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**Laugh? I nearly rioted: Johnny Speight, *Till Death us Do Part* and Race Relations in 1970s Britain**

In 1966 the first series of *Till Death Us Do Part* was shown on BBC television. The show (which lasted for 25 years after its 1980s reincarnation as *In Sickness and in Health*) quickly became the nation's favourite. Within a year, it commanded higher weekly viewing figures than any other programme and Speight had become the best paid writer on British television. From the outset *Till Death* was controversial, orientating around the extreme conservative views of the sitcom's lead character Alf Garnett (played by Warren Mitchell). Every week, Garnett's diatribes about the political status quo, the monarchy, religion and, frequently, immigration dominated the show.

Speight claimed to have written the series in order to challenge bigotry in British society. The idea was that the British audience would be both amused and repelled by Alf Garnett's extreme views and would see in him the folly of intolerance and prejudice. However, from an early stage it was clear that the show produced no such obvious outcomes. In a 1973 BBC audience survey, 45% of those asked told researchers that Alf was right more often than he was wrong!

This paper will look at the relationship between the views expressed in *Till Death* and British race relations in the 1970s. It will question the extent to which the concerns raised by Alf reflected broader social anxieties. Ultimately, it will consider those issues which made *Till Death* both popular and controversial in British homes, arguing that the deconstruction of the sitcom allows a window into social thinking on race and immigration in 1970s British society.