Whose Britain Is This Anyway: Questioning Race, Class, Immigration and Nationality in Great Britain Between 1948 and 2011

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Whose Britain is this Anyway:
Questioning Race, Class, Immigration and Nationality in Great Britain between
1948 and 2011

by

Christina Jayne Cruce

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of Senior Independent Study

Supervised by
Shannon King
Department of History

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Chapter 1

Introduction

On April 29, 2011 the future King of England, Prince William Arthur Phillip Louis married Catherine Elizabeth Middleton in what was to be the grandest royal wedding since his parent’s, Prince Charles and Lady Diana wed in 1981. The wedding was broadcasted worldwide as people from all over tuned into the show in anticipation of the glitz and the glamour that can only be done by the British royals. My friends and I stayed up until five o’clock in the morning, due to the time difference, to partake in the festivities. The wedding was perfect, Catherine’s dress was stunning, as was her sister Pippa’s. The bride and groom, as well as both of their families looked very pleased with the match and with how everything had turned out.

Their happiness was clearly shared by the thousands of people who had taken to the streets of London, in front of the church and were lining the route that the new Duke and Duchess of Cambridge would take to their reception. With the sheer numbers of people out celebrating, some trouble was to be expected, but there were no reports of any serious melee. The people were happy, all their troubles forgotten for a day. On that day, London was the picturesque capital of England, and with it the capital of propriety, manners, royals and of course, tea. By all accounts it was a wondrous occasion.
It was not a full four months later that the world was to receive a new image of the streets of London; an image that was not so quaint. Images of hooded youths running the streets, throwing bricks and fire at the police, breaking into store windows, burning down buildings and total anarchy flashed across televisions and computers around the world. As the wedding of Will and Kate showed one side of England, these new images showed another, the side of England that was not so glamorous. These youths were representing the major societal issues within Great Britain, though I did not know this yet. I found myself watching news coverage and videos of the riots, trying to figure out what they were about. I had always believed that England was the perfect place. Perhaps it was some childhood fantasy of kings and queens and castles, but I had never known the inner-turmoil that festered in the city streets. It was not until I delved deeply into the history of the country that I found that there were two sides to the story. It was then that my rose-colored glasses were forcibly removed.

On the one hand, Britain has an illusory side, what the royal wedding represented. There is something appealing about the idea of still having princes and princesses and castles in the twenty-first century. No other country in the world has a history like theirs, or has been so successful at modernizing architecturally without destroying all of its historical appeal. To an outsider, England seemed like a magical place. The other side of the coin however, is not magical at all.

In researching the causes of the 2011 riot, I found that rioting occurred regularly throughout British history. More modern riots have occurred because of racial tensions that are the results of colonialism and imperialistic conquests of the last century. I also found that classism runs rampant in England a consequence of some having too much,
while others have too little. I found in place of the magical kingdom I believed it to be, a country and a society that is still struggling with becoming multi-cultural.

When my senior year began in the fall of 2011, I already had an idea of what I wanted to work on for my Independent Study project. I needed to know what the causes of the riots were. With the help of my advisor I was able to take that desire for knowledge and form a coherent topic and research question. I based my research on how questions of race, class, immigration and nationality have changed in Great Britain since 1948. To answer this multi-faceted question, I looked at two separate riots, the 1981 Brixton riot and the 2011 UK riots. Throughout the project I argue that, despite improvements in black and white race relations, British society has continued to discriminate against black-Brits at multiple levels. I have also found that since the 1980s there has been a governmental and, more generally a societal neglect of the working-class population as a whole. I looked for and found causality of the discrimination through various factors such as, economics, housing, culture and policing. I truly looked to find how societal issues in a first-world country could come to the point of violent rioting on the streets.

**Historiography**

To understand the causes of the riots, one must study the history of the country. To get the full picture one must look at the works of other historians. Throughout the years historians have discussed the ideas of race, class, nationality and immigration in Great Britain in different ways. They have looked at the effects of immigration within the country and the policies passed by government officials, the growth of racism and racist ideas and how immigration may, or may not have affected ideas of class. Whether or not
the racism that some say has become ingrained in British society was institutionalized, or was the result of fears of cultural change has always been questioned as well. Most historians seem to discuss these ideas in terms of either cultural racism, institutionalized racism or cultural classism. In looking at both the 1981 Brixton “race riot” and the 2011 “urban youth riot” as case studies, these ideas can be examined.

Some believe that racism in Great Britain began with the arrival of the first large, immigrant population of blacks who arrived on the Empire Windrush in 1948. From there, politicians feared an ever-growing black presence, and the conservative government passed many laws in an attempt to institutionalize ideas meant to “keep Britain white,” which is what the resulting movement was called. In terms of institutionalized racism, authors Clive Harris, Bob Carter and Shirley Joshi wrote the essay, *The 1951-1955 Conservative Government and the Racialization of Black Immigration*, contained in the anthology, *Black British Culture and Society*. The three authors look at policies by the conservative government following the beginning of large-scale Afro-Caribbean immigration. In the work, which disagrees with a previous study which found that, race “only touched the periphery of political debate”, meaning that race was not political at all, the authors believe that the state took a major role in constructing black immigration as a “problem” and in doing so reinforced a conception of Britishness grounded in culture and color.¹

The authors continue with their argument and state that the government wanted to keep blacks out of Britain because they could, as future Labour Prime Minster Clement

Atlee stated, “Impair the harmony, strength and cohesion of our public and social life and to cause discord and unhappiness among all concerned.” As a result of surveillance of the black communities, several government agencies put together “The Employment of Coloured People in the UK”, in 1953, which they believe proved their “strong case”, as in blacks were blights, and thus should be excluded from British society.

The authors argue that this and several other government produced documents and policies perpetuated and continue to perpetuate and stereotype the black population of Great Britain as undesirables, and blights to white British society. They racialized immigration and promoted anti-black and anti-immigrant ideas that are in affect throughout all of black-British history. My argument is in agreement with the ideas of these authors, as I argue that the perpetuation of these ideas led to the ghettoization of blacks; they could not get jobs or get affordable housing, so they ended up living in slums, and have been stereotyped as poor. I also believe that the racism that was institutionalized by the government enculturated within society ideas about blacks that were so damaging to their social position that they have still not recovered.

When examining institutionalized racism another factor is policing. For both the 1981 riot and the 2011 riots I argue that, because blacks were seen as criminals, the police paid a disproportionate amount of attention to the black community. The relationship between the police and the black community was usually at a low point when the riots would begin. There have been many works about the historical relationship between policing and racism in Great Britain, especially after the Brixton Riot in 1981,
after which police tactics were heavily criticized. In the Anthology, *The Empire Strikes Back*, academic Paul Gilroy writes an essay entitled *Police and Thieves*. This piece is several years earlier than his book, *Ain`t No Black in the Union Jack*, from which he seems to build upon some of the ideas of this essay. While the book discusses cultural racism and institutionalized racism throughout British society, this piece specifically deals with police racism. He argues that police racism is due to the idea of blacks as criminals, an idea which spread throughout England and concludes that police racism is institutionalized racism.

My work deals heavily with the idea that the black community is seen to be criminal. These stereotypes of black criminality led to cultural oppression as well as police racism because there was a fear of blacks getting together in groups and participating in cultural events. This, in turn, led to greater police oppression during cultural events like the Notting Hill Carnival, which has a history of violence regarding blacks and the police. There is a disproportionally higher crime rate in black communities, so again the police presence is more prevalent there. Gilroy uses evidence such as speeches from higher up police officials to make this argument. For example, at a seminar one such official stated that the police, “must be a little prejudice” to do their job well, which is clearly an excuse for the institutionalized racism that is contained within the police force.4

Later in the piece, Gilroy, references Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher during a 1979 campaign speech in which she used the stereotype “muggers” to describe blacks.

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4 Paul Gilroy. *Police and Thieves. The Empire Strikes Back Race and racism in 70s Britain* (London: Hutchinson, 1984), Edited By Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies., 143
She was referencing a criminal stereotype of blacks and how it is believed they would rather steal a purse then work. I find in my work that common ground between poor whites and blacks can be found in this speech, as she references whites as “vandals” who will not get out of the “picket lines” and get jobs.\footnote{Ibid., 153} She is grouping poor blacks and poor whites together as one poor, urban class, prone to criminality. She is beginning a rhetoric that will put them together and allow them to be oppressed and demonized together as one under-class. Both groups have been oppressed throughout history but I find that Thatcher, especially for poor whites, creates and anti-working-class rhetoric that leads to greater stereotyping and demonization.

Another black British academic, Caryl Phillips, makes an argument for institutionalized police racism as well. In his novel, \textit{Foreigners}, he describes the experiences of three fictional immigrants to Great Britain. The work is a novel and is thus fiction; however, it can still be used as a valid source because he takes his information from documented sources of black abuse by police and other primary sources. One of his characters, David, is a black immigrant who had come to Great Britain for an education, but due to racism was chased away from all opportunity. He ended up homeless, and was constantly harassed by police, who in the end murdered him. Phillips’ is making the case for what is clearly institutionalized police racism. He would describe David as not bothering anyone, and just standing around, when the police would attack him for no reason.\footnote{Caryl Phillips, \textit{Foreigners} (New York: Random House, 2007), 152} It is certainly a case of police bias against blacks, and a case of their brutality ending in murder, which it may have done many a time outside of Phillips’ novel. Again,
my work is in agreement with the idea of an institutionalized police racism, because of the stereotypes that blacks were criminal. This would take on another form, police would get so used to the idea that blacks were up to no good, and combined with individualized racist ideas, they would attack blacks for no reason.

Both Gilroy and Phillips believed that racism was ingrained in the police force culturally, and institutionally. Lord Scarman, the man who did the inquiry into the Brixton Riots did not believe that racism was institutionalized in the police force. In the Anthology, *Scarman and After*, for which Lord Scarman wrote the Epilogue, he argues against this idea. He believed the police had made mistakes and there was a great disconnect between the police and the black community, which was because of cultural insensitivity and not understanding the community. However, he found that institutionalized racism was non-existent and could not be the cause of the riots. The main argument of this piece however, is that, since the 1981 Brixton Riot, Great Britain’s police forces had “learned their lessons”, and made real attempts at “mending fences” with the black community.

Scarman believes that his recommendations were followed, and the police malpractices have been remedied. Due to the fact that there was another riot, a riot much worst then the Brixton Riot, and just thirty years later, it is hard to say if Scarman’s recommendations were actually followed or not. My research found that policing during the 2011 UK riots was a factor, and it seems that the police and black community had not bettered their relationship. There was also a great disconnect between the police and the poor white community, who it could be argued, is also stereotyped as criminals.
As previously stated, Paul Gilroy has another work that was crucial to my research, a work in which he uses both ideas of cultural and institutional racism. In his book, *Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*, he discusses the realities of being black in Great Britain and argues that what soon emerges after the realization by some whites of permanent black communities and black culture in Great Britain is “New Racism.” This is a culturally racist idea that he believes is linked to ideas of nationalism, patriotism and xenophobia. The “Keep Britain White” movement of the aforementioned government racism was nationalistic in that, they wanted the culture of Great Britain to stay white, because white was proper and decent while black culture, while generally unknown, was made out to be criminal and indecent. Gilroy believes that “New Racism” redefines race as something to do with, not necessarily the fact that they are not from England, though that still makes them alien, but that they are culturally different. What began to be believed, Gilroy states, is that “race differences are displayed in culture.”

Gilroy evidences these claims with the works of several, anti-black, anti-immigration, white British scholars. Famous British politician, Enoch Powell believed that “cultural identity defines genuine membership to the British nation.” Gilroy argues that Powell is saying that blacks cannot ever truly be British, because their culture is completely separate. Another scholar, Raymond Williams combines ideas of race with nationalism and patriotism. He states that racism began with immigration, and continues on with ideas of racial superiority. The government perpetuated ideas of what blacks were like to make them seem like blights to white British society. As these ideas spread,

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8 Ibid., 49
9 Ibid.
Paul Gilroy argues that it became so that, “white British people and their traditional culture are locked in struggle against the disruptive criminal encroachment of the blacks.”

This works show that ideas of black immigrants as criminals were perpetuated by the government, and academics. I argue that the effects of these ideas are still felt for black immigrants in the 1980s and in 2011. I found that these policies led to increased racism and hostility for blacks, and stopped them from getting jobs and decent housing. They started stereotyping blacks as poor and criminal, which is what black culture became known as. I also find that it is because of this that during the 1980s and continuing today, blacks are still socially deprived, which was one factor in both cases of rioting. The notion that blacks were criminals, alien to the country and unsuited for British society became culturally accepted by society.

The 2011 riots are widely believed to have been about class and so to fully understand them, one must look at how ideas of class and cultural classism have changed through the decades. Lynsey Hanley’s 2007 work, Estates: An Intimate History, discusses ideas of the oppression and classism that poor whites are faced with. The work seeks to expose the world of which Great Britain’s poor, whites live in and how it became that way. Hanley’s work is on public housing, estates and is an intimate history, as it blends some of her personal experience growing up in various estates, with the history of public housing. Her focus is class and she says nothing about race, yet the areas that she talks about are mostly white housing estates. So she is mainly discussing class discrimination and its effects on the white-working class.

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10 Ibid., 73
She argues that living in an estate, surrounded by a high concentration of poor people who do not know any other way of life can breed within people a sense of hopelessness.\textsuperscript{11} She argues against the stereotypes and the way people are treated as if, living in an estate is some confession of failure, and that the discrimination that those who live in estates face, is unfair, yet ultimately unstoppable. She uses her own personal experience, and experiences of others to tell tales of hopelessness that are felt by many of those who live in estates and are cut off from society. She suggests that residents who are cut off from society are prone to creating their own society’s and makes an argument for gangs.

My argument is in agreement with her work in that I have found that feelings of hopelessness and being cut off from society are both issues that some have claimed led them to rioting. I also found that many of the people who rioted lived in estates in some of the worst areas in the country. I found her work and her arguments helpful in understanding what living in an estate and being demonized for it means for some of these people, and what social deprivation can really do to a community and the individuals residing in it.

Social commentator Owen Jones wrote, \textit{Chavs}, in 2011, just months before the riots occurred. Owen Jones is a socialist and thus his work focuses on class. Like Hanley he is specifically looking at the oppression of the white working-class. He argues that working-class whites are “demonized” at the hands of the upper classes. He argues that this “demonization” began in the mid-1980s, with the Thatcher-era and the spread of

\textsuperscript{11} Lynsey Hanley. \textit{Estates An Intimate History} (London: Granta Books, 2007),97
hateful, anti-poor rhetoric which continued through to 2011, the David Cameron era. He shows examples of institutionalized hatred towards these lower-class people, as well as how they are calculatingly left out of society.

My argument fits with this work, as I argue that blacks began being caricatured in the 1950s and working-class whites, though always oppressed, began to be caricatured as well in the 1980s because of the anti-poor rhetoric. A “Chav” is a stereotype for urban, poor youths thought of as, “council housed and violent,” and are believed to be poor, trashy, people of the white, working-class that, along with poor blacks, are ghettoized.\textsuperscript{12} Since Jones does focus on poor whites, I juxtapose his argument and the examples that he uses to demonstrate anti-poor, white behavior with cases of racism that blacks have faced. Together, these two groups make up the urban poor, and are both demonized, though in very different ways. I also agree with Jones that social deprivation, what he argues is an epidemic, was a major cause of the 2011 riots, but I also believe it was a cause of the 1981 riot as well. Since Jones is so left-leaning and put so much emphasis on blaming right-winged politicians, it could be thought that his work was somewhat biased.

\textbf{Chapter Organization}

This work is organized chronologically, beginning with the 1940s and working to 2012. In chapter two, the broad political background of Great Britain is discussed. As I begin with the arrival of the Empire Windrush in 1948, I continue through the 1950s discussing the racist policies of the conservative government that was in power and how these policies resulted in social exclusion, which is still a problem today. Next I cover

\textsuperscript{12} Owen Jones. \textit{Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class}.(London: Verso, 2011),8
Margaret Thatcher, broadly touching on her relationship to the working-class and her policies in regards to them. The rest of the chapter contains brief summaries of the Prime Ministers between Margaret Thatcher and David Cameron, their political affiliations and any noteworthy things they accomplished. This chapter, while a brief introduction to Britain’s more recent politics, is really about policies pushed forward by the government and how they fit into the context of the riots.

Chapters three and four follow the same format, though discuss different things. Chapter three focuses on the Brixton Riot of 1981, while Chapter four is about the UK riots of 2011. Both begin with brief introductions to the riots, and what really happened on the streets. Factors including, economics, housing, culture and policing are used to discuss both riots. In regards to chapter three economically there was a recession, and an anti-working-class rhetoric became a major point for Margaret Thatcher. The housing shortage and terrible conditions for poor blacks and whites is discussed next. In this section the term “ghettoization” is used to show how, in the 1950 and 1960s black immigrants were forced into slums by the racist policies that the government had promoted. There is a discussion of the creation of a “black culture” in Great Britain and how it became a form of resistance to white oppression. The poor relationship between the police and the black community is also examined.

Chapter four, in following the same format as chapter three, begins with an introduction to the 2011 riots, how they were started and the directions in which they spread. Economically, the country was also in a recession and the government had to make severe cuts to social spending. How the economy has affected the youth is also a major discussion point in this section. The poor blacks and whites of England are forced
into an “out of sight, out of mind” living situation, in which they live on the fringes of society. They live in public housing and areas that have high concentrations of both poverty and crime. Culturally the influence of black culture on mainstream society is discussed, as is the emergence of a defiant youth culture. This youth culture came about as the racial relations between urban, poor whites and blacks healed. In regards to the police, the relationship between them and the black community is examined once more. Their relationship to the working-class white community is looked at as well.

Chapter five is the comparison of the riots as a conclusion. They are compared through the same four factors, economics, housing, culture and policing. Instances of continuity or change since 1981 are discussed as well. The epilogue contained within Chapter 5 brings up continuity and change in a broader sense between these two riots and 1948, the starting point of this work. I conclude with what caused the riots, as well as, a premonition of the future of British social and racial relations.

Acknowledgement of Other Riots

As I found in researching for this project, there have been many riots throughout British history. I focus on the 1981 Brixton riot and the 2011 UK riots because they are seen as two of the most critical points in history. However, I do acknowledge the Notting-Hill Carnival riot of 1979, as well as the 1981 Liverpool and Toxeth riots, both of which are thought to be run off from the Brixton riot. I must acknowledge two others, the first being the student riots of late 2010, when thousands of students took to the streets in
protest of the University tuition fees increase. The other took place in March 2011, and had an anti-austerity cuts message. Over the last few decades there have been at least six major riots in Great Britain, the causes of which are all basically the same thing, some type of social deprivation. This just shows how social conditions in Britain have refused to change.
Chapter 2

Early Conservative Policies on Immigration

On June 22, 1948, the Empire Windrush landed in Tilbury, a port town in the east of England. The ship sailed from the Caribbean, and brought with it huge numbers of black immigrants to “the mother country”. The ship carried four-hundred and ninety men, as well as two women, a number that would quickly be called an “influx of coloured people,” by various government officials. The ship’s landing is symbolic of a great change in the United Kingdom, a change which still has effects that resonate today. It began the struggle of some to keep Britain white against the African and Caribbean immigrants, and not let it become multi-cultural.

To keep Britain white, the government, specifically the conservative government in power during this time, passed several discriminatory policies. These policies left immigrants, specifically blacks, out of society. Black citizens were kept out of housing and employment, brutalized by the police and culturally repressed with this institutional racism. The government also attempted to change the ideas of blacks with specific caricatures that they pushed and attempted to make societal norms. This chapter will discuss these governmental policies and actions that have affected poor blacks and whites between the 1950s and 2011.

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In the early 1950s, at a time when black immigration was really picking up, government officials sought to show black immigration as a problem to their idea of “Britishness”. This conservative government was elected in 1951, a time when there was no real articulated public anxiety about black immigration, as there were jobs enough for blacks and whites. However, this new government still felt that legislation was needed to protect Britain from, as Winston Churchill’s government stated, “a permanent black presence.” At this time, they began to build the case for “Britishness”. This “racial reconstruction” would keep Britain white with the idea that “white was to belong, black was to be excluded”, which was also called the “strong case.” This would be done through, as previously stated, legislative measures attempting to create a racial caricature to bring about white anxiety and fear of blackness to the white British people.

It is important to point out that these measures were not taken up by just the Conservative Tories, the Labour party wanted to check black immigration as well. The Tories and the Labour party working together shows that this was less a case of the conservatives being anti-immigration, as much as it was a “keep Britain white” idea held by the two important sides of government. By this point, Liberals had been eclipsed as the second most influential party, by Labour and thus are not as relevant at this particular time.

By 1952, the Tories and the Labour Party instituted some legislation that was meant to keep blacks from being accepted into society. One of the first examples of governmental influence in the acceptance of black immigrants in society was a report

\[15\] Ibid., 24
\[16\] Ibid., 22
\[17\] Ibid., 24
\[18\] Ibid., 23
titled, “The Employment of Coloured People in the UK”. This report, published in 1953 was an empirical demonstration of the government’s “strong case” and took surveys and other data to show why blacks were a blight to British society.\(^\text{19}\) It was done by several groups including, The Ministry of Labour, The National Assistance Board, The Welfare Department and The Home office.\(^\text{20}\) This is when they began pushing the caricature of black people being unemployable because they had an “inability to accept discipline, volatility of temperament, were easily provoked to violence and were quarrelsome.”\(^\text{21}\)

It was also shown in the report that blacks were not suited to do industrial work, probably the most abundant type of unskilled labor at the time, as they were of a “slower tempo” and a “poorer physique” then their white counter-parts.\(^\text{22}\) These types of stereotypes were used to keep black people in lower paying positions, thus keeping them poorer than whites, and at the bottom of society, where they would eventually need the benefits that the government would begrudgingly give them. While showing blacks as seemingly unemployable, they also showed them to be poor housing tenants in the same way.

Housing options were very limited for black immigrants too. They could not get good paying jobs, thus they could not afford, what is hard to call “decent housing” in slums. The government reduced production of public or council housing that was made to house those who needed assistance in buying a home in 1954. The number of homes built was reduced from 235,000 to 160,000; this reduction did not bode well for the now

\(^{19}\) Ibid.
\(^{20}\) Ibid., 24
\(^{21}\) Ibid., 26
\(^{22}\) Ibid.
poor and somewhat homeless, immigrant blacks. 23 It also did not help the housing crisis that has impacted England throughout its history. Unable to receive council housing, blacks would have to turn to the private sector, which was usually unsuccessful because of racism; they were denied housing due to their race, and the aforementioned stereotype of blacks, which seemingly did not make a good tenant. 24

Another part of the stereotype was that blacks were predisposed to criminality and drugs. 25 This led the police to keep a watchful eye on black communities. One Sheffield constable hired two officers whose main jobs were only to, “observe, visit and report” on the black population. 26 As society grew more racist, the police were no exception, in fact some claimed that, the “police present racist attitudes and preconceptions in proportion to those found in the rest of society.” 27 This is helpful in understanding why the relationships between the police and black communities are the way they are. Black people have always felt mistreated by the police, which make sense seeing as they were sent in to spy on them and to be suspicious of their actions since they immigrated to the country.

These measures were successful in many ways. Public anxiety of black immigration grew, the two most prominent concerns being the accelerating rate of black immigration and the growing size of the black population within the United Kingdom. At

23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., 28
26 Ibid.
27 Paul Gilroy. Police and Thieves. The Empire Strikes Back Race and racism in 70s Britain. Edited By Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (London: Hutchinson,1984),143
this point the West Indian population was growing faster than any other race.\textsuperscript{28} These measures also crippled the black population, as was felt in the Brixton Riot of 1981, and also the more recent August 2011 Riots.

**Margaret Thatcher and the Working Class**

As the “strong case” was built to exclude blacks from society, there have also been similar policies that have kept working-class whites out of society. Though the working-class had always been looked down upon, and somewhat separated from the middle and upper-class, it became more apparent during the reign of the conservative Tories in the late 1970s and 80s. The anti-working-class rhetoric really became clear when Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister in 1979. At this point, the Labour Party was the party for and in defense of the laboring, working classes.

Margaret Thatcher grew up middle class and married a wealthy man, the type she seemed to favor, as she also filled her cabinet with wealthy men.\textsuperscript{29} She was always surrounded by wealth and though she grew up middle-class, she never really had any experience with the working classes. This ignorance of the working class could be why she disliked them so much. Before her 1979 election, a cabinet minister claimed, “She regards the working-class as idle, deceitful, inferior and bloody minded.” \textsuperscript{30} It could be said that she hated the working class and the poor, seeing as she would eventually raise

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.,24
\textsuperscript{29} Owen Jones. *Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class* (London: Verso, 2011),46
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.,47
an offensive against them, their communities, industries and institutions.\textsuperscript{31} To be working class, or to be from a working class family, was no longer something to be proud of, it was something to escape. This is an idea that began with Thatcher, who would also come to push for people to raise their positions in life or be left behind.

The concept of a working class is the mortal enemy of Thatcher, because it goes completely against her ideas and policies of an “everyone-for-themselves model of capitalism.”\textsuperscript{32} It showed that one group had wealth, while another did not, thus, the clash of classes, which “conjures up the notion of a potentially organized block with political and economic power, and one that could wage war against wealth and privilege.”\textsuperscript{33} So basically, she disregarded the needs of the working class because they went against her ideas of “pulling yourself up.” In her opinion, if one cannot be pulled up then they are not trying and should be ignored until they make something of themselves.

**After Thatcher**

In November of 1990, Margaret Thatcher resigned her post as Prime Minister after eleven and a half years. John Major, Chancellor of Exchequer in Thatcher’s cabinet, took her place as leader of the party and subsequently Prime Minister of England.\textsuperscript{34} At forty-seven he was the youngest Prime Minister yet and had a reputation for being much less confrontational then Thatcher had been.\textsuperscript{35} Though Major reigned for seven years, those years were not as active as Thatcher’s had been.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 47
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{34} Walter L. Arnstein, *Britain Yesterday and Today: 1830 to Present* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), 463-4
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 464
During the first five years of Major’s reign as Prime Minister the economy flourished, unemployment declined and his government sponsored a National Lottery which provided new financial resources to organizations supporting British music, dance, theater, art and architecture.\(^{36}\) He also, in August of 1994 secured a cease-fire with the I.R.A.\(^ {37}\) Yet, his government was plagued by the sex and financial scandals of members of his administration and even greater, the split within the party, regarding whether or not Britain should join the European Union and on what scale.\(^ {38}\) His cause was not helped by the social democrats and liberal alliance coming together to form the new third party, liberal democrats, or the reemergence of the Labour Party.\(^ {39}\) At this point it became clear that the reign of the conservatives had come to an end.

In 1997, Tony Blair won the general election for the Labour Party and became the new prime minister.\(^ {40}\) Though he was the Labour Party candidate, he claimed not to be a socialist but a centrist social democrat. He also was quick to admit that many Thatcherite policies had been necessary acts of modernization.\(^ {41}\) This could, perhaps, be where the Labour party lost their working class base, since, as previously stated, Thatcher was the enemy of the working class.

Blair played with the details of domestic policy reform, but did not do much in regards to it. He did balance the budget and income taxes that were set by his predecessors, and unemployment did fall again under him.\(^ {42}\) But again, he stated he wanted to reform the welfare state, health, education, benefits, etc., but he really did not

\(^{36}\) Ibid., 467
\(^{37}\) Ibid.
\(^{38}\) Ibid.
\(^{39}\) Ibid., 464
\(^{40}\) Ibid., 468
\(^{41}\) Ibid., 469
\(^{42}\) Ibid., 471
do much in that regard, only “tinkered with the details”, which led some to say he was more “style over substance”.43

Blair did however reform the Labour Party. He believed that his party needed to be more centrist, thus he took the party away from Clause four, which was what had really made them socialist. By putting it aside the Labour party was no longer first and foremost socialist, but more moderate.44 This switch of Labour from “old”, to “new”, weakened the parties connection to trade unions; this governmental separation from trade unions has been upheld, not only by Blair’s successor Gordon Brown, but also Conservative Prime Minister, David Cameron.45 This move from connections with the unions is another place where Labour began to disregard its loyal, working-class base. Fans of “Old Labour” criticized Blair’s move, stating that he wanted only to create a party that could win.46

Gordon Brown, another Labour Party Member, succeeded Tony Blair and he upheld Blair’s vision of “New Labour.” This New Labour party was different than the old Labour party in that, they were much more conservative, and thus more classists. The working class became a problem for them. The white working class under this party became, in a way, marginalized with its own problems that needed to be dealt with, as it was so different and far removed from mainstream British, middle-class society. Dealing with the issues of the working-class was not a primary concern for the ruling party.47

43 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
Historically, the basis of the Labour party was the working class. In the 2010 election, of all voters thirty percent voted for Labour, while thirty-seven percent voted for the Tories, who eventually won. However, out of the four million working-class, council estate tenants in the country, forty-seven percent voted Labour, while twenty-four percent went Tory.\(^{48}\) Clearly, the working-class was loyal to the Labour party, but this was loyalty became unrequited. An economics editor for The Guardian, Larry Elliot, summed this all up, “Working class people are sort of seen as a problem. They drink too much, they smoke too much, they don’t look after their kids properly, they’re feckless, and they’re work shy. Racist. Essentially, that’s how they’re seen.”\(^{49}\) So, black immigrants were not the only ones caricatured and stereotyped as an excuse for the government to disregard them. It seems working class, became too “uncivilized” for the new and decidedly middle-class Labour party. Labour, as many of the parties closer to the right, began to have contempt for the working-class, who’s stereotyped behavior did not fit in with the ideas of proper behavior held so closely to the classes above it. Labour’s dislike of the working-class is most likely what led to their defeat in 2010, which brought about the re-emergence of the conservative party.

**David Cameron as Prime Minister**

David Cameron came to power in 2010 and as of 2012 is still Prime Minster. He was the first Tory in power since Thatcher and Major, yet his ideas are very similar to theirs. His personal

\(^{48}\) Ibid., 85  
\(^{49}\) Ibid., 86
political philosophy is “a person’s life chances are determined by behavioral factors rather than economic background.” So like Thatcher, he believes that personal responsibility is the most important factor in society; if you want a job and to not be poor, you find a job and raise yourself out of your poor situation. That is, even if there are no jobs to be had because certain policies took away all the industry, which provided all of the jobs to an area, one needs to find a job and make money themselves. It is quite begrudgingly that he accepts any evidence of a “link between material poverty and poor life chances,” something that can be seen in his reluctance to acknowledge any social factors in the 2011 riots.

One of Cameron’s greatest supporters has been Iain Duncan-Smith, who has not gone unrewarded for his loyalty. Cameron appointed him Secretary of State for work and pensions, putting him in charge of the welfare state of Britain. Smith, who founded the Centre for Social Justice, a right-wing think tank, has developed the idea that “poverty is not about lacking money” quite the contrary, it is a “lack of discipline, family break up, and substance abuse.” Cameron and the followers of his philosophy strongly believe and thus govern with the idea that the family structure is what makes one poor. So if one’s family was broken, or they were not properly cared for, in the eyes of the conservatives, they basically have no chance at being anything less than poor.

One of Cameron’s main focuses, one of which has grown since the riots, is his idea of a “Broken Britain.” This is the idea that nearly all of the issues affecting the poor, which are heavily exaggerated, are breaking the country apart. Today’s Tories are
obsessed with making it seem like “entire communities are crawling with ‘feckless, delinquent, violent and sexually debauched no-hopers’.”  

Ian Duncan-Smith’s 2010 plan, to move council house tenants out of areas with heavy unemployment, to areas where there were more jobs, reiterated this idea of having no hope.  

What could send more of a hopeless message then to move the “millions [who] were trapped in estates with no work” away from their homes, instead of investing in human capital where they were and creating jobs?  

While this plan has not yet come to fruition, it seems some do not believe that they can be saved, or are worth being saved.

The idea of “social cleansing” came about in 2009, before the Tories had even regained full power of the government.  

The conservative run council of Hammersmith and Fulham proposed to demolish nearly 4,000 council estates, relocating all of the tenants, to put up nicer, middle-class residences.  

This plan, which was heavily criticized, was basically forced relocation to replace the bad parts of the area with middle-class homes, and moving the estate tenants to new locations where they would probably be charged more. In fact, they had planned to charge those living in the “barracks of the poor” more, moving the rental price from £85-£360 a week.  

These changes never occurred, but the council of Hammersmith and Fulham is known to be and often referred to as, David Cameron’s favorite in the country.

It is clear that today, both the Labour party and the Conservative party dislike the poor. They have both become Thatcherites in that they think the working-class poor just

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54 Ibid.  
55 Ibid.  
56 Ibid.  
57 Ibid., 80  
58 Ibid.  
59 Ibid.  
60 Ibid.
want handouts, as they are not working hard enough. Their work ethic is questionable due to the fact that they are still poor. Neither one has the interests of the poor on their agendas. Yet, unlike the Thatcher movement, they will not allow them to sit and rot in their estates. Officials want to move them so they can sell the estates, make some money and make the area nicer, by moving the working-class, poor. The poor have absolutely no power anymore, and no one in power has their interests in mind. Their demonization which started with Thatcher and the Conservatives is now coming from both sides of the government, conservatives and oppositional Labour. Conclusion

From the time black immigrants set foot on British soil they were demonized and there were a great many attempts to keep them out of society. Though always discriminated against, white, working-class, poor people began to be left behind in society in 1979. From the year of Thatcher’s election, and even thirty-odd years before that to today, demonization of specific groups of people in Britain is still an issue, and is getting worst. Conservative policies have effected both black immigrants and poor working class whites, because of the fact that the policies both attempted, and succeeded in bringing these people down, keeping them down and banning them from entering society. This is also where the blacks and whites find common ground; both groups are demonized by those above them on the social latter and kept out of society, institutionally.
CHAPTER 3

Brixton Riot Intro

It was a mild Friday night in April that Constable Steve Margiotta witnessed a young black man running towards him “at quite a speed”. After colliding with the young man, he realized he was profusely bleeding from what looked like a stab wound on his shoulder. Margiotta also had gotten some of the man’s blood on himself from running into him. The man got up continued to run away. Margiotta claims that he wanted to “help him,” so after calling for back up, he proceeded to chase after him. When he finally apprehended the young man a crowd of people circled around them, watching them curiously. Rumors had begun to spread that Constable Margiotta was not allowing the young man proper medical care and only attempting to arrest him; the crowd grew in size and agitation. When Margiotta’s backup finally arrived they were met with bricks and bottles being pelted at them from the crowd, and so began what was to be known as the catalyst to a long and violent weekend, the worst rioting that Britain would see for thirty years.

Tensions between the black community in Brixton and the police had always been somewhat strained, but they were worst at this particular moment because of an operation the police had begun earlier in the week. “Operation Swamp”, as it was called, was an

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61 Peter Walker. "I couldn’t have done anything else'- Brixton riots policeman tells his story." The Guardian, April 2, 2011.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
operation to alleviate street crime in Lambeth, the borough in which Brixton is located.\textsuperscript{65}
The operation was done under the SUS law, ‘SUS’ being “shorthand for the charge of being a suspected person under section 4 of the Vagrancy ACT of 1824.”\textsuperscript{66} The act stated that police could stop and search anyone who they suspected “might be planning to carry out a crime.”\textsuperscript{67} Plain clothed police on the streets went around stopping and searching people at will. In the six days leading up to the riots, the police stopped and searched about one-thousand people in Brixton alone; an area in which twenty-five percent of the population was of an ethnic minority.\textsuperscript{68} At the time, many black men believed they were specifically targeted in the stop and searches and the police who they believed were racist, just wanted to humiliate them.\textsuperscript{69} Alex Wheatle, a teenager who had participated in the riots claimed, “We were fighting the police,” he and his comrades knew it would not last, but it was “exhilarating to see them retreat,” because, “for so long we’d had to run away from them.”\textsuperscript{70}

Clearly, tensions were heightened already when Constable Margiotta attempted to stop the bleeding man. When his reinforcements arrived, the youths began to confront them. This disorder lasted a few hours, but was eventually contained. However, rumors began to fly that the youth who had been stabbed had died, though this was not the case.\textsuperscript{71}

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{70} Peter Walker. "Brixton: could it happen again? 30 years after the riots." \textit{The Guardian}, April 1, 2011.
The next day, Saturday April 11th, things in Brixton were still very tense, and the normally bustling city center was eerily quiet. The police had made two decisions for the rest of the weekend; one was despite tensions, to increase the number of plain clothed officers and the other was to continue the stop and searches of Operation Swamp. Though the atmosphere was still tense from the night before, there was no trouble to be seen, until just after 4:30pm, when two plain clothed policemen arrested a young black man, “for no apparent reason” and pushed him into their van. At that moment everything changed. The anger that had been building finally burst resulting in about two-hundred black and white youths taking to the streets, chanting, shouting and throwing things at the police. A battle had erupted in Brixton.

Around 5:00pm, the fighting came to a head on Railton road, where the previous night’s stabbing incident had occurred. About an hour later, most of the rioting had moved to Railton road and looting had begun in Brixton center. It was rumored that most of the looters were organized whites from outside Brixton, who were prepared to cause extreme havoc with special window breaking gloves. At this point, over three-hundred youths were on the streets, fighting the police and setting fire to buildings, police vans and other automobiles. Ordinary citizens were attempting to mediate with the police; one man in particular asked the police to just “decrease police presence now because they [the youths] see the police as their target”, the policeman responded that that “was not even a question”. By 8:00 that evening the first Molotov cocktail had been used on mainland

72 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
Britain, as the rioters began a burning rampage through the city, resulting in the destruction of two pubs, and twenty-six businesses.  

Around 11:00, the police began to bring in officers from outside of the city, and at its peak, the police presence was around twenty-five hundred. The police were able to squeeze out the rioters and the riots began to fizzle out. In the early hours of Sunday Morning, the police had regained control of the streets. By the end of it all, over three hundred police were injured and forty-five members of the public were injured as well. The damage was estimated at around £7.5 million.

In November, Lord Scarman was charged with conducting an inquiry into the events in Brixton, which resulted in, “The Scarman Report”. Scarman found that there was “no doubt racial disadvantage was a fact of current British life,” he had not however found any instances of “institutional racism” within the Metropolitan Police Force. He also found that the riots were not planned or coordinated, but were spontaneous reactions to the incidents and the “built up resentment” of the police, with whom community relations needed to get better. In his report, police confidence, or lack thereof, was a big problem. Most of his reforms were for the police themselves, some of which are still in effect today. The SUS laws were ended and police could only stop someone when they had reasonable cause, and could not target specific racial groups. However, the SUS laws were reintroduced in 2010, with stopping people based on their race brought back as well, which led to some of the discontent that resulted in the riots of 2011.

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78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
While the riots in Brixton ended, they are seen as the catalyst to what some call, Britain’s “summer of unrest”, which showed a “violent wave” of protests move from Brixton to Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham. The particular things that sparked the Brixton riot are unique to Brixton clearly; however, they show a great deal about what was going on during this time in Britain. 1981 was a year of high unemployment, especially for young black males, deprivation was an issue, racial tensions and poor police relations were seen all across the nation, and all helped cause the riots throughout the year. This chapter will continue to discuss the causes of the riots, categorizing the factors as economics, housing, culture and policing.

**Economic Atmosphere**

In 1981, the year of the Brixton riots, a manufacturing recession hit Great Britain. This caused the unemployment rate, which had been relatively low and stable since 1945, to skyrocket to three million unemployed. This was an issue that needed to be dealt with by the then, conservative government. The task fell to the relatively new Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher. To solve this problem, Thatcher and her government used their macr economic policy of reducing inflation, which eventually helped to lower unemployment. This was just one of many tests that Thatcher would go through in her reign as Prime Minister.

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84 Peter Walker, "Brixton: could it happen again? 30 years after the riots." The Guardian, April 1, 2011.
As previously stated, it was claimed that Thatcher had little sympathy or regard for the working class, as she saw them as, “idle, deceitful, inferior and bloody minded.”  

This statement foreshadowed her seemingly, anti-working class policies that would follow. Above everything else, what Thatcher believed in most was personal responsibility, she did not believe in society, or class, which she believed was a “communist concept.” She was an enemy to the working-class because of her disbelief in class. She felt that, if one person could get rich, then so could everyone else, thus class, was a fallacy; poor people just were not trying hard enough. She is best known for her fights with the unions, which she despised because they brought up the idea that people could better themselves by working together, collectively, which completely went against her idea of “pulling yourself up by your bootstraps.” She believed people should get things done by themselves without help from anyone else, or the government. 

In the 1980s, she completely changed the idea of class. Class became almost this need for wealth, for if one did not have wealth, then they had absolutely nothing at all. Wealth defined the people of this time. The poor could only blame themselves for the own destruction, it was a dog-eat-dog world that Thatcher created, and if one did not succeed, it was their own fault. Thatcherite policies destroyed poor or working class communities in two phases. First, they were left behind and discarded as “old world remnants”, and then they were reviled and caricatured without sympathy.

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88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.,71
91 Ibid.
92 Ibid.
Thatcher was not alone in her wish to get rid of inner cities where large populations of the urban poor festered. She was advised by senior Tory ministers to let places of urban decline “rot.”93 Speaking specifically of Merseyside, Liverpool after the terrible riots that occurred there in the summer of 1981, just months after the Brixton riot, her Chancellor, Sir Geoffrey Howe, advised her that putting money into fixing these areas of urban decay would be like trying to “make water flow up hill.”94 Though advised of this, she decided to have Michael Heseltine, the Environment Secretary, dispatched to Liverpool as “minister for Merseyside” to look into leading a program for urban regeneration.95

However, her minister’s continued to tell her it was a waste, and due to “limited resources”, they could not do very much.96 It seems she did not necessarily push the issue, as, from the start of her reign as Prime Minister she stated that she would not spend money in urban areas. These were areas of decay and she could not help them because she saw any government aid as a part of a “socialist theory to solve social problems by throwing money at them.” 97 This was not good for poor blacks and whites around the country because these areas she was talking about were their communities.

During this time of economic decline, everyone was suffering. However, the black population was suffering more. They disproportionally lived in the poor, deprived areas that the Tories talked of letting “rot”. The unemployment rate was also much higher for blacks then it was for whites, especially black youths. In Brixton, for example, in

94 Ibid.
95 Ibid.
96 Ibid.
1981, the unemployment rate for black youths was estimated to be at fifty-five percent. Whether one believes that the Brixton riot was a race riot or not, it is clear that economics, for both blacks and whites, were a factor in the rioting. Everyone was suffering, particularly those that lived in urban areas and inner cities.

**Housing**

Through this time of economic turmoil, immigration in Great Britain continued to grow exponentially. It grew despite the housing shortage of the 1950s. The desire to keep the country from becoming multi-cultural, however, had not feigned. Those who wanted to stop blacks from immigrating, upon finding that they could not, searched for ways to make the immigrants so miserable and unwelcomed that they would want to leave England. They did this often through housing. It got to the point that black people were living in slums. It became so that these overcrowded and inhumane conditions, in buildings which should have been torn down years ago, were all they could afford.

In her 1964 work, *Back Street New Worlds: A Look At Immigrants in Britain*, Elspeth Huxley described one of these such slums; “In a three storied house built for one family, with two dark basement rooms, six ordinary rooms and a couple of back passage spaces shared as kitchens or let as ‘rooms’ to single men, dwelt nine separate families or ‘units’ comprising twenty-two individuals.” This is just one of many examples of the overcrowded, poor living conditions black families lived in, and all that they could afford. People started to see black people, at this time, as stereotypically living in

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“squalor”. Since black people could not, as previously stated, get good jobs, they did not have money to buy good housing, and would usually end up needing government assistance of some kind. This would eventually lead to the black population being stereotyped again, but this time as, the “welfare state”.

It added to the idea that they did not act in a socially respectable way. They were seen as poor and living in filth. They were thought to be unwilling to work, and unworthy of financial assistance. However, with the situations they were forced into, it would have been unlikely for them to be able to break through the barriers of institutional racism and get a nice place to live.

The 1950s in Great Britain were host to a great and unwavering housing shortage. This shortage was due to a mishandling of government funds and policies, and not due to the number of immigrants entering the population. Working-class whites, as well as blacks had a difficult time getting housing; they would spend months, perhaps even years on waiting lists for social-housing and for black immigrants, racism made getting a home even harder. Most local authorities, those in charge of social housing or council estates, would not house black people and this would go unchecked. They were able to get away with this because they would base their decision on the pretext of “residence requirements,” however, it would most likely be because of the stereotypes of black tenants perpetuated, once again, by the conservative government.


\[101\] Ibid.

\[102\] Ibid.,62
In 1954, the Conservative Commonwealth Association released a pamphlet that reiterated racist ideas of black people, called “The Problem of Colonial Immigrants,” which brought up this idea of “common sense”, which was highlighted by another idea, that of “New Harlem”. ¹⁰³ They juxtaposed the newly crumbling British cities, primarily black communities, with American ghettos. They focused on a “New Harlem” being created in Liverpool and this idea consisted of “lots of old dilapidated buildings, and high rent- rentals being given to colored’s, who live in squalor”, where “vice and Crime [run] rampant”, “social responsibilities are ignored”, “children abandoned and left for state to pay for”, and “ large numbers of adults living on Welfare”; these places also had a lot of “drug trafficking, drinking dens, and prostitution” as well.¹⁰⁴

The idea of commonsense here, was that because black people were in these areas, the areas were becoming slums and so they believed the areas were becoming slums, because black people lived in them and could not take care of their own communities. It was thought that black people were not respectable enough, and could not take care of these areas, thus they let them fall apart. Not only was the area falling apart, but the people living in it, the members of this society were letting themselves go as well. They were no longer believed to be socially conscious, and they were poor, a condition they would never escape and they were not even trying to.

At the same time the conservatives are blaming the immigrants for destroying these areas, it was clear that the government and local authorities were letting the areas go because they were where the black populations and poor people lived, and so they did not need to spend money to maintain them. They also discussed how the immigrants

¹⁰³ Ibid.
¹⁰⁴ Ibid.
dismissed social responsibility. They believed that the racial character of the “New
Harlem” tenants and their way of life was a great threat to the social order.  

British society prefers it when everyone behaves a certain way socially, and the people living in these areas were not doing so, this could be a reason that they were being left behind.

So if black immigrants could not get social housing, they would have to look at private sector housing; however, this in itself posed many issues. Racism was even more blatant here and overcrowding was still an issue, just as it had been in the estates. Many local authorities would not alleviate overcrowding by relocating tenants because they did not want to be seen as showing preferential treatment to people of color, which would upset local whites. The Housing Rent Act of 1954 was supposed to fix this, as it was meant to force local authorities to move tenants out of overcrowded and unsanitary conditions, though it was hard to maintain and many authorities did not follow it.

This shows that the “ghettoization” of black immigrants to Britain and the black-British community as a whole began in the 1950s and 60s. They were refused housing in decent areas, in either the public or private sector. Blacks had a hard time even getting into the estates, which were meant to house those who could not afford private sector housing. So they lived in the only places available to them, slums and old, dilapidated buildings with unsanitary conditions. Following this, the local authorities refused to put money into these areas for maintenance because of the fact that they were areas that were primarily black.

105 Ibid., 63
106 Ibid., 62
107 Ibid.
This idea of “common sense” correlates with the realities that blacks faced. Blacks were forced to live in slums, ghettoized areas that the government would put no money into maintaining. When the area fell apart, blacks were blamed for not maintaining their communities and white-British society saw them living in squalor which became the image they would come to have of black people and how they lived. They were clearly forced into these ghettos by racist ideas and racism that was ingrained into the social institutions that were created to help them get housing.

This was not only the conservative’s doing, the Labour party had some part in it as well. In 1968, Labour created “The Urban Program.” This program was meant to give money to working-class, poor areas. The money went directly into white, working-class areas, in fact, black ghettos did not see any money from it until 1975, and it reached then only because of the “government’s anxieties about disaffected black youths.” It is disheartening to think that the only reason aid got to black communities was because the government realized another issue in the community, an issue that could have been avoided had they only helped the black immigrants. They saw the arising issue of disaffected black youths, and then finally sent aid to the black communities.

Housing was a cause of the Brixton Riot for many reasons. For about forty years prior to the actual incident, the government, national or local, had been practicing pushing policies that were institutionally racist. Black people could not find homes that were affordable and so they were forced to live in slums, where no one would ever choose to live. It was the immigrants and the black community that were and, it could be argued

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still are, “locked in the inner city wasteland.”

So when the black community rioted, they were rioting against the poverty that has been pushed on them from the moment they set foot in Britain.

Culture

Not only was poverty pushed on the immigrants upon their arrival, but they were culturally oppressed as well. Great Britain’s racism in 1981 was not the same as it had been in 1948. It was no longer the desire to keep the immigrants out of the country, or if that failed, then out of society. It was too late for that, as there was already a substantial black population in England at that time. Racism in the 1980s was more about trying to control the black population by any means necessary, from housing and job discrimination, which left them poor and ghettoized, to cultural repression, and police brutality. To understand the cultural repression of this time, one must explore forms of black cultural expression, such as, the Notting Hill Carnival, and Rastafarianism, which was a remnant of the black power movement. Cultural repression in the 1980s was very strong, as this new generation of black-Brits was realizing how difficult it would be for them, as black people born in Britain, to fit into society. However, for black culture to truly be understood, one must start from the beginning, when black people started immigrating to England during the late 1940s and 50s.

The conservative government elected in 1951 was not at all excited about the growing number of black immigrants and the idea of a “permanent black presence.”

109 Barbara A. Hudson Race, Crime and Justice (Aldershot: Dartmouth, 1996), 246

They wanted to keep Britain white, and thus, reaffirmed the idea of “britishness” as being white. They subscribed to the ideal that “white was to belong, black was to be excluded,” thus shunning black people and black culture from main-stream, white society. This would have lasting effects on future generations of black-British youths, who would soon enter into an identity crisis; were they black, or were they British, they were not allowed to be both.

The type of racism found in Britain in the 1980s was labeled by some, including Martin Baker and Paul Gilroy, as “New Racism.” Not only did it define race “in terms of culture and identity,” but it linked it to patriotism, British nationalism, and what it really comes down to, British Superiority. One of the idea’s greatest promoters was British politician and scholar, Enoch Powell, who with the legacy of his “Rivers of Blood” speech, in which he declared that if nothing was done about it, immigrants would overtake whites in Britain, was no stranger to racist, anti-black, anti-immigrant rhetoric. He saw a grave difference between legal citizenship and cultural identity, the latter of which is what truly defines membership to the “British nation.” This makes sense as the idea here is that “race differences played out in culture.” It seems then that they did not want to see black culture in their country because they did not want any challenge to their own dominant, “British culture.”

111 Ibid., 24
113 Ibid.
114 “Enoch Powell’s ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech.” The Daily Telegraph, November 6, 2007
115 Ibid.
116 Ibid. 
Another “New Racism” promoter was British academic, Raymond Williams. He held ideas quite akin to Powell’s, as he too linked racism to nationalism, and believed that it began with immigration, the “arrival of new peoples.”\(^{117}\) To him immigrants were not British, nor would they ever be, regardless of the legal definitions. To Williams it was not the legal definition but the social identity that made blacks unable to be British. They did not have “an effective awareness of social identity,” which he believes, “depends on active and sustained social relationships.”\(^{118}\) So because black immigrants did not come from Britain, they could not be British, as they did not really have roots in the land, they were just the seeds, in a metaphorical sense. This idea begs the question, how long must one live in England before white-society allows them to truly be able to claim their legal title of, “British Citizens”, a question which Williams’s work seemingly refuses to answer.\(^{119}\) However, it can be assumed that though the first two generations, to those of the “New Racism” ideology, can in no way be true Brits, they allow for future generations to be.

The first generations of black people to arrive in Britain, the one that had no roots, and thus, in the eyes of some could not become citizens, were either immigrants from Africa or the Caribbean. They brought the culture of their homeland with them, and though many were educated by the British in their homelands, actually living in Britain and being able to assimilate were still very difficult. As academic Stuart Hall theorizes, when immigrants from the Caribbean first came to England, they had their own separate island identities. When they were faced with British racism upon their arrival, they were able to “discover themselves” as black people in a white country. They came together in

\(^{117}\) Ibid.
\(^{118}\) Ibid.
\(^{119}\) Ibid., 50
the black identity that was thrust upon them. The next generation was a little more assimilated, and the subsequent generations would be wholly British in a sense, but still Black-British. They were also still not completely accepted into mainstream British culture, which, as previously stated was white and determined to stay that way. So what black culture did, at least in cases of young British Blacks, was become defiant to white culture. They took up roles that were potentially opposed to it.

This defiance was showcased in the Notting Hill Carnival. The Notting Hill Carnival is the largest street festival in Europe, attracting to London, for one weekend every August, two million people. The festival, like Mardi Gras in New Orleans, or the Carnival in Rio De Janiero, Brazil, consists of music, a parade with floats and masquerades. It is promoted as a confirmation of the “vitality of post-colonial, multi-cultural Britain.” Though its history has been stained by incidents between the police and black youths, it is meant to show black British cultural change.

Notting Hill in the early 1950s was a dilapidated area of London, completely falling apart. However, it was one of the only places that black immigrants could obtain housing, as it was in terrible condition and no one else would want to pay to live there, and because the landlords took advantage of that fact, and charged accordingly. Notting Hill was a racially divided area, with the population being mostly working-class

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121 Ibid.


123 Ibid.
whites, and blacks.\textsuperscript{124} In 1958, the first “race riot” of Notting Hill took place, after black residents had been subjected to racial oppression and racial violence, in which white residents had begun racially-motivated and anti-black attacks.\textsuperscript{125} The violence began when a group of “teddy boys”, working-class, white, youths who were classified as rebellious teenage thugs, armed themselves with iron bars and beat down any “coloured pedestrians” they came across.\textsuperscript{126} This was a group of nine young men, six aged seventeen, with no prior criminal records, somehow becoming violent racists, carrying out seemingly random, vicious attacks on their black neighbors.\textsuperscript{127}

Their racism was a continuation of the hatred towards blacks that their parents, working-class, whites felt during the time. The “Keep Britain White” movement was particularly successful in poor white areas like Notting Hill.\textsuperscript{128} As stated in a previous section, working-class whites sometimes felt that they were given less opportunities, particularly in housing, then immigrant blacks, which did not seem fair to them, as they did not view the immigrants as British, but instead as aliens, taking over what was rightfully theirs. We shall see in the next chapter how this divide is somewhat healed, as poor, working-class blacks and whites, find themselves together being oppressed by the institutions placed on them by the government. However, racism has not completely depleted, as some of the resentment whites have for blacks remains. Not every white, British person was racist, that is clear, but the generally anti-black atmosphere they lived

\textsuperscript{124} Carole Boyce Davies. \textit{Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones} (London: Duke University Press, 2007), 172

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{126} Paul Gilroy. \textit{There Ain’t No Black In The Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation} (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 81

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 81-82

\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 81
in, where they were restricted to poor housing, abused and repressed by most police interactions and economically held back, probably made it hard to see that.

Through this violence the black community came together and decided that they needed to, as “black Londoners” being of African and Caribbean decent, organize themselves to fight back against the daily repression and celebrate their “blackness”, while also creating a more “self-directed and culturally and politically aware community.”

The first Carnival took place in 1959; it was held indoors at St. Pancras Town Hall. In 1965, it grew due to a merger with another festival in Notting Hill, meant to celebrate the area’s cultural diversity, not just the black side but also for the Spanish, Portuguese and Ukrainian residents. The first parade was held that year, as well.

Over time, the festival did obtain a somewhat, Afro-Caribbean feel to it; it was greatly impacted by the rise of Jamaican popular music. The surprise hit by Millie Small, “My Boy Lollipop” was hugely successful on the American, British and world charts; and in London it was popular with black youths, as well as white youths. The track epitomized the “sharp ghetto” style that was “ska”. It took Jamaican folk rhythm and gave it a distinct, modern twist that made it wildly popular.

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131 Ibid.

132 Ibid.

133 Ibid.
The music’s popularity continued, and in 1967 Desmond Dekker’s “The Israelites”, was another wildly successful song.\textsuperscript{134} This song was the start of another musical trend, a trend towards a, somewhat more political message. The music urged the youth to “not assimilate into the racist system,” that assimilation should not be one’s aspiration, as the white ruling elite would not let it be an option.\textsuperscript{135} Reggae added to this political awareness with its emersion in the 1970s, as well as the emergence and popularity of the Rastafarian movement. Each took the Jamaican tradition of resistance and put it to music, but not just any music, West African Rhythms. Together they created something that was very close to the experience of black Londoners.\textsuperscript{136}

This sense of resistance within the black cultural movement was probably very refreshing, especially when they were being repressed and oppressed in every facet of society. When the police began trying to control the Carnival parade and activities, in the mid-1970s, they came into confrontation with black youths, who believed the music’s message; they did not need to be repressed. The two worst years of the Carnival for violence between the black youths and police were 1975 and 1976.\textsuperscript{137} This was due to the officer’s “heavy-handed” attempts to control the crowds, as well as, their use of the SUS laws.\textsuperscript{138} Throughout the 1970s and 80s the police would try to control the crowd, diverge them, and yet usually have the opposite effect.\textsuperscript{139} However, in recent years there seems to not have been as much trouble.

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.
During the 1970s the Rastafarian movement gained steam as well. The movement began in Jamaica in the 1930s and was started by black politician Marcus Garvey and his Universal Negro Improvement Organization which preached, “look to Africa where a black king shall be crowned, he shall be your redeemer;” this statement became the movement’s foundation.\textsuperscript{140} In Great Britain it was not considered a religion, yet it’s basic principles were, the “Bible is the book of life,” “Africa is the motherland and all Rasta should be repatriated there,” because there was nothing for them in Britain.\textsuperscript{141} In a way this was preaching the idea that black people did not belong in Britain, because they were not British, nor could they become British. So, it would seem that Rastafarians believed that Black-Brits did not need to assimilate, nor did white British culture need to accept blacks into it, because they do not belong there in the first place. This is an argument that could also be used by racist white supremacists who did not want a multi-cultural nation.

A lot of the issue for young blacks growing up in Britain during the 1980s was that they were not accepted culturally, politically or economically by society because of their race, yet they were also, usually, second or third generation British citizens. This offers an interesting paradox; these youths were black and thus they did not fit into British culture because they were not seen as British, however, even though they were not welcomed by British culture, they were British by birth, and as such, should have been able to fully partake in it. Of course, they could learn about where their families immigrated from and take part in celebrating that culture, but it was not really their own, because they were black-Brits. This gave them a kind of identity crisis. Part of what made


\textsuperscript{141} Ibid.
Rastafarianism attractive was its strong push for love of the African side, or the Caribbean side, the side of their motherland, the side that was not British.\(^{142}\) So, Rastafarianism helped these youths to cope with the dual identity, by pushing hard to the side of loving themselves for being black and wanting to go back to Africa.

To the Rastafarians of the 1980s, being wholly defiant to the white culture of “Babylon” was a very important part of the whole scheme of things. In Birmingham, during this time, young, black Rasta would go before a court and not attempt to get their sentences lowered by acting repentant, like others did. They did not repent and some even said out loud, in the courtroom, that an “agent of Babylon” could not pass judgment on them.\(^{143}\) Back in Jamaica, Rastafarians were considered blights to society, and so many parents, first generation immigrants at this point in history, were surprised to see their children acting in this way. Sometimes young Rastafarians found that they were cut off from mainstream black society too, which would probably not help the identity crisis.\(^{144}\) Rastafarianism is by nature a reaction to the circumstances, while Carnival, which started out as a reaction to events in the late 1950s, has become a celebration of Black-British cultural identity.

Rastafarianism today does not play as significant a role as it once did, as youths do not embrace it as much as they once did, but the effects of it are still seen.\(^{145}\) Rastafarianism gave the seed of defiance to youths. Now, perhaps they do not want all


\(^{143}\) Ibid., 181

\(^{144}\) Ibid., 182

\(^{145}\) Ibid., 188
the religion and the importance of the Bible that was held by old Rastafarianism, what they keep is that idea of defiance. It is a way to say no to white culture, which clearly has not accepted them, and to create their own culture in choosing the black side, over the white side.

During a time of great racial prejudice they found resistance as a way to strengthen their identities that is why some joined the rioting. Not only were they tired of being persecuted for their race, but they were also tired of dealing with the British cultural side attacking their black cultural side. They did not want to conform to white “britishness.” They saw the injustices being done to their people, how they were trying to force their assimilation and resisted it by protesting and rioting. These people, along with the Rastafarians found a sort of anti-mainstream societal identity in their resistance, and within it, they found their own identity that in their defiance of assimilation.

Of course mainstream white-British society wanted to oppress, and control the black cultural expressions. These expressions were unknown, new and white society feared parts of black society. What they truly feared was the idea of the “black masses.” So, when black people would get together during Carnival, the police would crash the events and then clash with the black people. This led to the idea that black culture was violent, or at least provoked violence. The idea was that black cultural expressions led to violence, when in reality, this was not the case. When the police attempted to control these events for no reason other than that they wanted to, black people would resist. Violence would, of course, ensue as both sides fought for control.


147 Ibid.
One side fought to control these “strangers” in their country, while the other fought to control their own cultural expressions, and thus it became believed that black culture led to violence.

Any time black-British people would try to get together, was viewed as a danger by white-society. Truly what they were afraid of, as previously stated, was the gathering of the “black masses;” that was the true danger to the state. So, what the state saw as dangerous, which was always the gathering of the black-British citizens, celebrating a culture which was unknown, strange and unwanted in Great Britain, they wanted to control that expression. Even if in reality it was really not a danger, as it usually was not, they would interfere and violence would erupt. It goes back to how the state attempted to push these racist stereotypes and caricatures of blacks, to keep them from jobs and homes when they first began immigrating. Black culture in the 1980s was clearly different from “British culture.” The government continuously attempted to keep all black influence away from mainstream, “British culture”, so then it would make sense that the only way that, at least upper class whites, could deal with black culture or relate to it, or even acknowledge it, was by trying to control it and the dangers they saw in it.

Black-British people during this time found ways to resist the anti-black culture movements of white-British, mainstream society and ideas that stated because they were not white, and no matter what generation they were, they would never be British. Through this resistance, they were able to create a new sense of what it was to be a black-Brit; they gained pride in and celebrated, what used to be a confused circumstance. The riots occurred at a time when that pride was beginning to grow, and what the people in Brixton witnessed, on those warm April nights, or what they believed they were
witnessing, angered them, and they took that anger out, along with what was anger at how they and those before them had been mistreated by their adopted home. Their new, emerging culture was certainly a reason for their rioting, along with the other factors. Though, it seems as if culture played a different part. In a way, it gave them the courage to resist white control, fight against the oppression and stand up for themselves and the identities that they were creating.

**Police**

After the immigration influx of the late 1940s and 1950s, England was entering an age of diversity. However, as previously stated, a large amount of British society was in favor of keeping Britain “white”; not everyone was a fan of a multi-cultural state. With Caribbean and African, black immigration came many fears. Many white-Brits feared losing their national identity. They believed that if they became more diverse, Britain would lose its “whiteness.”  

The growth of black immigration made facing racism in Great Britain necessary. During the 1980s, the Thatcher era, through the 2000s, race was a big issue in political agendas. As is well documented in this work, Margaret Thatcher did not like the idea of lower classes and during this point that is what black immigrants were. Continuing on with the idea that the government continually used racist caricatures to  

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148 Erik Bleich. *Race and Politics in Britain and France ideas and policymaking since the 1960s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1
149 Ibid., 2
150 Ibid., 3
spread the “Keep Britain White” movement, Thatcher’s favored caricatures of black immigrants were “muggers”.151

Margaret Thatcher was quoted during her 1979 campaign, stating that, “In their muddled but different ways the vandals on the picket lines and the muggers in our streets have to the same confused message, ‘we want our demands met or else,’ ‘get out of the way give us your handbag or else’.”152 Here she integrates her ideas of both working class whites, and poor black immigrants, stating that both groups are lazy and deserve no more than they work for. The “muggers” were the racist caricature of blacks who wanted material things but refused to work. The muggers are the idea that black criminals want without getting a job, they are told to better themselves, but as seen throughout, they were institutionally discriminated against.

After the riots in Brixton had fizzled out, Thatcher was warned by the Home Office, in a secret report that, “‘spontaneous disorder’ was likely among the country’s ethnic minority communities.”153 As is well known, “disorders” did spread to different areas during the summer months. This report led Thatcher and her advisers to consider, and then decide against bringing the army into play if riots broke out again; they did however, decide to arm the police with gear that would make them better able to fight rioters.154 The police were given, shields, protective clothing, water cannons, CS gas, rubber bullets and surveillance helicopters, all the things they had asked for.155 However,

151 Paul Gilroy. Police and Thieves. The Empire Strikes Back Race and racism in 70s Britain. Edited By Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (London: Hutchinson, 1984), 143
152 Ibid.
154 Ibid.
155 Ibid.
she did not consider that a cause of the riots was the poor and worsening relationship between the police and the black community.

Eye witness accounts of the Brixton riot reveal that days before the riot, members of the black community felt that the “police were [the] enemy” and that, in return the police, “looked at you like [the] enemy.”\textsuperscript{156} There have always been issues between the white police officers and the black community. The police are an extension of the government, and their main duty is to execute the orders of the government. So, when black immigrants started to arrive in England, and the government created racist policies, it was the police’s job to enforce them. This created the issue where the police were seen as the ones actually doing the racism. However, there is also the idea that, it is not necessarily that the police discriminate against black people, its just that “policing blacks” means that they are keeping the peace or the rule of law, because black people cause trouble. It is there job to stop trouble, thus they must stop the black people.\textsuperscript{157}

With the Suspected Person, or “SUS” laws, which were scrapped in the later 80s after all the rioting occurred, yet brought back in the late 2000s, the police are allowed to target anyone that they believe is planning to carry out a crime. Under the law, they are allowed to stop and search that person, merely for suspecting them, no one is governing whether or not they truly suspect the person, or if they are basing it off of any type of prejudice. Officers are given free reign basically, to stop and search anyone they like.\textsuperscript{158}


\textsuperscript{157} Paul Gilroy. \textit{Police and Thieves. The Empire Strikes Back Race and racism in 70s Britain}. Edited By Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. (London: Hutchinson, 1984),145

In Brixton, an area with a twenty-five percent ethnic minority population, the SUS laws seemed extraordinarily discriminatory. During Operation Swamp, one of the clear causes of the riots, when one-thousand people were stopped, in six days, tensions were, of course, heightened.¹⁵⁹

In 1965, a man named Joseph Hunte released a report entitled, “Nigger Hunting in England.”¹⁶⁰ This report basically listed off all of the “police malpractice” done to black citizens of England. ¹⁶¹ In the work, Hunte stated that, “it has been confirmed from reliable sources that sergeants and constables do leave police stations with the express purpose of going ‘nigger hunting.'”¹⁶² To make matters worse, one police commander in Brixton stated that this claim was, “basically true.”¹⁶³ He meant it was true that police officers all over the country would go out with the specific purpose to arrest, harass, attack and sometimes, to kill black people. Maybe they did not go out specifically to kill, but it did happen on occasion from an attack gone too far, that they would murder black people, for no real reason. Clearly there was a racial discrimination problem in the Police Force.

An example of one of these “hunts” can be found in the work Foreigners, by Caryl Phillips. In the work, Phillips explores three different tales of non-whites of Great Britain. In this particular tale, “Northern Lights,” Phillips gives the story of a young, black girl who notices a black man, David, who is most likely homeless and begins

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.
¹⁶⁰ Paul Gilroy, Police and Thieves. The Empire Strikes Back Race and racism in 70s Britain. Edited By Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies., (London: Hutchinson, 1984),143
¹⁶¹ Ibid.
¹⁶³ Ibid.
exchanging greetings with him. She sees him constantly harassed by the police and he is eventually murdered by the police. Through her not understanding what David is doing wrong, just standing around, and keeping to himself, she gains a fear of the police, a fear that eventually becomes hate.164

This tale takes place in the mid-1960s, so the young girl is a great example of what happened in communities like Brixton to the second generation of black immigrants. They would become angry at the discrimination they receive at the hands of the police, and at the oppression they faced daily, though they were British-born. Sadly, David is also an example of what could happen to black people during this time. As his personal history is explored, he had immigrated to go to school but became homeless, and was eventually killed for his race. At the end of the chapter, something unusual happens; Phillips allows the police who killed David to be prosecuted, something that most likely did not happen often.165

Joseph Hunte’s work alleged police racism, which there are many more examples of. Dick Holland, a superintendent with the West Yorkshire police, used Margaret Thatcher’s term, “muggers”, during a police federation seminar, to describe black people in England.166 His point was that, “police must be prejudiced if they are to do their job properly.”167 Again, it is the same idea, the fear of black people, that they must be controlled. Black people are the ones that cause lawlessness, and the police fight lawlessness, and must stop it, thus they must stop black people.

165 Ibid.,214-15
166 Paul Gilroy. Police and Thieves. The Empire Strikes Back Race and racism in 70s Britain. Edited By Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. (London: Hutchinson, 1984),143
Another unnamed Brixton Inspector claimed that his men regularly used racial slurs for immigrants, but excused it as, “words in industrial language are something blokes working together will say without meaning a thing.” 168 This goes along with claims that the police only “present racist attitudes” proportionately to the rest of society. 169 The police are and were expected to protect and serve the people, thus, their language should have been cleaned up and prejudice should not be shown when one is supposed to “protect” the people. It is difficult to understand how a police officer can protect someone if he hates them, regardless of the reason.

During the weekend of April 10-12, 1981 in Brixton, many who participated in the riot stated that it gave them an opportunity to “vent anger.” 170 The insensitivity of the police force within this community is clear; they used the controversial and discriminatory practice, stop and search, in a community with a high ethnic minority population. The SUS laws were proven to be at least partially racist and that they used the practices without consulting the community, or letting the community leaders in on it. The police stopping over one-thousand people in six-days, shows even more racial insensitivity. 171 The way Operation Swamp went that weekend was, plain clothed policemen, who were “obviously police”, as described by one eye-witness who stated that their short hair and attitude gave them away, just standing on corners, going around

167 Ibid.
168 Ibid., 143-5
169 Ibid.
171 Ibid.
stopping people.\textsuperscript{172} Tensions grew, as they probably would have in any ethnic community in the country, as it was grossly harassing and humiliating to everyone in the community.

There were many rumors that helped the tension grow. It was said that the police were doing strip-searches on main roads, for no apparent reason.\textsuperscript{173} There were many other negative interactions between the community and the police, including the real catalyst to the events, when the young boy was stabbed and it seemed that the police were not giving him adequate medical attention.\textsuperscript{174} Most people, especially black residents of Brixton, blamed the police for being inappropriate and also blamed their actions against the youth, as there was a high number of young black men not only stop and searched, but involved in the rioting.\textsuperscript{175}

The people in the Brixton community were so angry about their treatment at the hands of the police that one eye-witness, before the second day of rioting had begun, stated, “It wouldn’t have mattered if they had looked at them funny, it would have been enough.”\textsuperscript{176} This anger grew as the police made two decisions after the first night of rioting; they increased foot patrols, and carried on with Operation Swamp.\textsuperscript{177} Not only did they carry on with it, despite all the tension, they basically put it on steroids by increasing the police presence by so much. The riots continued for two more days, and in that time the anger at the police felt by the Brixton community was certainly seen.

Soon after the rioting ended, Lord Scarman was given the task of making the inquiry into what caused the events. He was appointed to the task by Home Secretary
William Whitelaw to, “inquire urgently into the serious disorder in Brixton on 10-12 April 1981 and to report, with the power to make recommendations.”¹⁷⁸ When he came back with his findings, he stated his belief that the riot was made up mostly of black youths and backs this up with figures; over half of the stopped in Operation Swamp were black, and two-thirds of those were under the age of 21.¹⁷⁹

In his report, Scarman claimed that social factors, as well as police malpractice were to blame. In regards to the police, he stated that there was no such thing as institutionalized racism within the force; not all police officers were racist. Yet, those few that were gave the force a bad name, and fueled the rumors that led the youth to riot.¹⁸⁰ The inflexibility of policing methods within Brixton was also a flaw.¹⁸¹ He believed they should have fitted their methods to the community. Operation Swamp, he found to be a serious mistake as well.¹⁸² Outside of the causes, he found that through the riots, the police force’s inability to sufficiently handle and stop riots was another big problem.¹⁸³ He wanted the police force to increase its minority recruitment as well, at the time there were only 326 police officers in all of England.¹⁸⁴

He found many social factors to be root causes of the disorder. He considered unemployment to be one of the greatest, as it disproportionately affected black youths, at

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.
¹⁸¹ Ibid.
¹⁸² Ibid., 118
¹⁸³ Ibid.
¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 103
an estimated fifty-five percent.\textsuperscript{185} Many believed that this was a principal factor but social deprivation was the main cause.\textsuperscript{186} Margaret Thatcher was completely against this idea. She stated in regards to the idea that unemployment was a factor that, “it may well be a factor, but I do not believe it is the principal factor.”\textsuperscript{187} She refused to accept any social causes, and believed anyone that did, was only seeking to excuse the violence.\textsuperscript{188} She ignored the root problems and did not attempt to remedy them.

Scarman also saw racial discrimination as a large problem. In the report he stated that, “…Some young blacks are driven by their despair into feeling that they are rejected by the society of which they rightly believe they are members and in which they would wish to enjoy the same opportunities and to accept the same risks as everyone else.” He continues, “but their experience leads them to believe that their opportunities are less and their risks are greater. Young black people feel neither socially nor economically secure.”\textsuperscript{189} He means here that, black British youths feel like they have no future or opportunities because they live in a deprived area, and are discriminated against. They do not feel like members of the society in which they live, because they feel like the system is working against them. He also found that Brixton’s black population is disproportionately poor and the inner city. The inner city in which they live is in an advanced state of decay.\textsuperscript{190}

\textsuperscript{187} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{188} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{189} Ibid.,27
\textsuperscript{190} Ibid.
Years after his report came out, Scarman wrote the epilogue to the book, “Scarman and After”, stating what he thinks has happened since his report. He believed that the police did learn their lesson after the 1981 riots, and have made real attempts at “mending fences”. He found that the recruitment of minorities had improved and they were working to diminish the racism within the force through “training, supervision and monitoring” of officers. In his opinion, things had certainly changed, but not completely. The report brought public attention to police consultation with local leaders, citizens and overall accountability. He does not believe, however, that accountability has been completely remedied.

There are some recommendations he made, however, which he does not believe will ever be implemented, those two being, having lay station police visitors and a reform of the police complaints procedure. He would have liked to see those implemented because they would go directly to the public’s confidence; a reform of the police complaints procedure is also a hotly debated topic during the 2011 riots. His greatest regret in regards to the report was that he took zero measures against the actual rioters, which could be good or bad; however, a positive would be that the stop and search laws were done away with.

The 1981 riots came from a toxic combination of many factors, the main spark being police malpractice. As a result, the discriminatory SUS laws were taken away, and many other positive things happened. However, a year or so before the 2011 riots, the
SUS laws were brought back with their full power and were a great complaint of the 2011 rioters. It seems as though, at least in part, the police did not completely learn their lesson in regards to their actions.

**Conclusion**

The Brixton Riot of 1981 had many factors, many of which were continued from the beginning of black immigration to England. The riot was definitely a race riot; those who participated in the rioting were overwhelmingly young and black. Working-class whites played a role as well, which would make the riot also, partially a class riot. Both blacks and whites of the urban poor suffered at the hands of institutionalized oppression. However, historically and in reality, blacks had it much worst. They were oppressed in every facet of life. The people involved in the riot were reacting to, not only Operation Swamp, but also to the way that black people were oppressed in every way, and though they were always discriminated against, the whites were beginning to be demonized by the new rhetoric enforced by Thatcher. From the time that black immigrants began arriving in Great Britain in the late 1940s, it was clear that racism was and would continue to be one of the greatest issues that Great Britain would be forced to deal with.

Between the 1948 arrival of the Empire Windrush, the event that some see as the true beginning of black immigration to Britain, and the 1981 Brixton riot, conditions for black-brits had not changed very drastically. Though the 1981 economy was poor and most people struggled, black people had a much more difficult time getting work. Black people were also disproportionately unemployed. The legacy of the first caricatures of
blacks, as terrible employees, still lived on, and they were chosen for employment last every time.

Housing also had not changed since the beginning of immigration either. Black immigrants were ghettoized into slums, because no one would give them decent housing for an affordable price as they were painted to be terrible tenants. The fact that they were ghettoized, again, perpetuated the social idea that black people were stereotypically poor. There was also a great housing shortage. Getting affordable, public housing was very hard, for blacks and whites. There was not enough housing for everyone that needed it, and to save money, Thatcher’s regime had scaled back the number of public homes which they would build. Housing caused a rift between poor blacks and poor whites. However, poor blacks were more likely not to get a home, though everyone had to wait on the list for long periods of time.

Black culture had been forced to change in the conditions that were forced upon the immigrants and their subsequent generations. This new generation, the first truly “British-born-black” generation was much different than the previous generation who, upon their arrival had the separate identities of their homelands, their “island identities”. Those were stripped from them by British society that only saw them as blacks. From this, they united and created their black-British identities. This unity allowed them to be more defiant to the oppression that they faced in every facet of life. It may also have caused tensions between them and the police to rise as well. These black-brits, however, faced criticism from many white-British scholars, like Enoch Powell, who stated belief that they were not, and would never be, “British.” They lacked the British experience,
and were just aliens in England. However, they were still able to find a spark in the new black-British cultural movement.

The relationship between black-brits and the police right before, and during the Brixton riot, was at an all-time low. Police malpractice against black people, and in this case, particularly the black community in Brixton, did cause the riot. The police were agents of the government, and as such, perpetuated their racist ideas against the black community. The only good change in regards to policing in 1981 was the Scarman Report. This is because finally, someone stated the true causes of the atmosphere that produced the riot. Unlike Thatcher, Scarman was not afraid to state that black people in Britain were living in social deprivation and were hopeless. This also again reiterates that race was the greatest factor of the riot. However, Scarman argues that there was no “institutional racism” within the police force; however this seems false, as there are so many examples of the police using racial abuse against black people.

The causes of the Brixton Riot of 1981 were mostly factors that had not changed since the beginning of black immigration to Great Britain. The factor that created the perfect atmosphere for the riot was the economy; the country was in a state of disaster, the unemployment rate had skyrocketed, but it disproportionately affected black youths, and drove them to a state of despair. They felt as if they were not a part of a community. They looked around and they saw everyone they knew, living in abundant poverty, and they did not believe they could have any better. They also were subject to harassment from police, simply because of the color of their skin and their age. Age makes a difference in that, most of the people in Brixton who were stopped and searched were
under the age of twenty-one, regardless of race, which could be a reason that many white youths joined the riots as well.

In dealing with the issue of white people getting involved in a black-race riot one will find that, though it was a race riot, poor, working-class, whites also felt oppressed by the government and policies that left them poor. Conservative, Margaret Thatcher promoted a message that people of all classes, though she did not believe in class, needed to help themselves to become “bettered”; bettered in the sense of becoming better off financially. This is mostly because the economy was so bad, she did not think that the government could spare funds on the poor. It is also because she believed if one person was rich, anyone could be, they just had to work harder. Yet, as has been stated, there were not jobs for people to work in.

The Brixton riot exposes the fact that England in 1981 was in a very bad place, socially, economically and culturally. Lord Scarman went above and beyond in his inquiry, and made recommendations that, though ignored by Thatcher’s government, could have helped to fix things socially, not only within the police force. However, in looking at the Riot of 2011, it seems he was not listened to, for many of the conditions are still the same.
CHAPTER 4

Introduction to the 2011 Riots

Mark Duggan was a twenty-nine year old black man and father of four. His family had moved to Tottenham, London fifty years ago and had since become an integral part of the community. Described as a family man, who loved his children, it is hard to believe that he deserved to die the way he did on August 4, 2011. Duggan was the passenger of a mini-cab in Tottenham when the cab was pulled over by police in, what was supposed to be an “operation to arrest Duggan”. Officers of the Trident division, the division dedicated to ending gun crime in urban areas, and a special firearms officer of the CO19 force detained Duggan; what happened next is still being debated, and the truth may never be known. What is clear is that Mark Duggan was shot twice, once fatally in the chest, and once in his right arm, an officer was also injured when a bullet went through Duggan and was lodged in his radio. Duggan died soon after being shot and his family was never officially notified.

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200 Ibid.
For two days, the media reported on the shooting death of Mark Duggan. They said that he had died in a shootout with police, in which he shot first. The way the media were portraying him, it would not be surprising that he would have not only had a gun, but also shot at police. Many news agencies reported that he was a “gangster” and a hardened criminal. However, for those forty-eight hours, Mark Duggan’s family waited to hear from the police. They needed to hear what officially happened, they deserved to know, and they also had a right to know. The IPCC (Independent Police Complaints Commission), who claims to have “inadvertently misled” the family, as well as the media as to what happened, finally talked with the family on Sunday, three days after Mark had died. They finally told the family and the media that, there had in fact, not been a shoot-out and, while Duggan was found carrying an illegal firearm, he did not fire any shots at police. The firearms officer who fatally shot Duggan, expressed unhappiness that the family had been led to believe that he did.

The family did not just sit and wait for the police to call them. They, along with over one-hundred other members of the community marched to the police station to hold a silent protest and demand that the family be seen by a senior official. This protest was only supposed to take an hour. The community leaders that had helped organize it did not want to be out too late at night because they knew that there was great agitation in the community and did not want anything to happen. However, the hour long protest

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201 Ibid.
202 Ibid.
203 Ibid.
204 Ibid.
205 Paul Lewis, Sandra Laville, and Caroline Davies. "We warned Tottenham situation could get out of control—community leaders." *The Guardian*, August 7, 2011.
turned into a four hour long protest; the police kept the family waiting from 5-9pm, when they finally told them they would not be seen.206

The group grew agitated as time went on and at one point a sixteen year old female was accosted by police officers. There are conflicting reports as to why; one report is she verbally abused the officers.207 Other reports say that she kept asking them why they would not see the family and that is why she was grabbed by the officers.208 Whatever the case, the officers accosted the young woman, sparking a large portion, mainly youths, to break from the silent protest and begin to riot. Like the Brixton riot, the spark of this first night of rioting in Tottenham was started by the tense relations between the police and the community.

The first night of rioting took place in Tottenham, and was cleared up by the police early the next morning. However, the next night, rioting broke out again, but this time not only in Tottenham, but all across London. Blogs of various London and UK newspapers have minute by minute coverage of the riots, using Twitter updates on where the violence was spreading. The violence on the second night moved from Tottenham west towards White City, south towards Brixton, to Edmonton, Hackney and Enfield; the rioting in London spread in every direction.209 Over the next three nights, Britain would see rioting spread to many towns and major cities across the country including, Manchester, Salford, Gloucester, Birmingham and Liverpool, where a police station

206 Ibid.
firebomb is what started the violence.\textsuperscript{210} There would also be minor skirmishes in Wales.\textsuperscript{211}

On the fourth night, across the country it seemed peace was restored. The police finally came out with a strong presence; there were sixteen-thousand police officers on the streets of London alone.\textsuperscript{212} When the dust settled, after four nights of unrest, there had been at least four civilian deaths and £200 million worth of damage done.\textsuperscript{213} The conservative Tories, the party in power, claimed the violence that occurred was “pure criminality” and had no political motive.\textsuperscript{214} David Cameron, the Torie Prime Minister claimed that no inquiry was necessary; it would be a waste of money.\textsuperscript{215} He believed that the best way to deal with the rioters was to jail them and punish them as harshly as possible, taking away any social housing, or benefits they may have been on.

While no formal inquiry has been made yet, and it still looks doubtful that one will be had, Cameron has changed his tune a bit. He has called for a “sociological analysis of the riots ‘when the dust settles.’”\textsuperscript{216} David Miliband, the opposition party (Labour) leader has declared that if Cameron and the Tories do not launch an inquiry the

\textsuperscript{210} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{214} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{215} Leo McKinstry. "Spare us a useless and costly inquiry into these riots." The Express, 1 edition, sec. Editorial, August 15, 2011, 1.  
Labour party will do it themselves.\textsuperscript{217} Some would say that this was a political charade, just another thing for the two parties to attempt to one up each other on.

Though a formal inquiry may not happen, a few things about the riots are clear. First, they were very youth oriented, with that being clear from not only pictures, but the court records as well; fifty-two percent of those who have appeared before the courts were under the age of twenty, while ninety-six percent were under the age of forty.\textsuperscript{218} In Tottenham, the death of Mark Duggan showed the unresolved racial issues that have plagued the area for a long time, but as it moved across the country it seems that rioters, who were of every race, gave very different reasons for why they rioted, the economic conditions being the underlying reason for all. This chapter will continue to discuss the causes of the riots in more detail, categorizing the factors as economics, housing, culture and policing.

**The Economic Atmosphere of 2011**

The 2008 recession had dramatic effects for countries all over the world. By 2010, England alone had racked in a debt of £154.7 billion. In October 2010 there was a new conservative government in power that saw the need to install dramatic austerity cuts to the country to slash the massive debt. George Osbourne, Chancellor of the Exchequer came up with a budget package that would use deep spending cuts to lower the deficit.\textsuperscript{219} This austerity package took away half a million jobs in the public sector, got rid of the

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\item Leo McKinstry. "Spare us a useless and costly inquiry into these riots." *The Express*, 1 edition, sec. Editorial, August 15, 2011.,1
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Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA), took away welfare and benefits to the poor, as well as raised prices on council estate homes, which the government has since stopped producing. To some these changes were completely necessary, to others however, they completely changed and will continue to change the country.

When reading responses from youths about why they think the riots of 2011 happened, and if they joined in the rioting, why, there are four big themes; the first being a lack of education. The second most given response was that they were not employed, and had no legal means of making money. The third was police abuse, which made police and community relations worst. The fourth reason was that they felt that no one listened to them, or cared about them; they were neglected, so they rioted to be heard.

Many of these themes stem from the recent austerity cuts. The EMA for example, was designed to encourage youths whose families made under £30,800 a year to continue their education. It was a weekly allowance to college aged, (16-19 years old) students of about £10 to £30. Only a year after it was taken away, college enrollment had severely dropped in some areas. There were 40,000 fewer students enrolled in colleges in England, as of October 2011, then there were exactly a year before, when the program was cut.

Hackney, a borough of London, is one of the poorest parts of the country, with a benefits claimant’s rate of working age people being at nearly twenty-two percent, while

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220 Ibid.
223 Ibid.
226 Ibid.
the rest of Great Britain is less than fifteen percent. After the riots in Hackney, a sixteen year old male stated, “we cannot afford studying and we do not have work.” The youth in Hackney, as well as, the rest of England were concerned about their futures. They knew that the only ways to better their lives, as the conservatives wished them to do, was to get an education and get a job, two things that have become increasingly difficult since the austerity cuts.

Youth unemployment is currently the highest it has been since 1992, when it began to be reported. Between July and September of 2011 the unemployment rate of people aged sixteen to twenty-four jumped to nearly twenty-one percent. So at the time of the riots (August 2011), youth unemployment was at its highest. Many youths, because they cannot get a job or go to school, are finding it hard to support themselves and are growing more and more hopeless. Another youth from Hackney stated, “We cannot work and some of our parents are not able to support us. Finding a job is much harder than before. […] Many people do not have the financial strength to look after themselves.”

It is clear that they worry about their futures and it is also clear why the youth in Hackney rioted. Another Hackney youth stated, “Nobody listens to us.” By this he meant that the people in Hackney are suffering and the government seems to be doing nothing to help them, they are forgotten and neglected.

230 Ibid.
232 Ibid.
Hackney also has one of the highest unemployment rates in the country. So, in the months before the riot they watched as the government took away their benefits, increased their housing payments, took away their right to an education and left them to rot in their estates. These working-class, urban, poor people are truly hopeless. They want to believe in a future, but it is hard to believe in anything, when they have nothing, nothing that would lead them to believe that they actually had a future.

Another element here is that students who went to university to better their lives, graduate, but find themselves still unable to get a job. Upon graduating they are overwhelmed by the debt they incurred while in school. It is what one interviewee from Wood Green called, the “lie of higher education: aspire and ye shall achieve.” However, they are quick to point out that it is not that simple; what university one goes to, and who one knows are both factors of getting a job out of university. Connections are important here, however, if one is coming from a poorer area anyway, they do not have the connections some of their school mates would have coming out of Oxford. Most of them probably could not afford to go to Oxford anyway, even with scholarships.

Many youths see education as a way to a better their lives. The better one’s education, the better jobs they can get, the more money they can make and the better their social status will be. However, for the younger kids at least, they see older people graduating school and ending up in the same place they were, with just more debt. This would probably turn them off to the idea of more schooling, thus the prospect of good

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jobs, and pensions are out of reach for them. If they know that at a young age, they are not going to end up having much in life, they seek to just “get paid,” thus the few nights of rioting and looting to get the things they desired would be totally justified to them.

The idea of “getting paid” completely fits in with this being a response to an unjust society; I have nothing because you will not allow me to, so I am going to get myself paid, I am going to take what I want. Some could see this as David Cameron’s idea of “pure criminality.” Others could see it as, in a way, a somewhat justified response to their social conditions, and if not justified exactly, then not wholly unexpected.

Three authors from The Guardian newspaper put it best; the England rioters were “young, poor and unemployed.” Featured later in this chapter is a “poverty map”, which was featured in another article from The Guardian. The map shows different parts of England and color codes the areas in terms of wealth, yellow being the wealthier areas, all the way to dark red, which would be the poorest areas. They showed where rioters lived in relation to the actual riot activity; the addresses of those known rioters were mostly in red areas, except for a few.

As if they did not take away enough, the 2010 austerity cuts slashed budgets by one fifth and thus caused the loss of half a million public sector jobs. This package, which was meant to lessen the state in the lives of its citizens, took away centers that

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235 Ibid.
were meant to help youths become integrated in their societies, and programs meant to keep them off the streets. It also took away work from those that worked in these centers. The riots quite clearly show how important these centers and places have become.

One could ask a poor youth in just about any estate in the country, why they would destroy their own communities; they would probably respond, easily. They do not feel they belong in society; it has no place for them and offers them nothing. They have been cut off from society’s structural bounds and in some cases, have created their own, “anti-social” societies, places where they can fit in and make money anyway they can. One 15-year-old boy who was interviewed said, “if you do it the government way, you will wait until you’re 80 by the time you can buy a nice, decent tracksuit. I probably be dead by then.” He is 15 years old, still a child and he has given up on his future. Like so many others his age, he sees the ways they have been left behind by society and have thus, created their own society where they can do what they need to do to survive. In some cases, the drug economy can provide them with more money than social agencies can now that their budgets have been cut, due to austerity measures.

Social commentator Owen Jones brought up in his work, *Chavs: Demonization of the Working Class*, how the idea of a dog-eat-dog individualism began in conservative, Margaret Thatcher’s time; it was something she implemented. These ideas still hold true, however, now instead of youths trying to climb the social ladder and fighting for

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240 Camila Batmanghelidgh. “Caring costs- but so do riots” The Independent, August 9, 2011., 1
241 Ibid.
242 Harriet Sargeant. "Feral youths: How a generation of violent, illiterate young men are living outside the boundaries of civilised society" The Daily Mail, September 19, 2009., 1
243 Ibid., 2
244 Camila Batmanghelidgh. “Caring costs- but so do riots” The Independent, August 9, 2011., 1
position in society, they fight for positions outside of society. They fight for survival on the streets.

The austerity cuts of 2010 brought about the loss of the EMA, loss of welfare and benefits, rising of estate home prices and also unemployment. These are all things that contributed in some ways to the riots. It is true that everyone felt the cuts, the middle-class, the working class, every class felt them in some way. But the poor, especially the poor youth, have felt them more than anyone else.

Another English newspaper, *The Independent*, released a statement regarding the austerity cuts saying, that governments everywhere will try to do more, with less and will fail, thus, in a decade Britain will be a world of “diminished ambitions for politicians as for the rest of us.”246 I do not know about politicians, but literally a year later, you have children running around burning down buildings and looting shops because they know they don’t have a future. Sadly, the potential of these youths will be wasted, if these problems are not rectified.

**Housing**

The austerity cuts hurt the poor, but even before them they were hurt by the poor housing conditions that have always been a problem in Great Britain. David Cameron agrees with most of Margaret Thatcher’s general ideals, and has for the most part stuck to them. Just months after he came to power, he called for a scrapping of the lifetime council tenancy agreements and decided that only the neediest would be eligible for

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246 Camila Batmanghelidgh. “Caring costs- but so do riots” The Independent, August9,2011.,1
shorter term leases, such as five to ten years.\footnote{Owen Jones. \textit{Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class} (London: Verso, 2011), 210} However, if it was seen that the people had risen in status, they could be kicked out of their homes and forced to rent privately.\footnote{Ibid.} Cameron wished to take the benefits away from families to make them more self-sufficient by having to rent privately, yet does not realize that for many of these people, affordable housing is nearly non-existent.

The way it was set up, poorer people could easily be removed from nicer areas, and put in to, what are basically ghettos, where all the poorer people are sent.\footnote{Ibid.} They are pushed out of society’s sight. According to London Councils in 2011, a quarter of a million people are at risk of losing their estate homes or being forced to move elsewhere.\footnote{Ibid.} A senior London Council official believes that, “London is going to be a bit like Paris, with the poor living on the periphery. In many boroughs in inner London in three or four years there will be no poor people living in the private rented sector…it is like something from the nineteenth century.”\footnote{Ibid.} The poor people are not only being left out of society, and left behind politically, but now they are either being moved out of the wealthier people’s way, or hidden away in their very own ghettos.

Early on in British society the black immigrants were stereotyped as lazy and criminal, the residents of the estates of the contemporary period are stereotyped as well. “Chavs”, are the vile nickname given to working-class, young people thought of as, “council housed and violent.”\footnote{Ibid.} They are thought of as the kind of poor, lazy and troublesome working-class whites that live in the estates. The conservatives put them in
the middle of all conversations about the direction society is going and point them out to be, “feckless, delinquents”. The same stereotypes are in existence for black people that live in the estates that have historically been in existence, however, the idea of a black, “gangster” is also the cultural stereotype for black youths in estates, just as “chav” is for whites. These are the two greatest stereotypes which are basically the embodiment of the poor in Britain.

That everyone living in the estates fits this criteria is false, however, due to the “sheer concentration of Britain’s poorest living in social housing, estates easily become associated with ‘Chavs’” and gangs. Council houses say a lot about the people that live in them, even if they do not live in one that is slum-like. As soon as someone, from outside of the estate, hears the word estate, an image of something like a “Chav” or a “gangster”, will pop into their head. That ideal, the stereotypes of these people who live in a particular area, are in a way ingrained in British culture.

These stereotypes are completely untrue, not everyone in every estate is the same. Perhaps the one to truly blame for their spreading, are the estates themselves. One major issue that can be seen in the riots is that living in the estates and being kept out of society, in their own little world has given these people the idea that they can do what they like, “they can rule nowhere but their own back yards.” The estates keep the residents isolated, they are surrounded by people as poor as they are, and people from other classes rarely venture into estates. The residents begin to feel isolated.

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253 Ibid., 80
254 Ibid.
256 Ibid., 139
anti-social and they go against the societal norms of mainstream Britain, but so do their homes, the old, dilapidated council houses.

Those who rioted in the 2011 UK riots were, as has been stated, overwhelmingly, young and poor. In most cases, it can be seen that they lived in the poorest areas in the country. The aforementioned *The Guardian* newspaper’s website with the interactive map that they put up after the riots, showed where the rioters lived. The map, shown below, marked the wealthiest areas in light blue and the poorest in dark red; very few of the rioters lived in blue areas. In fact in the area around Manchester, there was only one rioter from a blue-ish area.²⁵⁷ This shows that housing along with deprivation were also causes for the 2011 riots. Perhaps, they were rioting against their circumstances, for they felt they had nothing to lose. If the impoverished people are not given a voice, or are continuously neglected riots will continue to happen and these angry, poor, youths, will continue to fight for their voice and for their rights to adequate housing, among other things.

Culture

In the days following the 2011 Riots, many academics, social commentators and others, found forums for their own personal theories on the violence that occurred. David Starkey, a well-respected, white historian, Dreda Say Mitchell, a black-British novelist, and Owen Jones, a white novelist and journalist, all found theirs on BBC’s News night program. The discussion was supposed to be on the social changes and issues that each believed caused the riots, and the first question was posed to David Starkey. He was asked if he “believed this [week] had been a cultural shift?” His answer was not simple, but rather complicated and quite bold. He said that the riots were not the shift, but the results of it. He believed that there had been a “profound cultural change”, in that, “a substantial section of the Chavs has become black. The whites have become black.” \(^{258}\)In essence, he was saying that black culture was to blame for the riots because it was violent and wholly different from mainstream white culture.

The other two commentators, Owen Jones and Dreda Say Mitchell, had a field day with his claims, both with very reasonable arguments against him. But it begs to question, does David Starkey have a point? He was quick to point out that it was not all of black culture, but a “violent, destructive, nihilistic gangster culture” that is truly the menace here. \(^{259}\) Black cultural had finally beaten repression and influenced white culture, but now because of this, it was being blamed for issues, far beyond its control.

\(^{258}\) “BBC Newnight”. Recorded 8/12/11.BBC.Web. \url{http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-14513517}.

\(^{259}\) Ibid.
In Britain, as well as in the United States, there is a “gangster culture” however, it is no longer just black youths participating in it, but whites as well. It has grown into a subculture that seems to lay in opposition of the mainstream. One newspaper, The Guardian, did interviews with youths across Britain and found that “more whites now see black street culture as their only credible influence in the UK.”

They also found that this “black street” influence has led to a new, hybrid language, “blinglish” or the Jamaican Patois.

Language is another thing that David Starkey brings up; it is another aspect of the “black gangster culture”. He dubbed the Jamaican Patois that youth around the nation chose to speak in, the official “gang language”, which he claimed, had “intruded in England.”

TRBI, a marketing agency that advises clients on how to sell to young people, found that an increasing number of young people talk with the patois, which is what they call “blinglish”, named so for its “marriage of English to black street culture’s love of ostentations displays of wealth, known as ‘bling’.”

However, all of these claims take for granted a couple of facts, what exactly is “black culture”, what is talking “black” and is all of this encompassed in hip hop culture?

One thing that the youth in 2011 did not take from Rastafarianism was the longing for Africa. Today’s youths no longer want to leave Britain, in fact, they claim a specific area of the country, or city or neighborhood as their own and they defend it, sometimes, with their lives. They perform ownership of this territory, through language, physical

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261 Ibid.


behavior, or emitting a sense of belonging. This performance could be what David Starkey was talking about; this could be the start of “gang culture.” Urban, poor youths live in this area that they share with a group of people, not their family, but another type of family, their “gang”. They protect it together and they live in it together.

However, “gang culture” is not an element of “black culture”. In Sky News’s report, *Britain’s Gangs: Younger and More Violent*, several gang members and “fringe gang members” were interviewed. The first thing one would notice about the boys interviewed in the report, besides their youth is, that through their hoods, they are clearly white males. One of the young boys interviewed about his gang in the report, a boy probably no older than fifteen, that one must, “stand by your mates and they stand by you.” Another boy, a “fringe gang member”, or a boy who was in danger of joining a gang, was asked if he would be out shooting at his rivals if he was not in some social program, to which he replied, “if they stay by my estate.” Clearly these groups come together as a type of family, who watch out for each other, but who also come from the same area and are sworn to protect it from “outsiders.”

David Starkey would say that these young boys have “become black”, in the sense that they “act black”, though this is a terribly flawed statement. Whether in agreement with him or not, one must recognize a cultural merging of black and white youths. They have found common ground and have become one group. Black culture is no longer excluded from mainstream society and it has become accepted by whites, which began in the 1980s through music. However, in the 1980s, whites did not

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264 Ibid., 275
266 Ibid.
necessarily accept blacks. That is very different from today, as white youths and black youths have come together and formed youth culture. Unlike the previous white-British generations, this generation of white-British youths, specifically those of the working-class have accepted black culture.

In the early 1980s, American hip-hop music became more readily available in Britain. It was popular with black youths and white-working class youths alike. In fact, working-class whites were more likely to listen to black music, especially hip-hop and rap, then music by any white artist because, black artists were in “a better position to provide and produce a positive and coherent expression of their oppression” then white counterparts. Due to the fact that hip-hop music came from the United States and was so well liked by working-class whites, there must have been something, a message perhaps, in the music that poor white youths could relate to African-Americans. There is not a lot of common history between the two groups, but one thing is for sure, they have both been oppressed by mainstream society and the government, both socially and economically.

Hip-hop enthusiasts do not believe that the music can only be understood in the context of African-Americans and their historical experience, in fact it can be fitted into the daily lives of working-class youths very easily; “hip hop carries a level of symbolic importance which goes far beyond a shared sense of affinity with the African American experience.”

So, at least in the 1980s, white youths absorbed American black culture

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through music because they felt they were going through the same struggles that African-Americans were in relation to governmental oppression.

In a more contemporary sense however, Britain has successfully grown their own talent, such as Giggs, Professor Green, Lethal Bizzle, Devlin and Wretch 32; two out of the five aforementioned rappers being white. One up-and-coming British artist, Sloth believes, "artists now are talking about issues that the young people can relate to. They have no time for US rappers and would much rather hear homegrown talent. The new wave of rap artists over here has finally realized that not only is it selling a sound but it is selling a lifestyle." So no longer is Britain reliant on America for its music. The issues facing today’s youth, can be more centralized, as they come from people who have lived where the youth live.

Britain has also come up with subgenres of hip-hop, the biggest of which being “Grime.” Grime music is defined as a, “genre of urban music which has been developing in London's underground since around 2002. With its combination of influences from UK Garage, drum 'n' bass, to hip-hop, it is the latest style to evolve from the UK garage scene.” Not only have they come up with their own genres, but many British musicians now feel they are “the voice for the streets.” Two decades ago, Chuck D claimed that rap music in the United States was “the black CNN”- a way to tell the stories of the lives

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270 Chantelle Fiddy. “Meet the rising stars of UK hip-hop.” *The Guardian*, February 9, 2011.,1


272 Lethal Bizzle “David Cameron is a Donut.” *The Guardian*, June *, 2006.,1
of ordinary people living in “the hood.” Juxtaposing that idea to fit the current state in Britain, “Grime and UK rap is the BBC News 24 of the British Urban Working Class.”

Some artists can claim the title of “voice of the streets” because of the fact that they rap about things that they know the youth are going through and that they have gone through and they bring these issues to light. These artists give a voice to those who would not necessarily have one. One artist in particular, Professor Green, in his track “Jungle”, discusses what life is like growing up in his hometown of Hackney. He starts the first verse, “Welcome to Hackney, a place where I think somebody's been playing Jumanji. A Manor where man are like animals, an' they'll yam on you like they yam on food. Cats with claws that'll stab a yout', act bad an' catch a slap or two. We don’t applaud success, all we clap are tools.”

Professor Green is describing his home as a “jungle”, a dangerous place where it is basically every person for themself. Hackney, where Green grew up, is a suburb of London widely known to be a dangerous place for anyone to live. He also talks about stabbings, which he has a lot of experience, as proven by the scar going along the side of his face and neck. Not all British artists discuss violence, many are about the poor state of society. In Skinny man’s tune, “Council Estate of Mind”, he discusses the hopelessness that comes from living in a poor, council estate, “full up of lost souls with no goals, who get left to rot.”

While today it is clear that black and white, working-class youths have bonded over music, this is not the first time that that has happened. In 1976, a small group of

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274 Ibid.
activists from the Socialist Worker’s Party, founded “Rock Against Racism”, a movement meant to unite blacks and whites, against racism, through music.\footnote{277}{Paul Gilroy, \textit{There Ain’t No Black In The Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation} (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991),102} This music took a stance against other artists with racist sympathies, such as Eric Clapton, who was an admirer of Enoch Powell.\footnote{278}{Ibid.} They used rock music because it was newer and it was potentially radical and wholly progressive.\footnote{279}{Ibid.,121}

The group, along with the punk music it coincided with, wanted radical, rebellious music to challenge people’s ideas and fears. However, it was not organized well enough to succeed in anything other than using music as an anti-racist platform. It did show that a youth movement could be built on “a hatred of racism, and a love of music.”\footnote{280}{Ibid., 122} Though it did not bring the groups together like hip-hop and other forms of music have done, it was a starting point, and showed that racism was not so ingrained in the youth. Though it would not be until the next generation that David Starkey would claim that the “whites [became] black.”\footnote{281}{“BBC Newnight”. Recorded 8/12/11.BBC.Web.http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-14513517.}

The greatest thing to take from this intertwining of black youth culture and working class white youth culture in Britain is that these two groups, who would be so opposed to one another, have found common ground, and now share a culture. It is not “black culture”, as David Starkey said, it is a youth culture. If youth culture is violent, it is not because it comes from black culture, which he uses synonymously with gang culture, it is because gangs are a youth issue, across Great Britain, with nothing to do with race.
Starkey also says that “Chavs” now “talk-black”, this is false as well. They talk the way the youth in Britain talk today, “Blinglish”, as *The Guardian* put it. This would be a more natural accent for children of immigrants, but a growing number of white youths use it as well. It has been shown that some white youths imitate the accent to look tougher. More than likely, poor black and poor white youths live in the same poor areas, thus, they probably have had similar experiences and share common mannerisms, including the way they talk, so they can all fit in with each other, making it a part of youth culture, not “black culture”.

The way some people talk seems unimportant in relation to the riots. But it was relevant to David Starkey’s point. However, what he was trying to say was that this language, which is false and non-indigenous to the region, was just another example of black culture taking over the country. Clearly, the issue is some people’s ideas of “black culture”, which are actually the ideas of “youth culture.” Black culture is not inherently violent. In some forms it can be defiant to the mainstream, but it is not violent. Youth culture is a product of the social environment. If the youth are rioting and being destructive, the causes of their behavior must be looked at, but it cannot be blamed on one race and the racist ideas about their culture that David Starkey was spewing.

The Brixton Riot of 1981 was a race riot. The African-Caribbean-British community was rioting against the oppression of the white mainstream. The Rastafarian movement helped many young black men feel defiant enough to step up to the police, who were doing their community wrong. Some white youths joined in because they also

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felt oppression. However, it was still a race riot, a riot of the black community against oppression, so though the two youth cultures were beginning to intertwine, they were not yet one.

2011 was a very different story. The fight was still against oppression, but the two groups became one; they were the youth. This riot was defending youth culture, all the youths of the urban poor who had been left behind and who were hopeless. It was the youth finally expressing itself, and being defiant against main-stream society, which has out casted them. On the BBC’s New night program, Owen Jones said it best, when a “tiny portion of people feel they’ve no future, they’ll take to the streets,” and take to the streets they did.283

Police

Defiance in the face of the oppressor was a big part of the riots. The greatest oppressor, who the people are usually at odds with, is the police. On August 6, 2011, forty-eight hours after the death of Mark Duggan and after his family had to learn about his death through the media, a small group of community members accompanied the Duggan family to the Tottenham police station to get some answers.284 The community was going to hold an hour-long silent protest and hopefully a senior official would talk to the family, as was usually protocol. That did not happen; they refused to see the family. The police were warned by various community leaders that if they did not see the family, there was going to be a community reaction- and they were right. Community leaders,


and the police, knew of the poor historical relations between the community and the
police, and they could foresee things going downhill if the police continued to disrespect
the family. The community leaders did not want the subsequent rioting to occur, but they
were not surprised and believed the police brought it upon themselves.285

Not talking to the Duggan family was unforgivable but, to add insult to injury,
they allowed the family to be misled into believing that Mark had died because he shot at
the police officers first.286 This was of course false, and even the Operation Trident
officer who shot, and killed Mark, came out and said that Mark did not shoot and them,
and “he was upset that the family was led to believe he did.”287 The Independent Police
Complaints Commission revealed that, though their first statements made no reference to
any type of “shoot out”, somewhere that message was lost in the “media frenzy.”288 They
also claimed that their representatives had been in constant contact with the family, since
the incident was first reported; a claim denied by the family, who say they were not
contacted until Sunday, the day after the rioting began.289

The Duggan family was not the first since the 1980s to have been disrespected by
the police. On April 22, 1993, Stephen Lawrence, another young black man, was
murdered by a group of white males, in an unprovoked attack.290 It was not until January
2012, 18 years after the murder, that two out of the original five suspects were finally

285 Ibid.
287 Ibid.
288 Ibid.
289 Ibid.
http://www.law.cf.ac.uk/tlru/Lawrence.pdf.
sentenced to life in prison. The convictions took so long because of the failure of the police investigators to put aside their racist beliefs before beginning the investigation. As Neville Lawrence, Stephen Lawrence’s father said, “When a policeman puts his uniform on, he should forget all his prejudices. If he cannot do that, then he should not be doing the job because that means that one part of the population is not protected from the likes of those who murdered Stephen.” In this case, it was he and his family who were not protected, from the police themselves.

After the initial investigation failed to prosecute anyone, Sir William Macpherson was asked by the home secretary to make an inquiry into the case. Particularly, he was to “identify the lessons to be learned from the investigation and prosecution of racially motivated crimes.” This became the Macpherson Report. Macpherson determined that it was “not purely incompetence, but institutionalized racism” within the police department and that had led to the mishandling of the Lawrence case. The inquiry found that the racism was caused by the lack of understanding between the police and the black community, culturally and through various other tensions between the two groups. It was also found that a lot of the racist beliefs held, not only by members of the police force, but of society too, were caused by “racist stereotyping of black people as potential crimes or troublemakers,” an ideal that has been perpetrated by anti-black governments and society for generations.

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293 Ibid.

294 Ibid.

295 Ibid.

296 Ibid.
As inquiries usually go, several recommendations were made, mainly a need for better communication which would hopefully lead to better relations between the black community and the police. It was also recommended that the force began training officers in how to deal with ethnic communities. This case gives reasons for why, historically, relations between the black community and police have been so poor. It is no surprise that relations are still bad, and show no signs of getting better, especially given the most recent policies that give police more power over the general citizenry.

The SUS laws and the “stop-and-searches” made their triumphant return in 2010. When the idea was first introduced, a lot of controversy arose about the way they were first drafted. If they were to remain the way they were, they would have been even more blatantly racist than they already were. Police officers could discriminate racially if the people associated with a particular act or were responsible for a particular incident were “associated with a particular ethnic identity.” Since blacks have been historically caricatured as criminals, this made it easier to stop them. When this became a controversial idea, Home Secretary, Theresa May scrapped that draft, and had it redrafted to state that officers “must take care not to discriminate unlawfully against anyone on the grounds of any of the protected characteristics set out in the 2010 Equality Act.” The 2010 Equality Act is a law banning unfair treatment based on certain characteristics in society, those characteristics include, besides race, disability, sex, age, sexual orientation and religious belief.

297 Ibid., 5
298 Alan Travis. "Theresa May drops plans for stop-and-search laws targeting ethnic minorities." The Guardian, November 18, 2010., 1
299 Ibid.
However, the stop and searches are still an ever increasingly controversial topic. It is widely acknowledged that ethnic minorities are more likely to be stopped than whites. In fact, in both England and Wales, black men are six times more likely to be stopped then whites, and Asians are about twice more likely to be stopped than whites. The Metropolitan Police Service claims that, “you should not be stopped just because of your age, race, ethnic background, nationality, faith, the language you speak or because you have committed a crime in the past.” However, there is nothing to stop this from happening. There is of course the IPCC, but they have been harshly criticized for being not independent enough from the police departments. The Metropolitan Police Service also offers a list of reasons for which one can be stop and searched, including, “if they think you have a weapon”, if “serious disorder” has been reported in the area, or “if they are looking for a suspect who fits your description.”

Mark Duggan was killed in an operation by Trident, a special police task force that responds to gun related activity occurring within London communities. It was actually believed that they stopped the cab that Duggan was in because it was reported he was carrying a gun. Trident focuses its operations mostly in the black community, and

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was set up by black activists to tackle black-on-black crime in the 1990s.\textsuperscript{307} Still, it is controversial because only a few of the officers are black and because it targets black crime. Many people feel it is now, “just another way in which the police can oppress young black men who are already disproportionately targeted for criminal behavior.”\textsuperscript{308}

The police force clearly targets the black community; it has been so throughout history. However, in recent years, they have become increasingly anti-youth as well. The Anti-Social Behavior Act of 2003 changed the way in which young people can be targeted by police. Dispersal orders, a component of the act, have been seen to disproportionately be used against youths. Evidence shows that these orders can “antagonize and alienate young people who recently feel unfairly stigmatized for being in public.”\textsuperscript{309} These orders, under the act, can be given to any group of two or more people that the police believe are likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to the public.\textsuperscript{310}

The act also gives the police the power to force youths under sixteen to return home after 9pm, and it changed the definition of “public assembly” from the Public Order Act of 1986, from twenty people constituting an assembly, to just two.\textsuperscript{311} So a group of youths can be “hanging out” together in public, as young people do and be forced by police to split up and return home, upon punishment of imprisonment.\textsuperscript{312} These laws are clearly demonizing to the youth.

\textsuperscript{308} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{311} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{312} Ibid.,3
It is clear that the act targets specifically youths, because many of the sanctions involve their parents, and curfews. The main criticism here is that the police have been given more power to “demonize children”, as Cathy Evans, of the Children’s Society states, “we are very concerned at the prospect of creating more ways, more reasons to punish children and to demonize children.”\(^\text{313}\) The government’s chief adviser on youth crime, Rod Morgan agrees, and warns that the act and its subsequent orders can feel demonizing because of the criminalization of “otherwise legal behavior.”\(^\text{314}\) The act was passed in 2003, and in 2011 the effects were certainly felt, as many youths surveyed in the days after the rioting felt picked on and harassed by the police for doing nothing at all wrong.\(^\text{315}\)

Many people are upset with the behavior of the police, whether it is how they treat ethnic minorities, youth, or anyone else. Besides minorities and other groups who are harassed by the police, white, middle-aged, people, who live outside of crime infested areas, are also losing faith in the police department.\(^\text{316}\) Incidents of police abuse happen so often that they are hardly ever put into the news anymore. But some incidents are hard to forget. During the student protests in late 2010 a handicapped twenty-one year old man, Jody McIntyre, was tipped by police out of his wheel chair and dragged across the street.\(^\text{317}\) The incident was caught on tape and outraged nearly everyone that saw it. It seems as though the police at times forget that they are supposed to be protecting people,
and until they can get themselves sorted out and start protecting people again, they will continue to be at odds with different communities around the country.

**Conclusion**

Clearly the 2011 riots were not caused by any one thing. More so, they were a reaction to the state of Britain as a society. Though a reaction by a small minority of people, it was a movement that spread throughout the country, and quite quickly. The riots cast a light on the country’s dense societal problems. However, it is obvious that at least one of the underlying causes of the riots was the harsh economic climate. The economy over the few years before the riot saw nearly every step of the social ladder struggle financially.

The fact that the youth unemployment rate was the highest it had been since 1992 was certainly a factor for why fifty-two percent of those in court for riot related charges were under the age of twenty-one. Evidence was also given to suggest that most of the rioters were living in underprivileged areas, and could be considered the urban poor. Putting all of this together, *The Guardian* newspaper seems to have had it right with their headline during the riots, calling the rioters “young, poor and unemployed.” However, this has not been so great a change from the Brixton Riot of 1981. The youth, specifically black youth, were the worst off in the recession of 1981, just as they were worst off in 2011.

The entire world is still reeling from the recession of 2008, and most nations have had to have some kind of economic scale-backs to conserve money. Great Britain is no exception; however their cuts were quite drastic and were very detrimental to the poor.
youth. The Austerity cuts, took away a lot of social programs that benefitted youths, specifically the earlier discussed EMA, which helped poor youths attend school. Just like in 1981 when black unemployment was tremendously high, there were no jobs available, especially not to blacks. It was the same in 2011 for the youth all over the country.

Poor, urban, working-class black and white youths came together in this riot, in a greater way than they did in the 1981 riot because they finally had solid common ground. Both groups were oppressed in 1981, and both groups are oppressed now, however, now it is even more so, for whites. In every category black oppression has continued, as blacks have always been targeted in a specific way. Working-class white youths have always been economically oppressed, yet never scapegoated like black youths have been; that is no longer the case. Now they too are oppressed, for different reasons and on a lesser scale, but blacks and whites now share a social position. Working-class whites have had a cultural change in their adoption of black cultural practice, an adoption that began in the 1980s. Black culture is so ingrained in some parts of British society that it is difficult to still question black nationality; now they are seen more as British.

Black culture, in the eyes of one like David Starkey, is “nihilistic” and “violent”, and that is what the youth are to him, white and black youth alike. This is not the case; poor black and white youths, share a social position, they are the under-class, poor. From this shared social position, they have created the new “youth culture”, in the same way that black immigrants before the first riot created “black culture.” Youth culture is a result of the conditions that these youths live under.
As black people found resistance and identity through culture in the 80s, youth today have done so as well. They act tough like “Chavs” and “gangsters”, giving in to the stereotypes put on them by society. They do this to protect themselves from the constant abuse and oppression forced on them by the police, and other institutions in their lives of severe poverty, that they will probably never escape. Their lives are shrouded in social deprivation, the same way the lives of their parents are, they have no prospects of jobs, education or wealth, and are thus hopeless, which is probably the worst condition they could possibly be in.

Housing has also not changed much from 1981, both working-class blacks and whites still live in social housing, estates. As with the Margaret Thatcher era, those who could not raise their social positions themselves were left to rot, the same could be said of 2011. The poor of England are left out of sight, out of mind, yet they are stereotyped by society and government figures, as poor and violent. Some say Chav stands for “Council Housed and Violent,” which is the stereotype of people who live in council estates. The estates are not well-kept and are in bad areas, with high concentrations of both crime and poverty. So not only are the youth here poor, but so is everyone around them, thus, increasing their hopelessness.

Once again, police mishandlings are a major contributing factor to the riots. From the murder of Mark Duggan and the Stephen Lawrence investigation to the reintroduction of the Sus laws, relations between the police and the urban poor community are very turbulent. Unlike in 1981 Brixton, where it was a large minority population with which poor police interactions sparked the riots, the 2011 riots were all over the country, many acts aimed at police. Rioters wanted to disrespect their authority because they feel that is
the way they treat citizens, disrespectfully. There was a great disconnect between the police and the black community in Brixton. Now all over the country, relations between the police and the black community have not healed, and the dissatisfaction with the police’s treatment has spread now to the poor and the youth.

Defining the riots is a difficult task, but it does not seem to have been a race riot, like it was in Brixton. The origin of the riot, however, was a race protest. In Tottenham they protested the murder of Mark Duggan, but beyond that first night, it seems to have become more broadly based. The riots spread because of the aforementioned unresolved issues and prejudices being done to the urban poor. The number of youths involved in the movement cannot be ignored. Nor can the fact that the youths felt, and continue to feel the brunt of all of these issues much worse than the rest of the population. This one of the many reasons the youth lashed out during those warm August nights. While a large percent of the urban poor of all ages participated in the riots, the sheer number of youths shows that it was, a riot of the youth and it is very telling of the state of affairs in Great Britain; the kids are not alright.
Chapter 5

Comparison of the Riots

The riots may have been just over thirty years apart, but they shared many similarities. They were caused by societal factors that show either continuity or change since 1981 and for the black community since 1948. In regards to the individual factors, such as the economy, housing, culture and policing, they have been shown and explained for each riot. This chapter will re-examine those factors and compare the riots to each other so that changes in Great Britain, or a lack of changes can more easily be seen.

Both the 1981 riot and the 2011 riots show that Great Britain was struggling to deal with social issues, such as race and class. The Brixton Riot seems to have been a race riot. Blacks in Brixton were being targeted by the SUS laws. They were feeling the brunt of the struggling economy and were the ones truly being oppressed in every facet of life. Working-class whites were always discriminated against, but the reasons for their treatment were not the same as the reasons for blacks.

Whites were being stereotyped and caricatured by society similar to the way blacks were because of Thatcher’s anti-working-class rhetoric. Thatcher used this rhetoric to explain away poverty in working-class areas by stating that the poor were not working hard enough. She believed that the only thing holding the poor back from wealth was there dislike of working. At this point it was clear that British society had failed to properly address questions of race and class. It seems that governmental neglect,
symbolized by poor housing conditions, a struggling economy and poor police-community relations, contributed to widespread social deprivation across the country. These conditions devastated the urban poor, blacks and whites. The 2011 UK Riots were poor, youth riots; this is not to say that racism had disappeared, because it clearly had not. While race was still a problem, the economic and class oppression shared by poor black and white youths had also become a problem. This riot was caused by both racial and class discrimination.

The riots themselves are very comparable, but in looking at their similarities, their difference becomes blatant. As previously stated, they both started after police operations that did not end well. Operation Swamp in 1981 was the last straw. When people living in Brixton saw the bleeding boy with the policeman, they exploded into a riot. In 2011, the shooting death of Mark Duggan, and the community protest that was ignored by police, and their treatment of the protesters, ignited the riot in Tottenham. Before the Brixton riot had even begun, the area was undergoing a very tense time, which is why the riot was stayed in Brixton. Yet, like the 2011 riots, rioting did spread, just not as quickly. The summer of 1981 held riots in many other large cities across the country, but it is all believed to have been started in Brixton. The 2011 riots spread immediately the next evening, and popped up randomly over the next few nights across the country, with a few skirmishes in Wales.

In terms of economics, Great Britain in 1981 was very similar to Great Britain in 2011. Both economies were coming back from recessions that had been felt around the world. The poor economic state in both cases led to high unemployment that hit particular groups hardest. In 1981, working-class blacks and whites were the most
unemployed, with black unemployment being the higher of the two. In breaking the data down further, it was the unemployment rate for black youths that was estimated to be at fifty-five percent.\(^{318}\) 2011 was basically the same situation, the poor blacks and whites struggled the most and youths truly felt the brunt of it. Youth unemployment at the time of the riots, August of 2011, was the highest it had been since 1992, which is when youth unemployment began being tracked.\(^{319}\) Between July and September of 2011, dates which coincide with the riots, the unemployment rate of people aged sixteen to twenty-four jumped to just under twenty-one percent.\(^{320}\)

Great Britain’s two most powerful political parties between 1981 and 2011, were the Conservative party and the Labour party. The differences between them had decreased during Tony Blair’s tenure as head of the Labour party. In an attempt to modernize, he changed the political stance of the party, becoming more center then left by moving away from clause four. To conserve government money the conservative governments of Margaret Thatcher in 1981, and David Cameron in 2011, made cuts in government and social funding. Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s, made many radical cuts of her own, but a lot of what she did, was nothing at all. She was advised by her Chancellor, Sir Geoffrey Howe, among others to allow areas with high concentrations of the urban poor to continue to decline.

Thatcher was not a supporter of the working-class, as she believed that people should be able to obtain wealth if they worked hard enough. If one did not have wealth,  

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\(^{320}\) Ibid.
then they were not working hard enough. This was another factor in both riots, both were in times of great economic decline, and thus social decline for the urban-poor and at neither time was there a government in place that was for social programs and helping the poor. Both were conservative governments, who historically have not supported such programs that perpetuate, as David Cameron has called it on many occasions, “something for nothing culture.”

David Cameron’s conservative government in 2010, had a debt that was so large that an austerity package had to be introduced. This package took away half a million jobs in the public sector, got rid of the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA), took away welfare and benefits to the poor, as well as raised prices on council estate homes, which the government has since stopped producing. The EMA alone was so important to working-class youths that after it was taken away there were forty-thousand fewer students enrolled in colleges in England, as of October 2011, then there were exactly a year before, when the program was cut. College, for some youths was a gateway to better educations, better pay and better lives; in taking it away, many youths have gained a profound sense of hopelessness.

Decades before Thatcher and Cameron, the government disqualified black people from getting jobs by using racist stereotypes that they perpetuated against them to stop them from successfully becoming members of British society. One of the reasons that blacks were so disproportionally unemployed was because the few jobs that were available went to white employees. Whites would seem more attractive then black

322 Jessica Shepherd. "College enrolment numbers fall for first time since 1999". October 12, 2011.
employees who were stereotyped by the 1953 government pamphlet, “The Employment of Coloured People in the UK”, to have an “inability to accept discipline, volatility of temperament, were easily provoked to violence and were quarrelsome.”

Similar stereotypical caricatures kept blacks from much of the decent housing that was available, however Britain, throughout history has been plagued by a housing shortage.

The housing shortage combined with government neglect, forced not only blacks, but also poor whites, into public housing, estates and slums. They forced the people into areas where any “urban regeneration” was non-existent. These became the estates of 2011 that were still deprived areas, yet with an even higher concentration of poor people and crime. This ghettoization is a continuation of a trend that began in the 1950s but continues still today. Now these urban poor, working-class, blacks and whites live in council houses or estates. It is said that the non-working classes of Britain have an “out of sight, out of mind” notion of the poor.

Though they are forced to live in the same poor areas, working-class blacks and whites have not always co-existed easily. Racist attacks by white citizens on black citizens have caused race riots, like the Notting Hill Riot of 1958. Britain’s historical housing shortage continued to make getting affordable public housing very difficult for blacks and whites, as there was not enough housing for everyone. During her reign, Margaret Thatcher’s government scaled back the number of public homes built to save money. This caused a rift between blacks and whites; some whites believed, as Enoch

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Powell and others did, that black people were not British, and were aliens in England, so they should not be in competition with them for housing.

Not only were poor blacks and whites in competition for housing, but most of their relationship was built on competition. Both groups were poor and socially outcasted and so they competed to be at the top of the working-class. But again, many thought that black people did not belong there and should not be in competition with them. This competition and the issues stemming from it have calmed, as have the questions of black nationality. They are all working-class, urban poor and they have grown up in the same areas, and schools. The youth are more comfortable with each other than ever before. They now share their social position, and the discrimination that comes with it.

Juxtaposing race relations in 1981 with 2011, relations between poor blacks and poor whites have improved. They have bonded over the fact that they are both ignored by society because they share a social position. Several generations have passed since the initial immigrants arrived, yet, blacks are still ghettoized and the youth are stereotyped as poor “gangsters” and “muggers” by society. Working-class whites had always been poor, but the rhetoric that came with the Thatcher era has led them to be stereotyped as well. They are not only stereotyped by the rest of society, but there have been several examples of government officials labeling them as “Chavs” as well.

This new found camaraderie between the “Chavs” and the “gangsters” has really come about through culture. Before the Brixton riot black culture, across classes and to the government, was something unwanted, and foreign. It was clearly indicated, through
the “Keep Britain White Movement,” that black culture was not to be accepted. Immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean, upon meeting the racism of Great Britain, had to find their own “black identity.” This was accomplished in many ways, the Notting Hill Carnival being one of the most prominent. It was also in the 1980s that black culture began to become more main-stream through music, and was thus becoming accepted by whites. Many white youths in the 1980s accepted black culture, and enjoyed black music. They would not, however, accept black people. As black culture became ingrained in British popular culture by 2011, working-class whites, especially youths, were acclimated to black culture and black people. This acceptance has shown a cultural change for whites.

Historian David Starkey’s comments about what he saw as “black culture,” something dangerous and violent, was actually a perpetuation of the “Keep Britain White Movement.” The movement’s foundation was that black was dangerous, and improper which is what David was saying when he argued that this culture was the cause of the riots. His comment that the “whites have become black” was very dangerous. What he labeled as black culture is not black culture, but urban, youth culture. He was looking at the angry, rough behavior attributed to gangs. This is not black culture, but the culture that these poor, urban youths have created from their shared social position, a result of the poor conditions in which they live. Like the emergence of a strong, defiant black culture in 1981, which was a way to resist the oppression they felt every day, the youths have created their own culture, equally as defiant and also as a means of resisting the conditions they live in.
One of the greatest sources of oppression for the rioters was the police. Both riots were sparked by grave mistakes made by the police. In 1981, both Operation Swamp and the subsequent incident Officer Steve Margiotta had with a young, stab victim started the riots. In 2011 it was the shooting death of Mark Duggan and the subsequent treatment of his family that caused the rioting. Those events sparked the riots, but police and citizen relations, particularly the black and poor communities, have historically never been excellent. The police, as agents of the government, were the ones who carried out the government’s racist policies before and after the Brixton Riot. Throughout British history, there have been examples of the police abusing their authority, taking advantage of situations, and attacking black people, poor white people, and youths. Of all the other factors of the riots, the police issue is the one that manifests itself physically. If people want to fight against their oppressors then the police, who did their fair share of oppressing, are the ones they will take their anger out on.

Since the Brixton Riot, relations between the black community and the police have not fully healed. The investigational mishandlings of the Stephen Lawrence case and the fact that it was because of police mistakes that it took eighteen years to convict two out of the five original suspects of murder, has angered many throughout the world. It is only probable that the handling of the Mark Duggan shooting, and the disrespect of his family and community in the days following, will go down as low-points in history as well. It has been shown that there is a great disconnect between the police and the people; in 1981 Brixton it was mainly black youths, but in 2011 it was the working-class community, and even more specifically poor black and white youths.
The largest issue many, even those who did not join in the riots, have with the police is the disrespect they show for the people and their communities. Whether it is racial abuse and the beginning of the SUS laws in 1981, or the harassment of poor, youths and the reemergence of the SUS laws as it was in 2011, it is the general disrespect shown to the citizenry. Not only is it the police actions but it is also the insensitive laws and policies passed that it is their job to enforce, which are causes of these riots. They are the agents of the government, and as such, they enforce the unfair and discriminatory laws that the government produces.

Though black youths, and white youths shared that social position, it was not completely the same. They had very different historical relationships to the social factors. Economically they were both oppressed, but for blacks it was always worst. The same in regards to policing; the youth were more often targeted, but it was specifically non-white youths that truly had it worst. Even though they were both oppressed and did share a social position, their oppression was for different reasons, as blacks have been oppressed, historically, in every facet of life.

In the thirty years between 1981 and 2011 there have been a few other riots. These other riots were not as large as these two, but the fact that there was still rioting shows that Britain has not healed the issues that go back all the way to the forties. It is very likely that riots like this will happen again and again until these issues that have plagued Britain throughout history are finally resolved. On that fateful night of the BBC’s Newsnight program, David Starkey may have taken most of the spotlight, but social commentator Owen Jones made a very good point. He stated that, “when you have just a tiny proportion of people who feel they have no future,” he continued, “they will take to
the streets…unless we solve that, this will happen again, and again.”324 Jones’ declaration is tested and true and should be shared by all.

**Epilogue**

As the world looked on during those few days in August 2011, young people, black and white, took to the streets, burned down buildings, looted shops, fought the police and generally caused trouble. Before this project, I watched coverage of the riots, not understanding what was going on, what those hooded young people on my television screen were so upset about. Now, after spending the last few months working on this project, delving deep into the, at times ugly, that is the history of race, class and nationality in England, I understand the continuity or, in some cases, the changes over time that led to this riot and the 1981 Brixton Riot as well. For others who have not studied the causes, it will not be so easy to understand. Many believed then and believe now still that the riots were cases of materialism and mindless violence led by gangs of money-grubbing youths with no respect for their community or their country.

Though a continuous work in progress, race relations since the 1940s in Great Britain have not fully healed. The damage done in regards to the recent history of relations between the black community and the police has not allowed for any healing to begin. Poverty and unemployment within the black community are still disproportionately high which affects housing conditions. While the poor no longer live in slums, housing still needs to be improved. Black culture has continued to become more main-stream

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since the 1980s and is more ingrained in British popular culture than ever before. Poor whites though always discriminated against, began to suffer more in the 1980s with the anti-working class rhetoric perpetuated by Thatcher, which labeled them as lazy and stated that they would rather accept handouts then work for wealth. Thatcher also took no action to help ease poverty, so her negligence hurt the urban poor blacks and whites, who now share not only stereotypes but also social deprivation.

While clearly both blacks and whites have continued to be economically and socially neglected by the government and society, life in Great Britain is not all horrible, as there have been some improvements. Though whites began accepting black culture in the 1980s, just not the black people themselves, they accept them more now which has begun to heal their relationship. They now co-exist better than they did, as they share a relationship through class. Questions of black nationality are not as prominent as they once were for neither blacks nor working-class whites. Both of these riots occurred at times when tensions were high and certain events brought these tensions to their boiling point. It shows that there has been continuity in neglect, which led to the tension. Yet, change came in the ceasing of racial disputes between whites and blacks.

The opinions of the people who do not understand the causes of the riots can be seen in the days following the violence, when hundreds of youths began being arrested, and denied bail for their crimes, and how the people cheered their government when pictures of youths, who may have been involved in the riots, and their families being forcibly evicted from their homes became front page news. There have been reports that now black people are even more susceptible to racial profiling because of the SUS laws
then they were last year.\cite{townsend2012} When the riots had finally stopped, David Cameron stated that he did not believe an inquiry was necessary; he has since changed his tune, though, as previously stated, it was only at the pushing of the opposition Labour party that he finally gave in.\cite{mcKinstry2011}

The inquiry committee has yet to report, but hopefully it will give the people of England a look into their own tragic, national history. Instead of trying to punish the rioters more harshly, maybe they will try to remedy the issues. The rioters should be punished. Without a doubt, they caused millions of dollars in damage and a fear that will linger in the minds of those affected for the rest of their lives. However, evicting council house tenants and their families only creates more problems; a solution needs to be found, a solution that will not ostracize the poor even more. Yet, it is quite worrisome that headlines for January 2012 read that some government officials blame old labour laws for not allowing parents to “smack their children” and also blame parents not “smacking” their children as a causes for the riots, because it shows a lack of discipline.\cite{theGuardian2012} This idea is worrisome because, just as before, it shows that the blame is being put on the youth and their families and engaging in questions of work-ethic and discipline rather than looking to the social factors, as has been done here.

The summer of 2012 is going to be important for England. It will be nearly a year since the imagery of riots and burning buildings in London and other parts of the country flashed across the television and computer screens of people around the world, tarnishing

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\begin{itemize}
\item \cite{mcKinstry2011} Leo McKinstry. “Spare us a useless and costly inquiry into these riots.” \textit{The Express}, 1 edition, sec. Editorial, August 15, 2011.,1
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the already questionable image of the country. This summer the world will be drawn to London once more. The 2012 Olympics will be an important moment for Great Britain. It will allow them, or perhaps deny them, the opportunity to repair their image. It all depends on if the problems that have plagued the country for nearly a century can be remedied. If not, it is a well-regarded fact that the warmth of the summer months is when emotions erupt and riots begin.

Annotated Bibliography

A. Primary Sources

ABC News

This is an American news corporation. It was useful in giving an easy to read and understandable summary of the riots, so someone in the United States could understand the riots and what was going on without doing a lot of research. It was interesting getting an American view on the riots and they did an interesting piece on Mark Duggan. This source was primarily used for the 2011 riots.

Associated Foreign Press

This is an international news agency. They focus on emerging world issues, like the global recession and the subsequent economic blunders. In regards to Great Britain they have done several articles on the 2010 austerity cuts and how damaging they would be to the country’s future. The articles are somewhat biased, but no distractingly so. It was useful in giving a detailed analysis of the cuts, how much would be cut, and where it would be cut from. This source was primarily used in regards to economics.

BBC News

This is a news agency that discusses world events. They claim to be independent, yet they have been criticized by both the left and the right for being too biased. They were useful in that they had archived articles available to be read and thus, many of their articles on the 1981 Brixton Riot were available. It was also helpful in gaining immediate reactions, as well as political reactions to both riots.

Bloomberg

This is an American financial news corporation. In regards to the UK riots, they did studies on the economic causes. They saw issues of unemployment and recession as the largest factors, but also found that British youth would bear the brunt of the country’s poor economic state. This source, while primarily used for the 2011 riots, was very useful in a more in-depth explanation of the financial crisis facing not only Great Britain, but the rest of the world as well.

The Daily Express

This is one of the UK’s larger newspapers, and it is conservative. It was used primarily to gain reactions to the riots. The journalists tended to condemn the rioters of 2011 as criminals. They also criticized labour’s desire for an inquiry into the riots. It was useful in gaining immediate reactions from a conservative perspective. This source was used for information on the 2011 riots.

The Daily Mail
This is one of the UK’s larger newspapers, and it is very conservative. It has articles on not only government and political affairs, but it is also known for its entertainment news section as well. The paper is traditionally very conservative, and many of the pieces used were clearly biased, yet they were still useful in helping to uncover different sides to stories and arguments. This source was used primarily for the 2011 riots and the years leading up to them.

*The Daily Telegraph*

This is one of the UK’s larger newspapers, and is also quite conservative. During the riots the newspaper’s website had a blog dedicated to minute-by-minute coverage of the riots. This was very useful in helping to find how the riots spread and how individual riots started. It was also useful because it allowed journalists and other citizens from around the country to tweet their reactions to the events around them and what was actually happening on the streets during the riots. This source was primarily used for the 2011 riots as they were happening, yet also political reactions and their aftermath.

*The Evening Standard*

This is a London based newspaper. As it is one of the UK’s smaller papers, it is more based on local news, yet does discuss what is happening all over Britain and the rest of the world. It was useful to help get immediate reactions to what was going on, particularly in London during and after the 2011 riots, and in some cases even years before. It was primarily used for the 2011 riots.

*Foreign Policy Magazine*

This is an American bi-monthly magazine. The magazine covers issues of state around the world and has had many politicians, prize winning journalists and others as contributors. The magazine took more of a social stance on the riots, and questions the social factors at the root of the problem. They also believed that the 2011 Riots, was a youth riot. This source was used primarily for the 2011 riots.

*The Guardian*

This is one of the UK’s larger newspapers and it is also one of the more liberal sources. On the newspaper’s website, they had minute-by-minute coverage of the riots, with people sending twitter messages from various riot locations, some before the riots had even begun in that area, warning that one could sense trouble was beginning; people also sent in messages with what was going on and their reactions. They kept in close contact with what was going on politically, as well. As they are one of the more liberal papers, they, along with the London School of Economics did a long, multifaceted study on the riots; they went into various communities that had been effected and talked to the youth to try to figure out what happened, and why. They believed that it was caused by social factors and that the rioters were mostly young, and poor. This source was used primarily for the 2011 riots and the months afterwards.

This is the Anti-Social Behavior Bill, as introduced by Parliament in March 2003. The main focus of the bill is to end low-level, nuisance crime, including crimes of youths. Looking at a copy of the actual bill is useful in helping to understand the bill and what makes it so controversial. This is used primarily for the 2011 riots.

The Huffington Post- United Kingdom

This is a liberal news outlet that started out in the United States, but now there is a Huffington Post on-line source in most countries. The British edition was useful in getting the opinions of British citizens in regards to the political world, as well as, immediate reaction to the riots. Though it is a liberal outlet, many criticized the riots, so it was also useful in getting differing views from people of the same party affiliation, and those that are more conservative. This source was used primarily for the 2011 riots.

The Independent

This is a London based newspaper. As its name says, it is independent in the sense that there is no political affiliation; however, it does tend to go left-of-center. As it is a London paper, most of what it was helpful with were smaller incidents in relation to the police and people of London. Though, there were useful articles about government affairs as well. This source was primarily used for the 2011 riots and after.

Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR)

This is one of the UK`s leading progressive think tanks, and as such, is liberal. Throughout the 2011 riots they released several press releases, and editorials on what should be done with the rioters and the issues of youth unemployment. As they are a liberal think tank, their releases were slightly biased, but not overwhelmingly so. They were useful in getting a more thoughtful and in-depth idea of the social causes of the riots, as well as what consequences the rioters should face. This source was primarily used for the 201 UK riots.

Metrolyrics.com

This is a website containing accurate lyrics for thousands of songs. The site was used to find lyrics for songs that showed the effect of hip-hop music on the youth and the emerging youth culture. Many of the songs gave insight into the mind of struggling youth, living in poverty and social deprivation. They gave examples of what youth look forward to, but also of the crime and dangerous situations that they are put in every day. The lyrics were used primarily to show the youth culture that was in place during the 2011 riots.
The New York Times

This is a left of center, American newspaper. It was useful in getting immediate, non-English coverage and views on the riots and other political issues in Great Britain. It could be argued that, since the paper is more liberal than not, the journalists could give information a liberal bias, however, if that was the case the bias was not too distracting, or disruptive of the facts. This source was used primarily for the 2011 riots.

View From the Right

This is a conservative webpage. The authors of articles on this page are far-right social commentators. Many of the articles are laced with racial and class bias, as well as anti-leftist bias. This page was useful in getting a conservative perspective on race and racism in Great Britain, however, it was a racially biased article. It was used more for factual information then for the argument it contained because of the aforementioned bias.

B. Secondary Sources


Abercrombie is a Professor of Sociology at Lancaster University in England, thus he is clearly an authority of his subject in this work. It is meant to be used as a textbook for sociology, as it looks at actual British society, rather than debating within the field of sociology. It also reviews recent sociological works and their relevance to the previous ideas within the field of sociology. The work is seemingly un-biased, as the author uses evidence from society. It is useful in getting a feel for modern British society and culture.


This work is mean to accompany the aforementioned work, as it follows the same ideas, but goes more in depth into the particular studies. It is a compilation of the most recent and important sociological studies to help one to understand trends in British society from several different angles. It is helpful in explaining, in more recent terms, what is happening in British society.


Armstein is a professor of British history. He gives a detailed history of Great Britain from 1830- the present; the work is a survey of the nation’s comprehensive history. It is useful in that it was a brief study of the history and it helped to show what happened in the past, compared to now and what has changed.


Wideshut.co.uk is an alternative news agency. They are politically independent and seek the non-biased “truth”, believing that all other news agencies are too politically based, do
not give facts, but what the politicians pay them to say. This agency seeks to do the opposite, especially in regards to the 2011 riots, who they blame big banking and heavy spending government officials for, as they have forced the citizens into extreme poverty. This documentary is extremely biased, and anti-government, however, if one is able to look past that, it does give a lot of factual evidence, great interviews with people on the streets during the riots and great imagery of the rioters.


This is a documentary from 2008 made by the BBC. It goes through the Brixton riots, as they happened. It contains great interviews from 1981 and 2008 of people who were there, what they experienced and why they believed the incident occurred. They get the point of view of the media, police and people from the community. It is very informative, and it is not biased.


BBC’s Newnight is a nightly, investigative news program. This particular episode is during a night in the middle of the riots, and the guests are social commentator Owen Jones, author Dreda Say Mitchell, and historian David Starkey. They discuss the causes of the riots, and David Starkey makes his infamous comments about “black culture” being the culprit. It was useful because it gave a great example of confusing “black culture” with what is ultimately gang-culture, and youth culture. This piece was very useful for the project especially in regards to culture during the 2011 riots.


The BBC is a British news agency that carries stories on various global topics. This posting on their webpage in particular is a summary of the history of Rastafarianism. It states that it began in a specific culture in Jamaica, and eventually it immigrates to Great Britain. The piece is unbiased, and is helpful in explaining the movements of Rastafarianism.


John Benyon was a Professor from the University of Leicester. This is an essay from his anthology on the results of the Scarman Report. In the essay, Benyon discusses Scarman’s findings in regards to the black community and its relationship with the police, as well as police malpractice.

John Benyon was a Professor from the University of Leicester. He started the Scarman Centre for the study of public disorder. This work contains essays from various British scholars, and an epilogue from Lord Scarman himself, on the before and after effects of the riots and Scarman`s report. While all contributors have opinions, the work is not overwhelmingly biased. It was very helpful in looking at the causes and effects of the Brixton riot in relation to police and community relations, and race politics.


This is another essay by John Benyon in his anthology. He reports on the social findings of the Scarman Report, regarding the black community. It states his finding that social deprivation was the greatest cause of the unrest, as well as, Margaret Thatcher`s disagreement with these findings.


Erik Bleich is a professor of Political Science at Middlebury University. The work looks at race politics in Europe through a case study on Britain and France. It is helpful in that it shows how race has been a factor in policy making in Europe, most importantly Britain, and compares it to other places in Europe.


This is a short documentary by SkyNews about British gangs and youth, gang culture. The film argues that the gangs are getting younger, as the youth lose any hope of bettering their positions in life. It contains interviews with real young ganger members about why they have joined, and for some how they got out or even stayed out of gang life. It was helpful in showing an example of why youths join gangs.


This was a chapter of the work *Black British Culture and Society.* The chapter discusses racist policies regarding immigration that were passed by the conservative government throughout the 1950s and so on. The piece may have a slight bias against the conservatives; however, they provide evidence for all they argue. The work was useful in setting up ideas of how racism has been perpetuated from the government since immigration began.

This work is a study in the field of cultural studies. The centre looks at the marginalization of race and racism in Britain. They look through the views of black immigrants to Britain, and the Afro-Caribbean, and Indian communities. It is helpful in looking at black culture as it was during the Brixton riot.


Hip-hop journalist Jeff Chang writes a history of the hip-hop musical movement. The work is helpful in looking at how hip-hop transformed cultures, and moved around the world, especially where the argument that hip-hop culture is important for working-class British youths. It was used primarily in discussing the 2011 riots in regards to culture.


Richard Critchfield is an American writer, mostly of essays on various topics. In this work, he looks at Contemporary Britain, in the early 1990s. He does his work through surveying British citizens, as well as looking at the history of the country. This work is helpful in looking at what Great Britain was like coming after the somewhat politically tumultuous 1980s, and why things and opinions are the way they are.


Carole Boyce Davies is a professor of African-New World studies and English. In this work she takes a look at the political life of Claudia Jones, an Afro-Caribbean, radical, activist in London. This work is helpful not only in looking at Mrs. Jones’ experiences and activism in the afro-Caribbean community, but because she was one of the greatest promoters of Carnival.


This work is in a chapter of the *Black British Culture and Society* work. It discusses the emergence of Rastafarianism as an alternative to mainstream white culture, for young black youths. It helps to identify the identity crisis many young blacks went through before the Brixton riot, and how the defiance that came from their culture may have helped them to riot.


Alison Donnell is a professor of English at Reading University. In this work she seeks to track black British culture from 1970-2001. It documents achievements, challenges and changes in, what the author calls, “the second generation of black Britons.” It is helpful in showing changes in the black community in this particular point in time.

Economics Help is a website run by economists meant to help ease the understanding of economics. This particular article tracks and discusses the UK’s recession of 1981. Understanding the recession and its effects is helpful in finding causes for the 1981 riot.


This is Britain’s Home Offices main website. The website contains many of the bills, acts and laws it produces to help one to better understand them. This particular page summarizes the Equality Act of 2010, what it meant and what it changed. This information is useful because the law should have stopped some forms of racism or discrimination. It is used particularly in discussing the 2011 riots.


This is a chapter by academic Paul Gilroy. In it he argues that racism is ingrained in policing because, the idea that black people are more likely to partake in criminality has been perpetuated for decades. He uses statements from police officials, as well as the arguments of other historians to make his case. This work is very useful in helping to understand the relationship between the government, the police and the black community.


Academic Paul Gilroy’s work is an analysis of cultural and race politics within Britain. He mainly discusses the struggle that blacks find themselves having in terms of race, class and nationality. This is useful in that it helped in putting into context, the black British experience; it put the people at odds with themselves, and created issues within the black community and the rest of white British society.


George Greaves was the Principal Community Relations Officer in Lambeth, a part of Brixton where much of the rioting took place. In the essay he describes what happened in the days prior to riots, as well as what happened during. He describes the SUS laws and how they were used against many people in the Brixton community.

This page discusses Grime music. It explains what makes Grime its own genre of music, separate from other forms of hip-hop and gives the history of the genre. There are many quotes by early Grime musicians and it tracks the movement to a fairly recent time. This source is useful in describing a small, yet influential part of popular culture for youths during and before the 2011 riots.


Cecil Gutzmore is a black political activist, researcher and scholarly writer. In this work he discusses Carnival, its historical presence and what it has really meant to black British culture. This work is not biased, as he gives evidence for his argument. The work is useful in helping to understand the importance of Carnival in black culture and even more so, the Brixton Riot.


Stuart Hall is a sociological theorist who created this work in union with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. It looks at how youths in Britain have created subcultures to deal with the effects of a changing society, starting with WWI. It is useful in helping one discover how “youth-culture” was created, how it can change, why and how frequently.


Lynsey Hanley is a writer and has contributed to several of the UK’s top newspapers. This work is a personal history, mixed with the history of the notorious British housing estates. Hanley, who grew up in various estates, discusses how they affect the people living in them. She mixes her personal experiences with how the estates came to be and a history of British housing and the housing shortage. This work is helpful in that it discusses the bad effects of living in an impoverished area on the youth, while also explaining what, historically speaking, caused it.


Dick Hebdigde is a media theorist. This work seeks to define youth subcultures and show their changes during different times in society. He also seeks to explain the intersections of black youths and white youths in “style”. This work is helpful in the discussion of youth culture, and black culture becoming, somehow, intertwined.


Roger Hewitt is a psychologist. This work is a physiological study which looks at how inter-racial friendships in Britain, impact the youths. Due to the newly formed black population in Britain, the author believes that they affect each other greatly, as one group attempts to mimic the way the other acts. This in helpful in showing how black youths
and white youths have created a “youth culture” with traits from both white and black communities.


Barbara Hudson is a criminology writer. This work is a reader in criminal justice and socio-legal studies. It looks at the effects race has on crime and justice in Great Britain. It is helpful in looking at legal, institutionalized racism within Great Britain, whether it is the police or the courts.


Winston James is a professor of History, specializing in black, Caribbean and Africa history. This anthology takes a look at post-war Great Britain, and the increase in immigration from the Caribbean colonies. The authors focus on the experiences of the black immigrants. This book is helpful in looking at the experiences, whether they faced racism and at what stages of immigration.


Owen Jones, a young, left-leaning social commentator wrote this work that basically depicts, what he calls, the “demonization” of “chavs” or white-working class people, particularly youths. He begins the work in the mid-1980s, the Thatcher-era and brings it to 2011, in the David Cameron era. He shows examples of institutionalized hatred towards these lower-class people, as well as how they are calculatingly left out of society. This book is very useful in that, it shows the intersection of blacks and poor whites in the abuse they receive from society.


Bakari Kitwana is a writer on culture and hip-hop. This work attempts to use hip-hop music to show a cultural shift in the United States. It looks at, what is considered black music, and its popularity with whites, regardless of class, and uses its findings to challenge the ideas of racial identity in the United States. This work is helpful in because it shows the questioning of racial identity for the new generation; however, it cannot necessarily be used in the case of Britain, because the factors are different.


Lord Scarman was the judge put in charge of the inquiry into the Brixton Riots of 1981. In this particular piece he is reflecting on his findings. He maintained that there was no institutionalized racism within the police force, but he did recognize the need for racial sensitivity. He believed many of his recommendations were put into work, however, not all. This piece was helpful in getting Scarman’s analysis of his own report.
Casper Melville is a journalist. This article is a short summary of the history of Carnival and the effects it has had on Black British culture. It is just a summary, so it is really not biased at all. It is very useful in helping to give information of Carnival, which so greatly affected the Brixton Riot of 1981.


This is the official web page of the Metropolitan Police Force, the largest force in all of the United Kingdom. This is a detailed summary of the stop and search laws, what happens if someone is stop and searched and one` s rights. This is useful in helping to understand the role of the officer stopping, and why they are stopping the person, but also what one ` s options are when they are stopped. Knowing these laws is very important, especially on an issue as divisive as the stop and search laws.


This is the official web page of the Metropolitan Police Force. It gives a detailed summary of what the special Trident Force is supposed to do, what they were created for and how they help the community. This is very useful, as Mark Duggan was killed in a Trident operation.


This is a short summary, by the Cardiff Law School, of the Stephen Lawrence murder and subsequent inquiry. The knowledge contained here is very useful, as this is an easy to understand version of the entire inquiry. It does not give an argument, just a summary, thus it is not biased. The information is useful in helping to understand the case.


Nomis is a service provided by the British Office of National Statistics. This particular report is the labour statistics for the London borough of Hackney. Hackney has some of the worst statistics in the country, and one of the highest unemployment rates in London. This is valuable information because when reading interviews with people who live in Hackney, talking about how they do not know anyone with a job or an education, having a statistical background is helpful in understanding what the people are going through.

Kwesi Owusu is a black political scholar. This work is a compilation of scholarly writings and essays on cultural studies, particularly black British culture. It is an entry into the newer field of, specifically, black British cultural studies. It takes a look at how black-British people have transformed, and their experiences have changed throughout history. It is useful in helping to understand the experiences black-brits had to go through from immigration, to today.


This is another article from the webpage, Economics Help. It discusses the rate of unemployment and unemployment trends in Great Britain. It also gives insight into why the unemployment rate in the 1980s was so high, putting some of the blame on conservative politics. This is useful in regards to the 1981 Brixton Riot.


Caryl Phillips is a black-British scholar. In this work he seeks to show the difficulty of being a non-white citizen of Great Britain. He discusses his own personal experience of growing up black in Britain, but also uses examples of others from Britain and the United States. This work is helpful in getting a firsthand experience of a black British person.


This second work by Caryl Phillips is a fictional novel. It is about a black-British man, and a white- British woman, who fall in love. It discusses their secret life together, and perhaps the taboo of interracial love. It is helpful, as it is set in contemporary times, and shows that though racial relations are better than they were, some things are still off limits.


This work by Caryl Phillips is a fictional novel, however, it is mixed with historical fact. This fact comes out in his use of statistics, and the experiences that some black-British people would, and sometimes did have. While it is a scholarly work, he speaks clearly to the reader. This work is helpful in determining the experiences and lives of foreigners in Great Britain.


James Procter is a professor of English at the University of Birmingham. This work is a collection of writings, essays, songs, poems, etc., about black British culture in Britain between 1948- the beginning of immigration, to a more contemporary 1998. It is helpful in that it contains primary sources with the experiences of black immigrants, and black Brits.

Mark K. Smith is a contributor to the Encyclopedia of Informal Education. In this article he seeks to explain the riots by discussing issues in the youth community, mainly social issues. He discusses unemployment and lack of places for youths to go and things for them to do, as reasons for getting in gangs, and into trouble. This work is useful in the discussion of the 2011 riots, as it describes possibly what drove some youth to get involved in the riots.


Zadie Smith is a scholar and novelist. This particular work is a novel. It is about people living in a multi-racial, contemporary community in working-class Great Britain. It is helpful in showing what people, lower-class, living in estates, of all races live like, act like, and how they live together.


Stan Taylor was a Professor at the University of Warwick. This is another essay in the Benyon anthology. He describes the social findings of the Scarman Report, the explanations and governmental reactions to the findings.


Richard Webster is a scholarly essay writer, but also a critic of other works. In this article he critiqued three works regarding police racism. He goes into detail on all three, and though they are not available in the United States, one can really get a feel for what they are about from his descriptions.


Simon Wheatley is a journalist with first-hand experience in the world of the underground grime movement. This work is about the underground music movement. It discusses the creation of Britain’s “Grime” music, and its origins in the poorest communities. Also discussed, are the ramifications of poverty on these communities and the people that live in them. It is helpful in that it discusses a particular part of black, and poor, youth culture. It also juxtaposes black culture and hip-hop culture, whether it is “gangster culture”, or not.