

'That black boy's a different class!' Race, class and local football in Leicester c.1982-2010

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Britain's African-Caribbean heritage ('black') middle classes as an area of academic study has received relatively little scholarly attention. Importantly, seldom has leisure, sport and specifically local football as a cultural activity been used as a prism to gain a deeper insight into the border work, identity politics and lived experience of this group of black Britons. Drawing on a combination of ethnographic and archival data from the forthcoming book, *Football, Ethnicity and Community: The life of an African-Caribbean football club* (Peter Lang), these points form the central threads of this discussion.

I begin by sketching-out the arrival of a new and more upwardly mobile black professional which emerged within the club and the city of Leicester towards the end of the last century. Attention is given to the ways in which the conditions, social realities and sensibilities for this group of black people impacted on the identity, mission and development of the Cavaliers organisation. I also discuss how the diverging socio-economic and black cultural experience in Leicester was also being reflected in the pluralising functions and meanings ascribed this one site of sporting resistance and to local black football by the increasingly heterogeneous group of black people who constituted the club.

The second half of the discussion is set against a number of important developments in the black experience in football in Leicester and Britain during the period of focus. By the 1980s established semi-professional and professional football clubs began to recruit black footballers more frequently. Consequently, the late 1980s witnessed the arrival of a more professionalised and more commercially driven (or new class of) black footballer. With a current lack of managerial and coaching opportunities for now retiring black semi and professional footballers, today local black, Asian and minority ethnic clubs in the region often seek out and offer these men important and rare avenues into coaching senior men's football. Against these developments, the discussion uses the Cavaliers club as a case study to identify and explore some of the resultant tensions and micro-politics brought about by this relatively new manoeuvre. The discussion concludes by exploring the influences this development is having on the continuing identity and role of local black football in Leicester and Britain in the 21st century.