

T042

## Juries trying aliens

In saying that our legal system has never provided for juries to be composed of persons of the same race as the accused, your leader of 13 June 1985 overlooks the jury *de medietate linguae*. The rule providing for this was a feature of our law for over 500 years. It entitled an accused alien to a jury half made up of aliens 'if so many there be in the town or place where the trial is had' (6 Geo.4 c.50 s.47). The right was introduced in 1353 as part of a measure to attract wool merchants to this country. It was abolished by the Naturalization Act 1870, which equated the legal position of aliens to that of citizens. Supporting abolition, the Earl of Derby remarked that 'it is stigmatizing ourselves as a nation very unjustly to assume that the prejudice against foreigners is such that an alien on his trial will not have a fair trial before British subjects' (Hansard vol 199 col 1129).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, 17 June 1985.

7.3.4. *Text of FB's letters in TheTimes*

A. Letters on Times main letters page