . but] a lot of young people hang around, smoking, mucking about, stealing things from the shops. So, oh God, people trust each other less." Less than half of Barking and Dagenham residents responding to a 2011 police Public Attitude Survey felt that their local authorities were adequately dealing with crime and displays of antisocial behavior effectively (London Borough of Barking and Dagenham 2010b). Reduced social trust more generally has led middle-aged adults to be ever more insular and nepotistic.

A reliance on family members to run businesses and care for children is also a reflection of the fewer professional opportunities for Barking and Dagenham's working class. In the absence of the Ford factory "family" and the favoritism of white British business owners, today's economy places a higher premium on objective educational achievement—a value not typically passed down from generation to generation in white working class households. In many ways, the children of such households find themselves outside of an increasingly globalized education system—a system preparing individuals for a future of stringent competition for viable jobs (Standing 2011: 68). In the past, the children of Barking and Dagenham typically finished school at 14, took a job at the Ford factory, got pregnant, and lived off their housing benefit, salary, and pension. According to Council administrators, the borough has

the worst levels of literacy in London and the second worst numeracy. The 2011 Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for the borough indicates that white pupils continue to perform at levels significantly lower than the national average (London Borough of Barking and Dagenham 2011a). There are fewer people with advanced qualifications, and more with low qualifications, than in other London boroughs. The educational level is said to resemble that of the East End in the 1970s, when Bangladeshis began to move in. Achievement is thought not to be "for the likes of us." "Adults did not have the benefits of a strong education system," said Fred Toulson, the school headmaster. "In schools, there are bulletin boards dedicated to kids who graduated and went to uni. There was no history of higher education. Parents tore up one of my student's coursework and told him he was a 'boffin.' You're ridiculed for being 'too clever by a half,' or for being 'a bit bookish' " (see also Willis 1977: 2). Many of the young men industrious enough to be admitted to universities do not take up their positions—distracted by family difficulties, hesitant to take on further debts, and unexposed to role models who may establish new norms of professional success.

While achievement among white working class women is not much different, they are also subject to social exclusion for their achievement. Gender roles remain rigid in households, and Barking and Dagenham has the highest rate of domestic violence per 1,000 residents in all of London (London Borough of Barking and Dagenham 2011b). "Mum always goes to school, if there's any problem," explained Toulson, describing gender roles. "If it's major, then dad goes too and he sits there quiet-like." Fiona at the flower shop said, "In my family, my dad was never the easiest man to talk to. But my mum was, and she would always speak with Dad for me. My friends would often not speak to either of their parents much. Dads often don't have much time for their kids. Some parents are very forceful with their ideas on their kids, and don't give them a chance to form their own opinion." Compounded, these trends render a white working class community heavily subject to self-understandings and behavior initially practiced by an ever-present generation of elders, who have retained young people inside their own distortions of time.

Turning Back the Clock

In 2007, Barking and Dagenham's borough Council administered a survey to several hundred residents. It asked, "What can we do to make Barking and Dagenham better?" According to Council administrators, the most common answer was: "Make it like it used to be 50 years ago." The average white resident could not conceive of progress coming from the future. While this response

connects closely to the prominent images of an idyllic past, it also represents people's discomfort with and confusion about the social and economic processes that have led to the borough's current state. Amid the extraordinary amalgamation of narratives that constitute Barking and Dagenham's past, there is little consensus about how it transformed so substantially, so quickly. Today's politics is therefore a fight to characterize this transformation, which enables power brokers to assign blame and set agendas accordingly.

At a town hall meeting at a church in Dagenham's Alibon ward, Member of Parliament Margaret Hodge and her staff went from table to table to hear complaints and requests from constituents. A Labour politician, Hodge had held the seat since 1994. Volunteers dispensed pizza, tea, and shortbread to mostly elderly locals who gathered around six tables for what is called a "surgery"—aptly named, as community members typically alert the representative to social and economic ills needing resolution. Hodge approached Eleanor Hodgkins and Poppy Moore first.

ELEANOR: But where are [these foreigners] coming from, Margaret?

HODGE: Many are second- and third-generation immigrants. A lot of people have sold their houses and left Barking and Dagenham. Listen, you're never going to change it back again. All you can do is make it better for your children.

POPPY: But Margaret, they're in and they're out. Why do we let them do it?

HODGE: With the buy-to-let people, no one is buying who has a commitment to the community. But you can't control it. It's no one's fault: the government, the Council, no one's. But you can recreate the community spirit.

POPPY: The smells from the houses will make you heave! And on the Heathway, there's too many strange stores selling odd meats and vegetables.

HODGE: Well, some people like it.

POPPY: Margaret, would you please live here for two or three weeks and see what it's like?

HODGE: I'm here pretty often. . . . Listen, times have changed and we have to move on with them.

ELEANOR: I feel sorry for my grandkids.

HODGE: Look, we want good schools and jobs for them. What worries me is the 18-year-olds coming out of school or college with no work. That's the fault of the Tories and this government with all their cuts.

POPPY: You would have made the same cuts.

HODGE: Not like this. Every young person would be employed, apprenticed, or in training. Now come on, don't mope. You don't have it that bad.

POPPY: [Brief pause] We're getting things taken away. I can't even get my eyes tested.

HODGE: Yes, you can.

POPPY: No, I can't.
HODGE: Yes, you can.
POPPY: No, I can't.
HODGE: Yes, you can.
POPPY: No, I can't.
HODGE: Yes, you can. Don't feel so cross.
POPPY: It makes me feel cross just to walk up the bleeding Heathway.

Hodge excused herself to take a phone call on her iPhone. She had been trying to get a supportive local councilor tickets to the weekend's big West Ham football match at Wembley Stadium. Poppy looked at me and asked, "How can she tell us to make a change? How can we? We're pensioners. If [English] shops are shutting, how can [immigrants'] shops afford to open up? We could really do with a decent clothes shop. The politicians all go up there and say what they're going to do. But they never do it."

Labour politicians have struggled to walk the line between maintaining the loyalty of white working class unionists without estranging Britain's many ethno-religious minority groups, who represent the party's future growth. The twin pulls of populism and pluralism have restricted Hodge and others from pointing fingers at foreign immigrant groups or entitled welfare kings and queens—making for a murky message in Barking and Dagenham. Local minority groups have appreciated Hodge's restraint, but the white working class has condemned her betrayal and, in 2005, elected 12 politicians affiliated with the British National Party (BNP) to the 51-seat municipal Council. The BNP emerged as a splinter group from the far right National Front party in 1982, and has since championed the same platform, largely unsuccessfully. Their agenda seeks the expeditious return of immigrants to their home countries and preferential treatment for indigenous British citizens. After an initial burst in pre-election polls, the party's leader, Nick Griffin, lost a challenge for Margaret Hodge's seat in 2010 (London Borough of Barking and Dagenham 2010a). Barking and Dagenham still features many of his supporters. "I voted BNP," says Poppy with a mix of pride and guilt. "I can't help it. They call them Nazis. But they're not. They're Britain for Britain. Labour sent [immigrants] all down here and [Hodge] won't tell me where they come from. I think they fiddled the votes, so that the BNP did not get one candidate in." She continued, "Barking and Dagenham has always been white working class, but the Council was always for us. What did my grandparents work for? An Asian women told me that I'm a racist. So I said, 'Well you made me one.' Why can't Margaret Hodge see the change in this place?"

Since New Labour revolutionarily embraced neoliberal market economics in 1994, the party has steadily frustrated unionists and working class whites—their staunchest supporters since Clement Attlee was Prime Minister in the

mid-twentieth century. Labour found that they could get away with this philosophical shift and their recruitment of visible minorities' backing because their base had far more profound disagreements with Conservatives over the welfare state and with Liberal Democrats' support for the EU's supranational governance. Subsequently, Labour politicians chose to cautiously avoid charged debates over British identity and social change—suggesting an aloof disposition to Barking and Dagenham's white working class frustrations. "When you're sick, you need to be able to describe your symptoms to the doctor," said Alec Edwards, a Council bureaucrat. "But these people cannot describe what's happening to them. And like body parts, there are some ills that people don't want to talk about. The BNP feeds into this. They also don't want to talk about these symptoms. They'd rather blame others, totally representative of the people who vote for them." He also noted, "The equivalent to private parts is immigrants. We are an island nation, so there is a natural aversion to people who wash up on our shores. They all get absorbed, but we have an inability to talk about it."

The BNP addresses immigration head-on. In fact, BNP politicians address little else. A 2008 London election flyer that was distributed across Barking and Dagenham features two photos. The first, a black-and-white exposure, captures a neighborhood block party in the late 1950s. With a table of food in the foreground, there is a line of exclusively white women in housedresses posing behind it. A mother holds her daughter in her arms nearby. A crowd of people chitchats in the background under banners of flags stretching across a street of uniform brick homes. Underneath this image, the second photo features three Muslim women, each wearing a hijab (Islamic headscarf) and a niqab (Islamic veil). The first brandishes two fingers toward the camera (a nonverbal expletive), the second menacingly tightens her fists, while the third shields her eyes with her hand. In large font, the flyer laments, "The Changing Face of London: From this . . . to this . . . Is This What You Really Want?" Smaller text elaborates: "Consider this, this is the way London used to be. At ease with itself, friendly, happy, secure. A capital city with a sense of community values and social inclusiveness. If you would like London to be like this again, then support the British National Party, the party that puts local people first."

Although the BNP won over 20% of the Barking and Dagenham Council chamber in 2006, thanks to about 16,000 votes, they subsequently lost all 12 seats in the 2010 general election (London Borough of Barking and Dagenham 2006). It is not that they lost any support. The party garnered 30,949 votes in the borough, but a mobilized Labour opposition challenged BNP incumbents in every ward and won hotly contested victories to go along with Hodge's dismissal of Nick Griffin for the Parliamentary seat (London Borough of Barking and Dagenham 2010c). Today, these voters are without a representative sharing their views. "The majority of white English people here have given up,"

says Harry Carlisle, a BNP supporter. "They have punched us into the sink so much that there's going to be a civil war. There's only so far you can go before there are riots and uproar. It's on a wobbly edge right now. There's no one else to talk to, to listen to us, to hear our story and take action." He continued, "It'll take one big thing to spark it all off. And when it starts, it ain't going to stop. You can feel the tension. It will be released, and in such a way that the whole country's going to have to do something about it. How long are people going to put up with it?"

Observably, Barking and Dagenham's working class white population has expressed with their frustration in variable ways. While some have continued to support the Labour Party, others join issue-specific movements through their tenant and residents associations. Others have appealed to the exclusive politics of the BNP and similar, more openly violent organizations like the English Defence League (EDL) or the English National Alliance. Still others have withdrawn from the spheres of political expression completely. This raises this book's primary research question: why do similar people under similar socio-civic circumstances take different forms of political action? The remainder of this examination of Barking and Dagenham addresses this question, and explores perhaps a more basic, but equally important enigma: why are people who for decades have been politically unified by their working class status unable to look past ethnocultural difference and unite with new—albeit foreign—members of the working class?

The External State

White working class people in Barking and Dagenham speak frequently about the government—or, as it is more commonly called, "They." *They didn't fix my radiator. They keep letting the foreigners in. They don't listen to us lot.* In speech and frequently inscrutable allusions, residents hinted to the separation they feel from the state. On the one hand, the state is the essential purveyor of housing, welfare benefits, healthcare, and a variety of other public services, not to mention its representative functions. On the other hand, despite its intimate relationship to citizens' quotidian needs, it remains intensely distrusted and external. To the vast majority of people I encountered in Barking and Dagenham, the state is the all-powerful, unapproachable, unpredictable provider. It is sometimes generous, frequently adversarial, but always uncontrollable.

While such a Kafkaesque portrayal is reactive to the perceived unresponsiveness of today's local government, it also has deep historical roots. To Barking and Dagenham's early residents, the local government was a proactive, if not overbearing presence. As part of the "cradle to grave" paternalism

enforced by the Council's honeycomb of departments, agencies, and programs, the government also micromanaged residents' behavior. Ordinances were enacted to enforce the uniform grooming of privet hedges in front yards. If any tenant departed their cottage or flat, the state would remove any embellishments they had made to the house and replace them with standard-issue fittings. One-upmanship was frowned upon by a utopian nanny state that provided everything an East End transplant could dream of, in exchange for strict obedience to the rules of a well-regulated environment. This veneer of egalitarianism contributed to the greater sense of solidarity, and would sensitize the citizens of Barking and Dagenham to the exhibition of material differences later in its history. It also created an instrumentalist—rather than activist—relationship with the state.

As expressed by the borough's working class white citizens, externality frequently comes from political representatives' material well-being. "All the prime ministers have come out of Eton," says 30-year-old Ollie Marks, referring to the school traditionally associated with the upper class and aristocracy. "Democracy is an illusion. [. . .] The immigrants get all of the attention because it's part of a divide and conquer strategy." "The government means nothing to me," said Theo Garrigan. "If the Queen died tomorrow, the only thing that would change in my life is the head printed on my bank notes. It's everyone out for themselves. As soon as we start getting involved, we get arrested." "Politicians look out for themselves, and create services for rich people," said Oscar Bradley. "If they lived out there with us, they'd experience what we go through. The rich and poor are separated. [. . .] David Cameron concentrates on his type of people, the people who can afford decent homes. And the working classes are left to do their own bit."

However, others suggest that the state's externality has only emerged after breaches of confidence. "The politicians listen, but there's no action," said Norma Davies, the pensioner and activist. "We've been saying that we need to have more police, but they've been cut back. Years ago, you could go to the Council and they would help." She continued, "But people think that no matter who gets in [to office], nothing will get done. People are just treated as numbers, without compassion." "The Council promised me a fence," said Lexie Browning of Thamesview, "because all these people keep looking through my bedroom window and are seeing me sleeping. But they took so long, we just had to do it ourselves. I've given up. I don't feel safe here." Over pints at the Lighterman, Kieran Turner said, "It's very strange. With the Olympics, they were pumping money into Stratford, but there are still poor people. What are they going to do? Money gets spent on things other than us." Turner went on, "I don't mind going half and half with the Council. I used to propose things to the Council, but they found it unacceptable, so I've lost interest. A lot of people don't vote, because

it doesn't matter who gets in." Several interviewees said that they also do not rely on the government to resolve civil or criminal disputes anymore. They cite experiences with social service representatives removing a child from their custody, encounters with judgmental council employees, and unfair court verdicts. The government is no longer welcome in white working class lives—unless it is delivering a check.

Tenants and Residents

Because of both this dissatisfaction and the conception of the government as the aforementioned aloof provider, there is a general norm of yielding to the state and its elites—no matter how passionate a citizen may feel about an issue. Since the 2010 election that saw Labour remove the BNP from any electoral representation in the borough, Barking and Dagenham has featured very little political activism. Shortly after the election, when the Conservative–Liberal coalition government made across-the-board spending cuts, there were protests and rallies at town halls across London. Barking, however, was quiet. Council bureaucrats say that they did their best to mitigate the bite of the cuts, but there was still a significant effect—but little reaction. After peaking toward the middle of the twentieth century, today's unions are much smaller, less organized, and not very vocal. Since 2003, the Ford Factory has focused on diesel engine production and employs a mere 4,000people in engine, transport, and stamping operations (Hudson 2009). The civic culture and block parties of earlier days have also dissipated. At Scratton Farms Social Club, they organized a party in the neighborhood fields for the royal wedding in April 2011. Residents said it was the first time they had experienced that kind of event in 15 years. A year later, the Council set aside ten small grants to fund community parties for St. George's Day, the English national holiday. Administrators received 11 applications, three of which were from people who were not of English descent.

The most significant hubs of political activity in Barking and Dagenham are the tenants and residents associations (TRAs). Each of the borough's 17 wards has a TRA that meets monthly to discuss community affairs. Topics tend to be exceptionally localized—like a noisy neighbor or a repeated burglary. The Council provides a modest budget for tea and neighborhood events, but offers limited oversight of technically independent organizations. TRAs tend to be the breeding ground for Council political representatives, and are occasionally the venue for proxy wars about wedge issues like diversity and housing. Associations are typically composed of retirees, and led by presidents who can be quite autocratic and intolerant of difference.

Nancy Pemberton, the Thamesview resident with an affinity for Union Jack flags, has served in her TRA for 20 years. "I write to the local paper, and have a go if I have a bee in my bonnet," she says. "I think that I have some power locally, and I now I have some friends on the Council. People come up to me and tell me things that are going wrong," she says, with a sense of duty. Nancy felt agitated and empowered enough recently to write to David Cameron, then the Prime Minister:

David Cameron
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

10th February 2012

Dear Mr Cameron,

I am writing to ask if you would stop any more house building in the LB Barking & Dagenham but particularly in Barking.

We used to be a very close community but over the last 15 + years this has changed so much and certainly not for the better.

It would seem that immigrants from all over the world are encouraged to come to our borough to live, thus driving out the indigenous community one by one until now we have the situation where we are in the minority in a place we have lived for most of our lives.

Before you start to think of this letter as a racist rant, it is anything but. We have always been a hugely diverse area but the immigrants who came over with their families in the 1950's were completely different and they hate what is happening here even more than we do. When they came they had nothing given to them; they had to work hard, learn to speak English and they integrated; they have our values.

Unfortunately, because of the overgenerous benefits offered to the rest of the world, the people swarming into our borough (into council housing ahead of local residents in need) feel they have a right to everything for nothing and they have absolutely no respect for us or where they live.

Despite thousands of pounds being thrown into promoting 'community cohesion', this is never going to happen because the recent arrivals are only interested in their own cultures and, to a large degree, this is being encouraged by all the services created especially for them at great financial cost, while we sit on the sidelines and watch all this; we watch our elderly being frightened to go out because if they get on a bus they are likely to be the only

person speaking English; they are pushed and shoved at the bus stops while these people (mainly Nigerian) walk to the front every time.

The only thing they are interested in is shouting loudly on their mobile phones and making a lot of noise in the many industrial units they have taken over in our area for their happy clapper events, where because they go under the guise of a church, they do not pay business rates. They are ruining job opportunities and the chance of new businesses coming to our area.

I work hard in a voluntary capacity for our Tenants & Residents Association. Despite advertising everywhere, being part of a very active group who try to include all elements of society and different organisations working in our area to improve where we live, these immigrants never ever join us and are really not interested in what we are trying to achieve in our area.

Our house prices have fallen alarmingly over the last couple of years because so many immigrants are buying to let here and mainly social tenants are moving in who care not a jot for the area; have no interest in where they live and if they don't want something they tip it over their back garden or into the street. This is costing thousands for our Council to keep cleaning up after them. When it comes the time for us to move, as it surely will come, we probably won't be able to move into anything more than a caravan because of the value on our homes dropping and the pitiful amount we get in state pension, that we have worked our whole lives to earn the right to, unlike recent arrivals who gain access to pensions, health care, free travel and countless benefits without contributing a penny.

It is time that people who make decisions about how we should have to live our lives came and actually saw these areas they are sending all the immigrants to; came and saw the devastating effect this is having on communities, on public services. Of course this won't happen because you are all cocooned in your cosy little exclusive areas where the problem of immigrants never touches, it's just words on a paper.

Our forebears fought two world wars to keep our country free; not to have us treated as second class citizens in our own country and subservient to the most corrupt organisation that ever existed, the EU. They died so we would not be invaded by Germany but it is slowly happening by all our laws being made from within the EU dictated to by Germany.

I dread to think what our country will be like as our grandchildren grow up. Will English still be the main language spoken here; will Christianity still be the predominant religion; who knows?

Please come to our borough Mr Cameron, without any advance warning. Get out at Barking Station and see how the third world looks, despite all the money being spent to 'improve the area'; then walk around and see if you can identify any English people or hear English being spoken. It's very difficult these days.

I am proud to be English and I love England but I hate seeing it disappear and our language being lost among all these other tongues. I hate seeing our way of life eroding and all our values being ignored. I hate all our little bits of green being built on to house even more immigrants, who are a drain on our society, certainly of no benefit to us.

People coming to live here, to live off us in the main, should be required to take a driving test before they are allowed on the roads and for this they should *have* to speak and read English fluently; should be checked for infectious diseases (as we were once TB free); and should have sufficient money to live on and be able to support their families. Whatever is this nonsense about them taking driving tests with interpreters (for which we taxpayers pay highly). It's no wonder there are so many bad drivers around and accidents that we are left paying the cost of; not to mention the horrific cost of car insurance, even to drivers who have been claim free for over 40 years. Are you going to do anything about this?

We have always had more than enough of our own wasters, spongers, trouble makers, villains; we really don't need them being imported in from the rest of the world to luxuriate here under our benefits system that pays them far more than someone working extremely hard to support themselves and their family. That is the most terrible state of affairs for any self-respecting person to have to put up with . . .

Come to Barking; come and see how a town with tons of history attached to it looks in today's society; it's a crying shame and we, the people who have lived here all our lives, deserve better. Stop building new homes for immigrants, our schools can't cope already. In a class of 24 you have maybe one or two English children these days; how terrible is that. 67 languages spoken at our local primary school! One language should be spoken—English—this is still, just about, England.

If someone wants to come here to live then they should be prepared to live like us and speak like us, not expect to transport their culture here, it's not working.

I hope I will not get an automatic response to this letter. I would like to think you would have the courtesy to read it—really read it—and

> wonder why someone would feel so bad they would have to write such a letter.
>
> Go out and ask the people; they all feel the same; we are getting a raw deal and no-one cares unless you are an "asylum seeker" or just an immigrant, then nothing is too much to ask!
>
> Yours in hope that you will actually read this; will realise that things have gone way too far now and have to change.
>
> Stop immigration immediately; give priority to British people for jobs; ensure our manufacturing industry gets contracts they deserve and they don't go to Germany, who would never give such contracts to us.
>
> Ignore rulings from the EU; what can they do? They need us, we don't need them.
>
> Please, start to put our country and people first for the first time in years.
>
> Yours,
> Nancy Pemberton

Nancy clearly felt like her words had a chance of being read and absorbed by 10 Downing Street. This sense of competence was rare among people I met in Barking and Dagenham. For many, voting is the only civic activity undertaken, and this tends to be done out of a sense of duty and habit—not because of expected impact. Nancy has an extraordinary sense of internal efficacy. But like many of Barking and Dagenham's TRA leaders, she had been in power for over a decade. This marginalizes not only dissenters, but also younger participants and ethnic minorities.

Nicki Josephs is a 22-year-old single mother, who was placed in a new council flat after the birth of her daughter two years ago. She grew up in a four-bedroom, one-bathroom Dagenham cottage that housed 11 people. A heavyset blonde with visible hair extensions, she sat on her sofa stroking two cats, Missy and Cookie, who were perched on her black leggings. She recently joined her local TRA.

"I don't think anyone knows where to turn," she said, releasing a plume of cigarette smoke. "I got involved with the TRA when I got burgled. I don't think they have an impact though. It's more about the police. They said they'd circle more but we were let down. I think you need to get more young police officers so that youths don't feel threatened by them. My voice ain't big enough." She went on, "I think the government is interested, but they've got a lot on and not much money. They're paying a hell of a lot of money to house people in flats. It costs £800.00 per month for my flat, and I pay £7.00 a week."

"Do you vote?" I ask.

"I don't vote," she said, in a way that suggested she had thought hard about the decision. "I know that's how you get your voice heard, and it could make a difference, but I'm not interested. I'm a single mum, I'm not working in order to support my two-year-old. So instead of doing nothing, I joined the TRA to contribute something to the community. I know that there are some things we don't get told. There are some things that are hidden. I think the government is at the center [of everything] though. I'm certainly not, or things would change. Instead, they're getting worse. There's no respect anymore. Young people are on the outside. They can't speak out for what they want."

Lou Griffiths, the retired darts aficionado who had been a member of the Becontree TRA for many years, noticed that activism had declined. "Years ago, if you didn't like something, you'd go protest and march," he says. "But now, we have fragmented communities, so people don't pull together. You're lucky to see the odd letter in the newspaper. No one turns up for meetings. After years of no communication from the government, people just assume that politicians are there to feather their own nest.

"It's going to break soon," Lou said ominously. "Something's going to give way, but will it be in a good way or will it lead to anarchy and more riots? I think you'll see more of them riots. It just takes a small spark. The younger generation just feels like they don't have a future. There's nothing there for them. There's no job security, benefits, and there's a lot of abuse. We don't have much contact with young people, because they don't have much interest in politics"—at least not on the surface.

The BNP

With older citizens' monopolization of tenants and residents associations, there are few venues for political expression by people under 50 years old. And beyond TRAs, there are few role models or solicitations of their views. However, the BNP fixed that by telling perennial Labour supporters that it was acceptable to be angry. BNP leaders recognized that dissenters among Labour's base possessed a great deal of political capital, and that the general veneer of political passivity was actually suppressed aggression. One of the more fascinating trends in white working class politics is just how little separates the social and political attitudes of BNP and Labour voters. In dozens of interviews, nearly all working class whites griped about European Union oversight "and all their human rights laws." Nearly all believed that immigration was out of hand, that the government "shut the barn door after the horse had bolted." Nearly all were frustrated with the "politically correct brigade" favoring the rights of immigrants over the entitlements of citizens. And nearly all had a low opinion of the government. But

in nearly all of my interviews, I was genuinely unsure about individuals' partisan leanings based on their policy preferences.

While a legal political party in the United Kingdom, the BNP straddles the line between democratic and undemocratic. Through their electoral ventures, the party works within democratic channels to gain power. However, to win elections and influence opinion, party members employ exclusivist and occasionally violent tactics. Until a 2009 court order, the BNP did not admit nonwhite individuals. Interestingly, their first "ethnic" member was Rajinder Singh, a septuagenarian Sikh who came to Britain in 1967 and authored a regular Islamophobic column for the party's *Freedom* newspaper. In Barking and Dagenham, BNP leaders used to walk around with burly bodyguards dressed in black. Members have been accused of using intimidation tactics. Their posting of British Union flags was so ubiquitous that it has become a widely interpreted symbol for xenophobia, much to the chagrin of ex-law enforcement and military personnel. At their public rallies, leaders condemn people of diverse ethno-religious backgrounds and urge their mass deportation. Many of these gatherings have deteriorated into violence, as rival minority groups confronted BNP personnel. In a series of investigative reports, the *Guardian* newspaper accused the party of using "front organizations" and other "techniques of secrecy and deception . . . to conceal its activities and intentions from the public" (Cobain 2006). The BNP reportedly operated using a "network of false identities" and clandestine meetings, at which party members were instructed to curb public hate speech. BNP supporters' acceptance of these tactics is the primary characteristic that distinguishes them from many white working class Labour voters who otherwise wish to see the same policy changes.

Among BNP voters in Barking and Dagenham, many depict their vote as one of desperation. "The BNP was the only way to have a voice," said Lucy Iverson in the Gascoigne ward. "It had nothing to do with being racist. We were just bursting at the seams. They ruffled a few feathers. And we did get a change of [national] government in the end. But you know, Labour will always be here." In Thamesview, Harriet Johnson noted, "I think that the National Front should come in for a bit. And I don't even like the National Front, but they'll level the estate out. In the council block over there, there's not one family of whites and there are English people who could use that home. In that section, it's all blacks. Then they open up all their [African] happy clappy churches. It's not a nice place to live. You want someone to look after their own, the English people first." Several young men suggested that the BNP treats support for their agenda as a litmus test for patriotism. Their current slogan is "Love Britain."

Toby McEwing is the 22-year-old manager of a betting shop, one of many that appear in nearly every ward's shopping parade. He completed two years at

London's City University, but dropped out before completing his final year due to the accumulation of debt from short-term "payday" loans and the need to support his mother, nan, and two young siblings. "I never used to get involved in the politics," he says, "but when I went and voted for the first time, I met [BNP leader] Nick Griffin who was arguing for British jobs for British people, and I agreed with that. I also went to a demonstration against Muslims Against Crusades. I just thought the army is fighting to keep our country safe, and some people fail to appreciate that. It was what young people my age were talking about. I agreed with the philosophy of British jobs for British people. I knew a lot of people out of work and wanted them to have a job. The way it came together, there were a lot of people who got their votes counted because a BNP candidate got elected. For them to do that, it made me feel like what I voted for made a difference."

The BNP not only depended on the externality of the state; it also depended on the vision of the state as ultimate provider. Per Dancygier (2010: 35), such great government-procured resources produced not only white peoples' grievances, but also their perception that their protest might address the perceived inequity—that it might, essentially, restore the provider's earlier favor.

Political Displacement

Since their loss in 2010, a significant number of BNP supporters have backed the ascendant United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP). However, Toby and many other BNP backers have felt voiceless. After the euphoria of its revolutionary 2005 victories in Barking and Dagenham, the BNP went on to win its first three county Council seats in Hertfordshire, Lancashire, and Leicestershire in 2009, along with two seats in the European Parliament—a body it had repeatedly denounced. One Labour councilor from Dagenham noted that the BNP would have won a majority of the Council seats had they fielded more candidates that year. The party was raising more money and starting a youth brigade. However, elected representatives in Barking and Dagenham proved to be absenteeist and incompetent while in office. They were unresponsive to citizens' claims and often did not attend meetings to vote or meet constituents. With their removal from office in 2010, the party imploded in a tempest of personal betrayals and infighting. Sidelined supporters ceased to have a single presence in government, and there was increasing scrutiny from the press and equality advocates monitoring their speech. Thousands of Barking and Dagenham's working class whites felt silenced and out of bounds.

Vincent Dogan was born and raised in Hackney. He joined the BNP at 17 years old after suffering a brutal mugging by a gang of black teenagers. Now

38, he has been involved ever since. "I had an utter revulsion and hatred toward blacks," he told me over lunch at a Dagenham diner. "At the time, I wanted something Nazi, and through the whispers, I knew the BNP was that party. The party was like a second parent to me, a moral guide. The militarism, the racism, the hatred appealed to my anger. It channeled my emotions into something positive. Kids are very impressionable."

He moved to Dagenham in 2004 to mobilize support for the party. His father was a Turkish Cypriot Muslim who married an English woman and naturalized as a British citizen, before dying a few years ago.

"I didn't give a toss about the ideology. It was the hunger for power. It's the most overriding aspect of politics. Not money. Without power, you can't do anything, whether for good or bad. I gave my heart and soul to the BNP, but now it's full of pricks, misfits, and degenerate people. Good people left because of what Nick Griffin did to people who once looked up to him. He betrayed all of us. He's guilty of treason to the people and the nation. All that hope has been flushed down the toilet so that he can secure his position as leader and money-grabber."

"When I arrived here in 2004, [Dagenham] was a sight for sore eyes. There just weren't as many ethnics living here as in Hackney then. The first thing I noticed when I came out of Dagenham Heathway Station was how white it was. And I told people here, 'You've got a nasty surprise coming your way.' I saw it as a political opportunity. The white demographics were vastly in favor of the BNP. If you're not part of the [Liberal Democrat, Labour or Conservative Parties'] trick, you're not mainstream. They all agree on everything, except for the minutiae of tax. They all want to stay in Europe, allow migration, and destroy British industry. We've lost our identity."

"When you've got whites walking around with trousers beneath their arseholes, listening to gangster rap and mimicking their physical mannerisms—I was in Tesco [supermarket] the other day, and I wanted to shake the cashier and tell him he's not one of them. These days, you've got the Black Police Association and ethnic organizations like that. But when the native population wants to organize, it's construed as racist. That is a hypocritical double standard. People like David Duke; I'd like to speak to him someday."

Dogan continued, "Sometimes totalitarianism can do some good. We can take a little something from each of the different governing ideologies. I like the appeal of not being afraid to stand up for yourself. I find the militarism appealing. I don't want to invade Poland, but when I see the black and white images of 'Triumph of the Will' [Nazi propaganda film], I think it's proud, forthright, unashamed, strident. The events that occurred after 1939, some might consider them aggressive nationalism. That's not what I would favor, because European nations shouldn't attack each other. That kind of fascism

would not work here. To quote Mussolini, 'Each fascism finds its own identity.' To a young mind, it can be inspirational, but you have to change with the times. The idea was a vision of what could be better than what we have. That's a triumph of the will.

"The way the BNP went about it was unprofessional, the electioneering. You don't win by sitting at a table and passing out pamphlets like we did here at the Heathway. You win by door-knocking, talking to people." Dogan went on, "I would never have pulled a Brevik [the xenophobic Norwegian convicted of terrorism] though, because I don't like prison food. It might sound weird, but I understand his ideology. I don't agree with what he's done because he killed some people that were completely innocent. Somebody must have channeled his political thoughts in a negative way. Do it through the ballot box. But there are some things I would do that would make Stalin blush. Politicians should be executed to leave an echo-ey Halls of Parliament."

Dogan is now trying to create a new political party to capitalize on other estranged BNP supporters and their militarism. "People join it to recreate the 1930s, but that's misguided. The BNP was not about that. Its goal was to restore Britain to greatness. Since the British Nationality Act in 1946, this country has known nothing but problems. When the white birth rate is lower than the ethnics, you know things are heading down. The Luftwaffe's actions were small compared to our current demographic annihilation. The immigration since 1945 was deliberately designed to change this country. People said that we needed them for postwar labor shortages, but that is a lot of shit. They just didn't want to pay proper wages."

"But your father's family is Turkish Muslim," I interjected.

"If the BNP had a problem with me, then that's their problem. I know what I wanted, and I wasn't going to let some fuckhead stop me. Sorry to put it in abusive terms, but sometimes an emotional response is useful." He continued, "Muslims are setting out to build masjids [mosques] everywhere. If push comes to shove, they would want this country to be Islamic."

"But what about your Muslim family members?" I asked.

"I'm not sure."

"Would you be in favor of comprehensive repatriation," I probed, "knowing that you would be on the boat, too?"

"Possibly," he responded, pensively. "I might go, because that would mean that my work here is done. I don't think the Titanic was big enough. There is a void to fill today. [. . .] Ex-BNP members just need a little electoral success to get started again."

The opening of the Becontree Heath Islamic Centre on Green Lanes in August 2010 injected new life into dormant tensions. Barking and Dagenham's Council granted permission to build the mosque despite the Development

Control Board's decision not to recommend construction due to concerns about parking, loss of rental units, and crowding around prayer times. Local residents sent hate mail to the Council, and subsequently contacted the nascent, militant, openly racist English Defence League to get involved. A local branch was opened, and EDL leaders immediately organized marches that quickly turned into confrontations between white British and South Asian Muslim men from groups like Muslims Against Crusades. Harmony House—a shelter for refugees in the Goresbrook ward—has since endured bricks erratically thrown through its windows. EDL members have also frequently interrupted meetings by opposition groups such as United Against Fascism. After the failure of electoral tactics, radicals are now using alternative measures to communicate their welled frustration.

The London Riots

It is difficult to explain confidently why riots take place. It is usually possible, however, to identify an impetus. In August 2011, London Metropolitan Police officers shot Mark Duggan, a 29-year-old black man who was suspected of planning a handgun attack, and riots erupted in his Tottenham neighborhood to protest police misconduct. In response, satellite violence took place across parts of England and much of London, including Barking. Indeed, Barking was the site of the riot's most iconic video imagery—when a group of young men pretended to assist a blood-covered bystander whose jaw was broken in the violence, only to rummage through his backpack and steal his wallet and mobile phone, leaving him to stagger away in a daze. The perpetrators were later identified to be from outside of the borough, but for days, Barking market's electronics and sports apparel shops were assaulted by a mix of locals and people from other parts of London. News media underscored the multicultural character of the rioters and portrayed the revolts as a unified expression of frustration by poor, unemployed youths in the depths of a recession. However, interviews in Barking and Dagenham suggest that rioters participated in the looting and violence with much less coordination and agreement than suggested. While some depicted the riots as opportunistic thievery, others construed meaning in the violence, but few acknowledged unity.

"I went out [to the riots] for the fun," explained Finn Peterson of Barking. "All my mates were out there, and I thought I'd join them. They were just bored. There's nothing to do but commit crimes. All the things that go on in Barking, Dagenham, Newham, and Stratford. That wasn't doing something about the problems we face; that was making things worse than they already are. There was no point. It was just fun. Around Barking and Dagenham, all you need to know is

that people are going to do what they want to do. Nothing is going to stop them." Peterson clearly felt little camaraderie in the revolt. Other respondents suggested that every rioter had a different reason for their participation—whether protest, thrill, political expression, or poverty.

Some young men interviewed acknowledged the riots' political significance. "The Government is squeezing everyone," asserted Kyle Downey, an unemployed 21-year-old from Marks Gate. "Everyone's broke. And rioters wanted to do something about it. They were sending a message to the government saying, 'You can't control us'. If everyone rose up, we'd outnumber them 10 to 1. I don't like how they'll say they'll do something when they come into power, and then do nothing. For the little man, there is no other way to put your message across than to hurt them or to hurt their profits." "The riots are a way young people fight against their oppression by the ruling class," said Joseph Fallon, a 19-year-old McDonalds employee who will attend Kingston University next year. "We feel like we don't have control. We're being ignored and stereotyped by the government as being in gangs. Rioting is a more direct way of releasing tension. If they do it in a civil way, then they're more likely to be ignored." However, for working class whites making a political statement in Barking and Dagenham, any politics of class unity was contradicted by the socially divisive changes they sought.

Displacement and Anomie

The sense of shifting social boundaries has undermined white working class interviewees' solidarity, as they yearn for another life and higher status. This has meant that the younger generation has aspirations to move up and break free from their parents' community and its sinking place in the social order. In their avoidance of relegation to society's periphery, many Barking and Dagenham residents viewed neighbors as a threat. Social ascendance is increasingly perceived to be an individual, rather than collective, endeavor. As such, interviewees observed an increasing number of fellow working class whites violating earlier norms of reciprocity and breaching the social bonds established by their grandparents. "[Other white] people look at you and judge you," noted Callum Everett at the Spotted Dog pub. "But if you're wearing a brand new tracksuit, they'll think you got money. If you're different, that's when you get picked on. So people are joining groups just to defend themselves. [. . .] Everyone is against each other. Gangs are all about postcodes: IG11, RM9, E3."

Paul Bibby is a 20-year-old plumber who is currently contracted by the Barking and Dagenham Council to repair housing estates. "You don't really know everyone the way you once did," he says. "Even the English people lack respect

now. Because all the foreigners created more anonymity, you can now get away with a lot. [. . .] If you were here in the 1960s, everyone was the same. Culture, religion, country, goal. Now you've got so much variety, people can't cope. Can you imagine 20 different wild animals in the same room? Those people in the 1960s had it harder. I work in council flats, and the standard of living there is not nice. They're struggling. In the sixties, there was no underclass because everyone had to work. Many of those people are members of today's underclass. I don't see how things are going to get any better."

"Does that stop people from trying?" I asked.

"One of my mates from work got sacked for getting caught looting, and he was on the same wage I'm on," he replied. "People think they have no chance of moving up except through the lottery. That guy had gotten the job through the 'Youth Offenders' program. It's not worth it. I'm against crime. But there are a lot of people living a nice life from lives of crime." The quick (and ephemeral) wealth of criminals only incentivizes this moral collapse in Barking and Dagenham, as envy sweetens the temptation of deviance.

A major issue is that it is not clear to many of the working class white people whom I interviewed that hard work and educational achievement pay off—that the economy's meritocracy actually functions fairly. "People that work all their lives from the bottom of the ladder, they should get more from life," said Terry Hammonds. "The people who never give up, the underdog. Some people make it there, but so many people give up halfway. They're lazy. They can't be asked. I've signed up for jobs and jobs and jobs, without response. But I keep going. You have to believe in yourself. I don't believe in the system. I believe in myself." Self-reliance and individualism is threaded through the statements of many of the under-30 interviewees. It is reflective of their interpretations of a new economy—one premised on greater risk for greater reward; one premised on greater flexibility for the employer and the employee; one that sees work not so much as a relationship or an extension of one's community, but as an instrumental exchange, or at worst, as a civil form of exploitation. However, it is also reflective of their interpretations of a new society—one that does not feature the collectivism and normative agreement associated with Barking and Dagenham's past.

Many young men are torn between lives of hard, thankless work with little prospect of social ascendance and the shortcuts of criminal pursuits. Theo Garrigan said, "I'm fully trained in cleaning science. I have no problem with the job market. I know people are saying that the economy is fucked, but they're looking at the wrong jobs. They only look at the jobs that they want to do. Look for the jobs that no one wants to do, but that pay you the same wage." He insisted, "I think if you're willing to work hard, you'll reap the benefits. If you're not honest, you don't get nowhere in life."

"Does that make it difficult to see last year's rioters get away with stealing?" I asked.

"If I were out [of prison] during the riots, I would have done it. I'm not sure I would have thrown missiles at Old Bill [the police]. But I would have looted. If the Job Centre pays me GBP 53 per week and expects me to get by without committing a crime, it's just not possible. People wanted money. But the government imprisoned people for 14 months for stealing a pair of shorts. The amount it costs to put them away would have paid their benefits for twice that amount of time. You get three meals a day, showers, toothpaste, toothbrush, deodorant, free training, and a bed to sleep in."

Young men and women in the borough have no real models of upward mobility. "I just want a good life," said Callum. "Nice job, family, nice cars, a beautiful wife. But that's just a dream. I don't know anyone that has that though. Those who come close get it by robbing. I see the queen and the royals on telly with all the flashy stuff, and then I look at my pockets and think 'I want that.' " Rhys Williams said, "It might help if I had a model to follow. There are some people who I admire, but just because I think they're cool people, like [musician] Frankie Ocean. None professionally. I've seen people in TV adverts, like [musician] Billy Bragg grew up in Barking. But I don't know anyone who's climbed up the ladder. There's John Terry." Terry ascended quickly through the Barking youth ranks to captain the English National Team and the famous Chelsea Football Club. However, throughout his meteoric rise, he has been revealed to be a heartless, racist, philanderer who had an affair with his teammate's girlfriend. Barking and Dagenham's crisis is economic, but more importantly, it is normative.

Remarkably, one of the most prominent attempts to reinvigorate white working class solidarity and reestablish a sense of moral structure comes from the bellicose English Defence League. They organize around some of working class white citizens' most basic senses of injustice: fundamentalist Islam, criticism of the British armed forces, unpatriotic behavior, and the fate of Britain's contingency of British people. Ashton Roberts is a 24-year-old artist, who was enamored for some time with the EDL's campaign. "I saw the EDL as a group that stood up for us, and didn't call us racist when we said what we believed," he explained. "People of the same culture and class as me were standing up to terrorism and to groups trying to take our freedom away—like the people burning [Memorial Day] poppies and insulting the history of our country's victories over Fascism. I read about the EDL and saw that they're not exclusively for white people. One of the scouts, this black guy, asked me to stand up for my people. [. . . But they and] the BNP exploited us. They know we don't have a voice. They know the government doesn't give a shit about us. For 20 years, we haven't had a voice. But to get that voice, we have had to agree to be torn apart." Many Barking and Dagenham

residents have consented to such an exchange. Said one Labour councilor, "No one realized the extent of the anger, the dissatisfaction and the loneliness."

Mute Button

Unimpressed with Labour's priorities, profoundly distrustful of government, and unwilling to join forces with working class immigrants, Barking and Dagenham's working class whites are now engaged in a largely unstructured, alternative form of minority politics. They tend to be focused on local affairs, fighting for scarce public resources and wary of institutionalized discrimination against them. The difficulty has been having their claims heard, and taken seriously.

In interviews, working class white people tended to preface many fervent statements by first clarifying that they are not racist or prejudiced. This was not a trend among a few individuals; rather, it occurred 32 times across the 40 interviews with nonelite sources. Some examples follow:

NICKI: I'm not racist, but the solution is to get rid of [the immigrants].

GEORGE: I'm not racist, but this used to be a nice community of English people, before all the Albanians and Africans came over.

JESSI: I'm not racist, but this country's covered by blacks and Bosnians.

BLAKE: I'm not racist at all. I've got black cousins and nieces. But the Polish have been taking all of the work and running prostitution and drug rings.

JOEL: The West Indians make me goat curry all the time. I'm not a racist. I fucking love goat's curry, pardon my language. But the principle of English families not coming first is just not right.

PAM: When they get off the bus, they don't say "thank you" or "excuse me." But I'm not racist. I've got a grandson who's half-Sikh. My niece is seeing a black boy.

FIONA: The shops around here used to sell more homemade things. Now they're—and I don't want to be racist, but—they're not English, and they all sell the same things.

HARRY: I was supposed to go door-to-door [for the BNP], but I just don't think I'll say the right things or do the job. I think I come across a bit ignorant, and I don't have all the right information to put out there. I might sound racist.

While such disclaimers suggest awareness about intolerance, these individuals had not endured hours of sensitivity training. Instead, they were concerned that their ideas would be disqualified, when they are in fact genuine expressions about how their lives are being transformed. Accusations of racism are interpreted as yet another means of controlling working class white people's

expressions, and declaring them invalid. So the preface serves as a caveat that at first appeals to the impressions of outsiders, before appealing to what the individual perceives to be the their true sentiments. "Kids have always picked on difference," noted Nancy Pemberton. "Spotty. Fatty. Honky. Blacky. But I think the anti-racists have made it worse. They look for trouble. They construe everything as racist—like my Union flag. But it's not racist; it's our country's flag and it's up for the Queen's Jubilee anyway. They'd say the same about the cross in the undertaker's window. These people are ruining our country. And we're the only ones who can be racist." Indeed, participants were not concerned so much with being labeled a racist, as they were about the effect of such a label on the perceived veracity of their grievances. Racism is, in this sense, not a branding. It is a "mute button" pressed on someone while they are still crying out about a sense of loss—from a position of historic privilege, frequently in terms they have difficulty articulating. Therefore, the preface "I'm not racist" is not a disclaimer, but rather an exhortation to listen and not dismiss the claims of a purportedly new minority.

This perceived minoritization informs the sense of social, economic, and political displacement among East Londoners. As will be discussed in the next chapter, Youngstown has experienced a similar collapse in its way of life, but its politics are informed as much by the desire to reinstate the past as a desperate search for more stability. British respondents benefit from greater state support and a functional local government, but struggle to coexist with the immigrants who filled the void left by a previous generation. Like much of the United States, Youngstown's citizens can trace their roots to immigrants. Instead, they struggle with the insecurity that pervades their social, economic, and political lives.