

The Last Interview: Stuart Hall on the Politics of Cultural Studies

[Transcript]

Text on screen: Stuart Hall is one of the seminal figures in the development of cultural studies. On August 30th, 2012, Sut Jhally interviewed Hall at his home in London on the occasion of the republication of the classic book *Policing the Crisis*, which Hall co-authored. Over the course of a wide-ranging conversation, Hall discussed the book's continuing relevance, and shared his thoughts on the direction cultural studies has taken since the early days of the Birmingham Center. Stuart Hall passed away on February 10th, 2014.

Sut Jhally: So the first one is: Where does *Policing the Crisis* fit into the whole history of cultural studies, and why is it still worth thinking about, and why is it worth reprinting?

Stuart Hall: Well, *Policing the Crisis* fits slightly oddly in the cultural studies endeavor over the whole period because it is quite early on. It's written in a probably more collective way than a lot of contemporary cultural studies is written, which is singularly authored by researchers and scholars and so on. It is more political than a lot of cultural studies. It deals directly with a set of political events and with a specific political conjuncture in the seventies. So, it fits the earlier part of cultural studies, the sixties and the seventies, better than it fits the eighties and nineties, which went into high theory and went more into the media and with more interdisciplinary and so on. So, I suppose it depends on what you call cultural studies. I have always thought that cultural studies had to have a political dimension. By that I do not mean that it had to be recruited to a particular party line or political position, but if your task was critical thinking, you were bound to question the boundaries, the hierarchies, the orthodoxies, the established views and that was itself a political project - a challenge to existing forms of knowledge. In that sense, I think *Policing the Crisis*, which tried to read the seventies in a very different way from the way in which it was being read, against the grain, was part centrally related to the long project of cultural studies, which I still think is bound to be political as well as intellectual and aesthetic, etc.

If I think about, more specifically, that was one of the first moments in cultural studies when the question of race and culture really came to the center of cultural studies. Before that, it wasn't that people were not interested in it, but we had no black students to begin with. There were very few black students in the early days in higher education at all. So, the odd thing was that *Policing the Crisis* was written by graduate students who weren't black but were riveted by the questions of race and so on. So, that is an important point. And another thing is that, at that stage, race was not taken as a central political question. If you wanted to get into the center of understanding a period, or the cultural shifts or the political movement of a period, you did not use race as your prism. And I think *Policing the Crisis* was particularly important because it said you can get into a conjuncture from several different vantage points, and race is an excellent way for getting into, in a sense, the hidden and unconscious as well as the conscious and explicitly discriminatory effects of race on the society.

So, in all those ways, I think it is a part of what I would call the long cultural studies project. By which I don't mean everything that has happened in cultural studies. I don't necessarily approve of everything that has happened. I have my own criticisms of it. If I think it is boring, I don't read it. I do not think it really is central to the conception of cultural studies as we had it in the early days. Things change and you have to accept that, but I don't feel I have got to defend cultural studies as a project. I think what we tried to do then, and what I've tried to do in my own work, and a number of people have continued to do throughout the whole length and breadth of the project, that is, in a sense, the kind of cultural studies I read and am interested in and contribute to. From that point of view, I think *Policing the Crisis* with its more explicitly political edge and its concentration on race as well as its interest in the relationship between politics and culture was dead-centered to the cultural studies project.

Jhally: What do you think in terms of its theoretical and methodological contributions?

Hall: Well, theoretical methodological is what I would call conjunctural analysis. We didn't know we were doing it. We got into *Policing the Crisis* because of a series of events - some boys all with a mixed race background got involved in an incident in Birmingham and were getting a whacking great sentence by the courts. We started out by asking why the huge sentence? What's the big fuss about this? What does it do with the fact that these boys are not white English working class lads? They could easily have been.

So, we started to try to understand that and we came conceptually and methodologically very much from what were called deviancy studies at the time. A lot of the youth work, the work on youth and youth culture, like *Resistance to Rituals*, which is a book we published, relatively the same group published, just before *Policing the Crisis* was very much drawing on that tradition. One of the things that that tradition contributed was it asked who sets the definitions of what is not normal? What is abnormal? What is criminal? What is deviant? Who sets that? Who controls it? Who patrols it? That deviancy is not just the act of the deviant but is a social act. It depends on all the people, all the actors involved in defining this group as responsible for something, which does not fit. So, I think the first half of *Policing the Crisis* is driven by that. But there is a shift even in that because, at a certain point, in deviancy studies people began to say, "well, you put these agencies of social control together and what you get is something we used to call the state". Well, it was not called the state in American research on deviancy and so on, but that is what it is.

So, we said, well, this involves looking at the agencies of the state. So, we looked at the courts and the police and the media, and these institutions whose definitions were feeding into defining the situation. When we put that together, we realized that we were really looking at a very much broader political moment. We were looking at the disintegration of the welfare state, post-war welfare state settlement that is what was coming apart. What we were looking at in *Policing the Crisis* is what happens to a society when it starts to disintegrate, the settlement that dominated a period started to disintegrate. And what Gramsci once called 'morbid symptoms' begin to appear. Anxiety, social anxiety about other people. Senses of threat and danger, anybody different is a danger to you, etc. So, the book sort of turns at that point into looking more at the state. But the last half of the book

pursues that line even further and says, what is this moment? What does race have to do with it?

So, methodologically the book takes us from a base in deviancy studies, if you like, into Gramscian or Marxist analysis of race and politics and of a historical period. And central to that analysis was the idea that this moment of the seventies constituted a very distinctive political moment, comes out of an arc of development but it is when everything, as they say, fuses together and creates, what Althusser calls, a 'ruptural break' a 'ruptural fracture'. So, the idea of thinking historically not as an evolutionary development, but in terms of the moments of rupture and settlement, rupture and settlement, is a kind of conjunctural analysis. It looks at the different conjunctures - how they're different, how they arise, what sets them in motion and what sometimes resolves them and sometimes doesn't resolve them etc. So, the notion of conjuncture, which really comes from Gramsci, partly Althusser, etc. is sort of introduced into the field almost in the center of this work and transforms what we're doing. Now, looking back I think of this as one of the first works in English, British work certainly, that uses what I would now call a conjunctural analysis. I, myself, think conjuncturally, in that way, about politics now. If I were to talk about the period between Thatcherism and now I would look at the various moments of fusion, moments of conjuncture where things have kind of come together and fused over that period. So, I think that's what it does methodologically.

Jhally: Is conjuncture the main theoretical contribution that you think...

Hall: I don't know that it is, you see, conjunction does appear in Gramsci. It's a concept which has a long history in critical and Marxist thinking. It doesn't always mean the same thing. It is not always applied the same way. I would say it's not the only concept by any means. I would say that you only understand how to analyze a conjuncture if you use many other particularly, for me, Gramscian ideas. So, the idea of, the notion of hegemonic power, being different related to a different moments of dominated power. I think Gramsci is very interested in the mechanisms by which popular consent are won, not just by which the people are dominated by a system but by which they come to invest in it themselves. So, the whole range of concepts like that. Gramsci uses the phrase 'social forces' where, I think, we would use the phrase 'classes'. Why does he do that? Because he is aware that classes that are basically constituted at the level of what we would call economic don't appear politically in their own disguise. They don't march onto history as 'we are the ruling class' or 'we are the working class', etc. The term is related to class, of course, very much, and it is related to all that we understand about the laws of motional capitalist economy. But, politically, you have to understand what is distinctive about the political domain and how forces of governance and opposition and resistance appear on the political stage. So, in understanding conjuncture, you need these subordinate or other related concepts to say, "how am I going to analyze it? Okay, this is the conjuncture. This is the conjuncture of neoliberalism, a high point in neoliberalism. How am I going to analyze it?" And at that point, I think we need many of these other concepts, but the conjunctures sort of framing device, for me, of referring to all these other ways of trying to unpack a political moment.

Jhally: To what extent is it relevant to understanding either the contemporary political context or the period from the mid-1970s or late-70s to the present?

Hall: Well, I would say *Policing the Crisis* is extremely important in understanding the whole arc of development really. I would say the whole arc of development from the post-war period. I would see that as composed of two basic eras: the sort of social democratic Keynesian welfare state moment which is the end of the war up to the sixties, begins to run into trouble in the sixties, and by the seventies its disintegration is palpable, its coming apart at the seams. And a new paradigm comes into existence, which is neoliberalism. That has gone through several versions and variants and huge developments from the early stages of multi-national corporations to a global capitalist system, which is what we have now. It's a huge historical development, but I think all of the period between the seventies and now is really a part of that.

So, almost casually, almost by chance, we hit on the moment of transition between two major conjunctures. Now, I also think, it gives me pleasure to say that though Sociology thinks it's a predictive science, it doesn't predict anything very much, very well. *Policing the Crisis* predicts on the basis of the analysis it made. It said, this is not intellectual swing. It's not just a swing of the intellectual pendulum. It is not just the usual ins and outs of politics. This is a major historical shift we are looking at. Really deep and profound. The place will not be the same when this one gets going. It's a historical moment. And the second thing that we said was if a certain kind of authoritarian populism is the way in which this crisis is resolved, it will have profound historical effects. And that is anticipation of Thatcherism before Thatcherism. So that when the election came, when Mrs. Thatcher to everybody's surprise took power, in the conservative party not at all a leading contender, and initiated Thatcherism - whatever that strange combination of authoritarianism and liberalism it was - when she initiated it, I said, we all said, if that takes root, she will win.

Nobody else thought that Mrs. Thatcher was going to win that election. And nobody else really thought, and for a long time went on not thinking, that this was anything more than the Tories have come back in, the conservatives have come back in. They will go out, they will come back in. The alternation of political parties. It was not that. It was the start of a completely different phase of capitalist development. So, I think it was important, you know, because it was right. I have to say right about what was coming. What was coming justified the analysis we made. It was the moment of transition between two conjunctures and what was going on was not just electoral politics. It was a historical shift. So, I feel that all of that kind of justifies it. Now, what does it tell us about now? Well, what I don't think is that we can say nothing has changed. I do not think that is true. And if you look at any of the indicators, things have changed sometimes in different directions.

For instance, take the policing and social control. Well, policing and social control are now partly in the hands of capitalist enterprises. They have been outsourced. Private companies run our prisons. Security firms are completely privately owned. So, the kind of market element which wasn't present during Thatcherism in this area has become much more important. Does that mean that the prison system is any nicer? No, it doesn't. It doesn't

mean anything of the kind. Does it mean that the police are very less politicized in their view of the world? No. I think it means that in some ways they are more politicized in their view of the world than they were, but you can't say that it's just the same. It doesn't help me to say we are still in the Thatcher moment because we are not, we are not. So, what I think understanding *Policing the Crisis* does is not to answer your question, what does it have to tell us now? It obliges us to do a *Policing the Crisis* now. To go back to that and say what has changed? What remains the same? How does the media function in it? How does a market function in it? What is the nature of the state in a moment when the state isn't coming but going and so on. So we don't, even in our new preface, try to answer that question when we try to say this is why the book was important and, if you want ask how is it important now, you would need to do a kind of conjunctural analysis of your own on this moment and put race and crime at the center of it as we did and see what happens.

Jhally: Do you think that's possible within how cultural studies has developed? That there are people who could do that in the present context?

Hall: I think there are always people who could, whether they are in cultural studies or not, I don't know. Cultural studies had this long period when it tried to forget that it had a political edge or political dimension. It went into a splurge of high theory, I'm not against theory - I don't believe you can live, understand things without theoretical concepts. But cultural studies was never an enterprise to produce critical theory, which it kind of became. Much more damaging than that in its attempt to move away from economic reductionism, it sort of forgot that there was an economy at all. So, is it in a position? It's not in a wonderful position to take that job of conjunctural analysis now on. Though some people within cultural studies are because they do understand the culture is constitutive of political crisis and a lot of other people don't. So they are potentially in a position of making a deeper analysis of the present conjunctures that a lot traditional political scientists or you know economic theorists would. But they would have to recover lost ground. They would have to go back to the political of function of cultural studies, political dimension of cultural studies and they would have to go back and ask themselves, "well, if the economy does not determine everything in the last instance, well, what is the role of the economic in the reproduction of the material and symbolic life?" So, they would have to ask themselves economic questions.

And now, the funny thing is that historical circumstances impose themselves on how people think. I hear cultural studies people now talking about the Libor interest rate. I mean talking the language of neoliberal economic, but trying to understand how the neoliberal global capitalist economy works in ways in which I haven't heard cultural studies people talking of economy for over twenty years. I think there is a kind of return to that. I don't want to see a return to economic reductionism, which as you know I have never thought explained anything very much. But as Gramsci always said, the economy can never be forgotten. It has to be taken into account. So, cultural studies has to find a way, a language of reintegrating politics, culture and history, as we were trying to do at the very beginning of the project. So, you won't be surprised to know I think it's more like a return to what cultural studies should have been about and was in the early stages. It sort of lost its way very much. You know that when I say that I have to remember that there are many

varieties of cultural studies, it's become a kind of international movement so you can't sum it up in some places - the political has always been close to the edge of what was being done. In other places, the economy and politics have been completely forgotten.

But, it is not at a good, healthy state to undertake that work. But, it does have something to contribute to that work of conjunctural analysis of the present, which a lot of other schools of thinking and research and critical work doesn't have. So, I think it could, if it pulls its socks up -- sounding like a headmaster. Sounding like the headmaster I never wanted to be! You know I never wanted to be cultural studies judge. It was too varied, too wide; too broad for any one person to say this is cultural studies and that is not. I didn't want it. I came out of that sort of patriarchal position in relation to the field. I wanted to say, I am going to do some work of this kind in cultural studies, but I am not going to legislate what is and what isn't cultural studies. So, what I am saying now is more of an impression of where I think we are and what the state of the field is than it is a kind of serious analysis of the trends of cultural studies now. Nevertheless, I feel there is a kind of choice of pathways going on. I think a lot of people in cultural studies think we can't just go on producing another analysis of *The Sopranos*. Sorry, something more is happening in the world that requires our attention. I do not know if they know quite how to do it or where to go, but I do feel that shift of mood happening in cultural studies now.

Jhally: I hope so. I think when you talked about the kind of approach, the questions that cultural studies asks, I remember you talking how Marxism was central to it - not as, this is doing Marxist analysis, but a conversation with, against, talking to Marxism, shouting at Marxism, and that is gone.

Hall: That is gone.

Jhally: How important do you think that is? Not that a Marxist approach is no longer there. But that conversation about those kinds of questions is no longer. For example, what gives the frame to the constitutive analysis of culture? That without that you end up in a free-floating idealist world of culture, where it's constitutive but not driven by anything.

Hall: Yes, I would say that I would put my weight on your second emphasis. It is not that Marxism is not around, but that kind of conversation which cultural studies conducted against some aspects of, around the questions, expanding a Marxist tradition of critical thinking - that is absent and that is a real weakness. So, that is one of the reasons why I would say we are not in a very good position. I don't myself regard as the whole of the period between the sort of weakening of that tradition, which I suppose happens by the end of the seventies, early eighties, and now as completely lost. I think important gains were made which enable us to understand culture, cultural discourse, the place, the relationship of the ideological to the cultural - I think they are related but not the same things exactly. So, I think a lot of ground was covered, kind of conceptual ground was covered, which could go to enrich the position provided the basic conversation was reengaged. But, if it is not reengaged, then that interim period is when cultural studies lost its way and won't find it again.

Jhally: Jhally: I've always been, in the work that I've done, I remember the book I did with Justin on The Cosby Show. I actually don't think there's any audience work that's been done since then that has engaged, for example, questions of ideology in the same way. And that actually is what I see. There's lots of work that's being done on audiences, but it is now done towards fan studies, rather than engaging those central questions.

Hall: I would agree with that. That's one of the missing dimensions. The critique of ideology is rather reductive. It was taken too far. It is a loss of real important elements. I would say, for instance, it's the articulation between ... let me put it this way, that you cannot define culture and culture developments solely in terms of being driven by a kind of economic frame, but you have to look at the articulation between culture and, for instance, economic interests. Somebody has an interest in the shape, ownership of, control of the media. It is not the only way in which power intervenes in the media to make the point. Therefore, some of the work that has gone on on discourse and the nature of discourse really enlarges and expands our attention and understanding of how exactly ideology works, and you could take that bit forward, but still you would have to come back and engage with those points at which culture and political interest or class interests or social interests interlock.

So, I do not want to return to something, but I want to reengage the same kinds of issues. I would put it rather differently. I would say that my own feeling is that this is what cultural studies was in the beginning. In the beginning, I always thought that culture was not a sphere, autonomous sphere of its own. And that what cultural studies was trying to do was to understand the ensemble of relations between the economic, the political, the cultural, the ideological, and the social. So, I don't think that it was ever intended that culture would arise that did sort of in the nineties, out of this was a specter of its own autonomous generative power. That was never intended, it was not what it was about. So, we have to go back to those early questions of how do you think the relationship between culture and ideology; culture, ideology and class; culture, ideology and power; culture, ideology and other spheres of social life including some that we didn't look at: education, gender, race. So the enterprises aren't complete. But unless they ensure the impetus to make that the central focus of critical thinking, it won't hit its target.

Jhally: If we could change the subject a little bit, I'd like to get your take on Obama and American politics. I think a lot of people on the left are quite confused as we head toward the 2012 Presidential Election about their view of Obama and the Democratic Party. Looking at it politically, what advice could you offer them?

Hall: Oh, I don't know about that. But, I see the point you are making. I will tell you my response to Obama, to the victory, to the success of Obama in getting the presidency. I said at the time this was in two halves. The election of the first black president is a historical moment, and you can't take that away from it. It does alter all sorts of things, including the political response of the right towards it. It changes the terrain. But, the value of Obama's presidency remains to be seen. That's what I said. I think, now, after two or three years, we are in a better position to see what that meant. But, what did it mean? I do not think Obama was ever a radical. It amuses me to see that the Tea Party thinks that he was a Socialist. He never was. He is what he was, you know, a good community organizer. Someone with his

heart in the right place in relation to civil rights and the social and economic oppression of black people and so on. But, he was never a secret lefty of any organized or theorized kind, I never expected that.

And the second thing is that, I would give more weight to the simple inertia of the American political system. I thought to myself, anybody who fools themselves that because you touch a popular nerve, as he did, and you engage a very large number of people who had been largely depoliticized, that tells you anything what is going to happen when you get in to power. And I have this specter of Obama with his ideas, sitting at the first meeting of the foreign policy committee or one of those Senate committees, "well I'm going to wind up Guantanamo", you feel the whole system like a steamroller just prepared to roll over him. You don't know what you are talking about. Well, how do you win a crucial vote on health in the system? You don't. That is not what the American political system is about. You bargain. You bargain for the lowest common denominator. You sell a pork barrel here and a directorship there. I mean that's what it is, you go across the aisle. The idea of constituting a radical alternative conception of America was never there in the Obama campaign, and I do not know quite how it works itself into the system in the U.S. So, I am more pessimistic about the terrain than I think a lot of people on the left are. That's why I suspect that it is less a question of, it's less a question of his abandoning the cause. I don't think the cause was really properly understood. I don't think the limits of his movement were properly understood. I blame him more for not understanding them and not squaring up to the people to say, "It is not going to change, Washington is not going to change the day after tomorrow because I have arrived in a white limousine at the White House." It's not going to change like that. This country is much more stubborn, much more deeply invested in a conservative history and a conservative common sense and a kind of market consciousness than anybody really acknowledges. It has an absolutely vicious, practically insane far right, anti-statist religious formation, which is not mirrored anywhere else, certainly not anywhere else in Europe. You've got to understand those things.

Gramsci used to say, "Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will." What he meant is, understand how the bloody system works. What confronts you, the fact that the terrain is not favorable to your project. Understand that even if it disillusions you. Even if it makes you awake at night. Understand it. Then you are in a position to say, well, what can change? Where are the emergent forces? Where are the cracks and the contradictions? What are the elements in public consciousness one could mobilize for a different political program? So, I am a bit suspicious of the now the simple, simple reverse: he is going to change the world, no, he hasn't changed anything. I don't think that is a very useful response. Although, I have to acknowledge that I am very disappointed, deeply disappointed about many specific things. I am disappointed about the compromises around health. I am disappointed by the double talk about Afghanistan. I am disappointed by the conceding collapse into Israeli Middle-Eastern policy. I am concerned about the unwillingness to really tackle the vested interest in social policy. You know, on and on and on I could tell you things, which I too, am deeply disillusioned about, you know, about Obama's period. But, I do not think I would say that I thought it couldn't happen and that he has sort of just given the game away.

Jhally: One of the things that I found interesting was, there were people on the left who really - and not just liberals but actually people on the left - who really thought he was something different. I remember a friend of mine thinking he was a Socialist. And I think there was a sense, in which, his power or the power of that moment, was that he was a Rorschach inkblot test where people could read into him however they wanted.

Actually, I went back to understand this. I was thinking about this. For one moment, in George Bush's memoir, he's asked what the worst moment of his presidency was. I don't know if you remember what he said. It wasn't Katrina. It wasn't 9/11. He said the worst moment of his presidency was when Kanye West called him a racist. That somehow being a racist - and there is a fantasy around race that has developed. And that largely was what was playing. It was that that fantasy of people's own sense of who they were...

Hall: It's a very important point you're making.

Jhally: So let me ask you a question, a more specific question, which is... We did an interview with bell hooks a long time ago in the late 90s. She was talking about rap music and about the centrality of black popular culture within mainstream culture. And she said, this is the way that fantasy will mediate fascism. Think you're going somewhere, but you're not really going. So when the state comes calling, you really haven't left home even though you think you have. Do you think that Obama played a part? What do you think about that? A large part of what people were attached to was the notion of themselves as being something different than they were. And especially around issues of race in America. That America's racial past, this was the moment it was going to be overcome.

Hall: Well, I would say two things in response to what you have said. One is, I never thought he was a Socialist. I never thought he was of the left in some traditional sense, but I cannot say that his early work is not inspirational. It is inspirational. And it speaks perhaps to the second part, namely that fantasy. It may be nothing more than his articulacy. But, he is able to frame in words what you would think of as the beginning of a project, which is larger than anything he intends and which would take him further than he intends to go, but he does conjure it up. So, I think this is not just an illusion and I think that is what certainly got to me about him.

Secondly, I do think it was a historical moment. I mean the moment when America elects its first black president, I don't care who he is, that is a shift. That is some kind of shift, I do not quite understand it, but it is a historical shift. I don't think we can neglect it. But thirdly, you know, what Bell says is really extremely insightful. It had as much to do with fantasies around race. First of all, that really, I am not that kind of person myself. Secondly, that America is not that kind of place. All of these are fantasies, but some are the fantasies that enable you to take part, to participate in movements and positions that you think are moving you towards the realization of that fantasy. Whereas actually, they are not at all. They do not correspond with reality. The trends are really right against you and so on. So it is a very important observation.

Well, let's ask the question where you began. What does that tell us about black popular culture now? What does it tell you about the fantasies and the illusions...I don't quite know what to call them, which are invested in black popular culture? I think it is an extremely contradictory domain, has become an extremely contradictory domain. The idea that it is, the repository of an alternative vision of liberation, is not the case. The idea, on the other hand, that it is just integrated into the normal capitalist American way of life consciousness is not so, either. But, its ambiguities are very profound. Very profound. Difficult for us to acknowledge, but very profound. And, I think there are fantasies that it generates in some ways because of the languages it uses. Languages of emotion. Languages of style. Languages of the body. Languages of sexuality. It is in a better position than the language of politics to conjure up those fantasies. And so I think that some difficult work remains to be done around the question of what is happening to black popular culture in the new century.

Jhally: The last question was about the Olympics and Britishness and race. The last three weeks have been quite extraordinary to some degree. Have you thought about how race and Britishness intersect in this period?

Hall: Well, I thought about this question of race and Britishness and the Olympics a lot. I have been quite preoccupied with the question of Englishness because there has been a kind of debate about Englishness going on in British society over the last ten or fifteen years, partly in response to immigration, partly in response to the black presence, partly in response to the position of a different culture. So if indigenizing itself at the heart of Englishness itself, which is such an imperial and self-deluding form of superiority. So, I have been preoccupied with that. And, of course, clearly, race is central to that question. Central to it. Because it is a kind of repository of difference, repository for everything that is not naturally and normally British or English. So it is an important question.

Now, what do I think has been happening to that? I can't tell you I think it's the same place as it was at the time, in the fifties and sixties. Not in the same place. Has it changed completely? By no means. Are some of the old elements still present? Yes. The riots that took place in the British cities this last year, their equivalence could be spotted right across the last five decades. Events like that, misunderstandings, conflicts between people and the police, have triggered rioting or explosive moments, etc. So, in that sense, all too familiar. On the other hand, it is not quite familiar as all that. Why not? Lots of people were white. What did they think about being? Were they demonstrating, were they participating in the riots for the same reasons as black men and women? I don't know. So there are a lot of issues, a lot of questions which relate to this issue of "is it the same?", "is it absolutely different?", "is it a transitional moment?" And I would say we are still in a very transitional moment.

If you take visibility. Well, you know, when I first came to England in the fifties and sixties, there wasn't a black person on television to be seen except in a comedy program or the equivalent of coon show. Now, black presenters are all over the place, black sports people are all over the place. They are relatively, of course, low in the promotion stakes in every field, there are all sorts of occupations they don't occupy, but they also have a lot of

visibility, which they did not have before. How do you explain that? Well, I think there has been a kind of what I would call a multicultural drift.

A sort of acknowledgement, grudging acknowledgment: "Well, they are there, they do not seem to be going home. I guess one must get accustomed to having them around, though I don't like it." A kind of grudging acknowledgement that is not quite the celebration of multiculturalism that I think you find among some young people who really like living in the diverse society. The majority of English people don't like living in ... but they do acknowledge that it is not going to change overnight. And that has led into a kind of drift of acceptance. Ok, you go into a store on Oxford Street, or one of the shopping malls, the attendant is likely to be a very smartly dressed, fashion-conscious, street-conscious, street wise, black man or black woman. And that is no surprise any longer.

So there is a kind of drift going along, which has transformed the situation but not dramatically. On the other hand, to those people who say "it is totally different", it is not totally different. Completely not totally different. At the bottom of the ladder are still a layer of oppressed black people who on every social indicator are worse than their white counterparts. On employment, on earnings, on income, of professionalization, of educational achievement, of social mobility - worse. There are substantial sections of young black people who are not just angry as they were in the seventies about prejudice and discrimination and racism, but who feel completely outside the society. They form a society of their own, in a way. They don't relate to the rest of the society very much. And, they are deeply disaffected. And they are disaffected not just literally because they are poor or can't afford consumer goods or cannot buy the kind of clothes or technological gadgets that they would like, but because they feel just sort of rejected, as if society has set its face in stone, like a wall, against ever seeing them as part of itself, even as a subordinate part of itself.

So I think there are very contradictory tendencies going on, very contradictory. And I do not know that I could come to a definitive judgment as to where the balance of forces lies. I was not optimistic, but I was hopeful about what I would call the moment of multiculturalism, because I thought "well, ideas of diversity are beginning to sort of be acknowledged, grudgingly, to take root in the society." They are beginning to. Well, that moment is gone. The Prime Minister said multiculturalism is dead. And it is quite true that 9/11 and 7/7, and the politicization of Islam and terrorism, etc. has done incredible damage to the possibility of the gradual inclusiveness becoming sort of an English common sense. So I do not think that is happening at all.

Indeed, I think, in some respects, we are in the reverse of that. Borders are much more closed, asylum seekers, not just black people but anybody from anywhere else, are very, very, very not welcome. They are a source of threat. They are a source of difference. Difference is a threat. The society feels itself now as in decline into the status of the second rate power. It has been for a long time, but it feels itself. And in those circumstances, really it produces all kinds of very dangerous symptoms, of which racism is one. So I don't think we are in a settled state at all. Ok, let's, I could have taken the riots because they have all these elements in them. But let's take the Olympics. The Olympics consist of all these moments. First of all, the hype about Englishness and the English, and Team GB, and all that

rubbish chauvinism which went on. Which lasted into the Olympics in one important way. In the first week, you did not know anybody else who had won any medals. Everything on the media was about what Team GB had done. You know, one two three, and Team GB was seventh. Who was third, fourth, fifth, sixth? So, the chauvinism is not unfinished. Secondly, the political capital is hugely exploited and used. Boris Johnson intends to make his entire populist political career and his challenge to the conservative leadership founded on a kind of London Olympics moment, certain reading of it. Politically, that is the way it is going.

Commercially, it was a shocker. Both the Paralympics and the Olympics themselves were mainly sponsored by people who are the deep enemies of the Olympic ideal in that domain. The Paralympics, which opened today, is mainly sponsored by one of the organizations whose job it is to test disabled people so that fewer and fewer of them can get government benefits. And let's not speak about McDonalds and Coke sponsoring the Olympics. The commercialization was horrendous. On the other hand, half of Team GB was black. What am I to think about that? False consciousness? They didn't look embarrassed as Lindford Christie did at one point earlier on. It was not an act of defiance to take the Union Jack and run around the track in it. They felt a certain pride in it, a certain kind of belonging. Not to Britain as such, but to "where I live," Hackney or South London or more localized. But they were not completely alienated from it. Well, a very difficult position for me to be in because, as well as that, they were bloody Jamaicans! One, two, three! There was Usain Bolt, who is a figure from another planet really, he's an extraordinary character. So what am I to do with that?

And then, I do not think there is any question of the genuineness of the response of a lot of the crowd, a good section of the crowd, that this is a good thing. That this is a multicultural occasion. Lots of people here, lots of diverse people, everybody claiming to be English or British in some way. Then there was the sport itself and, in the Paralympics, the tremendous courage and triumph of people who are disabled, which has a very positive charge to it. So, what do I make of the Olympics? I am bloody puzzled is what I make of the Olympics. It is part of that ambivalent, ambiguous, transitional moment, which I have tried to describe earlier on.

Jhally: You alluded to it. How are Mo Farah and Lindford Christie different? How is this moment different?

Hall: I do not think Mo Farah is angry. He doesn't seem to me to be angry with being in England, with white people, etc. He doesn't seem to me to be, he is certainly not - I'm not suggesting that Lindford was, but he certainly is not adapting to it, trying to represent himself as if he were just an ordinary English person. He is who he is. He has this great gash of a smile, which could only appear in a black face, and it's just impossible for a white face to mimic that. I'm told that in his native country they think he is running for them, not for Britain! And I do not know what he makes of that. So I do think it is the different moment. And it's a moment of which, the English were never proud of Lindford Christie's triumphs, never. And I think they are quite proud of Mo Farah. I think they are very proud that Jessica Ennis turns out to be mixed race. Her father is a Jamaican carpenter. Her mother is English or whatever she is, I am not sure. But white, I think. English? Yes, her mother is English.

These are the two emblematic figures of the 2012 Olympics. It can't mean nothing. What does it mean? I don't know. But it's a different moment from the moment of the '70s. Very different moment. I don't invite anybody to resolve that into either "things are getting better" or "things are getting worse", but I do say "think about the contradictions which are at play at the moment."

Jhally: Yeah, think cultural studies.

Hall: Indeed.

[END]