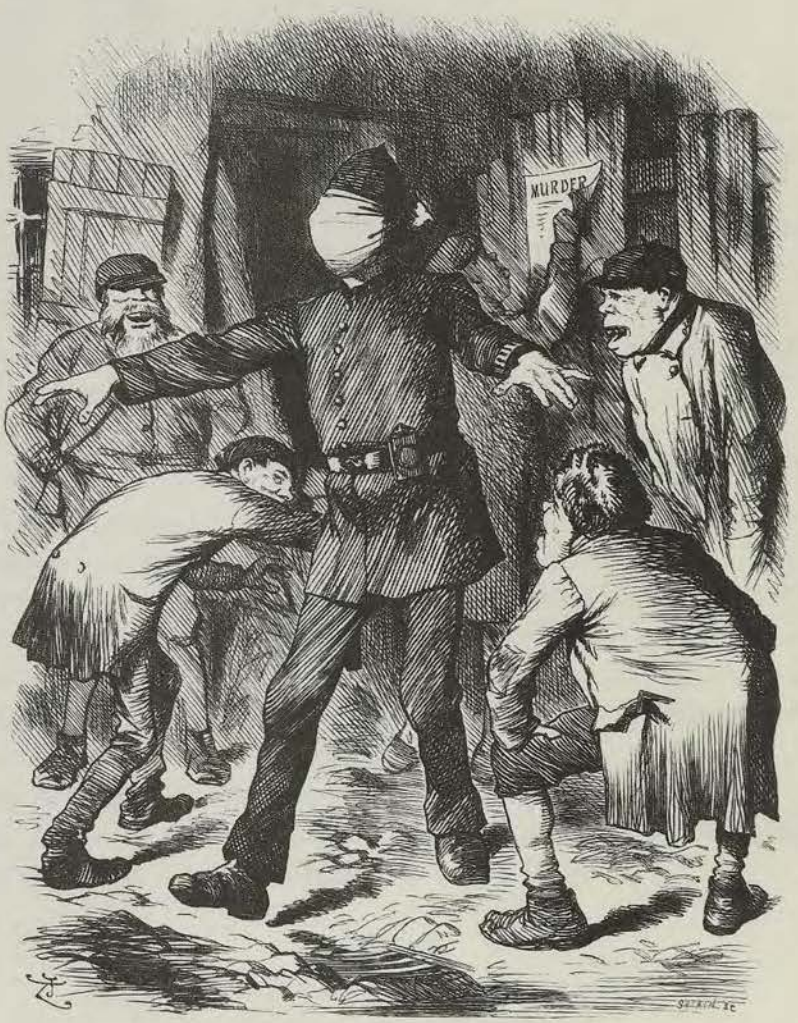

BLIND-MAN'S BUFF.

(As played by the Police.)

"TURN ROUND THREE TIMES,
AND CATCH WHOM YOU MAY!"

A CONTEMPORARY NOTED THAT "ARRESTS WERE MADE BY THE SCORE, PRINCIPALLY OF PEOPLE OF A LOW CLASS WHO INHABITED THE LOCALITY WHERE THE MURDERS WERE COMMITTED."

Jack the Ripper
As the Threat of Outcast London

Robert F. Haggard

DURING THE autumn of 1888, a killer terrorized London. He chose as his victims mostly older, decrepit, drink-ridden prostitutes from the East End district of Whitechapel. The name "Jack the Ripper" appeared on a number of letters mailed to the police and to various news agencies. The publication of several of these letters, in the hope that someone would recognize the handwriting, vastly increased the killer's fame. It has never been established that the murderer wrote any of the letters. Nevertheless, without them, the memorable appellation would never have been attached to the killer, and the murders themselves would probably now be long forgotten. The question of who performed the brutal killings and sexual mutilations has baffled later writers as much as it did the London Metropolitan Police in 1888. Many authors have posited theories, but no one hypothesis has been proven conclusively.

Unlike most papers on this subject, I intend to avoid the issue of who committed these horrible crimes, but instead to examine the reactions of London, both West and East Ends, to the killings. Jack the Ripper should be studied within the context of the 1880s, a period of economic uncertainty and heightened class tensions. The Whitechapel murders provide a case study of sorts. The reactions of the West End mirrored the debate over "Outcast London" and the fear of social revolution on the part of the poor of the East End. The reactions of the East End reflected ingrained prejudices against foreigners, Jews, the police, and upper class society. By examining the social conditions in East London, particularly Whitechapel where the killer operated most often, I hope to show why the East End was viewed with such concern and distrust even before the autumn of 1888. By discussing social unrest in east London and the fear of revolution among many in the West End in the 1880s, I plan to show how the Jack the Ripper murders reinforced a whole series of larger long-standing concerns and preconceived notions. Finally, by looking at the types of individuals who were suspected of being involved in these hideous events, I will reveal how the more-affluent

Mr. Haggard wishes to thank Mr. Lenard Berlanstein, Mr. Nicholas Edsall, and Ms. Susan Eisley for advice on both the style and content of this essay.

Victorians' reaction to Jack the Ripper exhibited deep-seated prejudices against certain social classes and elements of the population.

By the mid-1880s, "the East End had become as potent a symbol of urban poverty . . . as Manchester had been of industrial conditions in the 1840s."[1] Many in the West End viewed the East as a place where the "vilest practices are looked upon with the most matter-of-fact indifference . . . [and where] the filthy and abominable from all parts of the country seem to flow. Entire courts are filled with thieves, prostitutes, and liberated convicts."[2] A number of journalists and social commentators, such as Walter Besant, Jane Stuart-Wortley, and Samuel Barnett, tried to alter West End perceptions and prejudices. Yet, east London was too firmly fixed in most people's minds as a symbol of decadence, immorality, criminality, and poverty to be replaced easily. Such negative perceptions, in fact, migrated from West to East. Dr. Curshan Corner noted that people in the East were "coming to think that any discomforts or annoyances, any offensive innovations or dangerous nuisances . . . must be resignedly tolerated because it is East London."[3]

There is no doubt that life in east London was difficult for many of its 900,000 inhabitants. Whitechapel, with a population of 76,000, had 39.2 percent of its citizens on or below the poverty line.[4] Many workers could only find intermittent employment, and those who had regular employment often did not fare better. The sweating system, exemplified by overcrowded, unsanitary workshops, long hours, and low wages, was widely utilized. Many were forced to toil for fifteen to eighteen hours a day in the numerous tailoring, boot-making, and cabinet-making shops of the East End.[5]

Poverty was not the only problem leading to social unrest in London. The influx of foreigners, many of them Russian or German Jews fleeing persecution or economic hardship on the continent, caused concern that "English" jobs were being lost to the flood of new-comers. The belief that a rising tide of Jewish immigration was reducing native Englishmen to destitution led to an increase in popular anti-semitism. The comment that "the foreign Jews are filthy in their lives, and present a substantial similarity to the Mongolian type of character" did not seem out of the ordinary during periods of economic distress.[6] Contemporary social thinkers Charles Booth and Stephen Fox attempted to alter this impression by stating that Jews were hard working and law abiding, and, most importantly, were not immigrating in unprecedented numbers.[7] Such perceptions, like ones of east London generally, were extremely difficult to combat.

The fact remained that most foreign Jews immigrating to England took up residence in London. The Jewish community in Whitechapel was particularly compact. Of the 60-70,000 Jews in London, ninety percent lived in the East End.

Only one-half were born in England. Whitechapel alone had a Jewish population of 30-40,000.[8] Like their forbears, most Jewish refugees made good on the few opportunities presented to them. As Charles Booth noted

> They are set down on an already over-stocked and demoralized labour market. They are surrounded by the drunkenness, immorality, and gambling of the East-End streets . . . in the midst of the very refuse of our civilization, and yet . . . whether they become bootmakers, tailors, cabinet-makers, glaziers, or dealers, the Jewish inhabitants of the East End rise in the social scale.[9]

The Jews' success created some animosity with the Irish community. It may have troubled some Irishmen to see that long hours, periods of unemployment, bad food, overcrowding, in fact, "all the conditions which ruin the Anglo-Saxon or Irish inhabitant of the East End seem to leave unhurt the moral and physical fibre of the Jew."[10]

In addition to the supposed dislocation caused by the influx of foreigners into east London, social commentators recognized a large number of long-standing problems which needed to be solved—overcrowding, poor sanitation, excessive drinking, immorality, and poverty. All of these concerns were intimately connected. Victorian social legislators had long adhered to the notion that improved living conditions in the East would lead to a decrease in the amount of vice and crime. There would be little change as long as there were "reeking courts, crowded public-houses, low lodging houses, and numerous brothels . . . poverty, rags, and dirt everywhere."[11]

Overcrowding was a huge problem in east London. In 1891, 55.5 percent of the people in Whitechapel lived with more than two persons per room in apartments with fewer than five rooms. Two districts of east London had even higher rates. Such living conditions were due in part to the large rent increases in the East over the previous quarter century. Although rents in the West only rose by 11 percent between 1880 and 1900, those in the East End jumped by 25 percent.[12] Overcrowding led to the association of the honest poor with criminal elements, and produced "incest, illegitimacy, juvenile prostitution, drunkenness, dirt, idleness, [and] disease."[13]

It also prompted people to spend as much of their time as possible away from home; although many joined social, religious, or philanthropic clubs, a larger number spent much of their spare time in the local public houses. Drunkenness led to disease, the loss of jobs, and, often, violence.[14] Poor sanitation, another problem intimately linked with overcrowding, caused a high rate of child mortality. According to *Lancet,* the prestigious medical journal, reform on this

front would not only be useful "in saving human life and health, but also in reducing the prevalence of crime."[15] An inadequate water supply made personal cleanliness impossible. The lack of mortuaries forced some poor families to keep the corpses of their loved ones in their own living room until the day of the funeral.[16]

Part of the problem of overcrowding was due to the policies of the government and to middle-class reformers. The demolition of unsanitary buildings, under the provisions of the 1875 Artisans and Labourers Dwelling Act, led to some rebuilding, but often the new apartments were too expensive for the earlier tenants to rent. This led to more crowding in the slums adjacent to the "improved" areas.[17] Some commentators were outraged by the government's lack of foresight; the journalist George Sims revealed that "in scores of instances the work of improvement has stopped with the pulling down" and argued that instead of "civilizing the Zulu and improving the condition of the Egyptian fellah the Government should turn its attention to the poor of London."[18] Other writers noted that rising rents defeated the purpose of the housing legislation. The philanthropist Octavia Hill commented that the government should "be thankful if [it] can secure for the same rent even one room in a new, clean, pure house."[19]

For many of the poor, common lodging houses provided the only escape from spending the night on the streets. These houses were as profitable to their owners as they were wretched and degrading for their boarders. In such houses, it was often difficult to distinguish between the honest and the criminal poor. Indeed, the police frequently did not make any distinction between the two at all. The common lodging house system did allow the police a larger measure of social control. The owners of the houses were often prepared "to assist the police with information, and the inmates [were] under police supervision to a greater extent than they would be if they were driven to live elsewhere."[20]

There was a strong perception among middle class reformers that there was a close connection between the common lodging houses and prostitution in London. One writer expressed it this way, "want first, exigency next, bad companions in low lodging-houses next, and the fatal step—the last [prostitution]."[21] Both prostitution and lodging houses flourished in the East End. Whitechapel contained sixty-three brothels, 1,200 known prostitutes (a conservative estimate), and 233 common lodging houses capable of holding 8,500 people. In addition to those who chose prostitution as a full-time profession, many women engaged in certain low paying trades (specifically needlewomen, slopworkers, actresses, seamstresses, and lacemakers) resorted to "casual prostitution" in times of economic hardship. Such activity was often the only way these women could make ends meet; their neighbors, families, and

friends usually understood the pressures of economic necessity and did not shun them.[22]

London was an extremely hospitable environment for the practice of prostitution. It's size provided anonymity, protection from police harassment, and a constant supply of customers. The police were generally more concerned with prostitution in the West End since "it was [there] more likely to come to the notice of respectable persons, press reporters, and foreigners."[23] For most of the 1880s, East End prostitutes were left to ply their trade in relative peace. Prostitution was not actually a crime in Victorian England; the police could only take action if the prostitutes' solicitation created a public disturbance.[24]

In the mid-1860s, the government passed a series of laws in an attempt to control the spread of contagious diseases in the armed forces through the incarceration of infected prostitutes. Although these acts were removed from the statute books in 1886, opposition to the state-regulated prostitution of the Contagious Diseases Acts spawned a social purity movement. Moralist activity turned from the protection of working class women from police harassment to the repression of prostitution.[25] Recognizing that the "attitude of the average working girl towards . . . her sexuality, and the sexual act itself was so foreign, and so inimical to prevailing middle class conventions,"[26] the social purity movement wished to root out "the traditional social and sexual habits of the poor."[27]

Josephine Butler, the leader of the opposition to the Contagious Diseases Acts, disapproved of and spoke out against such attempts to legislate morality. Furthermore, *The Pall Mall Gazette* published a letter arguing that it was "impossible to do anything furthering morality by the law of the land without also touching the economical relations of society."[28] No one heeded their pleas. Parliament raised the age of consent from thirteen to sixteen, and attempted to crack down on houses of ill-repute. Between 1885 and 1914, 1,200 brothels were prosecuted annually in England and Wales; between 1875 and 1884, the average had been eighty-six per year. Even though the head of the Metropolitan Police, Sir Charles Warren, tried to initiate a policy of laissez-faire towards prostitution in the summer of 1887, two hundred brothels in east London were closed in that year as a result of the actions of the government and various purity groups. Coming shortly before the outbreak of the Jack the Ripper murders, these closings rendered "thousands of women homeless, hence vulnerable to attack, and certainly [made] the lower stratum of prostitution . . . even more precarious as a means of subsistence."[29]

In the best of times, the East End was a brutal environment. The Vicar of St. Jude's Church in Whitechapel, Samuel Barnett, called for the closing of the open

slaughter-houses because of "his concern for the moral consequences, especially for the children of the poor, of this open peep-show of cruelty to animals."[30] George Sims, in his works *How the Poor Live* and *Horrible London*, related that "the spirit of murder hovers over this spot [east London], for life is held of little account."[31] He argued that the constant association of the honest with the criminal poor led to the moral deterioration of the former. Sims stated that the people of the East were so used to the sound of violence, that few would stir to see what was the matter. In fact, Sims found that "they became hardened and the cruelty at which we shudder is their second nature ... only the ferocious instincts of the brute are fostered."[32] Drunkenness often led to violence. Assaults of men on women occurred with great frequency. In a scene which certainly harkens to the later Whitechapel slayings, Sims wrote, "Down from one dark court rings a cry of murder, and a woman, her face hideously gashed, makes across the narrow road, pursued by a howling madman. It is only a drunken husband having a row with his wife."[33] What made the East End especially disturbing was the fact that the rest of Victorian society was becoming noticeably less violent; crime had been declining in proportion to the population since the middle of the century. Violent crimes were very rare. Trials for homicide declined by seventy percent between the 1830s and 1914, and fifty-three percent fewer homicides were reported between 1870 and the start of World War I. The East End generally, and Jack the Ripper specifically, served as a reminder of the scope of the problems remaining to be solved.[34]

ALL OF the problems listed above, from crime to prostitution to poverty, were long-standing. For a number of reasons, these issues became much more hotly debated in the 1880s than previously. The writings of Andrew Mearns, Beatrice Potter, Samuel Barnett, Charles Booth, George Sims and others were read and understood in a new way. One wrote that the poor will someday "burst their barriers at last, and declare open and violent war against law and order and property."[35] Another stated that "the life of a sweaters' man is so hopeless and dreary that their feelings against the order of things are not unnaturally bitter and intense."[36] Governmental procrastination had not made the problems disappear. Now the plight of the East End was seen to inflame class tensions and, perhaps, provoke bloody insurrection.

The reason for this renewed interest in writings on the problems of east London was, simply, the fear among many in the West that the East End's revolutionary tendencies were beginning to bubble to the surface. The 1880s was a period of industrial depression in which "the dangerous possibility [existed] ... that the respectable working class, under the stress of prolonged unemployment,

might throw in its lot with the casual poor."[37] The casual laboring poor, who were viewed as morally degenerate by many in the West, were often confused with the criminal poor. The threat would come from the casuals of the East End, because "only there . . . could a formidable riot take place, given the combination of 12,000 sailors . . . and the 7,000-8,000 dock labourers and lightermen."[38]

It is clear that it would take more than a new spate of pamphlets on the problems and hypothetical revolutionary tendencies of east London to stir the West out of its comfortable apathy. The spark was provided by the riots and demonstrations centering around Trafalgar Square between early 1886 and November, 1887. On 8 February 1886, the Fair Trade League held a meeting in Trafalgar Square to demand protective tariffs and public works to cure unemployment. Roughly 20,000 people, many of them dock and building workers, assembled. When the Social Democratic Federation interrupted the meeting and led part of the crowd in the direction of Hyde Park, a portion of the crowd marched west, bent on mischief. In the looting that followed, roughly £50,000 in damage was done. Over the next two days, a dense fog covered London, increasing the nervousness of West End shop owners. On the advice of the Metropolitan Police, many businessmen closed and barricaded their shops. Public confidence in the police was shaken by the ordeal.[39]

In the summer of 1887, a large number of homeless, unemployed vagrants began to camp in Trafalgar Square. The police was reluctant to remove them at first. The fact that charitable organizations in the West End provided the squatters with donations of free food made the problem worse. On 8 November, after many heated arguments with the Conservative Home Secretary, Henry Matthews, Sir Charles Warren, the head of the Metropolitan Police, took decisive action to disperse what he called the "veriest scum of the population;"[40] he banned all meetings in and processions to Trafalgar Square. On "Bloody Sunday," 13 November 1887, the Metropolitan Federation of Radical Clubs organized a series of marches and demonstrations to protest the government's policy of coercion in Ireland. The police violently dispersed the marchers before they reached Trafalgar Square.[41]

The reaction of the West End to "Bloody Sunday" was, on the whole, positive. *The Times* rejoiced that Warren's decisive action had defeated "a deliberate attempt . . . to terrorize London by placing the control of the streets in the hands of the criminal classes."[42] Nevertheless, the threat of the East End had been twice demonstrated. The danger was multiplied many times in the minds of many in the West because of their inability to "adequately distinguish between the ordinary poorer classes and the criminal classes;" thus, "every large assembly of people assumes to their disordered imagination the aspects of a dangerous and

hostile mob."[43]

THIS PERIOD represented a culmination of tensions between West and East. By the autumn of 1888, "the respectable classes were obsessed with fears of class conflict and social disintegration[;] coming so fast on the heels of the West End riots, the Jack the Ripper murders fed the flames of class hatred and distrust."[44] The fact that Whitechapel was situated at the western edge of the East End, next to the important financial district of London, made the killings seem even more ominous. The horrifying crimes of the Whitechapel murderer condensed the vague fears of the West End about the brutality, immorality, and destructiveness of the East into one mysterious entity. While many in the West End viewed the crimes as a logical result of conditions in East London, the reaction of the East End was marked by anti-semitism, xenophobia, and hostility towards the police, intensifying social divisions which already existed.

The Metropolitan Police had vast powers available to solve the Whitechapel murders. It could investigate "every pawnshop, every laundry, every public-house, and even every lodging-house in the huge area of London in a couple of hours."[45] Furthermore, there was a great willingness on the part of the people of the East End to aid in the capture of the killer. Thus, a contemporary noted that "arrests were made by the score, principally of people of a low class who inhabited the locality where the murders were committed."[46] The scope and lack of focus of police activity can be clearly seen in a report sent to the Home Office on 19 October 1888 by Chief Inspector Swanson. He noted that 80,000 handbills had been distributed, house-to-house searches conducted, 2,000 lodgers questioned, and inquiries made of sailors on the Thames, Asians in London's opium dens, Greek gypsies, and cowboys from the American Exhibition. Furthermore, "three hundred people were questioned as a result of communications from the public . . . [including] seventy-six butchers and slaughterers."[47]

By an examination of the sorts of people who were suspected of committing the Whitechapel murders, one can get a sense of the racial prejudices and class tensions that were very much a part of Victorian life. The police and press exhibited a strong suspicion of foreigners and Jews from the beginning of the investigation. One writer commented in 1891 that Whitechapel "harboured a cosmopolitan population, chiefly Jews, many of whom were decent hard working folk though others were the very scum of Europe."[48] There was a widely held suspicion that Jews were involved in the killings. The coroner, Mr. Wynne Baxter, described the killer as using "Judas-like approaches"[49] and Will Cross, the carter who found the sexually-mutilated body of Mary Nicholls, supposedly pointed at the nearby Jewish cemetery and said that the murderer was "probably

some sneaking Yid who wouldn't pay for his fun."[50] On 10 September 1888 the *Manchester Guardian* reported that "all are united in the belief that [the murderer] is a Jew or of Jewish parentage[,] his face being of a marked Hebrew type."[51] Sir Robert Anderson, the Head of the Central Intelligence Division, was adamant in his memoirs that the killer was a Polish Jew.[52]

Several other examples can be cited to illustrate London's preoccupation with the Jews. The London *Times* published several articles from their Vienna correspondent during the first week of October 1888 on the 1884 trial of a Galician Jew charged with the mutilation of a woman near Cracow. On 2 October another report from Vienna stated that one method for a Jewish man to atone for the sin of sexual relations with a Christian woman was to kill and mutilate her. Hermann Adler, a London Rabbi, responded to these charges by stating that "in no Jewish book is such a barbarity even hinted at. Nor is there any record . . . of a Jew having been convicted of such a terrible atrocity . . . [things were bad enough] without the revival of moribund fables and the importation of prejudices."[53]

On the night of the murder of Catherine Eddowes, 29 September 1888, an officer found a chalk-written message on a wall in Goulston street near the spot where a fragment of the victim's apron had been dropped by the murderer.[54] The message, "The Juwes are the men who will not be blamed for nothing," was erased on the express orders of Sir Charles Warren. Superintendent Arnold in his report to the Home Office explained that "a strong feeling existed against the Jews generally . . . I was apprehensive that if the writing were left it would be the means of causing a riot."[55]

Jews were not the only ones to be suspected or arrested. A number of non-Jewish foreigners also fell under suspicion. Some detectives felt that anarchists or nihilists in the East End were behind the killings. On 4 October, an American was taken into custody for threatening to "rip up" a woman. Another man, with an American accent, was arrested because his features supposedly matched the admittedly vague police description. The police requested information about an Austrian seaman, whose signature supposedly corresponded with the letters signed "Jack the Ripper" and whose description also "matched" that of the Whitechapel murderer."[56] Charles Ludwig, a German citizen, was accused of being the killer after his arrest for pulling a penknife during a drunken brawl.[57]

Even more exotic suspects were found in the Malays and Lascars of east London. Chief Inspector Abberline felt that the murders were neither typically British nor Jewish. He believed that "[s]exual maniacs of the type of the 'Ripper' were more to be found on the continent of Europe, or in Asia, than in Britain."[58] In early October, another writer remarked that the Ripper used "peculiarly

Eastern methods" and that the killer acted when he was "primed with his opium, or bang, or gin, and inspired with his lust for slaughter."[59] On 6 October the *Times* printed a telegram from an English sailor, then in New York, stating that a Malaysian cook the previous August had told him that "he had been robbed by a woman of bad character, and that unless he found the woman and recovered his money he would murder and mutilate every Whitechapel woman he met."[60]

After taking all of the reports regarding the suspicion of foreigners into account, it is difficult to come to any conclusion other than that the police and press were especially eager to believe that an "outsider" had committed these horrible crimes. Many agreed with the *Times* editorialist on 4 October who stated that "the celerity with which the crimes were committed is inconsistent with the ordinary English phlegmatic nature."[61] If the suspicion of foreigners did not lead to the arrest of the perpetrator of the horrors, the police could turn to a number of other "outcast" groups, which were, for one reason or another, beyond the pale of the respectable.

The mentally ill were naturally suspected. The suspicion of lunatics followed from the common belief that no sane Englishman would commit such brutal crimes. If the murders could not be tied to a foreigner, then the guilty Englishman must be insane. The *East London Advertiser* described the killer as being a "murderous lunatic, who issues forth like another Hyde."[62] A number of individuals turned themselves in to the police claiming to be the Whitechapel killer. Those whose stories were due to alcohol were often fined; others with more serious psychological problems were placed under restraint in an asylum. The police rigorously attempted to clear east London of anyone who seemed unbalanced. Some suspects brought in for questioning were determined to be insane and were also placed into confinement.[63]

Theories that the killer did not come from the poverty-stricken East End were neither common nor popular in the West during the autumn of 1888. The belief that the Ripper belonged to a higher class of society than both his victims and the usual suspects, however, found greater resonance among the less prosperous and educated in the East. The two main theories were that the killer was either a religious fanatic intent on ridding the world of prostitution or a medical doctor. The belief that the killer might be a "homicidal maniac of religious views" was first postulated by the eccentric Dr. L. S. Winslow early in the investigation.[64] Winslow was adamant that the Ripper was "not of the class of which 'Leather Apron' belongs, but is of the upper class of society."[65] In the London *Times* of 1 October, another doctor, Edgar Sheppard, agreed with Winslow's conclusions and added that the murderer "may be an earnest religionist, believing that he is extirpating vice and sin."[66]

The theory that the Ripper was a doctor was more widely respected. In essence, the case against the medical profession revolved around the question of whether the killer needed to possess surgical skills and instruments to have performed his grisly dissections. Some believed, as Dr. Winslow did, that "considerable anatomical knowledge was displayed by the murderer, which would seem to indicate that his occupation was that of a butcher or a surgeon."[67] Some people went even further. At the close of the inquest for Anne Chapman on 26 September, Dr. Wynne Baxter concluded that "no unskilled person could have known where to find [the uterus] or have recognized it when found. For instance, no mere slaughterer of animals could have carried out these operations. It must have been someone accustomed to the *post-mortem* room."[68] An editorialist, writing in the *Lancet* on 29 September, expressed his opinion that no one without experience in anatomical or pathological examinations could have performed such skillful mutilations in so rapid a fashion.[69] Other medical experts, perhaps in an attempt to deflect criticism from their profession, disagreed and stated that the killer showed little or no medical knowledge.

Debate also raged about what sort of weapon the Ripper used to kill and mutilate his victims. The discovery or accurate description of this instrument might have given a clue as to the class or profession of the murderer. As early as the second week in September, the coroner stated that a surgical knife might have been used. By mid-October, anyone carrying a small black bag, one of the symbols of the medical profession, in east London was suspected of being the killer.[70] A final reason for suspicion to be tied to the medical profession was the fact that in several of the killings, organs had been removed from the victim's bodies. It was commonly believed that there was a market for such organs. J. R. Bennett, in a letter to the *Times* in late September, exclaimed that such theories were just an attempt to defame the medical profession and should not be believed. To this day, however, many suspect that a doctor was, in fact, involved in the murders.[71]

Members of a number of other occupations were suspected of being involved in the Whitechapel horrors. Men with such diverse livelihoods as bootmakers, cork-cutters, butchers, slaughterers, sailors and servicemen on leave attracted the attention of the police. During the inquest for Catherine Eddowes in mid-October 1888, Drs. George Sequeira and William Saunders stated that the killer did not possess medical skills or knowledge of anatomy. At the same time, Drs. Frederick Brown and George Phillips argued that though the murderer showed some anatomical knowledge, "the murder could have been committed by a person who had been a hunter, a butcher, a slaughterman, as well as a student in surgery or a properly qualified surgeon."[72] A letter sent by Mr. R. Hull in early

THE TYPES OF PEOPLE WHO WERE SUSPECTED BY THE POLICE AND THE PRESS ACCURATELY REFLECTED MANY OF THE TENSIONS AND PREJUDICES OF VICTORIAN LONDON.

October made the same point; he had been a butcher for fifteen years and remarked that doctors did not understand "how terribly dexterous a good slaughterman is with his knife. There has been nothing done to these poor women that an expert butcher could not do almost in the dark."[73] Another concern related to the curious fact that the murders occurred only on weekends; suspicion attached itself to butchers or drovers working on cattle boats bringing live freight from the continent. These individuals had the necessary skill, and their absence from London would explain the intervals between the Ripper's murders.[74]

Since the police had no witnesses to the murders and few leads to follow, it cast a wide dragnet in the hopes that the killer would fortuitously fall into their hands. Whitechapel was densely populated with foreigners, Jews, and drifters of one sort or another; thus, these were obvious groups to target. The attaching of suspicion to butchers, slaughterhouse workers, and boot-makers, because of their proficiency with knives, also seemed to be reasonable. The attempt to round up all the mentally unbalanced of Whitechapel may well have been a sensible precaution. The suspects taken together, however, produce not a portrait of one killer, but a catalogue of those considered by the West End to be brutal and callous enough to perform such deeds. Much as in the East End, the police and press revealed their xenophobia and anti-semitism. There is a third element which enters the West End equation—that of class. The brutality exhibited by the Whitechapel murderer was felt to be confined to the lower classes. Few in the West would have argued with the following logic: an Englishman would not be likely to commit such crimes; if the killer were English, then he was probably a member of the refuse of Victorian civilization residing in the East End.

THE REACTIONS of London to the murders reveal that Jack the Ripper's activities reinforced earlier notions about the relationships between classes, segments of the population, and parts of London. Clearly, the Whitechapel murders were considered by the West End to be part of a larger problem, that of "Outcast London." It should not be surprising that the cures suggested by the press, social critics, and philanthropists were of the most conventional kind. For most middle and upper class Victorians, the relationships between poverty, poor sanitation, immorality, and crime were too strongly entrenched to be challenged. Examples of this phenomenon are numerous. On 6 October, an article in *Lancet* proclaimed that "great poverty, overcrowding, dirt, and bad sanitation ... renders [sic] more probable the conception and the execution of such crimes as those that now absorb the public attention."[75] There were many calls for reform. Several writers commented in the *Times* that if the government ever roused itself "to suppress disorderly houses, to cleanse and widen the streets, to pave and light the

courts and alleys, the chief external conditions which favour murder will have been removed."[76] Some called for additional police protection in the "criminal quarters." Others lamented the living conditions of the poor, especially with regard to common lodging houses in east London. If the dwellings were not improved, then "we shall have still to go on—affecting astonishment that in such a state of things we have outbreaks from time to time of the horrors of the present day."[77] Finally, there was an attempt to encourage missionary activities in the East End.[78]

The reaction of the East End reflected a different tone entirely. From the first, there seems to have been a genuine desire on the part of the vast majority of those living in the East to aid in the capture of the Ripper. Local tradesmen formed vigilance committees and helped to patrol the streets at night. On a less organized level, "any passer-by who aroused the suspicion of a street crowd was forcibly seized and hauled into the local police station."[79] With the ineptitude of the police proven by its inability to bring the killer to justice and their own activities failing to achieve results either, a more paranoid attitude took hold in Whitechapel. The *Times* described this feeling by stating that "it seemed as if every person in the streets were suspicious of everyone else he met . . . as if it were a race between them who should first inform against his neighbor."[80] The Home Secretary refused to offer a reward for the capture of the Whitechapel murderer at least in part because the "danger of false charge is intensified by the excited state of public feelings [in east London]."[81]

By early November, the East End was in such a state of exasperation at the police's failure to end the string of murders that each arrest brought crowds into the streets; on several occasions, innocent men were very nearly lynched. On 15 November, there were two such instances. In the first, a plainclothes policeman was chased through the streets with an East End crowd in pursuit. Secondly, after a man was arrested for staring at a woman in a supposedly threatening manner, the police were "followed by an enormous mob of men and women, shouting and screaming at him in a most extraordinary manner."[82] In one of the worst cases of this kind, a crowd watching an officer chase a man wanted for throwing bricks at policemen jumped to the conclusion that Jack the Ripper was about to be arrested. A large police escort brought the man in to the local station. The East End crowd, however, had their own ideas about how the suspect should be dealt with. The crowd stormed the building several times. It took a couple of hours for the crowd to be dispersed and peace to be restored.[83]

THE JACK the Ripper murders have been studied on numerous occasions over the past one hundred years. Most writers are primarily interested in determining

the identity of the killer. Some have examined the social conditions that made east London a blemish on the landscape long before the autumn of 1888. Very little has been done to synthesize Jack the Ripper's story with the crisis of the 1880s. It is important to do this. In the 1880s, many eyes in the West End were re-opened to problems which had been ignored for some time; poverty, overcrowding, poor sanitation, immorality, and criminal behavior had not disappeared in the interval. The riots and demonstrations of 1886 and 1887 revealed to the West End residents that, whatever their contempt for the East End, complacency could be dangerous. It was at that moment, a time when the West was most concerned about the threat from the East, that Jack the Ripper stepped onto center stage. The Whitechapel murderer represented the callousness, brutality, destructiveness, and malicious cruelty that the West had most reason to fear. The killings, in a more efficient fashion than any parliamentary blue book or social commentator's pamphlet, revealed the extent of the rot in the East End. Only there, many in the West End preferred to believe, could such a creature have evolved and prospered. The types of people who were suspected by the police and the press accurately reflected many of the tensions and prejudices of Victorian London. Anti-semitism, xenophobia, and distrust of the poorer classes all made an appearance. The East End, although harboring all of these prejudices, remained suspicious of the intentions of the more prosperous West and of the ability of the police to protect the residents of east London. Taken together, the reactions of London to the Whitechapel murders present a snap-shot of social tensions only a short time before the bloodless dock workers strike of 1889 relieved the West End of many of their fears concerning east London.

ENDNOTES

1. P. J. Keating, "Fact and Fiction in the East End," in Harold Dyos and Michael Wolff, eds., *The Victorian City* (London, 1973), 2:585.

2. Andrew Mearns, *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London* (1883; reprint, New York, 1970), 61.

3. Jane Stuart-Wortley, "The East End as Represented by Mr. Besant," *Nineteenth Century* (Sept. 1887) 362.

4. Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People of London,* 17 vols. (London, 1902), 1:32.

5. Booth, *Life and Labour,* 4:117, and Beatrice Potter, "East End Labour," *Nineteenth Century* (Aug. 1888) 181.

6. Stephen Fox, "The Invasion of the Pauper Foreigners," *Contemporary Review* (June 1888) 861.

7. Fox, "Pauper Foreigners," 856, 866.

8. Booth, *Life and Labour,* 3:178.

9. Ibid., 186.

10. Potter, "East End Labour," 177.

11. Mearns, *Bitter Cry,* 74.

12. Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London* (Oxford, 1971), 219-220, 325.

13. Arnold White, *Problems of a Great City* (London, 1886; reprint New York, 1985), 131.

14. Anonymous, "The Inhabitants of East London," *Quarterly Review,* (July-Oct. 1889) 453-454.

15. *Lancet,* (10 May 1890), 1036.

16. White, *Problems,* 136-138.

17. W. J. Fishman, *East End 1888* (London, 1988), 8, 18.

18. George Sims, *How the Poor Live and Horrible London* (London, 1889; reprint, New York, 1984), 106-07.

19. Octavia Hill, *Homes for the London Poor* (London, 1883; reprint, London, 1970), 88.

20. Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons, 22 Nov. 1888, 330:1819.

21. Stuart-Wortley, "East End," 375.

22. See Douglas Browne, *The Rise of Scotland Yard* (New York, 1956), 207, Fraser Harrison, *The Dark Angel* (New York, 1977), 225, 232-33, 241, and E. M. Sigsworth and T. J. Wyke, "A Study of Victorian Prostitution and Venereal Disease," in Martha Vicinus, ed., *Suffer and Be Still* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1973), 81.

23. Robert Storch, "Police Control of Street Prostitution in Victorian London," in David Bailey, ed., *Police and Society* (Beverly Hills, Calif., 1977), 51.

24. See Eric Trudgill, "Prostitution and Paterfamilias," in *The Victorian City,* 2:701.

25. See Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society* (Cambridge, 1980), 13-15, 29-31, and Paul McHugh, *Prostitution and Victorian Social Reform* (London, 1980), 17-18, 262-64.

26. Harrison, *Dark Angel,* 241.

27. Walkowitz, *Prostitution,* 251.

28. Brian Harrison, "State Intervention and Moral Reform," in Patricia Hollis, ed., *Pressure from Without in Early Modern England* (London, 1974), 306-07.

29. Judith Walkowitz, "Jack the Ripper and the Myth of Male Violence," *Feminist Studies* (Fall 1982) 558, Walkowitz, *Prostitution,* 252, and Storch, "Police Control of Prostitution," 56.

30. Fishman, *East End 1888,* 6, 202-3.

31. Sims, *How the Poor Live,* 11.

32. Ibid., 11-12, 70.

33. Ibid., 137; see also Fishman, *East End 1888,* 208.

34. Philip Smith, *Policing Victorian London* (Westport, 1985), 12; see also V. A. C. Gatrell, "The Decline of Theft and Violence in Victorian and Edwardian England," in V. A. C. Gatrell, Bruce Lenman, and Geoffrey Parker, eds., *Crime and the Law* (London, 1980), 282, 286.

35. Sims, *How the Poor Live,* 119.

36. Anonymous, "Inhabitants of East London," 441.

37. Jones, *Outcast London,* 284-85.

38. Smith, *Policing Victorian London,* 28; see also Jones, *Outcast London,* 11.

39. Jones, *Outcast London,* 292; see also Samuel Barnett, "Distress in East London," *Nineteenth Century* (Nov. 1886) 679, and Basil Thomson, *The Story of Scotland Yard* (Garden City, N.Y., 1936), 187.

40. See Victor Bailey, "The Metropolitan Police, the Home Office and the Threat of Outcast London," in Victor Bailey, ed., *Policing and Punishment in Nineteenth Century Britain* (London, 1981), 108.

41. See Jones, *Outcast London,* 291, Thomson, *The Story of Scotland Yard,* 186-87, and David Ascoli, *The Queen's Peace* (London, 1979), 160-61.

42. London *Times*, 14 November 1887.

43. James Stuart, "The Metropolitan Police," *Contemporary Review* (Apr. 1889) 628.

44. Walkowitz, "Myth of Male Violence," 544-45.

45. Basil Thomson, *My Experiences at Scotland Yard* (Garden City, N.Y., 1923), 2.

46. L. S. Winslow, *Recollections of Forty Years* (London, 1910), 261.

47. Paul Begg, *Jack the Ripper: The Uncensored Facts* (London, 1988), 137.

48. Frederick Wensley, *Forty Years of Scotland Yard* (Garden City, N.Y., 1931), 7-8.

49. Cited in Leonard Matters, *The Mystery of Jack the Ripper* (London, 1929), 33.

50. Cited in David McCormick, *The Identity of Jack the Ripper* (London, 1959), 26.

51. Begg, *Jack the Ripper,* 79.

52. McCormick, *Identity of the Ripper,* 45.

53. London *Times,* 2 Oct. 1888; see also Matters, *Mystery of the Ripper,* 92-93.

54. The killing itself had taken place outside of a club for Russian, Polish, and Jewish socialists.

55. Begg, *Jack the Ripper,* 126; see also London *Times,* 12 Oct. 1888.

56. London *Times,* 4, 16 Oct. 1888; see also McCormick, *Identity of the Ripper,* 99.

57. London *Times,* 19 Sept. 1888.

58. Cited in McCormick, *Identity of the Ripper,* 95.

59. London *Times,* 4 Oct. 1888.

60. Ibid., 6 Oct. 1888.

61. Ibid. 4 Oct. 1888.

62. Ibid., 8 Sept. 1888. It is interesting to note that a play based on Robert Lewis Stevenson's novel, *Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), was a big hit in London at this time.

63. See the London *Times,* 13, 28 Sept., 19 Oct., and 12 November.

64. Winslow, *Recollections,* 255.

65. London *Times,* 12 Sept. 1888.

66. Ibid., 1 Oct. 1888.

67. Winslow, *Recollections,* 262.

68. Cited in Begg, *Jack the Ripper,* 89.

69. *The Lancet,* 29 Sept. 1888, 637.

70. London *Times,* 15 Nov. 1888; see also 14 September.

71. See ibid., 28 Sept. 1888, and David Rubelow, *The Complete Jack the Ripper* (Boston, 1975), 73-74.

72. Cited in Begg, *Jack the Ripper,* 124; see also Matters, *Mystery of the Ripper,* 54-55.

73. Rumbelow, *Complete Jack the Ripper,* 222.

74. See London *Times,* 10 Nov. 1888.

75. *The Lancet,* 6 Oct. 1888, 683; see also London *Times,* 29 Sept. 1888.

76. London *Times,* 6 Oct. 1888.

77. Ibid., 18 Sept. 1888.

78. See ibid., 26, 29 Oct. 1888. For an overview of the various responses see Walkowitz, "Myth of Male Violence," 568.

79. Fishman, *East End 1888,* 213; see also London *Times,* 17 Sept. 1888.

80. London *Times,* 8 Oct. 1888.

81. Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons, 12 Nov. 1888, 330:904.

82. London *Times,* 15 Nov. 1888. Other examples of like behavior can be found on 10 and 12 November.

83. Rumbelow, *Complete Jack the Ripper,* 86-87.