

Race, Englishness and the Media:
Depictions of Urban Rioting in England, 1980-81

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Abstract

Race, Englishness and the Media is an examination of racialised depictions of the urban riots which broke out in England's major cities in the early 1980s. The analysis focuses on two major English newspapers, the *Times* and the *Guardian*, whose reporting of the disturbances both informed and drew from white, middle-class, English ideals. The media coverage of these racially charged riots demonstrates a continued connection in English society to a set of white, middle-class ideals which permeated all aspects of English society and kept immigrant groups on the outside of mainstream English culture through generations.

The riots which erupted in English urban centres like Brixton, London, St. Paul's, Bristol and Toxteth, Liverpool, were the result of decades of social and economic isolation of minority communities. Social isolation of ethnic minority communities led to the creation of countercultures which were often at odds with more traditional English mentalities, social structures and institutions. Economic isolation contributed heavily to increases in criminality among minority populations and inevitably clashes with the police. English society continued to keep ethnic minority communities on the fringes of society, particularly notable in media reporting where clashes between West Indian and South Asian communities were depicted as alien, even when most of their populations were born and raised in England. An analysis of the media reporting of the riots of 1980-81, clearly shows a reliance on and reproduction of white, middle-class ideals in the English media which would continue to keep minority groups on the fringes of society in the name of selling newspapers.

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Introduction

Firetrucks and police sirens blared over the sounds of petrol bombs striking their targets, shop windows being smashed and the voices of the socially and economically deprived shouting at the police. Between the Spring of 1980 and the Fall of 1981, the streets of England's economically deprived and socially isolated urban communities erupted in violent protest against the society that had isolated. Frustration from overbearing and unfair policing, coupled with a complete isolation from mainstream English society and systematic racial discrimination, pushed England's urban West Indian population to the point of action. Violent riots in the St. Paul's district of Bristol, Brixton, London, Toxteth, Liverpool, Moss Side, Manchester, and dozens of other urban communities across the country rocked the race relations status quo and dominated the news media. Uprisings and riots based on socio-economic discontent were not unheard of in English history, however, the scale of the 1980-81 rioting, the fact that the violence was carried out by an isolated visible minority group perceived as alien in England and the mass-media age, ensured that England's urban riots were heavily reported on. The news coverage itself would be shaped by the society in which it originated, but would also help to shape the perceptions of the English populace of the urban minority situation.

Riots, protests and revolts in which the politically and economically isolated rose up against the dominant classes are peppered throughout British history. Examples of social, political and economic uprisings such as the 1381 Peasant's Revolt, in which the English peasantry rose-up due to their economic and political isolation, to the political protests which led to the Peterloo Massacre in 1819, demonstrate the well-documented history of England's poor and weak voicing their discontent.¹ The unhappiness of the poor was directed at the ruling class,

¹ Clive Bloom, *Violent London: 2000 Years of Riots, Rebels and Revolts*, rev. ed. (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 179.

who laid claim to a sense of exceptionalism based on their superior social, economic and political standing. Members of the lower-classes were seen, by the dominant class, as inferior and needed to be kept in-line, with any force necessary. The oppression of the poor led to the use of force by authorities, such was the case at Peterloo.

The make-up of England's population changed dramatically from the early nineteenth century to the late twentieth century, with the collapse of the British Empire and successive waves of immigrants flowing into the country from her former territories. Those whose fore-bearers had been the peasants rising up in 1381 and voicing their anger at their social position at Peterloo, grew to be part of a white English mass culture which developed over the course of the twentieth century. Some of those involved remained poor and disadvantaged, but they came to be included in the larger society as the population of visible “others” grew within their midst. With the immigration of different ethnic groups to Britain, the isolation of the lower-classes was lessened as they were less “different” than the new arrivals to the island.

Waves of immigrants and invaders had been entering Britain since Caesar's expeditionary raids in 55 B.C.² In spite of the constant flow of different ethnic groups onto and around the island, common cultures, languages and eventually government bound the inhabitants of the island to one another. Eventually, the English dominated the other inhabitants of the island, and a number of neighbouring islands, becoming the pre-eminent economic, cultural, military and political power over the likes of the Scottish, Welsh and Irish. The Irish themselves had twice been expelled from Great Britain, in 1243 and 1413, and again entered Britain in increasing numbers in the late-18th and early-19th centuries.³ The 1841 British census counted nearly

2 Robert Winder, *Bloody Foreigners: The Story of Immigration to Britain*, (London: Abacus, 2005), 21.

3 Winder, *Bloody Foreigners*, 196.

300,000 Irish-born migrants inhabiting in Britain, with that number more than doubling in the successive twenty years.⁴ The Irish were subject to wholesale discrimination in Britain as their population became ghettoized and isolated from the rest of the British population. In his 1845 monograph, “The Conditions of the Working Class in England”, in which he described in great detail the utter fragility and extremely poor living and working conditions of the working class in England, Friedrich Engels described the Irish character as being “only comfortable in the dirt”.⁵ A royal commission in 1836 referred to the Irish as having, “uncleanly and negligent habits”, and brought with them, “filth, neglect, confusion, discomfort and insalubrity.”⁶ In 1848, the *Times* newspaper would draw attention to, “the Irish love of knife, dagger and poison-bowl.”⁷

Pogroms and state sponsored expulsions in Eastern Europe, in the late 19th century, saw a massive out-migration of Eastern European Jews toward Western Europe. Between 1881 and 1914 alone, nearly 150,000 Jews immigrated to Britain, raising alarms amongst the British born population who saw the Jews as a potentially de-stabilizing alien force.⁸ Earlier generations of immigrant Jews saw the downside of their new immigrant-brethren perhaps most acutely. Having entered Britain in relatively small numbers, the earlier Jewish migrants had carefully assimilated in British society and feared being grouped together with the new immigrants who turned whole neighbourhoods into self-isolating cultural and religious centres. An 1880 article in the *Jewish Chronicle* highlighted the fears of both assimilated Jews and native-Britons stating that, “[Jewish immigrants] have no right to isolate themselves from their English co-religionists.

4 Winder, *Bloody Foreigners*, 196.

5 Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, ed. David McLellan, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 46.

6 Ibid, 197.

7 Ibid, 199.

8 Ibid, 229.

They should hasten to assimilate themselves completely.”⁹

The social position of the earlier and white immigrant groups, like the Irish and Jews, would not greatly improve until the 'alien immigrant' status was shifted to new arrivals from the far reaches of the Empire. The entry of visible minority groups into Britain created a seismic shift in the country's perception of what was “alien”. Just as the entry of ethnic minorities shifted the bulk of Britain's social isolation away from the poor, the entrance of large groups of visible minority groups shifted the isolation away from groups like the Jews and the Irish on the basis of their tenure in the country and the colour of their skin. The majority of the new entrants to Britain from the Empire came from South Asia (primarily India), Western Africa and the West Indies. The new Empire immigrants would be faced with very much the same socio-economic isolation that earlier immigrant groups had faced and saw little change to their situation for decades.

Liverpool's West Indian and African communities rank among the country's oldest, with their earliest roots in the city dating back to the slave trade of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The port city of Liverpool's minority populations developed around a base of runaway slaves, West African and West Indian seamen, ex-soldiers and former servants. The West Indian and West African population in Liverpool also came to include princes, scholars and students who came to Liverpool to study, although close connections between the “upper-class” West Indian and West African and the rest of the West Indian and West African communities were doubtful.¹⁰ By the 1960s, the settlement of the West Indian community grew out of the docklands area at the south of Liverpool, and into the Liverpool 8 section of Toxteth.¹¹

9 Winder, *Bloody Foreigners*, 232.

10 Alfred B. Zack-Williams, “African Diaspora Conditioning: The Case of Liverpool”, *Journal of Black Studies* 27 (March 1997): 531.

11 *Ibid*, 531.

Having been a major port in Britain's slave trade, prior to the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 and slavery itself in 1833, Liverpool's West Indian community was viewed in a negative light, particularly those who intermarried with white Britons.¹² The mixed-race children of nineteenth century Liverpool's West Indian and West African communities were stigmatized just as were their parents and often excluded from employment.¹³ According to Robert Winder, most West Indian and West African women in late-nineteenth century Liverpool were left with few options outside of prostitution and pickpocketing, and the men were widely viewed as dangerous sexual predators.¹⁴ The discrimination against the new minority groups eventually led to the 1929, *Fletcher Report*, which blamed the stigmatization on the behaviours and customs of the West Indian and West African communities themselves, rather than racist sentiments in society.¹⁵ These negative sentiments toward Liverpool's West Indian and West African residents grew as the community itself expanded through birth and new immigration.

By the end of the First World War, when employment began to be scarce, the West Indian and West African communities came to be seen as a threat to white employment.¹⁶ Further, fears of race mixing brought more hostility to the “temptresses” and “sexual predators” of the West Indian and West African community.¹⁷ These combined fears led to anti-`black` violence and protests in Toxteth throughout the twentieth century. In 1919, a mob of as many as 10,000 Britons descended upon and attacked members of Liverpool's West Indian and West African communities. The result of which was the incarceration and forced repatriation of nearly 700

12 Zack-Williams, “African Diaspora Conditioning...”, 531

13 Ibid., 531

14 Winder, *Bloody Foreigners*, 139.

15 Zack-Williams, “African Diaspora Conditioning...”

16 Ibid, 531.

17 Winder, *Bloody Foreigners*, 139.

West Indians, which according to police was done for their own safety.¹⁸ Even as late as 1976 Toxteth's West Indian community was still the target of the ire of the white population of the city. That year, a large white protest attempted to block West Indians from moving into newly built houses until the needs of the white community were first met.¹⁹ The protesters argued that the West Indian community of Toxteth was predominantly composed of immigrants and 'queue jumpers', despite being established in the area for more than two centuries.²⁰ In reality, by this period, the West Indian population of Toxteth was primarily the third and fourth generation descendents of those early immigrants.²¹

The West-Indian population in St. Paul's has its roots in the post-war reconstruction effort and in-migration boom from Britain's former colonies. The Caribbean population in St. Paul's was almost exclusively of working class Jamaican roots, a group who chain-migrated to St. Paul's in the early 1950s as the white English population re-located to newer neighbourhoods.²² The ageing Georgian and Victorian houses which had come to house Bristol's working class, became the default destination for Caribbean immigrants who were being systematically discriminated against in terms of housing and employment.²³ St. Paul's was, however, by no means home to the majority of Bristol's Jamaican population, nor was the district's population homogenous.²⁴ Into the 1980s, St. Paul's continued to house a sizable white working class population as well as a contingent of South Asians.

18 Zack-Williams, "African Diaspora Conditioning...", 532.

19 Ibid, 532.

20 Ibid., 532

21 B.R.J. Criminol, "Competing Explanations of the Merseyside Riots of 1981", *British Journal of Criminology* 25, no. 1 (1985): 60.

22 Tom Slater and Ntsiki Anderson, "The Reputational Ghetto: Territorial Stigmatisation in St Paul's, Bristol", *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 37, no. 4 (October 2012), 535

23 Matt Clement, "Bristol: 'civilising' the Inner City," *Race and Class* 48, no. 4 (2007): 98.

24 Ibid.

The socio-economic issues in St. Paul's, coupled with its decaying infrastructure, led to the district becoming known as 'shanty-town' or 'the jungle'.²⁵ As their numbers grew, the West Indian population became a community built upon its own social isolation. The population of St. Paul's, not just the West Indian community, was subject to negative forces like, discriminatory mortgage lending and council house allocation.²⁶ At the same time, the "gutting" of Britain's manufacturing industry pushed unskilled labourers toward "vulnerable industries".²⁷ With the lack of social infrastructure in the district by the late 1970s, The Black and White Cafe on St. Paul's Grosvenor Road, came to serve as the centre of social activity for the area's socio-economically deprived West Indian youth, who had little in the way of social or economic connections to mainstream British society.²⁸

Similar to the population makeup of St. Paul's, Brixton, London's, population was predominantly West Indians whose roots in Britain began during the post-war reconstruction effort in the early 1950s.²⁹ The post-war wave of immigration to the district brought a varied mixture of Poles, Jews, Cypriots and West Indians, of whom Jamaicans were the majority.³⁰ The West Indian population was the last of the post-war immigrant groups to begin moving into Brixton, with their first numbers arriving aboard the Empire Windrush in 1948.³¹ By 1958, the first generation owned several hundred of the decrepit houses in the district and began to let out

25 Martin Kettle and Lucy Hodges, *Uprising!: the Police, the People, and the Riots in Britain's Cities* (London: Pan Books, 1982), 24.

26 Anderson and Slater, "The Reputational Ghetto...", 537.

27 *Ibid*, 538.

28 Kettle and Hodges, *Uprising!...*, 24

29 Maria Couto. "To Be Black in Brixton." *Economic and Political Weekly* 16, no. 19 (May 9, 1981).

30 Caroline Howarth "So, You're from Brixton?": The Struggle for Recognition and Esteem in a Multicultural Community.", *Ethnicities* 2, no. 2 (2002): 239.

31 Sheila Patterson, "Dark Strangers: A Sociological study of the absorption of a recent West Indian migrant group in Brixton, South London.," in *Coloured Minorities in Britain*, ed. Sydney Collins (London: Tavistock, 1963), 30.

rooms to family members and other West Indian immigrants.³² In terms of Brixton's population makeup, the district had a higher percentage of non-white inhabitants than the rest of its borough, but that group accounted for only thirty-six per cent of the populace.³³ Despite being less than one-third of the district's overall population, Brixton's West Indian youth population accounted for as much as 40% of the district's 0-18 year old denizens and 50% of the 19-21 year old age group.³⁴

Just as was the case in the in the Caribbean, the post-war period marked the beginning of a massive population migration in South Asia with as many as 17.5 million people moving across moving across new borders due to the partitions of India and Pakistan in 1947 and 1971, many of them looking to Britain, their former colonizer, for a new start.³⁵ The origins of South Asian immigration to Britain took place under very different circumstances than did the immigration of the West Indian population. The initial waves of South Asian migration to Britain took very much the same shape as that of the West Indian immigrants, lower-class workers seeking employment and better life prospects, but the South Asian population boom in England began over a decade later and also had a much higher proportion of white-collar immigrants.³⁶ These two fundamental differences saw British South Asian communities, particularly the Indian Sikh communities, develop very differently from their West Indian counterparts. Where West Indian communities remained in relative isolation from one another and mainstream society, South Asians were bolstered by the bourgeois elements of their immigrant group who founded

32 Patterson, "Dark Strangers...", 30.

33 Scarman, Lord. *The Scarman Report: The Brixton Disorders, 10-12 April, 1981 (Pelican)*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1982, 24.

34 Ibid, 24.

35 Ceri Peach, "South Asian Migration and Settlement in Great Britain, 1951–2001", *Contemporary South Asia* 15, no. 2 (June 2006): 134.

36 Peach, "South Asian ...", 138.

businesses and encouraged chain migration and increased cooperation within their cultural and linguistic group.

At the beginning of the 1950s there were only 43,000 South Asians living in Britain, but the after-effects of the break up of India into India, Pakistan and Bangladesh saw that number more than double to 112,000 in 1961 as dislocated populations sought new homes.³⁷ The South Asian immigrant group was composed largely of single male workers who built close ties with one another due to their cultural similarities and exclusion by white-Britons.³⁸ South Asian workers lived as cheaply as they possibly could by sharing rooms and living communally in large period houses.³⁹ The close relationships fostered by their collective isolation, linguistic and cultural similarities gave rise to the development of cohesive South Asian communities who developed and grew their own self-sufficient economies with shops, housing, trades, restaurants and professionals, but also tending to their social needs with the construction of schools, places of worship and social clubs.⁴⁰ The development these self-sufficient communities fundamentally changed the nature of South Asian immigration to Britain. Whereas the early arrivals sent remittances back to their families in South Asia, by the 1970s and 80s, South Asians had developed a large-scale chain migration which essentially recreated their home villages in their newly adopted British neighbourhoods.⁴¹ The chain migration trend is extraordinarily clear in the growth of South Asian populations in Great Britain which grew to 516,000 by 1971 and doubled again to over 1.3 million by 1981, the majority of whom being the more affluent Indians.⁴²

37 Peach, "South Asian ...", 134.

38 Winder, "Bloody Foreigners", 357.

39 Ibid, 357.

40 Winder, 357.

41 Peach, "South Asian ...", 136.

42 Ibid, 134.

The late-1970s and early 1980s was a period in which Britain was wracked with social disturbances and general unrest within the working-class. Although minor disorders broke out between West Indian youth and the police beginning as early as the 1960s, the scale of the disturbances grew sharply in the early 1980s.⁴³ The socially and economically neglected ethnic minority communities whose immigration to Britain made waves in the late-1940s and early 1950s, grew continuously more restless as they remained positioned on the fringe of English social and economic life. Decades of racialized immigration and nationalist policies which were passed by successive English Governments deepened the isolation of South Asian and Caribbean communities, but the election of Margaret Thatcher's regime in 1979 further deepened the divides in English society. Thatcherite social ideology, according to Faith Robertson Davis, was built around a "Host-Alien" dynamic, in which it is assumed that there exists homogeneity within the "Host" group, where the "Alien" group is constructed as a socially disruptive force.⁴⁴ Further, Nira Yuval Davis, in a discussion of Citizenship in Thatcher's England, describes the Thatcherite notion of citizenship as containing moral and legal constraints which prevent minority groups from existing on an equal footing with the majority group.⁴⁵ Those moral constraints, as Peter Riddell constructed them, were the moral values of the suburban and provincial English middle-class.⁴⁶ The literature clearly constructs the social branch of "Thatcherism" as being constructed around ideas of racial and cultural exclusivity, and thus, alienation and opposition.

43 Sivanandan, A. "From Resistance to Rebellion: Asian and Afro-Caribbean Struggles in Britain." *Race and Class* 23, no. 2 (1981/82): 111-52.

44 Faith Robertson Elliot, *Gender Family & Society* (Houndmills, Basingstoke.: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995), 41.

45 Nira Yuval-Davis, "Women, Citizenship and Difference," in "Citizenship: Pushing the Boundaries," Special Issue, *Feminist Review* 57 (Autumn, 1997), 17.

46 Peter Riddell, *The Thatcher Decade: How Britain Has Changed During the 1980s* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1989).

Building on a history of distrust of outsiders and a tension between lower-classes, the upper-classes and minority groups, England was host to a number of extremist organizations who sought the expulsion of outsiders for the benefit of the English people. Union leader Oswald Mosley became a major proponent of anti-immigrant and anti-minority sentiments in Britain for several decades beginning in the 1930s. Throughout the 1930s, Mosley led propaganda campaigns against the Jewish community in Britain and led marches through predominantly Jewish neighbourhoods, taunting the population and calling for their expulsion, not altogether unpopular notions at the time.⁴⁷ Into the late 1950s, Mosley's focus shifted from the Jewish population to visible minority immigrants, largely those coming from the Commonwealth. Setting up an office in the London neighbourhood of Notting Hill, and promoting a philosophy which would exclude immigrant and minority workers from the labour pool in favour of giving jobs to white Britons, Mosley shifted his message from one immigrant group the next as immigration patterns shifted never straying too far from the immediate fears of the dominant population.⁴⁸

Perhaps the most verbose and long-lasting anti-minority group in twentieth century Britain was the National Front. The Neo-Fascist National Front was founded in 1967 and evolved into a radical anti-immigrant faction which competed as a political party in national elections, an anti-immigrant propaganda machine and featured a sometimes violent street gang arm.⁴⁹ The National Front promoted conspiracy theories which piqued the fears of those most worried about alien influences in Britain, such as heavily publicizing a supposed Jewish-Zionist plot to promote Communism and a One World Government, at the height of the Cold War.⁵⁰

47 Winder, "Bloody Foreigners...", 297.

48 Ibid, 363.

49 David Edgar, Racism, Fascism and the Politics of the National Front"...

50 Ibid, 117.

Despite reaching its electoral peak, and arguably its peak popularity, in the 1974 election with 3% of the popular vote, the National Front would remain in the spotlight due to its involvement in Skinhead street violence.⁵¹ The street violence in the name of the National Front ranged from anti-immigrant vandalism to destruction of property and physical attacks on ethnic minority populations. The intent of these attacks was to both scare the minority communities into leaving Britain and to publicize the aims and goals of the organization itself, at no point were attempts made to hide the involvement of the National Front organization. While the attacks were almost innumerable, some of the more violent chapters included a 1981 campaign in Huddersfield which saw countless attacks on members of the South Asian community and the spray painting of swastikas and National Front symbols all over the neighbourhood.⁵² Another episode of National Front violence in 1981 where 80 National Front members stormed the Beechwood area of Dundee attacking the property and persons of members of the South Asian community.⁵³ The violence of the National Front ensured that their anti-immigrant message would continue to be publicized, even as their popular support in elections decreased leading into the 1980s, leading up to their involvement in the Southall riots of the summer of 1981.

With the growth and strengthening of the “Host-Alien” dynamic in the ideology of the powerful and still growing English middle-class, the news media made appeals to the sensibilities of their major reader base. Most newspapers being published in England during the period of analysis harboured their own analytical perspectives in the investigative coverage of the riots, the front-page, headline news stories were drenched in the ideals of the conservative middle-class. Nancy Murray, in an edition of the left-leaning academic journal *Race and Class*,

51 Winder, “Bloody Foreigners...”, 410.

52 Policing against Black people, 61.

53 Ibid, 67

remarked that the press, both right and left-leaning, had depicted the West Indian populations involved in the riots as “ticking time bombs” not because of their economic disadvantage, but because they were alien.⁵⁴ Murray also noted, however, that the *Guardian* newspaper did make attempts to address the perspectives of members of the West Indian community.⁵⁵ An analysis of the headline stories and deeper analytical pieces published by the *Guardian* and the *Times* shows that the *Guardian* did make attempts to address the perspectives of the rioters and their communities as the *Times* focused its coverage primarily on the views of Government officials and the police. The front-page headline stories of both newspapers, their most visible sections, however, cast the rioters as outsiders and criminals.

The *Times* and the *Guardian* are the ideal selections for analysis as they both occupy the more centrist positions of their respective political views, avoiding the scandal seeking rhetoric often found in tabloid newspapers and activist newsletters. The *Times* and the *Guardian* are major daily newspapers whose voices hold great power in the depiction of current events in Britain. Where tabloid papers like the *Telegraph*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Star* and *The Express* focused on unfounded theories about “outside agitators” and a “‘sinister’ possibly revolutionary ‘evil behind the violence’”⁵⁶, the *Times* and *Guardian* relied on fact and clearly demonstrated editorial oversight in their reporting. Despite the more professional approach of the major dailies, the reporting of the riots by the *Times* and *Guardian* was not completely unbiased. Each newspaper harboured its own analytical focus, the *Times* focusing on empowering members of the ruling class and the *Guardian* with a heavier emphasis on empowering those involved in the violence. The reporting of both publications was invariably shaped by the society in which they

54 Nancy Murray. “Reporting the ‘riots.’” *Race and Class* 27, no. 3 (January 1986), 87.

55 Murray, “Reporting the ‘riots’...”, 87.

56 *Ibid*, 1.

operated, but they would both select their own focus, but were in essence competing for the same customers. In a battle for readership, both papers had to appeal to the sensibilities, fears and beliefs of the majority of English society.

The period of analysis of the of riot and post-riot news coverage, from 1980 to 1981, possesses a number of key factors which make it ideal for study. The period from 1980-191 captures the beginning of a series of uprisings based on urban decline, social and economic isolation and police harassment of the West Indian population, which carried on into the 1990s. Clashes between police and West Indian youths had occurred in the past, the scale of the riots of 1980-81 were, however, unprecedented in recent history. Many of the factors which directly lead to the outbreak of the riots such as, youth unemployment, economic collapse in urban centres and police harassment of the West Indian and African population, were present for decades. The build up of tension and the hardline stance of the Thatcher government created the perfect situation for a violent protest. The existence of a public interested in current events and a mass media machine ready to dispense depictions and analysis of such news stories during this period also ensured that a massive amount of coverage was produced. The *Times* and the *Guardian* archives became publicly available on those newspapers' websites, thus making that wealth of data easily accessible for study.

The riots which broke-out in England's cities in the early-1980s, were essentially the same as earlier uprisings in that they were protests rising out of social, political and economic isolation, but were depicted by the media in a way that was very much coloured by the racial conflicts and debates of the preceding one-hundred years. Beginning with the birth of the idea of the Nation State in the late-nineteenth century, the sense of upper-class exceptionalism in British

society came to be re-shaped into a more generalized British (often just English) exceptionalism based upon centuries of military dominance, leadership in global culture and imperial rule. The exceptionalism of the English identity cast those who did not match a traditional white-English identity as outsiders. In the case of ethnic minority groups, the immigrant stigma remained firmly attached to their position in British society, despite the birth and growth of English-born generations within their groups. The ideals of the dominant middle-class continued to inform the opinions of the English public and mainstream media outlets made appeals to the exceptional English identity in their attempts to increase sales to the news reading public.

A middle-class inspired construction of English identity developed during the Second World War, which further impressed upon the ideas of Englishness and British exceptionalism, permeated the nation's psyche. Through poster campaigns and the penetration of the home offered by radio and newspapers, messages of English exceptionalism and strength in the face of adversity became a part of the fabric of British society. As new immigrants from her former colonies came to Britain in the years following the war, the exceptional British character and way of life was held as a standard to which the new immigrants could not meet. The English suburban middle-class identity and ideals come to form the basis of early-1980s Conservative ideology under the Margaret Thatcher Government.⁵⁷ Classist undertones remained a major part of the social structure of the nation, but new arrivals to the country came to be the targets of social, economic and political exclusion based upon their lack of claim to an exclusive English identity.

Despite immigration to England having been a constant in English society for centuries,

57 David Dixon. "Thatcher's People: The British Nationality Act 1981." *Journal of Law and Society* 10, no. 2 (Winter 1983), 173.

the growth of equal rights in English society afforded to all inhabitants in the Twentieth century raised the visibility of immigrant groups. Men from India and the Caribbean participated alongside their British counterparts in some of the mother country's largest conflicts of the Twentieth century, receiving very different treatment largely based on racial stereotypes.⁵⁸ Soldiers from India fought in massive numbers alongside the British armed forces in both the First and Second World Wars and were treated by the British army and public with great admiration.⁵⁹ During the First World War, His Majesty's Army went to great lengths to allow Sikh soldiers to observe their beliefs and dietary restrictions and even allowing the wearing of turbans rather than helmets and providing facilities for prayer.⁶⁰

Their Caribbean counterparts, however, were at first left out of military service for fear that they were too unreliable to serve on the front lines, but were later brought over in tens of thousands to work behind the lines as labourers.⁶¹ By the end of hostilities both the much revered Indian soldiers and the unreliable Caribbean workers found themselves distanced from English society. Lavish Indian Soldier's hospitals had been constructed in Britain, but were, by the end of the war, surrounded with barbed wire. What had been frequent day trips to British tourist attractions for the injured Indian soldiers, disappeared as fears of sexual liaisons between Indian men and British women grew amongst the populace.⁶² The Caribbean labourers, who were from the start ill-equipped and poorly fed, were sent off to fulfill the same menial role in other parts of the empire, some four-thousand were sent to Cuba to cut sugar cane.⁶³

Britain's relinquishment of her claim to former glory, her worldwide colonial empire, saw

58 Robert Winder. *Bloody Foreigners*. London: Abacus, 2005, 276.

59 Ibid, 277.

60 Ibid, 277.

61 Ibid, 276.

62 Ibid, 278.

63 Winder, "Bloody Foreigners...", 276.

the immigrants from the former colonies become a symbol of a loss of power. The symbolism of a collapsing empire became more engrained with the end the post-war reconstruction boon which brought so many of these colonial immigrants to Britain beginning in the late 1940s. Possessing full right of abode in Britain and citizenship rights, immigrant workers re-located to the home of their former colonial masters in search of employment and better life prospects. The post-war period, however, presented a series of new obstacles for immigrants arriving in Britain, among which were, institutional racism and a glass ceiling in employment which hovered just above menial jobs which native Britons found to be below them. The racialism in British employment did not block migrant workers from employment, but rather “de-skilled” them, creating what A. Sivanandan, head of the English Institute of Race Relations, described as “an acceptable exploitation.”⁶⁴ African, West Indian and South Asian workers were separated from the rest of the English working class, with South Asians assigned to Factories and Foundries and Afro-Caribbean's were pressed into the service industry.⁶⁵

Not only were immigrant workers placed into unwanted employment, but were also forced to live in the dilapidated urban centres which white residents had left behind to re-locate to newer suburban areas.⁶⁶ The racialism in housing went deeper than the relegation of immigrant workers to decaying urban areas, but it became widely acceptable in English society for landlords to discriminate against potential tenants based on race even when it was unacceptable to do so in the sphere of employment.⁶⁷ As Sivanandan uncovered, the same racialism also kept ethnic minorities out of white pubs, social clubs and dance-halls and also

64 A. Sivanandan, “From Resistance to Rebellion: Asian and Afro-Caribbean Struggles in Britain.” *Race and Class* 23, no. 2 (1981/82), 111.

65 A. Sivanandan, “RAT and the Degradation of the Black Struggle.” *Race and Class* 26, no. 4 (1985), 2.

66 *Ibid.*, 2.

67 Sivanandan, “From Resistance to Rebellion...”, 111.

limited the educational opportunities of immigrant and second-generation children.⁶⁸ The segregation of ethnic minority communities in England was felt most acutely by the female members of these groups. According to scholar and activist Amrit Wilson, Asian women were the worst off of all British workers in the post-war period.⁶⁹ Asian women workers were taken advantage of by employers in Britain due to their lack of experience, lack of knowledge of their rights, poor English skills and truly lacked any sort of support network in Britain to organize against their employers.⁷⁰ Many Afro-Caribbean women who immigrated to Britain in the post-war period held job qualifications, many were nurses, but were passed over for white women and relegated to menial tasks.⁷¹ Subjugation in the search for employment was, however, just one part of the wider isolation of England's new Afro-Caribbean immigrants.

Not only were Asian and Afro-Caribbean immigrants to Britain taken advantage of by employers and rejected by landlords but fears of immigrants “swamping” the English population and taking all of the employment led to some government involvement in the immigrant situation. The unofficial racialism which deeply affected the lives of minority immigrants to Britain during the post-war period, became cemented in the public psyche through the introduction of numerous pieces of legislation which further isolated Asian and Afro-Caribbean communities. With the introduction of the British Nationality Act of 1948, the British Government began a process of redefining the rights, privileges and status of those born in Britain's former colonies.⁷² The Nationality Act stripped citizens of Commonwealth countries of

68 Ibid, 112.

69 Amrit Wilson, “Work Outside the Home: Next Time I Won't Cry, I'll Make You Cry”, in *Black British Feminism: A Reader*, Heidi Safia Mirza, ed.,(London: Routledge, 1997), 38.

70 Wilson, “Work Outside the Home...”, 38.

71 Beverley Bryan, Stella Dodzie, Suzanna Scale, “Labour Pains: Black Women and Work”

72 British Nationality Act, 1948, 11 & 12, Geo. 6. Ch. 56. http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1948/56/pdfs/ukpga_19480056_en.pdf

the status of “British Citizens” and their home governments were given the power to create legislation which governed their own citizenships.⁷³

Concerns over the number of immigrants inhabiting in Britain and those continuing to flow across her borders began to be addressed by legislation introduced in the 1960s. With the end of the post-war employment boom and reconstruction efforts in the late-1950s, the paranoia which gripped Britons since the end of the war, regarding the large numbers of immigrant workers stealing jobs away from British nationals, intensified leading to a Governmental response in 1962. The introduction of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962, a piece of legislation which targeted the right of abode of Commonwealth immigrants in Britain, directly responded to the fears of white Britons.⁷⁴ The 1962 Act introduced a system of “vouchers” for which prospective new immigrant workers had to apply in order to gain the right of even temporary abode in Britain.⁷⁵ The voucher system, which was based on an individual's employment prospects, seriously restricted the ability of Commonwealth citizens to live and work in Britain, particularly those immigrants from the poorest of Britain's former colonies whose access to education and previous employment was limited.⁷⁶

Popular support for the new immigration restrictions grew leading into the 1964 election, in which many pro-immigrant Members of Parliament were voted out of office.⁷⁷ Building on the popular support for the legislation, the restrictions were further tightened in 1965 and a new, stricter Commonwealth Immigrants Act was put into place in 1968.⁷⁸ The 1968 Legislation

73 Ibid.

74 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, 1962, 10 & 11, Eliz. 2, Ch.21. <http://www.britishcitizen.info/CIA1962.pdf>

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid.

77 “The Cabinet Papers,” The National Archives, accessed January 5, 2013, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/themes/commonwealth-immigration-control-legislation.htm>.

78 The National Archives, “The Cabinet Papers”.

expanded the right of Immigration officials to reject citizens of former colonies, even those who still held official British citizenship, except for those born in the U.K. who had a parent or grandparent born there.⁷⁹ The immigration legislation put into place impacted former citizens from all over the Commonwealth, but it was instituted at a time of increased immigration of Asians from Africa and favoured white immigrants due to their significantly higher likelihood of having direct familial relations born in Britain.

Members of Parliament continued to speak out against immigration into the late 1960s, most notably Conservative MP Enoch Powell. In 1968, Powell delivered his now infamous “Rivers of Blood” speech in which he roused fears of immigrant populations overwhelming the British populace and chasing them out of their own country.⁸⁰ Powell stated that it was the official policy of the Conservative Party to bring to a halt immigration to Britain and promote the maximum outflow of immigrants already in the country.⁸¹ Summoning images of post-apocalyptic settings in which the British-born have been chased out of their neighbourhoods by unruly immigrants, Powell's overt anti-immigrant stance continued to have an influence on the immigration debate for decades going forward. Just three years after Powell's speech, the Conservative government of Edward Heath passed the Immigration Act of 1971 which introduced concept of patriality or right of abode in Britain to British immigration law.⁸² The Immigration Act was yet another piece of legislation that made immigration to Britain more difficult by limiting those who had the right to live in Britain, a right conferred by the birthplace

79 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, 1968, Ch. 9. <http://www.britishcitizen.info/CIA1968.pdf>

80 Enoch Powell. "Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' Speech." The Telegraph. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/3643823/Enoch-Powells-Rivers-of-Bloodspeech.html> (accessed February 11, 2012).

81 Ibid.

82 Immigration Act 1971, Ch. 77. http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1971/77/pdfs/ukpga_19710077_en.pdf

of ones self or parents.⁸³ The limitation on immigration to Britain included in the Act was yet another exclusionary move primarily directed at migrants of non-traditionally British origin.

The election of a Conservative government under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher in 1979, marked the election of yet another prominent proponent of anti-immigrant policies.

Thatcher who had famously declared that, “this country [Britain] might be rather swamped by people with a different culture”, brought with her into office a particular brand of Conservatism which emphasized individualism, a small government and a focus on the middle-class.⁸⁴

Thatcher's ideology constructed a conception of “Englishness” in which the emphasis was on conserving the existing social hierarchy and a new-found zeal for free-market capitalism worsened the fractures and inequalities already being felt by isolated groups. Deepening the isolation of minority groups, Thatcher remarked that race relations could only improve when immigration was ended and those minorities in England were better integrated into mainstream society.⁸⁵ Real social disadvantages, especially in minority communities, still existed, particularly in employment, public housing, education, and policing, among other spheres, but the government's involvement, in Thatcher's view, was limited to upholding anti-discrimination legislation.⁸⁶

The Thatcher Government upheld decades of Anti-racial discrimination legislation despite a deeply racialised xenophobia being central to Thatcher's “Englishness”. The Thatcherite conception of “Englishness” can be seen as racialised in terms of the notion of a new “cultural racism” as described by Faith Robertson Elliot in her book, *Gender, Family and*

83 Immigration Act of 1971.

84 David Dixon, *Thatcher's People...*, p.173.

85 “1979 Conservative Party General Election Manifesto.” Conservative Party Manifestos. <http://www.conservativemanifesto.com/1979/1979-conservative-manifesto.shtml> (accessed March 2, 2012).

86 Bashevkin, Sylvia. “Confronting Neo-Conservatism: Anglo-American Women's Movements under Thatcher, Reagan and Mulroney.” *International Political Science Review* 15, no. 3 (July 1994), 278.

Society.⁸⁷ Elliot constructs the racism persisting in Britain in the second half of the twentieth century as being more of a rejection of alien cultural influences than race.⁸⁸ The rejection of alien cultural influences created a form of xenophobia which was not overtly based on appearance, but left at its roots that visible differences are a primary means of identifying what was alien and thus what was to be rejected.

As decades had passed since the majority of Britain's Commonwealth immigrants flowed into the country, their continued treatment as outsiders in England created a great deal of tension within those ethnic minority communities. The growing tension against minority groups was perhaps most acute among youth and teenagers who were doubly associated as immigrants and social outsiders, despite them and their parents having lived their entire lives in Britain and at the same time lacking the political, social and economic agency that even their disadvantaged parents possessed. Where their parents and grandparents had immigrated to England in a post-War economic boom, West Indian and African English youth in the 1980s found themselves struggling for employment. The neighbourhoods in which their ethnic communities grew and developed in the 1950s and 1960s began to crumble, become over-crowded and stigmatized as unsafe, crime-filled areas where the general populace avoided. The criminal stigma coupled with higher crime rates linked to the increased poverty levels in those areas, caused West Indian dominated neighbourhoods such as Brixton, London and Toxteth, Liverpool to be targeted heavily by police sting operations.

There are wide ranging series of factors which contribute to the production and reproduction of identity and belonging in a society. In Britain, for centuries identity was linked

⁸⁷ Faith Robertston Elliott, *Gender Family & Society*. Houndmills, Basingstoke.: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 41.

ever closely with social standing and social class. The definition of an individual was there relative level of affluence to another individual. With the break from a more class centered society in the first half of the Twentieth century, new social divisions formed and what it meant to belong to a particular group changed along with it. The class system had been so deeply entrenched in English life that segments of entire cities were built around class segregation. For instance, Steven Johnson in describing the construction of London's posh Regent Street in the early nineteenth century, to connect Marleybone Park to the Prince Regent's home at Carlton House, as including a sort of "Cordon Sanitaire" of buildings to separate the Royal and wealthy elite from the working class of nearby neighbourhood Soho.⁸⁹ In spite of the primary focus on social and economic standing, race and ethnicity had long been factors in the British class system. However, in a country where the primary divisions of class began to close, visible and cultural difference would shift to the forefront. The way in which members of society defined themselves and isolated others led to dramatic shifts in society, which would not change in a clean break from the past and the new Britain would continue to progress with large portions of old British thinking intact.

An underlying conservatism in the English mentality would keep racial and ethnic biases prevalent in social development for decades into the late-Twentieth Century. Unlike her continental counterpart France, in England revolutionary change was not universally celebrated. Rather, England and Englishness has been produced and reproduced around the ideals of previous generations, leading to slow cultural changes and often overlapping ideals. For instance, the class structure which came to personify the English experience in the eighteenth

89 Steven Johnson, *The Ghost Map: The Story of London's Most Terrifying Epidemic--and How It Changed Science, Cities, and the Modern World* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2006), 20.

and nineteenth centuries has continued to persist well into the twentieth century despite the functioning of government being entirely dictated by elected officials. The continued presence of the Royal Family, the peerage and other forms of nobility in England, more than a century since their political power was effectively removed, is perhaps the clearest example of a society unwilling to shed its past.

The continued links to past generations in the production and reproduction of English identity and evolution of English society have remained strong over decades and centuries, but how have certain ideals and beliefs continually presented themselves in English life? How is it possible that decades into a major transformation in English life, where legally the country and government supported laws to prohibit racial bias in employment, housing and government assistance programs, did strong racist nationalist movements continue to exist? Even more interesting is how, in this continually liberalising and ethnically diverse democratic nation, did a focus on race remain so prevalent in the news reporting of urban violence in an economically deprived area and the ever present class-structure figured so minor a role? What factors were involved in the production and reproduction of English identities and how were the ideals behind these identities formative of and formed from the beliefs of the English people?

Politicians, by virtue of their employment, have held incredible power over the beliefs and ideas of populations. Political campaigns target commonly held ideas in the population base and exploit those ideas in order to gain favour for a particular cause or perspective. When in power, these political officials determine the course of legislation and thus, the future of the nation. Margaret Thatcher, in her electoral campaign in 1978, outlined the need for the return of a strong England after years of damage being inflicted upon the English state by post-war social

welfare programs. She sought to undo any damage caused to England by the advancement of the welfare state and a return to individualist policies and a repealing of social welfare policies.

Thatcher's policies rejected all that did not align with her views as non-English, thus creating an environment where what was not being constructed as English was to be rejected. As powerful a position as political officials hold, their power extends only as far as the voting populace will allow it to. The image of the politician, their policies and decisions would all need to be transmitted to the people through an intermediary, the media. An independent intermediary body, or bodies, with its own allegiances and goals shaped the messages that reached the general populace.

Michael Rosie, John MacInnes, et al., in an article entitled, "Nation speaking unto nation? Newspapers and national identity in the devolved UK", refuted the notion that newspapers are national institutions which have served to remind the populace of their nation and the national context in terms of current events.⁹⁰ What they state as having been commonly accepted without being critically deconstructed.⁹¹ Rather, they asserted that newspapers have served to "construct and reproduce the imagination of a national community".⁹² In essence, the newspapers serve to shape and grow the belief in a connected "nation", stressing the importance of certain perspectives and ideals as the situation warrants. In supporting political perspectives, political parties or figures, newspapers and other media outlets could construct national ideals and reproduce them in varying situations.

The ability of the media to shape a popular image is outlined by Ana Ines Langer in an

90 Michael Rosie et al., "Nation Speaking Unto Nation? Newspapers and National Identity in the Devolved UK," *The Sociological Review* 52, no. 4 (November 2004): 437.

91 Ibid, 437.

92 Ibid, 438.

article entitled, “A Historical Exploration of the Personalisation of Politics in the Print Media: The British Prime Ministers (1945–1999)”, in which she outlines how UK media have altered perceptions and shaped the popular images of British Prime Ministers over the course of the twentieth century.⁹³ Over the course of the second half of the twentieth century, the media increasingly humanised British Prime Ministers which has in various cases improved the visibility of the politician but also shed negative light on their policies.⁹⁴ The manipulation of popular images demonstrates the power of the media in shaping the views of their readership. As capitalist enterprises the newspapers were, however, heavily subject to public opinion. Regardless of political opinion, the newspapers had to appeal to their newspaper readers in order to sell papers before engaging in their political commentary.

In the early 1980s, English identity as it was being constructed by the popularly elected Thatcher Government and reproduced and transmitted to the public by the news media sought to appeal to the conservative nature of the English popular psyche. Appeals were made to less socially progressive ideals than were being pushed by earlier governments and a sense of nostalgia for times when England was a true world power and when the aristocratic and middle-class ideals were paramount. The mood echoed back to an England before new ethnic minority groups had migrated to the country and were awarded equal footing socially and economically to white Britons, and before their perspectives were valued. Harkening for an England for the English was what got Margaret Thatcher elected by the populace in 1978, and the newspapers would play on this appeal in the headline news stories to gain attention.

The perfect example of the interplay between popular political and social ideals, the

93 Ana Ines Langer, “A Historical Exploration of the Personalisation of Politics in the Print Media: The British Prime Ministers (1945–1999),” *Parliamentary Affairs* 60, no. 3 (2007): 371.

94 *Ibid.*, 372.

influence of a powerful ruling class pressing those ideas into popularity, the reproduction of those ideas for transmission to and the manipulation of the populace by the media and the ebbs and flows of popular opinion in England took place in the early 1980s. When the urban riots erupted in England's urban centres, the Thatcher Government were given an opportunity to directly fight back against non-English forces in the country, while the newspapers spun the events in their headline stories to manipulate the general populace into choosing their publication. While an underlying conservatism and xenophobia previously existed in the English psyche, these fears held within society were strategically played upon by the government and media for their own purposes. The Thatcher Government pulled the conservative xenophobia to the surface in the election campaign and maintained it throughout their term in office, while the newspapers would use the popularity of these ideas to garner attention to their coverage.

In the case of the riots in the early-1980s, two newspapers, the Times and the Guardian, both holding different political views, ran very similar headline stories, while publishing very different analytical coverage in the deeper pages of their papers. The papers did not abandon their own views in order to gain attention with attention grabbing headlines, but rather used those leads to pull readers into the analytical coverage which they used to press their perspective and reproduce a sense of national community. An analysis of the events themselves and the coverage of them by the Times and the Guardian, placed into the context of the neo-Conservative sentiments which were sweeping the country, clearly demonstrates how feelings of identity, and the creation of an imaginary nation were produced and reproduced by those holding power over politics, economy and information. The interplay between the constructions of identity and nation and England's slow changing social values very clearly shows how a nation was able to be

so socially progressive in outlawing discrimination but maintained an ingrained xenophobia.

The scope and scale of the analysis of the period in question requires the analysis of numerous historiographies. The nature of the analytical work delves into the realms of immigration legislation, the exclusionary national identity which came to be called “Englishness”, the West Indian and African experience in Britain, Thatcherism and the English media. Despite not directly drawing from one specific school of thought on these various topics, some aspects of the ideological stance which feeds the analysis of the newspaper depictions of the riots have been gleaned from these various historiographies.

Due to the vast and complicated subject matter involved, the history of British and English society in the 1970s and 1980s has most often been constructed in parts based on specific themes, although a few works exist which attempt to cover the history of the period in more general terms. One such work is Andrew Rosen's book, *The Transformation of British Life, 1950-2000*, which thematically traces the major changes in British life over the course of the second half of the twentieth century.⁹⁵ Rosen's book is not a specific study of the 1980s, it is a general analysis of British Society during the second half of the Twentieth Century, it does, however, provide several interesting insights into how race was viewed in England during the 1980s. Rosen focussed on the changing social situations of Ethnic Minorities and Youth and Age, as they transformed from 1950 to the turn of the millenium. In his discussion of ethnic minorities, Rosen raises an interesting point about the developing multiculturalism in Britain during the 1970s and 80s, stating that Britain remained a primarily white society with multi-racial metropolitan areas.⁹⁶ The view that Britain remained overall a white society, supports the

95 Andrew Rosen, *The Transformation of British Life 1950-2000: A Social History*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004.

96 Murray, “Reporting the Riots”, 92.

idea of a racialised hegemonic construction of the social norm being imposed upon society, one which intentionally excludes what are considered to be foreign elements. Rosen's analysis of a "multi-racial" England is, however, rather shallow in scope and fails to explore the true depth of the social situation confronting England's minority communities.

Another more general study of 1980s England, Andy McSmith's "No Such Thing as Society", takes a much more popular cultural approach to understanding English society in that decade.⁹⁷ In his analysis, McSmith transitioned from one popular milestone of the 1980s to another very much in the same way as the media coverage informed the public conscience of these events. For example, with regard to the riots of 1981, McSmith discusses the feelings of repression of Britain's West Indian communities, but also the popular culture which was inspired by these incidents. McSmith directly addresses the way in which the media depicted the riots, particularly focusing on alarmist coverage which painted the country's West Indian communities in a negative light.⁹⁸ Of note, he mentions that television networks like BBC and ITN reported on the causes of the riots, and the headlines of newspapers focused on the criminality and race of the rioters.⁹⁹ Despite focusing his attention to the larger events of the 1980s and their impact on the public consciousness, McSmith does well in conveying the long-lasting presence of the discrimination and inequality, which caused the riots, in English society moving forward.

The Historiography of the riots themselves both contains a great deal of depth in some aspects, but severely lacking in others. The most depth exists in the study of the earliest riots of the period in question, most notably Bristol in 1980, Brixton in 1981, and the country-wide violence of the summer of 1981. One of the more notable examinations of the Bristol riot of

97 McSmith, Andy. *No Such Thing as Society: A History of Britain in the 1980s*. London: Constable, 2011.

98 Ibid, 93.

99 Ibid, 93.

1980 and the riots of 1981 is Martin Kettle and Lucy Hodges 1982 book, *Uprising!: the Police, the People, and the Riots in Britain's Cities*. Kettle and Hodges, as newspaper editors, spent some time in their study covering the newspaper headlines which portrayed rioters in an almost exclusively negative light, but also put fear into the public with declarations of supposed large-scale organization behind the riots.¹⁰⁰ The book pays a great deal of attention to community-police relations as well, but comparatively little attention is given to the role of the Government. Above all, *Uprising!...*, is an attempt to understand the riots, but not how they were portrayed, which is the central thrust of the analysis of the newspaper coverage of the riots.

In a similar vein, Diane Frost and Richard Phillips' collection, *Liverpool '81: Remembering the Riots*, focuses on only the riots in Merseyside, Liverpool in 1981.¹⁰¹ Frost and Phillips discussed the intricacies of community-police relations and urban social disadvantage, but paid little attention to the superstructure created by the portrayals of the riots to further the agendas of the dominant institutions. Frost and Phillip's book takes the shape of a retrospective of the riots themselves and the conditions which led to their outbreak, whereas here, it will be studied how the events were publicized to discount the causes of the violence for which the Government and Police were responsible.

Two shorter articles, Nancy Murray's, "Reporting the 'riots'"¹⁰², and Jacquelin Burgess', "News from Nowhere: The Press, The Riots and the Myth of the Inner City"¹⁰³, begin to deal more closely with the subject matter surrounding the newspaper coverage of the riots. Murray's

100 Martin Kettle, and Lucy Hodges. *Uprising!: the Police, the People, and the Riots in Britain's Cities*. London: Pan Books, 1982.

101 Diane Frost and Richard Phillips, eds., *Liverpool '81: Remembering the Toxteth Riots* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011).

102 Nancy Murray. "Reporting the 'riots.'" *Race and Class* 27, no. 3 (January 1986).

103 Burgess, Jacquelin. "News from Nowhere: The Press, the Riots, and the Myth of the Inner City." In *Geography the Media & Popular Culture*, pp. 192–228. Ed. Jacquelin Burgess & John R. Gold. London: Croom Helm, 1985.

piece is a scathing attack on the way in which the Thatcher Government and media have portrayed the riots and urban deprivation.¹⁰⁴ The article is, however, rather short and is more focused on specific examples of press reporting in favour of the interests of the Government, rather than approaching the subject in a more focused and directed manner. “Reporting the ‘riots’” contains a number of ideas which form the basis of the analysis of the newspaper coverage of the riots, namely urban deprivation and racial isolation, but far more emphasis is to be placed on depictions of the riots as a consistent part of English identity.

Jacquelin Burgess' article emphasizes one key idea regarding the reporting of the 1981 riots, the fact that newspapers are engaged in a competitive business, both in terms of readership and access to reputable sources of information.¹⁰⁵ This two-fold competitiveness led to media outlets pandering to the interests of dominant forces in order to maintain or improve their competitive position. The competing goals of the news media is extremely important to understanding why the English major newspapers would often present mixed messages in their reporting. The fact mainstream media outlets were conducive in promoting the ideas and perspectives of the Government and Police to the mutual benefit of all three institutions.

The historiography of the West Indian experience in England ties in very closely with that of the construction of “Englishness”. As Englishness can be constructed as an exclusive identity separating itself from Blackness, as will be discussed later, the study of the 'black' experience in England revolves heavily around the experience of isolation. The sense of isolation felt by minority communities applied not only to the West Indian community as a whole as being isolated from mainstream society, but that the isolation of the whole group led to fractures within

104 Murray, “Reporting the Riots...”.

105 Burgess, “News from Nowhere...”.

itself.

One of the most prominent writers on the subject of British race relations and the minority experience in England is A. Sivanandan, director of the Institute of Race Relations in London. In an article entitled, “From Resistance to Rebellion: Asian and Afro-Caribbean Struggles in Britain”, Sivanandan chronicled the isolation of the West Indian and South Asian communities in England from their in-migration surge soon after the Second World War.¹⁰⁶ Within his re-telling of the minority-immigrant experience Sivanandan presented the idea that successive governments sought to control minority populations in England using similar methods to those used during colonialism.¹⁰⁷ These methods created tension within the minority communities and eventually led to violent eruptions against symbols of their oppression.

The complexity of the isolation of the English West Indian community is built upon once more by Henry Louis Gates Jr. in a 1976 article entitled “Black London”.¹⁰⁸ Gates refers to “Black London” directly as being fragmented and scattered across the city, creating an environment where the local tribe replaces the nation as a focus of loyalty.¹⁰⁹ Already isolated from any attachments to nationalism or the national ideal, these isolated communities developed their own unique cultures and group affiliations based on past and present culture and geography.¹¹⁰ The developing culture of in these isolated communities built their own form of exclusivity to counter that of the prevailing English exclusivity from which they were isolated. According to Gates, membership in the new-developing counter culture was linked directly to

106 Sivanandan, A. “From Resistance to Rebellion: Asian and Afro-Caribbean Struggles in Britain.” *Race and Class* 23, no. 2 (1981/82): 111-52.

107 Sivanandan, A. “From Resistance to Rebellion: Asian and Afro-Caribbean Struggles in Britain.” *Race and Class* 23, no. 2 (1981/82): 111-52

108 Henry Louis Gates Jr, “Black London”, *The Antioch Review* 34, no. 3 (Spring 1976): 300-17.

109 Ibid, 302.

110 Ibid, 303.

one's isolation from the socio-economic dominant group.¹¹¹

The historiography of “Englishness” is extraordinarily vast, as the idea of the English national character has so often been differently constructed and reproduced. Studies of differing notions of “Englishness” have been constructed in a huge variety of contexts in different disciplines, ranging from Englishness in written language styles, to psychological treatments and Englishness in tourism. Identity focused studies of Englishness have ranged from discussions of the nostalgic power of an idealized English country aesthetic as a basis of identity to more experience oriented constructions of Englishness. Peter Mandler's article, “Against Englishness: English Culture and the Limits to Rural Nostalgia, 1850-1940”, for instance, delves into the appeal of the simplistic and homogeneous rural England of the past in a modern, international English society.¹¹² He does, however, reject the idea that the rural appeal is the basis of an English culture which is purported to be, by Anthony Wiener, an anti-modernist culture based upon economic decline and free from non-economic cultural causes.¹¹³

Mandler further delves into and questions the idea that even late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century English culture is anti-modern, nor is the economic and elite culture of the period the basis of a national nostalgia.¹¹⁴ He maintains that English culture has done more to adopt aspects of social dissonance and external influences than many “rural nostalgias” in Continental Europe.¹¹⁵ He also argues that the developing mass culture of the Twentieth century was more based upon change, revolution and the growing power of those below the elite class.¹¹⁶

111 Ibid, 303.

112 Peter Mandler. “Against 'Englishness': English Culture and the Limits to Rural Nostalgia, 1850-1940.” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6, no. 7 (1997): 155-75.

113 Ibid, 157.

114 Ibid, 157.

115 Ibid, 157.

116 Ibid, 159.

Although his piece deconstructs the idea that a nostalgic Englishness is built upon the views and ideals of the Aristocracy of centuries past, Mandler leaves the door open to the growth of a new ruling class whose power over the development of the supposed “Mass Culture” of the middle and lower classes in the early Twentieth centuries.

Ian Baucom's discussion of Englishness in *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire and the Locations of Identity*, is less about a particular history of English identity, but rather takes aim at how English identities can be variously produced in relation to English places. In Baucom's work Englishness is produced and reproduced in “English” spaces, but is a completely relative concept.¹¹⁷ Baucom's “English” spaces are unique to each individual and their experience of the particular space. The view of some spaces as being specifically English, however, opened the door to the privileging of the experiences of the majority in the re-telling of stories and the construction of a mass cultural or historical view of said site. Further, the development of histories and common cultural connections built amongst minority groups become viewed as counter-cultural, or even in extreme cases, non-English.

Manthia Diawara built upon the concept of an exclusivity and privileging of the view of the dominant group in English identity in an article entitled, “Englishness and Blackness: Cricket as Discourse on Colonialism”.¹¹⁸ He constructs Englishness as a privileging of the culture, language and history of one group over another, particularly in the colonial context with the isolation of 'Blackness' from Englishness.¹¹⁹ His focus on the power of dichotomies in the formation and maintenance of identities which shape social, cultural and economic relations.¹²⁰

117 Ian Baucom, *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the Locations of Identity*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999, 6.

118 Manthia Diawara. “Englishness and Blackness: Cricket as Discourse On Colonialism.” *Callaloo* 13, no. 4 (Autumn 1990), 830.

119 Ibid, 830.

120 Ibid, 830.

He likens Englishness and Britishness to whiteness, and maintains that 'Blackness' in Britain is based around the dominance of white culture, and the projection of the visible minority presence in Britain as being deviant, impure and the epitome of what is not English.¹²¹

Diawara's perspective of 'Englishness' vs. 'Blackness' will play a major role here in demonstrating a relative end-point to the historiography of 'Englishness'. Where Mandler constructs 'Englishness' as more of a product of mass culture than a retention of the power of the Aristocracy, Baucom describes how in the mass culture of England that different experiences of common places come to create separations from the dominant group of the mass culture begin to fracture off and isolate minority groups. Finally, Manthia Diawara takes the final step to demonstrate how English mass culture has become the culture and identity of the dominant white population, and the minority populations, West Indians in particular, were given the role of criminals, drug dealers and threats to England in the overarching mass culture. The development from the creation of a supposedly inclusive mass culture, to the creation of rifts in that culture through different experiences of common places and the re-occurrence of isolation from dominant culture of minority groups from mass culture.

The dominant social group is hardly a unified social force acting and thinking in unison in all situations. There exists a fluidity in the idea of a dominant social group in that, depending on the situation, members of that group can be shift fluidly from the centre of the group, to its fringes and even completely outside the group altogether. These shifts are the result of disparate socio-economic positions, geography, group affiliations and perhaps most importantly, political beliefs. Even with these differences causing social a sort of sheering within the dominant social group, enough similarities remain to bind them together.

¹²¹ Ibid, 830.

The mass media fills a dual role of both appealing to the views of the dominant social group and all of its fluid parts and also informing and shaping the views of those same groups. In the case of Britain's daily and weekly newspapers, smaller tabloids sought out the attention of minority and fringe groups within the white-English born dominant group with re-tellings of the riots with links to Communism and other organized extremist elements. The tabloid style reporting, likely due to the outlandish nature of the stories, did see some of their claims enter the public consciousness.

More important than the impact of the far-fetched tabloid theories, however, was the coverage of the riots by the English major dailies. Despite their different political leanings, major dailies like the *Times* and the *Guardian* displayed very similar messages on their front pages when reporting the riots. For instance, The headlines of the April 3rd, 1980 editions of both *the Times* and *the Guardian* focused on the rioters creating chaos on city streets and attacking police, depicting threats to the order of civil society and attacks on the police, a bastion of civil defense. *The Times* headline, "Black youths battle with police in Bristol riot", features a large photograph of a police officer with dog moving toward a crowd of angry West Indian youths, an image which depicts the officer as being badly outnumbered by the rioters.¹²² Similarly, the *Guardian's* story entitled, "19 police hurt as rioters burn, loot city streets", displays the same photograph of the officer and dog approaching the crowd, along with another shot of damaged property and an upturned car.¹²³ Images of chaos, destruction and West Indian youth at odds with the police would be common-place in the depictions of the riots by the English media, further casting the West Indian population as outsiders and threats to English life.

122 "Black Youths Battle with Police in Bristol Riot," *Times*, April 3, 1980.

123 "19 Police Hurt as Rioters Burn, Loot City Streets," *Guardian*, April 3, 1980.

The political stances of the *Times* and the *Guardian* showed more clearly in their deeper analyses of the causes of the riots, as their front pages were both stamped with the perspectives of the dominant white-English, middle-class. The headlines of both the *Times* and the *Guardian* highlighted the race of the rioters, criminality and chaos in English urban areas, but largely ignored the real causes of the rioting; socio-economic isolation and police harassment. The first impressions of the rioting distributed to the population through newspapers was the demonization of the rioters, even if in the later pages the causes of the rioting were legitimized. An approach to journalism in which the most visible stories highlighted chaos being caused by a minority group not only ensured newspaper sales by appealing to the widest possible audience, but also highlighted the uneasy state of British race relations in the early-1980s.

England in the 1980s was a country caught between the creation of non-racial society and the continued xenophobia which had pervaded the nation since before the growth of nationalism in the late nineteenth century. A society where anti-racist legislation had been passed into law and was embraced by many, but where a strong national identity was being sought and was found in the social experience of the dominant white population. Despite not being overtly racist in its policies, Margaret Thatcher's government continually placed the blame for English society's ills onto minority populations. Discussions of minority groups "swamping" English neighbourhoods, coupled with the ever-presence of Enoch Powell's anti-immigration and forced repatriation rhetoric made the 'black' experience in England's urban centres an uneasy one.

The news media is both the informer and the voice of the majority of society, wrestling the division between reporting fact, representing opinion and using both to turn a profit. The English newspapers of the 1980s grappled with these factors and in-turn presented the riots of

the early-1980s in a very complex way. The most visible news stories, the headline stories and immediate reaction pieces presented shock and awe to the populace. Stories of destruction, theft, and non-English criminals threatening the safety of England's major cities were front and centre to both attract the attention and draw the interest of the news reading public; most of whom who just so happened to be of the white middle-class. The deeper analysis of the riots in the later pages of the newspapers was the venue for newspapers from the both political wings to make their own political statements regarding the violent events.

Chapter 1: St. Paul's Bristol, 1980

An ill-fated police raid on an urban cafe in the St. Paul's District of Bristol on 2 April 1980, set off what John Lea and John Solomos described as, “a watershed of postwar politics in Britain.”¹²⁴ The St. Paul's District of Bristol was not only the city's poorest area, but came to be recognized as possessing the highest concentration of West Indians in the entire city.¹²⁵ The West Indian population in St. Paul's has its roots in the post-war reconstruction effort and in-migration boom from Britain's former colonies. The Caribbean population in St. Paul's was almost exclusively of working class Jamaican roots, a group who chain-migrated to St. Paul's in the early 1950s as the white English population re-located to newer neighbourhoods.¹²⁶ The ageing Georgian and Victorian houses which had come to house Bristol's working class, became the default destination for Caribbean immigrants who were being systematically discriminated against in terms of housing and employment.¹²⁷ St. Paul's was, however, by no means home to the majority of Bristol's Jamaican population, nor was the district's population homogenous.¹²⁸ Into the 1980s, St. Paul's continued to house a sizable white working class population as well as a contingent of South Asians.

The socio-economic issues in St. Paul's, coupled with its decaying infrastructure, led to the district becoming known as 'shanty-town' or 'the jungle'.¹²⁹ As their numbers grew, the West

124 J. Benyon, *The Roots of Urban Unrest*, ed. John Benyon and John Solomos (Oxford: University of Leicester, 1987), 3.

125 Black Youths Battle with Police in Bristol Riot, *Times (London)*, 3 April 1980.

126 Tom Slater and Ntsiki Anderson, “The Reputational Ghetto: Territorial Stigmatisation in St Paul's, Bristol”, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 37, no. 4 (October 2012), 535

127 Matt Clement, “Bristol: 'civilising' the Inner City,” *Race and Class* 48, no. 4 (2007): 98.

128 Ibid.

129 Martin Kettle and Lucy Hodges, *Uprising!: the Police, the People, and the Riots in Britain's Cities* (London: Pan Books, 1982), 24.

Indian population became a community built upon its own social isolation. The population of St. Paul's, not just the West Indian community, was subject to discriminatory mortgage lending and council house allocation.¹³⁰ At the same time, the “gutting” of Britain's manufacturing industry pushed unskilled labourers toward “vulnerable industries”, such as labouring in infrastructure creation projects and the shrinking English steel industry.¹³¹ With the lack of social infrastructure in the district by the late 1970s, The Black and White Cafe on St. Paul's Grosvenor Road, came to serve as the centre of social activity for the area's socio-economically deprived West Indian youth, who had little in the way of social or economic connections to mainstream British society.¹³²

When the Somerset and Avon Police entered into St. Paul's on 2 April 1980, and advanced toward the Black and White Cafe, they were perceived as an external force invading the community that had grown up outside of mainstream society.¹³³ The raid on the cafe was officially carried out for illegal drinking under the 1974 Licensing Act and the Misuse of Drugs Act, but it was also part of a larger police strategy to manage to high-crime area.¹³⁴ The Institute of Race Relations identified the police strategy of targeting “symbolic locations, typically clubs and significant meeting places, within high-crime and largely West Indian populated communities in order to put an end to any 'deviant' activities.”¹³⁵

The Police shut down the cafe and surrounded the building, thus closing off the surrounding area for over two hours.¹³⁶ Cases of beer were removed from the premises and the

130 Anderson and Slater, “The Reputational Ghetto...”, 537.

131 Ibid, 538.

132 Kettle and Hodges, *Uprising!...*, 24

133 Clement, “Bristol: 'civilising'...”, 100.

134 “Black Youths Battle with Police in Bristol Riot,” *Times*, April 3, 1980.

135 Institute of Race Relations, *Policing Against Black People* (London: Institute of Race Relations, 1987), 2.

136 _____, “The 'riots',” *Race and Class* 23, no. 2/3 (January 1981): 223.

owner was removed in handcuffs, with the owner's wife, Gladys Wilkes, reporting to *The London Times* that numerous patrons were manhandled by the police without being provided a reason and that the police had overreacted during the raid.¹³⁷ As the police action continued, members of the local community began to gather outside the police barricade to voice their discontent, which eventually erupted into violence. Stones, bottles and other missiles were rained down on the police, who were quick to resort to military style tactics to hold back the growing crowd.¹³⁸ Riot shields, dog teams and reinforcements were all called into the district, but the numerically overwhelmed police were forced to retreat out of the district as their cars were burned and the crowd pressed on.¹³⁹ The end result of the night of rioting was roughly £500,000 of property damage and a great deal of blame for the violence being directed at the police, government and the community.¹⁴⁰

No government agency took responsibility for finding the underlying causes of the riots through an inquiry, but one was eventually arranged by the Bristol Trades Council.¹⁴¹ The Trades Council Inquiry placed the blame for the riot on the police and government agencies for keeping St. Paul's on the fringe of British society with their police practices and poor social and physical infrastructure.¹⁴² The report was not published until over a year after the riot, and thus, the general public were largely left with the impressions that they gained from the media reporting in the immediate aftermath of the riot.

The media reporting of the rioting in St. Paul's by *The Guardian* and *The London Times* (*The Times*) was extremely limited when compared to the coverage of the events of the following

137 "Black Youths Battle with Police in Bristol Riot," *Times*, April 3, 1980.

138 Dennis Johnson, "19 Police Hurt as Rioters Burn, Loot City Streets," *The Guardian*, 3 April 1980.

139 Ibid.

140 Lucy Hodges, "Inquiry Allocates Blame for St. Paul's 'volcano'," *The Times (London)*, 24 July 1981.

141 Ibid, 3.

142 Ibid.

year. Major coverage of the riot did not extend much beyond three days after the violence in either newspaper, with *The Times* continuing to highlight the event only in editorials and in terms of parliamentary discussion of the riot. Despite the small sample size in reporting, both newspapers manage to give a glimpse of themes which recurred during the more substantial reporting which occurred later in the decade. The voices of those involved in the rioting, however, were often overlooked in favour of interviews with policy makers and those in positions of authority.

When members of the community were interviewed the published quotations ranged from the fear of bystanders to the anger of rioters toward the police, seldom seeking the deeper reasons for the riot. Between these topics, however, a division was created by the media in which those who supported the reasons of the riot were negatively racialized or de-humanized, by only briefly discussing their opinions in favour of those in more powerful positions and focusing on criminality and the colour of those involved, to remove a sense of justification for their actions or beliefs. Meanwhile, those community members who expressed fear for their safety and property, were presented as real people being victimized by the riots, as was the case with Mrs. X, a young white English woman who was interviewed on her experiences with criminal elements in Brixton's West Indian population in 1981.¹⁴³ In essence, the newspapers firmly supported law and order and to a degree sought to discredit the situation which led to the riots by ignoring the many of the underlying causes of the riot when questioning rioters, as well as adding a negative connotation to the racialization those who were quoted. Rachel Pain identified the attempt to create a fear of

143 Robin Young and Nicholas Timmins, "Two Citizens of Brixton", *The Times*, April 13, 1981.

crime as a means of creating or reinforcing exclusions from social life.¹⁴⁴ Without referencing Bristol specifically, Pain's analytical framework of fear describes the media's treatment of the West Indian community in St. Paul's rather adroitly. Specifically, the West Indian community of St. Paul's were presented as “stereotypical 'others' whose presence appears to threaten disorder to mainstream life and values;” a group to be feared.¹⁴⁵ It is important to note, however, that Fred Emery's article, “The Shock and Challenge of Bristol, in the 5 April, 1980 edition of *The Times*, draws attention to the importance of underlying causes, namely unemployment in the West Indian community, but does little to counter the portrayal of the community in the initial reports.¹⁴⁶

In the immediate fallout of the riot, perhaps the most poignant and clear messages relayed to the public by the media were descriptions of the physical condition of St. Paul's and the news headlines, themselves. Both *The Guardian* and *The Times* in their headlines and descriptions of the setting of the riot, depicted a decrepit, almost alien urban centre overrun by crime. The April 5 1980 edition of *The Times* described St. Paul's as, “a crumbling area of dilapidated Victorian housing and monotonous council flats, with few social amenities”.¹⁴⁷ Prior to that, the 3 April edition of the paper published a cover story which described the neighbourhood of St. Paul's as Bristol's poorest area and “red light district, with prostitutes soliciting on the streets.”¹⁴⁸ On the day following the riot, *The Times* directed attention directly at St. Paul's West Indian community with the headline, “Black youths battle with Police in Bristol riot”, nowhere was the mixed-race nature of the crowd acknowledged.¹⁴⁹ The crowd was predominantly West Indian but was not

144 Rachel Pain, “Gender, Age, Race and Fear in the City,” *Urban Studies* 38, no. 5 (2001): 4.

145 Pain, “Gender, Age and Fear in the City...”, 4.

146 Fred Emery, “The Shock and Challenge of Bristol,” *The Times (London)*, 5 April 1980.

147 “Black Youths Battle with Police in Bristol Riot,” *Times*, April 3, 1980.

148 Ibid.

149 “Black Youths Battle with Police in Bristol Riot,” *Times*, April 3, 1980.

without a large number of white participants, the headlines, however, directed focus directly onto the West Indians, rather than simply the violent event or the social situation which contributed to the outbreak of the riot.

The Guardian on the other hand, did comparatively little in the way of describing the setting of the riot or the long-standing social problems associated with the district. In the opening lines of the 3 April edition of *The Guardian's* coverage of the riot, however, St. Paul's was referred to as a "poverty stricken black ghetto".¹⁵⁰ The headlines of both articles focused on the riot presented a negative connotation of race in the rioting. The sub-headline of *The Guardian's* cover story on the riot rather directly pointed out the major racial group involved in the rioting stating that, "Two hundred angry youths go on rampage after raid on black cafe in Bristol."¹⁵¹ The continuation of the front page coverage of the riot was, "19 police hurt as black rioters go on the rampage in city streets", which again pointed focus directly at the West Indian community in St. Paul's prior to any context for the riots being given.¹⁵²

Following the riot, newspapers became a major venue for the individuals close to one or the other side of the violence to voice their opinions and share their experience of the riot. Various members of the St. Paul's community were, perhaps for the first time, given the an opportunity to voice their opinions of the situation in the district by the swathes of reporters who descended on the district to cover the riot. The "opportunity" to have their voices heard, however, would make little positive impact for the public image of the West Indian community. The quotations which made it to print varied a great deal in subject matter, ranging in significance from race, to the police situation in the district and most importantly the anger of

150 "19 Police Hurt as Rioters Burn, Loot City Streets," *Guardian*, April 3, 1980.

151 Ibid.

152 Ibid.

local youth and the fear of community members for their safety.

The Times and *The Guardian*, as major newspapers and thus significant parts of mainstream English society, presented the interviewees from the perspective of mainstream society. Readers were led to sympathize with the personal experiences of frightened bystanders and police and fear the faceless, alien mob.

In terms of race, *The Times* cited, Mr. George Hendre, a white resident of St. Paul's. Hendre voiced a distaste for the police activities in the district, stating that, "The riot was started by the police who seemed to delight in pushing us about. My only regret is that more of the white residents did not join into the drive back the police."¹⁵³ The headline story regarding the riot in the 3 April, 1980 edition of *The Times*, focused more on issues of race in terms of quotes from the community, but still provided the public with mixed messages regarding the situation. Local Reverend Geoffrey Fowkes stated that, "Colour has nothing to do with this. I think it was a question of authority, and reaction to authority rather than a question of colour."¹⁵⁴

The reporting in the immediate fallout of the riot in, *The Guardian*, was somewhat less intensive in its focus on race, in terms of quotations from the community, than was *The Times*. *The Guardian* quoted one St. Paul's resident on the racial makeup of the mob, remarking that, "Not only blacks have taken part in the looting – whites have been involved as well."¹⁵⁵ Both the *Guardian* and the *Times*, at some point, made the distinction that the riot was not an entirely West Indian undertaking, they both placed a great deal of attention squarely on race.

The criminalization of the rioters by *The Times* and *The Guardian* was carried out in a few key ways during the early reporting following the riot in St. Paul's. Initially, it accomplished

153 Tim Jones, "Pressure Mounting for Public Inquiry Into Bristol Riot," *The Times (London)*, 5 April 1980.

154 "Black Youths Battle with Police in Bristol Riot," *Times*, April 3, 1980.

155 "19 Police Hurt as Rioters Burn, Loot City Streets," *Guardian*, April 3, 1980.

with descriptions of the social-economic conditions and crime problem in St. Paul's, but was primarily carried out by de-humanizing the rioters and humanizing the police and frightened community members. The rioters were depicted in both *The Guardian* and *The Times* as simply rioters, youths or West Indian youths, applying to them a mass identity, which separates them from their individual reasons for participating in the riot. Further, both papers used quotes from rioters and those who supported their uprising to present the rioters as extremely angry and fundamentally at odds with English society. *The Times* cited a West Indian resident of St. Paul's as saying that, "This is the start of a war between the police and the black community."¹⁵⁶ *The Times* also cited a West Indian youth as having said that, "The Babylon [Police] is always harrassing us and this time we kicked back."¹⁵⁷ The de-humanizing of the West Indian population was intended to lead the readership to disconnect from any emotional connection which could have been through a personal understanding of the plight of minority communities and to portray the rioters as hostile to English society and laws.

Police officers and frightened witnesses of the riot, however, were treated much differently from the rioters. Much attention was paid to ensuring that they appeared more human and relatable than the rioters who were portrayed as racialized, criminal, others. Even the simplest details such as *The Guardian's* emphasis on the "nineteen policemen and women hurt in the rioting", without a simple mention of any possible injuries to rioters did a great deal to promote the humanization of the police.¹⁵⁸ Having identified both policemen and women, rather than simply referring to them as officers or police, adds a degree of human connection to the police which is not afforded to the nameless, seemingly uninjured, rioting mob. Furthermore,

156 "Black Youths Battle with Police in Bristol Riot," *Times*, April 3, 1980.

157 "Pressure Mounting for Public Inquiry Into Bristol Riot," *Times*, April 5, 1980.

158 "19 Police Hurt as Rioters Burn, Loot City Streets," *Guardian*, April 3, 1980.

neither the frightened community members nor the police were racialized in any way by either newspaper, thus aligning them with mainstream society and victims of the racialized rioting 'other'.

The focus on the criminality of the rioters and their depiction as a faceless and “alien” mob bent on destroying the livelihoods of law-abiding citizens was continued by both newspapers with regard to their handling of fear and destruction. A large portion of the quotes which came from interviews with members of the St. Paul's community were from business owners and bystanders who feared for themselves, their families and their property. The personal stories of those who did not participate in the rioting were used to humanize those who were afraid or victims of the riot and the faceless, mob of non-English youth who ran wild in the neighbourhood. A St. Paul's pub owner was quoted in *The Guardian* as having “locked myself in and I am worried that we will be attacked next.”¹⁵⁹ In the same article an eye-witness to the events on Grosvenor Road who had locked himself and his wife in their home was said to be “praying that the rampaging youth on the street would not attack”, and stated that, “Luckily my two young girls are not here. They were out visiting friends and we told them not to come home.”¹⁶⁰ One St. Paul's resident, identified only as a “frightened girl” told *The Guardian* that, “Everyone went berserk. It was terrifying. Bricks and bottles flew everywhere.”¹⁶¹ Local Reverend Peter Jenkins addressed fright in the community when he commented on the stability of the elderly population stating, “...A lot of people were frightened and some of the elderly in the flats were so distressed we had to call a doctor in.”¹⁶² Even more specific than these stories

159 “19 Police Hurt as Rioters Burn, Loot City Streets,” *Guardian*, April 3, 1980.

160 Ibid

161 Ibid.

162 Ibid.

of fear for one's safety and property, both *The Guardian* and *The Times* made it a point to identify by name several journalists who were injured trying to cover the event.

The Times focused more on the police than the general public, but still managed to humanize the police through an emphasis on fear of the riotous mob. For instance, Chief Constable Brian Weigh told *The Times*, "It was threatening and frightening and had we stayed I am quite sure there would have been serious bloodshed and lives could have been lost."¹⁶³ Further, after having acknowledged earlier in the article through an interview with a member of the community that there had been a sense in the community that such an event was somewhat expected, the Police plead innocence to a degree as Chief Constable Weigh stated that he believed that the relationship between the police and the community was in good standing.¹⁶⁴ In both cases, much of the testimony of community members and police was published with the aimed of humanizing the physical and emotional 'victims' of the riot, and further condemning the alien fearsome actions of the de-humanized riotous mob.

An important detail in the interviews with those sympathetic to the rioters was how the papers were describing those individuals. As most of the St. Paul's residents who were interviewed by the media were kept anonymous, the papers sought ways to distinguish those individuals for their readership. The individuals being interviewed became spokespeople for their district and community for the press and by detailing those individuals the media were able to indirectly characterize the community in a particular image, as they were the only voices of their kind being heard. These descriptions were far more prevalent in *The Times* than they were in *The Guardian* who simply referred to their interviewees as "eye-witness" or another

163 "Pressure Mounting for Public Inquiry Into Bristol Riot," *Times*, April 5, 1980.

164 Ibid.

nondescript term.

The isolationist descriptions of those involved in the riots and those who spoke out in support of them would feature prominently in *The Times'* coverage. Despite making use of the quotation, "This was not a racial outbreak...it was a kick-back against police harassment", as a sub-headline for a story on the St. Paul's riot, *The Times* made a point to racialize those sympathetic to the rioters. One West Indian youth interviewed for the article was referred to first as a "rastafarian" and then as a "poorly dressed youth", both giving images of the Jamaican youth of St. Paul's being members of a counter-culture which is isolated from and alien to English society.¹⁶⁵ Later in the piece, a "university educated black man" was interviewed, the educational distinction being presented as something of an aberration in the community thus bringing attention to the low-level of education in the West Indian community as a whole.¹⁶⁶

The needless racialization of interviewees in these news reports draws attention to the social gap between mainstream British society and the largely West Indian urban community of St. Paul's, despite repeated quotes indicating that the violence was not a purely racial issue. The insinuations of these racialized descriptions demonstrate a fundamental support for the need of groups outside the social and economic mainstream to better integrate into British society in order to avoid the pitfalls of their current situation. The general lack of education and 'poor dress' coupled with racialization present an image to the reader of a counter-cultural group being closely connected to a large scale social rebellion against the police, who are meant to defend the general public from harm and are also a symbol of order in society.

Despite relatively minimal coverage of the riot in St. Paul's, Bristol, both *The Guardian*

165 "Pressure Mounting for Public Inquiry Into Bristol Riot," *Times*, April 5, 1980.

166 *Ibid.*

and *The Times* newspapers managed to portray the urban West Indian community of St. Paul's as alien and hostile to mainstream British society. St. Paul's was portrayed as an impoverished, crime-stricken ghetto which became a so-called "no-go zone" within a major English city. The media worsened the social isolation of the Bristol's West Indian community by racializing the rioters and those who supported them, but failing to do so for those community members who were frightened for their lives and property, or the police. In presenting the rioters as West Indian, the victims of the riots, the police and frightened community members, were insinuated to have been white. Despite the decrees of members of the public that St. Paul's was not a race riot, *The Guardian* and *The Times* deeply racialized the disorder, rioters and community. Furthermore, the rioters were painted as a faceless mob and the stories of frightened community members were presented in a very personal manner, thus shaping how their readers emotionally responded to the riot.

The news coverage of the St. Paul's riot was presented clearly from the perspective of mainstream English society, thus ignoring the failings of English society to deal with the socio-economic alienation of the West Indian community in that district. Rather than seeking to identify the underlying causes and present the plight of the St. Paul's West Indian community, *The Guardian* and *The Times* reinforced perceptions of the urban West Indian community as being alien to English society.

Chapter 2: Brixton, London, April 1981

Nearly exactly one year later and only 194 km removed from the violence in Bristol, Brixton, London became the focal point of the nation's attention. Unlike the violence which erupted in St. Paul's, which only lasted a few hours, the riots which broke out in Brixton lasted three days, with smaller disorders breaking out over the following months. The civil disorders in Britain were so profoundly destructive and troubling to the government that Lord Scarman was appointed to undertake a comprehensive inquiry, which came to be known as *The Scarman Inquiry*, into the causes of the outbreak, and what measures should be taken to prevent another such disturbance in the future. Due to the larger scale of the riots in Brixton, compared that in Bristol, the media reporting of the was considerably more expansive and in depth. As the reporting moved beyond attention grabbing headline news stories to more analytical and investigative pieces, the ideological positions of *The Guardian* and *The Times* more clearly emerged. *The Guardian's* reporting of the riots focused on presenting the realities and plight of the West Indian community in Brixton. *The Times*, on the other hand, presented reports that focused primarily on the perspectives of the police, government, bureaucratic agencies and were laced with right-wing conservatives views.

As a primarily working class district, Brixton was particularly affected the early 1980s unemployment crisis. Unemployment levels in the district were, however, felt more sharply by young West Indians, of whom 40% were unemployed, nearly double the figure of young whites.¹⁶⁷ Those young West Indians who did gain employment were largely confined to the same sorts of menial jobs that their parents and grandparents were forced to accept when immigrating to Britain decades earlier.¹⁶⁸ Coupled with the high unemployment rate in Brixton's

167 Couto, "To be Black in Brixton", 846.

168 Ibid, 846

West Indian community was a severe shortage of affordable housing. During the immigration boom of the 1950s, tenants' associations organized to keep West Indians out of housing, thus consigning the West Indian community to slum houses and multiple occupancy.¹⁶⁹ By 1981, as many as 18,000 members of Brixton's community were on waiting lists for housing.¹⁷⁰

Despite the lack of housing and unemployment woes in Brixton, the neighbourhood was filled with activity. Andy McSmith posited in his book, *No Such Thing as Society*, that the housing shortage in Brixton contributed to the liveliness of street life in the neighbourhood.¹⁷¹ Overcrowded houses pushed the youth onto the streets where they developed their own culture around “dope and reggae music” and their own vernacular.¹⁷² The youths took ownership of their neighbourhood, even making use of empty houses for “gambling clubs, dope centres or venues for all-night blues parties.”¹⁷³ Music and poetry played a major role in the street youth culture in Brixton. Artists like Brixton inhabitant Linton Kwesi Johnson produced a unique brand of dub poetry, spoken in the local vernacular, which aired their displeasure with the state of affairs in their neighbourhood and country. Johnson's poem, “Inglan is a Bitch” voices displeasure with the difficulty of life in Britain and the struggle to earn enough money to survive.¹⁷⁴ The high unemployment rate and vibrant street life led to a high level of street crime. In 1980, 10,626 serious offences were recorded by police in Brixton, a 13 per cent rise since 1976.¹⁷⁵ Over the same period, recorded offences of robbery and other violent theft in Brixton increased by 138 per

169 Sivanandan, “From Resistance to Rebellion...”, 120.

170 Couto, “To be Black in Brixton”.

171 McSmith, “No Such Thing as Society”, 90.

172 Ibid, 90.

173 Ibid.

174 Linton Kwesi Johnson, “Inglan Is a Bitch,” January 9, 2012, accessed January 9, 2012, http://www.eng.fju.edu.tw/worldlit/caribbean/johnson_bitch.htm.

175 Scarman, “The Scarman Report...” 83.

cent, more than double the increase in the district as a whole.¹⁷⁶

After decades of the same sort of unemployment, housing and infrastructure issues that plagued St. Paul's, the inhabitants of Brixton also found themselves in the midst of a major police crackdown on street crime in their neighbourhood. Dating back to the 1950s, there existed a negative relationship between the police and the West Indian residents of Brixton.¹⁷⁷ A. Sivanandan noted that liberties were being taken by police or police-like figures, beginning with the carte-blanche given to immigration officers who screened new entrants to the country.¹⁷⁸ Issues with the police worsened for the West Indian community once living in the country, as is reflected in the 1965 report on police excesses in Brixton, written by Joseph A. Hunte and published by the West Indian Standing Conference, entitled, "Nigger Hunting in London".¹⁷⁹ In an article entitled, "Policing Racism", Richard Webster cited the West Indian Standing Conference's article as having documented "the ready use of dogs against black people and ... frequent instances of overt racist abuse."¹⁸⁰ Further, Webster quotes the Hunte article directly writing that "it has been confirmed from reliable sources that sergeants and constables do leave police stations with the express purpose of going nigger-hunting."¹⁸¹ By 1978, the relationship between police and the community had become so strained that community leadership, in the form of the Council for Community Relations in Lambeth (CCRL), and police Commander Greaves formed a Liaison Committee in order to improve relations. The Committee, and the hope for better relations between the community and the police was, however, be short-lived.

176 Ibid, 83.

177 Sivanandan, "From Resistance to Rebellion...", 120.

178 Sivanandan, "From Resistance to Rebellion...", 120.

179 Ibid, 120.

180 Richard Webster, "Policing Racism," March 20, 2012, accessed March 20, 2012, <http://www.richardwebster.net/policingracism.html>.

181 Ibid.

The Special Police Group (SPG), a paramilitary anti-street crime unit of the Metropolitan Police, began operating in Brixton in 1975 and drafted nearly half its force into the district by 1978.¹⁸² The SPG made use of methods such as “SUS” or stop under suspicion, road blocks and raids, which the West Indian community claimed unfairly targeted them.¹⁸³ In 1979, an SPG operation in Brixton was carried out without informing the community leadership on the committee, for fear that they compromised the effectiveness of the operation.¹⁸⁴ The increased policing operations in Brixton without advising community leaders seriously worsened police community relations and was a major step toward the disbandment of the Liaison Committee. The final blow to formal partnership between the West Indian community and police came in 1979 when three members of the CCRL were wrongly arrested and detained for an assault on two plainclothes officers. After this incident, community leaders pulled out of the Liaison Committee, and despite later attempts to reconcile, the relationship between the West Indian community and the police had reached an all time low.¹⁸⁵

With the relationship between the West Indian community and the police in tatters and with a rising crime-rate in Brixton, SPG -style operations in the neighbourhood increased. Operation SWAMP 81, the SPG's major foray into Brixton in April 1981, saw 120 police officers, many in plainclothes, enter Brixton with orders to stop and question anyone who looked suspicious.¹⁸⁶ The operation led to 943 stop and searches and 118 arrests, leading to 75 charges being laid, all in four days in early April 1981.¹⁸⁷ More than half of those stopped during the four

182 Amrit Wilson, “Brixton Burns”, *Economic and Political Weekly* 16, no. 18 (May 2, 1981): 806.

183 Couto, “To be Black in Brixton...”, 847.

184 Scarman, *The Scarman Report...*, 88.

185 *Ibid*, 89.

186 Institute of Race Relations, *Policing Against Black People* (London: Institute of Race Relations, 1987), 4.

187 Scarman, *The Scarman Report...* 95.

day period were West Indian and more than two-thirds were under the age of 21.¹⁸⁸

Just days after the start of Swamp 81, with tensions still very high within Brixton, a West Indian youth was stopped by police, setting off a chain of events which led to several days of violent unrest. According to the *Scarman Report*, on Friday 10 April, 1981, at a little past 6 pm, Police Constable Stephen Margiotta spotted a distressed 'black' youth with a gaping stab wound in his back running down Atlantic Road in Brixton.¹⁸⁹ After a brief pursuit, police officers were able to catch the youth in order to check his injury, before being approached by several youths demanding that the injured man be left alone.¹⁹⁰ The youth escaped from the officers, but was stopped shortly afterward attempting to leave the area in a minicab.¹⁹¹ As the Police officers were attempting to tend to the youth's injuries in the mini-cab, a large crowd gathered around the scene.¹⁹² Thinking that the police had something to do with the injury to the young man, the crowd pulled him away and loaded him into another car as the police called for back-up.¹⁹³ As both the size of the crowd and the number of officers entering the area grew, violence began to erupt. Bricks, rocks and other missiles were rained down onto the police, who responded with riot shields and dog teams.¹⁹⁴ By 7:30 pm, the crowd had quieted and dispersed and the riot had come to an end.¹⁹⁵

Unlike in Bristol, the police did not withdraw from the district, but rather, increased their numbers in the area over the course of the evening. The Metropolitan Police made the decision to continue the SWAMP operation in Brixton into Saturday and deployed nearly one-hundred

188 Scarman, *The Scarman Report....*, 95

189 Ibid, 38.

190 Ibid, 38.

191 Ibid, 39.

192 Ibid, 40.

193 Ibid, 40.

194 Ibid, 41.

195 Ibid, 42.

additional officers to the district.¹⁹⁶ The heavy police presence in the area proved to be a major mistake on the part of the police, as by Saturday afternoon their presence had captured the attention of the community, as criticisms of the police's activities and rumours of the night before swirled.¹⁹⁷ At around 4:40 pm, two young police constables stopped a hired car outside the hiring agency as they saw the driver place some folded pieces of paper in his sock.¹⁹⁸ Citing a suspicion of drugs possession, the officers searched the driver and the car, finding nothing incriminating. According to evidence submitted to the *Scarman Inquiry* by Police Constables Cameron and Thornton, the driver protested to the police searching his car, fearing that they planted something incriminating in the car.¹⁹⁹

As police searched the vehicle, a group of approximately thirty youths, mainly West Indian, began to move toward the cab shouting at the police, accusing them of harassing the driver.²⁰⁰ The police arrested one youth for allegedly shoving one of the officers, as the crowd grew and became more hostile.²⁰¹ The violence quickly spread throughout the district with arson, lootings and missiles being hurled at police. A police van carrying reinforcements arrived at the scene and was rocked and attacked by the growing crowd.²⁰² By 9 pm, police were making use of riot shields in an attempt to contain the majority of the rioting, eventually turning the jets from a fire engine on the crowd.²⁰³ Order was finally restored in Brixton at 11pm, after nearly six hours of destruction. Saturday's riot was significantly more destructive than that which occurred on Friday. Police made eighty-two arrests and 279 officers were injured, along with forty-five

196 Scarman, *The Scarman Report...*, 43.

197 Ibid., 47.

198 Ibid, 48.

199 Ibid, 48.

200 Ibid, 48.

201 Ibid, 49.

202 Ibid, 49.

203 Ibid, 63.

members of the public.²⁰⁴ Destruction to private and police property was vast, with sixty-one private cars destroyed, fifty-six police vehicles damaged and as many as 145 residences damaged or destroyed.²⁰⁵

Saturday's rioting was by far the most destructive and intense over the course of the weekend, but the community again saw violence in the streets on Sunday. The police maintained their large numbers in Brixton, which led to another outburst from the populace. Sunday's rioting began around 5 pm, as police arrested a West Indian youth for obstruction. The officers came under attack when making the arrest, being pelted by rocks by the gathered West Indian youth.²⁰⁶ The violence continued sporadically through Sunday night into the early hours of Monday morning. Sunday's unrest primarily consisted of small, isolated groups of youths stoning the police and some minor looting, but no arson as on the previous night.²⁰⁷ In the end, some 354 individuals were arrested over the course of the weekend, 256 black and 98 white.²⁰⁸ Of the first 101 of those individuals who went on trial, 63 were black, 35 white, 2 listed as Mediterranean and one as Asian.²⁰⁹ The ages of the rioters who appeared in court ranged from 11 to 48; 89 were male and 22 female.²¹⁰

The media coverage of the rioting in Bristol one year earlier was modest by comparison to the larger scale of the rioting in Brixton. Not only was the rioting in Brixton on a much larger scale than that in Bristol one year earlier, it also took place in the Capitol city, which ensured that the media focus was far more significant. As the scale of the media coverage changed, so did the

204 Scarman, *The Scarman Report...*, 65.

205 Ibid, 65.

206 Ibid, 69.

207 Ibid, 72.

208 "Two Out of 100 Jailed at Brixton," *Times*, July 14, 1981.

209 Ibid.

210 Ibid.

focus of what was being covered. The coverage in *The Times* and *The Guardian* underwent some fundamental changes, compared to how the riot in Bristol was covered one year earlier.

The reporting of the riot in St. Paul's was primarily a very reactive response to breaking news, *The Times* and *The Guardian* carried on their coverage of Brixton for weeks following the riot, engaging in much more in-depth journalism. The immediate reporting, however, took on a very similar tone and shape to that in the wake of the St. Paul's riot. The first reports from *The Times* and *The Guardian*, regarding the initial outbreak of violence in Brixton on 10 April, were quite similar to one another, and echoed the police and race focused reporting which was prevalent in the fallout from riot in St. Paul's. *The Times* article, entitled, "Police hurt in scuffles with blacks", focused primarily on the injuries to police and mentions that the crowd was made up of West Indian youths.²¹¹ Similarly, *The Guardian* piece, "Police hurt in running fight", made brief mention of police injuries, the tension within the West Indian community in Brixton and the large immigrant population in the district.²¹² Quick and generalized reporting of the riot, however, largely contained to the attention-grabbing headline stories which would feed into existing negative stereotypes of the West Indian community.

The articles published in *The Observer*, the Sunday sister paper of *The Guardian*, focused on re-telling the events of the day before, underlying their re-telling of events were themes of destruction, violence and criminality.²¹³ *The Guardian's* and *Observer's* riot articles published on the 12th and 13th of April, bore a striking resemblance to their coverage of the riot in Bristol. The 12 April edition of *The Observer* contained articles entitled, "The night Brixton burned: Bloody clashes as rioters rampage on streets of London" and "Looters in Blazing Brixton", both

211 "Police Hurt in Scuffles with Blacks," *Times*, April 11, 1981.

212 "Police Hurt in Running Fight," *Guardian*, April 11, 1981.

213 "The Night Brixton Burned," *Observer*, April 12, 1981.

highlighted violence and destruction in their descriptions of the riots.²¹⁴ The emphasis placed on looting during the riot distracted from the social causes of the violence and criminalized those involved in the riot, based on looting which was largely carried out by opportunists and had little to do with the core causes of the riot.

The 13 April edition of *The Times* rounded out their immediate reporting of the weekend of rioting in Brixton by focusing on attacks on the police which occurred for “no apparent reason”, looting and the response and perspective of the government.²¹⁵ A brief story published by *The Times'* political editor in the 14 April edition of the paper entitled “Violence condemned by Mrs. Thatcher”, provides a direct view of the Prime Minister's perspective on the riot.²¹⁶ Despite having acknowledged the West Indian community's lack of trust for the police, Mrs. Thatcher, stood behind her firm support for law and order, stating that “nothing but nothing justifies what happened ... It was totally wrong that anyone should attempt to take it out on the police.”²¹⁷ Thatcher also maintained that she could not accept that unemployment was a primary cause of the disorders as “in the thirties unemployment had been higher but there had been no violence.”²¹⁸ Thatcher further dismissed the statements of the Lambeth Labour councillors who referred to the police force in Brixton as “an army of occupation” by stating that their position was, “absolute nonsense”.²¹⁹ As is made clear in the article, Prime Minister Thatcher stood strongly behind law and order, a position which was echoed in *The Times'* reporting of the riots.

The perspective of the Thatcher government and their planned response to the riot in Brixton figured prominently in *The Times* cover story, “Mr. Whitelaw expected to announce

214 Ibid.

215 “Mr. Whitelaw Expected to Announce Inquiry Into Brixton Riots Today,” *Times*, April 13, 1981.

216 “Violence Condemned by Mrs Thatcher,” *Times*, April 14, 1981.

217 “Violence Condemned by Mrs Thatcher,” *Times*, April 14, 1981.

218 Ibid.

219 Ibid.

inquiry into Brixton riots today”, published on 13 April, 1981.²²⁰ Martin Huckerby's eye-witness piece, “Looters moved in as the flames spread” in the same edition of *The Times*, takes the form of a minute by minute account of looting and assault on police during the rioting on the night of the 12th.²²¹ Huckerby's piece focused the looting which took place during the riot, rather than the context of the riot itself. Devoid of contextual ties to the social causes of the riots, Huckerby's article, like most of the immediate reports, focuses attention directly on criminal behaviour during the riots by evoking images of injured and overwhelmed police officers and members of the community climbing through smashed store fronts with their arms filled with stolen merchandise.

Depictions of race figured prominently in *The Guardian* and *The Observer's* early reporting of the riots in Brixton. As was the case with the reporting in St. Paul's, articles in *The Guardian* and *Observer* made contradictory assertions about the racial makeup of the rioters. Articles published on the 12 and 13 of April both identified the rioters as West Indian youths who were being “helped by a small group of young whites”.²²² Repeated assertions were made in all of the immediate reports in *The Guardian* and *Observer* that the violence in Brixton was not racial in nature. Community leaders, bystanders and participants in the riot were all given a voice in the reporting and almost exclusively used it to assert that the violence was not a race riot.²²³ Despite stating that the riot was not a “race riot”, race was a focal point in re-telling the of the events, largely in attempts to relay which racial groups were partaking in which activities. In *The Guardian* and *Observer*, West Indians accounted for the vast majority of the rioters and

220 “Mr. Whitelaw Expected to Announce Inquiry Into Brixton Riots Today,” *Times*, April 13, 1981.

221 Martin Huckerby, “Looters Moved in as the Flames Spread,” *Times*, April 13, 1981.

222 “Looters in Blazing Brixton,” *Observer*, April 12, 1981.

223 “Brixton Rioting Flares Again as Police Move In,” *Guardian*, April 13, 1981.

looters, and were only joined by white youth in a complementary role.

Just as in *The Guardian* and *Observer*, racial descriptions played a prominent role in the immediate reporting of the Brixton riots in *The Times*. Contrary to what was being reported in *The Guardian* and *Observer*, an article in the 13 April edition of *The Times* noted that West Indians and white youth were on the streets of Brixton in equal numbers.²²⁴ Despite the assertion that the crowd was mixed-race, the same article twice held that the violence of the previous night was between police and West Indian youths.²²⁵ In reference to the government's response, *The Times'* writers cited government ministers as having acknowledged that the riot was an “outpouring” of the anger of West Indian youths toward the police.²²⁶ In the same edition of *The Times*, Martin Huckerby, in his attempt to re-tell what he observed during the riots, consistently described the race of individuals whom he saw looting and rioting.²²⁷ Without necessarily incorrectly racializing or creating a negative image of one group over another, the reporting in *The Times*, with regard to race, became confused by contradictory statements regarding the racial makeup of the rioters.

The headline news stories in the immediate aftermath of the Brixton riots in both newspapers was similar, but were in many respects also similar to that of the Bristol riot one year earlier. The follow up coverage in the days following the riots saw the conservative ideological stance of *The Times* and more liberal position of *The Guardian* begin to show more clearly. The focal points of the two newspapers in their analysis and investigation of the causes of the riot began to diverge. *The Times'* post-riot coverage revolved primarily around the perspectives of police officers and government officials. *The Guardian* and *Observer* on the other hand paid

224 “Mr. Whitelaw Expected to Announce Inquiry Into Brixton Riots Today,” *Times*, April 13, 1981.

225 Ibid.

226 Ibid.

227 Martin Huckerby, “Looters Moved in as the Flames Spread,” *Times*, April 13, 1981.

closer attention to Brixton's West Indian community and the underlying causes of the riot, most notably by regular reporting on the findings of the Scarman Inquiry.

The Guardian's analytical and investigative coverage of Brixton began with an article focused on the perspectives of the people of Brixton, entitled "Brixton's Morning After", written by West Indian journalist Mike Phillips and *The Guardian's* social policy editor and Brixton inhabitant, Malcolm Dean.²²⁸ The two writers were able to capture the feeling of Brixton residents in the wake of the riots. Phillips interviewed one West Indian youth who called the riot "the black man's Christmas", basking in the feeling of having exercised power.²²⁹ Bringing to the forefront information that was neglected in the earlier discussions of the riots, such as the fact that most community owned businesses were left alone as chain stores were vandalized and looted, *The Guardian* writers sought to provide the reader with a real understanding of what had occurred in the neighbourhood.²³⁰ Further, Phillips and Dean discussed the depth of the social and economic woes of Brixton's West Indian community in relation to housing, unemployment and the failure of youth training schemes, but at the same time brought attention to the rich cultural events which occur within the district and the wealth of community-run programs and businesses.²³¹ For instance, Phillips wrote that, "Brixton is actually full of variety. For instance, there are projects set up by West Indian groups and community workers to alleviate some of the neighbourhood's social problems, which are thought to be characteristic of the place", a clear contrast with the view of Brixton as the embodiment of de-industrialization and poverty.²³²

228 Mike Phillips and Malcolm Dean, "Brixton's Morning After," *Guardian*, April 13, 1981.

229 Ibid.

230 Mike Phillips and Malcolm Dean, "Brixton's Morning After," *Guardian*, April 13, 1981.

231 Ibid.

232 Ibid.

The West Indian community was certainly the focal point of the article, but there was no dismissal of the involvement of other racial groups. Further, Dean quickly dispels the idea that the riots were an example of senseless and blind destruction and looting by noting that, “Long rows of shops, owned or run by Chinese, Asian or black people on Railton and Atlantic Road were left untouched. Well known white chain stores – John Collier, Burton's, Curry's, Dayville, had had their windows broken.”²³³ Rather, Dean and Phillips shaped their presentation of the riots and their aftermath as the result of the poor treatment of a large segment of the population of the district, with the West Indian community being those most deeply affected by these circumstances, but not them alone. Not only did the writers grapple with the fallout of the rioting, but also realities of the community's situation and the destruction left behind after the riots, which were often overlooked in other reports.

The *Guardian's* focus on community was expanded on 18 April with the publication of an article entitled “Divided opinions on how to build for a better Brixton”.²³⁴ The article goes into great depth regarding the different levels of social and political influence in Brixton and the organizations who were seeking to re-build the community.²³⁵ The riots were presented, in this piece, as being inevitable due to issues with the police and the inability of the community's power structure to properly fund social projects.²³⁶ The article goes on to discuss the power relationships in the district, both before and after the riot, revealing how the riots allowed the youths of the community to demonstrate some degree of power after years of powerlessness.²³⁷ MP John Fraser is quoted as saying that, “A taboo has been broken”, with regard to the young

233 Ibid.

234 “Divided Opinions On How to Build for a Better Brixton,” *Guardian*, April 18, 1981.

235 Ibid.

236 Ibid.

237 Ibid.

rioters attempting to affect their circumstances.²³⁸ Further, he noted that, “Not one adult or leader of opinion in the black community has uttered one word of condemnation”, regarding the riot.²³⁹ The emphasis on power relations in the community provides the reader with a real understanding of the situation which led to the rioting and an explanation for it, excluding an emphasis on West Indian criminality as a major factor.

The majority of the remainder of *The Guardian's* coverage of the aftermath of the Brixton riots took the form of a series of articles which closely followed the information being gleaned by the Scarman Inquiry.²⁴⁰ These took a different approach to post-riot coverage, than did the *Guardian's* previous investigative articles. As the series simply printed the evidence that was being presented at the Inquiry on a day-to-day basis, the thematic emphases changed drastically from one article to the next. For instance, the articles published on 16 and 17 June, 1981, respectively entitled “How Operation Swamp ended in the Brixton riots”²⁴¹ and “Street Tensions grew in weeks leading to riots”²⁴², which recounted the events of the riots and the social and economic situation in Brixton, were essentially countermanded by the article published on 18 June, “Operation Swamp 'did not contribute to riot”²⁴³, which was based primarily on police testimony.

The analytical and investigative coverage published in *The Times* takes a very different shape than the largely community based coverage of *The Guardian*. Interestingly, attention was paid to both the socioeconomic causes of the riots and the friction between the police and

238 Ibid.

239 Ibid.

240 “How Operation Swamp Ended in the Brixton Riots,” *Guardian*, June 16, 1981.

241 “How Operation Swamp Ended in the Brixton Riots,” *Guardian*, June 16, 1981.

242 “Street Tensions Grew in Weeks Leading to Riots,” *Guardian*, June 17, 1981.

243 “How Operation Swamp Ended in the Brixton Riots,” *Guardian*, June 16, 1981.

community. Both factors are never presented together which, in Maria Couto's view is problematic as those factors cannot explain the riots individually.²⁴⁴ Further, only an interview with a Brixton Reverend presents the community's perspective of police-community relations, several other articles emphasize on a bureaucratic and disconnected view of the riots or are laced with support for right-wing themes and ideas. In the days immediately following the riots short articles such as, "Overcrowded Brixton: Attempt to alter racial housing imbalance"²⁴⁵ and "Communities and the Police: Are there lessons in the way Handsworth became quieter?"²⁴⁶, began to touch upon the social and policing problems in Brixton prior to the riots, but do little to engage the voices of the community members. Both articles engaged in a discussion of the social problems in Brixton, namely West Indian alienation and resentment of the police and the severe lack of housing in the district, but do so from a disconnected and bureaucratic perspective. Later articles, published as a series entitled "Brixton Riots: The Aftermath", examined Brixton in the fallout of the riots, but not from the perspective of the people living there. Citing an MP and a trade union leader, the article entitled, "Hattersley attack on 'inadequate basis' of inquiry into riots", discusses, in brief, the Labour Party position that unemployment was the primary cause of the riots.²⁴⁷

The London Liberal Party's stance that the Brixton riots were caused by a shifting of public funds out of the inner-city, particularly in terms of housing, was featured in the article, "Brixton riots the result of shifting funds out of cities, Liberals say".²⁴⁸ The article, however,

244 Couto, 'To Be Black in Brixton..'

245 John Young, Robin Young, and Diane Geddes, "Overcrowded Brixton: Attempt to Alter Racial Housing Imbalance" *Times*, April 13, 1981.

246 Peter Evans, "Communities and the Police: Are There Lessons in the Way Handsworth Became Quieter?," *Times*, April 13, 1981.

247 "Brixton Riots "Hattersley Attack On 'inadequate Basis' of Inquiry Into Riots: The Aftermath," *Times*, April 15, 1981.

248 "Brixton Riots the Result of Shifting Funds Out of Cities, Liberals Say," *Times*, April 15, 1981.

quickly shifts away from the Brixton context to focus primarily on the state of council house funding across London.²⁴⁹ A piece by *The Times* reporter Diana Geddes entitled “Job opportunities for young have almost disappeared” discusses the state of unemployment in Lambeth, but from a purely educational and statistical perspective.²⁵⁰ These articles, however, completely lacked input from members of the community, outside of the leaders of community groups and discussed the social issues from a very bureaucratic and external perspective. The emphasis on the voices of the bureaucrats and government officials is important to contextualizing Brixton's problems, *The Times* empowered the voices of those disconnected from the actual events, and largely ignored those who were most affected.

There were a few short articles published in *The Times*, in which members of the Brixton community were interviewed, however. For instance, a short article published on 16 April entitled “Vicar speaks despairingly of his strife-torn parish” comes as close to seeking out the voice of the community in Brixton as any article published in *The Times* by interviewing Brixton vicar Robert Nind.²⁵¹ Nind's interview focuses primarily on his difficulty in brokering a dialogue between the police and community and the attitudes of young police officers in the neighbourhood.²⁵² He did, however, demonstrate an understanding of the frustration felt by the West Indian youths of the community, citing the “mind-blowing' racial attitudes” of police officers.²⁵³

Unlike the interview with Reverend Nind, the twin articles entitled “How the Reggae music soured for Mrs. X” and “Only way, says jobless Mr. T” portrayed the perspectives of white

249 Ibid.

250 Diana Geddes, “Job Opportunities for Young Have Almost Disappeared,” *Times*, April 15, 1981.

251 “Brixton Riots “vicar Speaks Despairingly of His Strife-Torn Parish: The Aftermath,” *Times*, April 16, 1981.

252 Ibid.

253 Ibid.

and West Indian inhabitants of Brixton as sharply contrasting and contained language and themes connected to the Conservative right.²⁵⁴ Mrs. X's interview is filled with references to anti-social behaviour and criminal behaviour within the West Indian community. The major themes in her testimony direct focus onto a need for more police intervention in the neighbourhood, particularly when she stated that, "This is my country. This is my town. I am not going to be terrified here."²⁵⁵ Mrs. X, a "young white, 'professionalish' woman", presents her experience living in Brixton through her encounters with criminality and fear of young West Indians. Mrs. X believed that the members of the West Indian community had specifically targeted her because of her race stating that, "Then I smile at a young black boy in the street, perhaps 10 years old, and he looks back at me with a look of just pure loathing. It is terrifying."²⁵⁶ Mrs. X maintained that she does not fear the entire West Indian community, and that she lives between two financially stable West Indian families, but that after being assaulted by a group of West Indian men in a "racialistic attack", she lived in a state of panic, carrying with her a "deep well of hatred and resentment."²⁵⁷

Mr. T, a young West Indian resident of Brixton, on the other hand, dismisses the idea of racial prejudice between white and black in the district, but demonstrated a strong support for the actions of the rioters and his lack of faith in the prospects for West Indians in England.²⁵⁸ He stated that, "Brixton is a nice place. It's a very good place to live", but remains clearly frustrated at the lack of political and economic agency afforded to members of his community.²⁵⁹ After stating discussing his distrust for and dislike of the police, Mr. T stated, "Now I don't consider

254 Robin Young and Nicholas Timmins, "Two Citizens of Brixton," *Times*, April 13, 1981.

255 Ibid.

256 Ibid.

257 Robin Young and Nicholas Timmins, "Two Citizens of Brixton," *Times*, April 13, 1981.

258 Ibid.

259 Ibid.

myself British”. The interview later notes that Mr. T saw no future in England and that his future “[lay] in going abroad back to Guyana”, lending credence to Enoch Powell's calls for optional repatriation of minorities.²⁶⁰ Reverend Nind's testimony presents a clear voice for the community in Brixton, but the interviews with Mrs. X and Mr. T's interviews appear to present a case for certain ideas stemming from right-wing ideology, namely the benefits of optional repatriation and the need for an emphasis on law and order.

Unlike *The Guardian* and *Observer*, the *The Times'* post-riot coverage placed the perspectives of the police at the focal point of their discussion. The focus on the police perspective in *The Times'* post-riot reporting began with an article in the 13 April edition entitled “The Police View: Force on streets 'was no provocation'”.²⁶¹ The article, citing police officers, claimed that the police presence in Brixton did not lead to the riot, and was necessary to maintain law and order in the district.²⁶² The police portrayed in the article, as protectors of law and order against the criminal elements in Brixton. At the same time, the fear felt by police officers during the riot and the injuries that they suffered were highlighted.²⁶³ Further, the article presents a police theory that external militants were responsible for organizing and arming the rioters, a theory which essentially contradicts the rioters' view of the riots as having been a means of demonstrating power within their environment.²⁶⁴

An article entitled “Policing and Crime: Why we stop black youngsters”, published in the 14 April edition of *The Times*, explains that, from the perspective of veteran officers serving in Brixton, the riots were an inevitability, due to the attitude of the West Indian community.²⁶⁵

260 Ibid.

261 “The Police View: Force On Streets 'was No Provocation',” *Times*, April 13, 1981.

262 Ibid.

263 “The Police View: Force On Streets 'was No Provocation',” *Times*, April 13, 1981.

264 Ibid.

265 “Policing and Crime: Why We Stop Black Youngsters,” *Times*, April 13, 1981., April 13, 1981.

One middle-aged officer remarked that “There is almost an inbred tendency for coloured people to believe they ought to be able to do their own thing.”²⁶⁶ According to the *Times*, the criminal attitude of the West Indian youth in turn led to a higher crime rate among the West Indian community, and thus the police developed a “natural tendency” to target West Indian youths.²⁶⁷ The article later notes that police officers believed that the SPG operation in Brixton was successful in lowering the crime rate and thus achieved its end.²⁶⁸ Similarly, in *The Times'* sporadic coverage of the Scarman Inquiry an article published on 4 July entitled “Bombarded Brixton police sang to raise morale”, presents the testimony of police at the Inquiry hearings. The article focuses on the testimony of Constable Roger Fuller, who discusses the fear and stress felt by officers during the riots who stated that in an attempt to keep up morale, “One chap from Z Division started singing, and for some stupid reason everyone joined in. It kept our spirits up.”²⁶⁹ Further, Fuller's statement spoke of the intent of the rioters themselves stating that, “Here the crowd was out to injure or kill you.”²⁷⁰

Despite having started their immediate coverage of the Brixton riots with very similar tones and focus, *The Times* and *The Guardian* began to shift in different directions when it came to seeking an understanding of the riots in their aftermath. *The Guardian* made some attempts to access members of the community and rioters in order to understand the riots from their starting point, *The Times* on the other hand largely kept the community at an arm's length. Race played a major role in how both newspapers presented their discussions. The Guardian sought out the West Indian community understand their plight and reasons for rioting, as they

266 Ibid.

267 Ibid.

268 Ibid.

269 “Bombarded Brixton Police Sang to Raise Morale.” *Times*, July 4, 1981.

270 Ibid.

were central force during the riots. *The Times* often framed the mention of race in terms of black versus white, largely connected to criminality and policing. In the one instance where the perspectives of Brixton residents was sought, the experiences of white and West Indian were presented as a contrast to one another, emphasizing criminality within the West Indian community, the fear of white residents and a disconnect between West Indians and British society.

The emphasis placed on the perspective of police officers in the *Times*, particularly in terms of some rather generalized condemnations of the conduct of West Indians in Brixton, firmly entrenched their coverage in a conservative interpretation of the events. The *Times'* conservative perspective placed the rioters, primarily the West Indian rioters, as an opposition to law and order and British society. *The Guardian's* in-depth investigations into the perspectives of the community, coupled with their coverage of the Scarman Inquiry, allowed for a significantly more balanced presentation of the causes and feelings surrounding the riots. With these divisions within the perspectives of *The Times* and *The Guardian* becoming more clear in April 1981, the country-wide rioting which enveloped England in the following months saw the continuation of the same themes in media reporting.

Chapter 3: The Summer of 1981

Just two and a half months after the major outbreak of violence in Brixton, tempers flared in frustrated urban communities around the country. Unlike in Brixton, where the rioting was largely restrained to one weekend with minor outbursts in the following weeks, the riots of the summer of 1981 occurred on and off for the entirety of July and August. Beginning with a riotous weekend in Toxteth, Liverpool from 3-6 July, before spreading to Moss Side, Manchester on the 7th and 8th, and to over twenty different cities on 11 and 12 July and beyond, the riots of the summer of 1981 were of an unprecedented size and scale.²⁷¹ The disturbances of the Summer of 1981 were widespread, affecting cities such as Hull, Birmingham, Leeds and Leicester, the majority of the media's attention, however, fell on the events in Liverpool and to a lesser extent, Manchester. The rioting that had initially erupted in April in London had spread to all corners of the country, ranging to centres like Manchester and Leeds, both of which being over 300km from the capital. The media's reporting was focused primarily on Toxteth and Moss Side, although the other disturbances were also covered in some capacity.

Despite the short time between the rioting in Brixton and that in Liverpool, Manchester and elsewhere, there was a slight shift in the way in which the news media covered the riots. The coverage in the *Times* remained very much the same as it was in Brixton, whereas the *Guardian* saw somewhat of a shift toward the style undertaken by the *Times*. Whether it was due to the difficulty of close observation and community penetration of so many different communities, or the idea that such investigative journalism in Brixton appropriately addressed the position of the affected communities, the *Guardian's* coverage moved away from in depth investigations of the perspectives of community members. The *Guardian* did, however, continue to depict the news

271 An outbreak of violence in Southall, a London suburb, precipitated by a conflict between the South Asian community and the National Front, also occurred on 3 July. Due to the differing circumstances, participants and causes, Southall will be handled separately in this study.

through a more analytical lens, but did so with criticism of the police and government rather than the perspectives of individual communities, feeding into negative images of the West Indian population and re-enforcing racist views held within English society.

As was the case in both Bristol and Brixton, the unemployment situation in Toxteth's West Indian community in the lead up the riots was dire. Between 1976 and 1980 unemployment in Toxteth fluctuated between 17,000 and 18,000, but increased sharply between 1980 and 1981 to reach 21,000 unemployed.²⁷² P.N. Torkington noted that employers in Liverpool's urban sections had developed sophisticated techniques for discriminating against West Indian people in the hiring process, even for low-skilled jobs.²⁷³ Candidates with "black foreign" surnames were often excluded from interviews and those West Indians who did gain employment, particularly visible in nursing, were kept in marginalized roles despite equal abilities and credentials to their white peers.²⁷⁴ According to Lord Scarman, the high level of unemployment again affected young West Indians most acutely.²⁷⁵ In 1977, more than half of those receiving unemployment payments in Liverpool were between 16 and 24 years of age, when the unemployment rate for West Indians was nearly three times higher than that for whites.²⁷⁶ By 1981, as many as 52 per cent of Toxteth's West Indian youth were unemployed.²⁷⁷

The high level of unemployment and persistent racial discrimination in Toxteth left West Indian youths with little in the way of opportunities and contributed to a high crime rate in the district. In 1980 alone, there were 995 recorded robbery offences in all of Merseyside, with 20

272 Scarman, *The Scarman Report...*, 32.

273 Zack-Williams, "African Diaspora Conditioning," 531.

274 Ibid, 537.

275 Scarman, *The Scarman Report...*, 32.

276 Zack-Williams, "African Diaspora Conditioning," 537.

277 Winder, *Bloody Foreigners*, 403.

per cent of those being recorded in Toxteth.²⁷⁸ Merseyside police sought to combat the high crime rate in the district, in very much the same way that other police services across the country had, with the formation of a Special Police Group called the “Task Force” in 1974.²⁷⁹ Complaints of the “Task Force’s” use of Stop under Suspicion powers in Toxteth, echoed those in London and other centres, as many claimed that West Indian youth were being unfairly targeted.²⁸⁰ The bad reputation developed by the “Task Force” in Toxteth saw Police Commissioner Kenneth Oxford disband the unit in 1976 citing that, “This rather forceful type of policing wasn’t doing the image much good.”²⁸¹ Despite the admission of police that the SPG style policing was creating a negative atmosphere and view of the police, the “Operational Support Division” was formed to fill the same role for which the “Task Force” was previously responsible.²⁸²

The continued activities of military-style police divisions further strained relationships with the West Indian community of Toxteth. Lord Scarman, upon visiting Toxteth in the fallout of the riots in July 1981 remarked that, “While many of the older people look to the police to protect them, and wish for an increased police presence on the street, the young are alienated and bitterly hostile.”²⁸³ Reflecting on his experiences as a young West Indian teen in Toxteth in the late-1970s and early 1980s, Michael Simon noted that the sentiment toward the police was, “...deep, deep hatred of the system if you like and the police were just at the forefront of that for me. You were just getting picked on...”²⁸⁴ Further reflecting on police activities in Toxteth,

278 Scarman, *The Scarman Report...*, 32.

279 Institute of Race Relations, *Policing Against Black People ...*, 166.

280 Zack-Williams, “African Diaspora Conditioning...”., 538.

281 IRR, *Police Against the People*, 166.

282 Ibid, 166.

283 Scarman, *The Scarman Report...*, 32.

284 Diane Frost et al., eds., *Liverpool '81: Remembering the Riots* (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 2011), 33.

Simon stated that,

“I remember one copper called Seargeant B and he would just do whatever he wanted, there was another one who eventually ended up corrupt called Bernard, he used to just kick the shit out of people in the street, there was nothing you could do about it at all and if you did complain, you'd just be arrested and they'd just make a charge up.”²⁸⁵

Claire Dove, who also grew up in Toxteth around the time of the riots echoed Simon's view that the police in the district were abusing their use of SUS and discriminating against the West Indian community. Dove noted that West Indian women were also targets of the police in Toxteth, stating that, “Even women were abused, I remember a young woman being severely beaten by the police outside a local youth centre.”²⁸⁶ Just as had been the case in Bristol and Brixton, feelings of disillusionment caused by racism, poverty and a lack of opportunities were seriously worsened by brutal and discriminatory police activity.

Beyond Liverpool, London and Bristol, West Indian communities in urban centres such as Moss Side, Manchester and Handsworth, Birmingham, and Tottenham and Notting Hill in London, were faced with very much the same negative social situation. The West Indian communities of both Handsworth, Moss Side, Tottenham and Notting Hill grew out of the post-Windrush flow of immigrants from Britain's former Caribbean colonies.²⁸⁷ These new immigrants faced a great deal of difficulty finding employment and were constantly faced with racial discrimination in their search for adequate housing.²⁸⁸ For instance, the unemployment problem in Moss Side in 1981 was dire, with 6,122 people unemployed, twenty-two per cent of whom were non-white.²⁸⁹ Further, seventeen per cent of those unemployed were under 20 years

285 Frost, *Liverpool '81...*, p.33.

286 Ibid, p34.

287 Winder, *Bloody Foreigners...*,350.

288 Ibid, 350.

289 Scarman, *The Scarman Report...*, 32.

of age.²⁹⁰ Just as in Bristol, Brixton and Toxteth, West Indian youth in Moss Side, Handsworth, Notting Hill and Tottenham charged that they were being unfairly targeted by SUS and their social clubs and gatherings were being unfairly targeted by police operations.²⁹¹ Some specific examples police mistreatment of West Indians in these neighbourhoods include, West Indian youths in Birmingham having faced charges for indecency for wearing Rasta colours, or were charged with weapons possession for carrying umbrellas, coins or combs.²⁹² In 1976, a West Indian youth was punched in the kidneys by police after a brief exchange in which the officers called the youth “Sunshine” to which he replied, “My name's not Sunshine.”²⁹³ The largely West Indian run Notting Hill Carnival, despite having been a peaceful event for a decade, was patrolled by as many as 1,600 police officers as part of a political campaign in which the Home Secretary was called upon to ban the event.²⁹⁴ In each of these neighbourhoods, there existed the same set of circumstances; inadequate housing, high crime rates, high levels of unemployment and discriminatory policing.

In the months following the riots in Brixton, discussions of urban decay, race in British society and policing took the forefront in Parliament, the media and even popular culture. At the same time that the government and media were closely following the testimony being given to the Scarman Inquiry regarding the riots in Brixton, the top place in the British pop charts was occupied by a song focusing on urban decay.²⁹⁵ British Ska-Reggae band “The Specials” reached the Top of the Pops in early July 1981 with their song “Ghost Town”, which covered themes of

290 Scarman, *The Scarman Report...*, 32.

291 Policing Against Black People, 2.

292 Ibid, 58.

293 Ibid, 32.

294 Institute of Race Relations, *Policing Against Black People ...*, 5

295 McSmith, *No Such Thing as Society...*, 261.

urban decay and youth frustration.²⁹⁶ The song's lyrics, which included verses such as,

“This town, is coming like a ghost town,
Why must the youth fight against themselves?
Government leaving the youth on the shelf,
This place, is coming like a ghost town,
No job to be found in this country,
Can't go on no more,
The people getting angry,”²⁹⁷

further popularized the knowledge of urban plight in England's cities, particularly among youth. With all of the attention on the riots and being victims of the same pressures and tensions which existed in Brixton, West Indian youth in other communities became far more acutely aware of their own plight. The awareness of the West Indian community of their own misfortune, coupled with the existing social, economic and policing issues in urban centres across the country, greatly enhanced the chance that more disorders could break out. Few, however, predicted the scope of the disturbances which began in July, 1981.

Despite the growing frustration within the urban communities, police leaders, at least politically, were publicly confident in the good relations between police and West Indian communities. Chief Constable of Merseyside Police, Kenneth Oxford, stated in May 1981 that,

“My policy on relationships with the community has been endorsed and strengthened throughout the year with all members of the Force being mindful of their obligations in this direction. I am confident that these relationships, with all sections of the community, are in a healthy position and I do not foresee any serious difficulties developing in the future.”²⁹⁸

Oxford strengthened his stance that community-police relations were strong by adding that the, “relationship the Merseyside Police... and ethnic groups has been good.”²⁹⁹ Whether Oxford's

²⁹⁶ McSmith, *No Such Thing as Society...*, 261.

²⁹⁷ “The Specials,” *The Specials*, October 11, 2012, accessed October 11, 2012, <http://www.thespecials.com/music/view/36>.

²⁹⁸ Institute of Race Relations, *Policing Against Black People ...*, 169.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 169.

statements were politically motivated or were legitimately ignorant of the situation in the district, they demonstrate a lack of understanding of the impact of military-style policing and the use of SUS on deprived communities. Toxteth Methodist Minister David Copley, reflecting on the period surrounding the riots, remarked that as the police presence in the district grew, as did the feelings of resentment among the youth, stating that,

“Part of their [black youths] anger was that they were never allowed to feel at home. Whereas a very strong feeling amongst [the youth] was this was their territory, their home, and , as there would be in any kind of inner-city area, these are/were their streets and the police are invading them. I think there was a [feeling that] 'nobody's listened to our pain; we're not being listened to'.”³⁰⁰

With the police's skewed view of relations in Toxteth in the weeks and months leading up to the riots, SPG activities and the use of SUS continued in area, right until the outbreak of violence in early July.

On the evening of 3 July, 1981, the spark that was needed to ignite the growing pressure in Toxteth came in the form of a traffic stop. Despite a separation of nearly 3 months and 350km, the circumstances surrounding the beginning of hostilities in Toxteth strangely mirrored the situation which led to the eruption in Brixton. Around 9pm, Merseyside police chased and stopped a West Indian motorcyclist and began to question him regarding the ownership of the bike, claiming that it was stolen.³⁰¹ The motorcyclist protested that the police officer's allegations were false and that he had borrowed the bike from a friend, but was arrested anyway.³⁰² Quickly, a crowd gathered and stoned the police, allowing the motorcyclist to escape from the police van.³⁰³ Police re-enforcements were called in and running battles with roaming gangs continued

300 Frost et al., eds., *Liverpool '81...*, 17

301 Institute of Race Relations, *Policing Against Black People ...*, 15.

302 Ibid, 15.

303 “The 'riots'.” *Race and Class* 23, no. 2/3 (January 1981): 227.

throughout the evening.³⁰⁴ Reflecting on the evening, Toxteth youth Michael Simon, who was 13 years old at the time of the riot, remarked that for him,

“it just seemed like this was the beginning of a war if you like because there was an option, the future for me was like you grow up, the police will arrest you whenever they want, they'll beat you up and you will have a criminal record if they say you do. It was just quite scary really, looking back on it now, but in my own mind, it was wholly justified, every single part of it.”³⁰⁵

Regarding the events of Saturday 4 July, Simon noted that, “by 3pm there was a crowd of at least 2000 already waiting on Granby Street. ... It stopped from being kind of like tit for tat and hit and run and just started as a stand-off fight if you like.”³⁰⁶ The standing fight, as Simon described, lasted well into the evening, when around 10pm West Indian and white youths began to erect barriers in the streets, set fire to derelict buildings and throw petrol bombs at police.³⁰⁷ The violence continued through the night, with some form of order being restored around 7:30am, with only three arrests having been made.³⁰⁸

The violence in Toxteth peaked on Sunday 5 July, carrying into the early hours of Monday morning, when numerous buildings were set ablaze and despite there being as many as 800 Merseyside police in the district, they were forced to call in reinforcements from as far afield as Cheshire, Lancashire and Greater Manchester.³⁰⁹ Just as had been remarked in the aftermath of the riot in Brixton, the businesses which were set ablaze were not those owned by members of the community, as was noted by one community worker who said that,

“It was obvious why people went for the police, but there were exact reasons why each of those buildings was hit. The bank for obvious

304 “The Riots...”, 226.

305 Frost et al., eds., *Liverpool '81...*, 14

306 Ibid, 15.

307 “The Riots”, 226

308 Ibid, 226.

309 Ibid, 226.

reasons, the Racquets Club because the judges use it, Swainbanks furniture store because people felt he was ripping off the community.”³¹⁰

By 11pm Sunday night the police were forced to withdraw from Toxteth due to the overwhelming attack they faced at the hands of the rioters.³¹¹ At around 1am, the police returned to the area firing CS Gas canisters into the crowd, the first time that CS Gas had been used in mainland Britain.³¹² The canisters being fired, however, were designed for penetrating walls and buildings, leaving at least five rioters seriously injured.³¹³ By the end of the four nights of rioting, 150 buildings were burnt, 258 police officers had to receive hospital treatment and 160 arrests were made.³¹⁴ In the fallout of the rioting, Oxford dismissed any connections between the rioting in Toxteth and that which occurred in Brixton, stating that, “It is just a group of black hooligans with some criminal elements among the whites streaming in to help, who were hell-bent on provoking the police.”³¹⁵ The government responded quickly to the outbreak by dispatching Secretary of State for the Environment Michael Heseltine to act as Minister for Merseyside and expanded the scope of the Scarman Inquiry to include the Toxteth disturbances.

Just days after the outbreak of violence in Toxteth, the Moss Side section of Manchester erupted in rioting. Unlike the previous riots, in Moss Side the youths of the community took the offensive without a specific spark provided by police action. Shortly after 10pm on 7 July, a group of 1,000 West Indian and white youth raided the Moss Side Police Station.³¹⁶ The crowd broke nearly all of the windows in the building and twelve police vehicles were turned upside-

310 “The Riots”, 226.

311 Ibid, .226.

312 Ibid,,226.

313 Ibid,,226.

314 Ibid, 226.

315 Criminol, ``Competing Explanations of the Merseyside Riot...``, 61

316 “The 'riots', 227.

down or set ablaze.³¹⁷ The following night, Moss Side police went on the offensive, sending twenty-four police wagons carrying as many as 240 armoured riot police into the district.³¹⁸

Unlike in Toxteth, Brixton and Bristol, Moss Side police struck rioters with their vehicles, pinned and arrested both white and West Indian youths, and raided high-rise flats, from which rioters were hurling missiles at the police.³¹⁹ The Moss Side police's strategies, which were borrowed from policing measures used in Northern Ireland, were, according to Home Secretary William Whitelaw a, "conspicuous success."³²⁰

The supposed police victory in the Moss Side disturbances was short-lived, as three days later, disturbances broke out in as many as twenty cities across England.³²¹ Richard Clutterbuck stated that there were no fewer than thirty-eight riots over the course of 5 days following the first riot in Toxteth, and that no English city with a population over 300,000 was spared from the violence.³²² Police departments across the country found themselves in running battles with West Indian and white youths from deprived neighbourhoods in Liverpool, Leicester, Hull, Leeds, and Tottenham, among other locales.³²³ The majority of these disturbances occurred over the course of the weekend of 11-12 July, with smaller outbursts continuing in Toxteth and the rest of Merseyside on 26-28 July, 11 and 18 August.³²⁴ The offensive style of policing which first surfaced in Moss Side, began to be used in other parts of the country throughout this period. As many as 70 police raids took place in Brixton, seeking out "petrol bomb factories".³²⁵ These

317 "The Riots", 227.

318 Ibid, 227.

319 Ibid, 227.

320 Ibid, 227.

321 Frost et al., eds., *Liverpool '81...*, 7.

322 Richard Clutterbuck, "Terrorism and Urban Violence", *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science* 34, no. 4 (1982): 170.

323 Frost et al., eds., *Liverpool '81...*, 7

324 Ibid, 7.

325 "The Riots", 228.

searches proved fruitless for police, but further drew the ire of the community.³²⁶ The later riots in Liverpool revolved primarily around the death of a disabled white youth, David Moore, who was struck and killed by a police van.³²⁷ Rioting erupted in Merseyside following Moore's death, at his funeral and at an anti-police march a few days later.³²⁸ In the end, the vast majority of the damage and arrests were focused in Toxteth, with as many as 530 individuals arrested by Merseyside police for offenses connected to the disorders over the course of the summer and thousands of pounds of damage.³²⁹

The huge scale of the rioting in the summer of 1981, ensured that there was widespread and in depth coverage of the events in the media. The rioting had exploded from a very localized and brief event in St. Paul's in 1980, to a major disturbance lasting three days in the nation's capital, to a country-wide explosion of frustrations which directly affected all of England's major cities. Due to the nearly two months of outbursts across England, the coverage of the summer riots in the *Times* and the *Guardian* dwarfed the coverage of the riots in Brixton. Some of the *Guardian*'s more provocative stories of the riots of 1981 appeared in the investigative or analytical pieces, but the core of their investigative and editorial-style pieces, however, remained far more consistent with the overall political stance of the paper and their similar coverage of earlier events. In general, both papers continued portray the riots in very much the same way in their headline news coverage, but once the analysis and investigation into the rioting begins, the *Times* and the *Guardian* begin to shift back toward their political perspectives. It is interesting to note that in the coverage from both newspapers, the emphasis almost universally remained on the larger eruptions of violence in Moss Side and Toxteth, comparing them to Brixton and Bristol

326 "The Riots", 228.

327 Ibid., 228.

328 Frost et al., eds., *Liverpool '81...*, 7.

329 Criminol, 'Competing Explanations of the Merseyside Riot...', 61

and mentioning the smaller riots as an addition to the context of Liverpool and Manchester, rather than dealing with them on their own.

The front page of the *Times*, in the days following the outbreak of violence in Toxteth was filled with images of police under attack and shielding themselves from petrol bombs and other missiles being hurled by rioters. The *Times'* headline stories regarding the riots, continued the trend from their earlier coverage of portraying the riots from the perspective of police and government, thus casting the rioters as a threat to public order and society. The headline story of the 6 July edition of the *Times*, "Police use CS Gas after admitting riot is out of control: 3am: Residents begin Toxteth Evacuation", focuses its attention on violence against police, looting, possible riot organization and race, setting the stage for these factors to be discussed in later reporting.³³⁰ The article describes "elderly refugees" fleeing the scene of the violence, and the police also were forced to withdraw from the area leaving parts of Toxteth as "no-go areas".³³¹ Descriptions of the police withdrawal, injuries to officers and rioters carrying dropped police gear as trophies overshadows any attempt to address why the rioting was occurring, substituting imagery of a berserk crowd seeking to destroy the police. At the same time, the descriptions of people escaping their homes and fleeing the district during a mutually agreed cease-fire between police and rioters, paints the riot as a war against law and order, within which civilians and their property are in serious danger.³³² The police perspective is also bolstered in this piece by comments from Chief Constable Oxford in which he denied that the police had been unfairly targeting West Indian youth or that police were swamping the neighbourhood.³³³ At the same

330 "Police Use Cs Gas After Admitting Riot It Out of Control," *Times*, July 6, 1981.

331 Ibid.

332 Ibid.

333 Ibid.

time, Oxford directs some blame for the riots on the parents of the youths who were partaking in the violence and looting.³³⁴

Liberal MP David Alton was interviewed for the piece, and described acts of “urban savagery” and brought attention to a leaflet being circulated by the “Young Socialists” calling on area youth to “sweep out” the police, thus hinting at a possible organizing faction within the rioting crowd.³³⁵ The idea of riot organization is bolstered within the article by little mention of the deep-rooted causes of the riots, and an attempt to differentiate Toxteth from the earlier riots in Brixton and Southall by describing it as, “...not a race riot in the context of Brixton or Southall but was more the sudden fusing of elements common to black and white youths.”³³⁶ Despite pointing to the fusing of interests between West Indian and white youths, the article makes reference to “alleged over-intensive policing” towards West Indians, but points to hooliganism as a major cause of the riots.³³⁷ The piece builds upon the view that the riot was not a racial outburst by references to the mixed-race composition of the crowd, most notably describing the majority of the crowd as white. Further, a major emphasis on looting, further removes the piece from the causes of the riots.

The headline riot stories published in the *Times*, published after the 6 July article, essentially ignore race as the first article dismissed it as a cause for the riots, and focus on the perspectives of police and politicians. For instance, the 7 July headline story, “Police show of force quells new wave of looting”, focuses on the merits of the police's more offensive approach to dealing with the rioters on the Sunday night.³³⁸ Despite the main thrust of the article being

334 “Police Use Cs Gas After Admitting Riot It Out of Control,” *Times*, July 6, 1981.

335 Ibid.

336 Ibid.

337 Ibid.

338 “Police Show of Force Quells New Wave of Looting,” *Times*, July 7, 1981.

discussion of the successes of Merseyside Police's "positive policing" thrust, with a particular focus on the increase in arrests over the previous nights, it also highlights the injuries inflicted upon police by the faceless rioting crowd.³³⁹ Strengthening the emphasis on the position of the police and government, connected to this article was a brief piece entitled, "Whitelaw defends use of CS gas against rioters", which covered Home Secretary William Whitelaw's defence of the use of CS gas against rioters in Toxteth and the government's support for additional riot gear for police.³⁴⁰

At the outbreak of the nationwide riots just a few days later, the emphasis on the police and government perspective remained at the forefront of the *Times'* headline news coverage. The sheer number of cities in which violence erupted all across England on 10 July, meant that the coverage of each riot for the headline story was brief. The headline story on 11 July, "Rash of street violence and looting in London: Whitelaw bans marches", very briefly touches upon the eruption of rioting in Brixton, Dalston, Clapham, Battersea and Stoke, among other parts of London, without any attention paid to causes of the riots.³⁴¹ The article cites a statement from Scotland Yard in which described the actions of West Indian and Asian youth as, "mindless, unprovoked hooliganism", but further clarified that West Indians and Asians were not in conflict with whites, but were rather, "setting fire to shops, looting and throwing stones at the police."³⁴² Other references to the race of rioters pop up throughout the article, in most cases pointing out that West Indians were often "joined" by whites in looting and rioting.³⁴³ One small section, toward the end of the article, actually grapples with how the violence in Brixton erupted. Citing

339 "Police Show of Force Quells New Wave of Looting," *Times*, July 7, 1981.

340 "Whitelaw Defends Use of Cs Gas Against Rioters," *Times*, July 7, 1981.

341 "Rash of Street Violence and Looting in London," *Times*, July 11, 1981.

342 Ibid.

343 Ibid.

the assault of a Brixton “Rastafarian” business owner by police, to which a crowd of youth responded by throwing stones.³⁴⁴ The businessman later returned and told the crowd to stop attacking police.³⁴⁵ The single piece of context provided, however, does little to contextualize the numerous other riots which broke out and are discussed during the article. All that is discussed of the other riots is the damage, the race of the rioters and the number of arrests and police injuries.

Just two days later, in the 13 July edition of the *Times*, the headline story, “Copy-cat mobs in petrol bomb attacks on police”, downplays the underlying causes of the riots by focusing on the number of rioters in various locales and referring to the riots as “copy-cat” riots.³⁴⁶ The article also emphasizes the government's ongoing attempts to create laws which simplified the process in charging suspects involved in the riots by removing their right to trial.³⁴⁷ The police and government perspective is once again furthered in the 14 July headline story, “Army camps in readiness for riot offenders: Prime Minister and Whitelaw are our to put police on offensive.”³⁴⁸ The article centered on the discussion in Parliament of how to deal with rioters, particularly the ideas put forward by the ruling Conservative Party. The measures being put forward by the Conservatives did nothing to address the underlying causes of the riots and thus the article did not address those issues. Thatcher and Whitelaw were putting forward measures to better arm the police with armour, CS gas, plastic bullets and water cannons, to combat rioters.³⁴⁹ Only one dissenting voice in the parliamentary debate was featured in the article, Labour spokesman Roy Hattersley questioned the merits of military-style policing in a one

344 “Rash of Street Violence and Looting in London,” *Times*, July 11, 1981.

345 Ibid.

346 “Copy-Cat Mobs in Petrol Bomb Attacks On Police,” *Times*, July 13, 1981.

347 Ibid.

348 “Army Camps in Readiness for Riot Offenders,” *Times*, July 13, 1981.

349 Ibid.

sentence quote near the end of the article.³⁵⁰

The headline news stories which reported on the riots of the summer of 1981, published on the front page of the *Guardian* and *Observer*, continued to closely resemble the headline stories published in the *Times*. The perspectives of police and government officials remained disproportionately better represented than those of the members of the affected communities and the themes of hooliganism, looting and police weaponry were at the forefront of all discussions. The perspectives of members of the community do, however, manage to work their way into the reporting. Emblazoned on the front page of the 6 July edition of the *Guardian* was a photograph of police with riot shields being forced to withdraw from their position as missiles rain down upon them, with the headline, "Police forced to retreat: Hand-to-hand fighting in the streets marks Liverpool's second night of rioting."³⁵¹ Citing many of the same sources as the headline story from the *Times* on the same day, the major themes being put forward in the article are the unprecedented degree of violence against police and the insistence of public officials that the riots were the result of hooliganism and not a legitimate protest.³⁵² Race, however, was handled somewhat differently than it was in the *Times*. Not only was there no mention of white rioters, Chief Constable Oxford is cited as having said that the rioters were, "a crowd of black hooligans".³⁵³ To counter Oxford's perspective, the article also cites "black community leaders and residents", rather than individuals, who denied allegations that West Indians were alone in starting the violence.³⁵⁴ The emphasis on the government perspective is furthered in the 8 July *Guardian* headline story, "Scarman riot brief takes in Toxteth and Southall: Parents blamed for

350 "Army Camps in Readiness for Riot Offenders," *Times*, July 13, 1981.

351 "Police Forced to Retreat," *Guardian*, July 6, 1981.

352 *Ibid.*

353 *Ibid.*

354 *Ibid.*

breakdown of discipline”.³⁵⁵ The discussion in this short piece revolves primarily around the purpose and growing scale of the Scarman Inquiry, however, William Whitelaw is quoted as blaming the parents of rioting youth for a lack of discipline which led to the outbreak of the riots.³⁵⁶

The emphasis on the government and police perspective began to erode with the 9 July headline story, “1,000 on rampage in Moss Side: Fresh looting 'coordinated'.”³⁵⁷ The police perspective was reported briefly in the beginning of the article, citing Moss Side police calling the attacks on police “coordinated”. Much of the rest of the article, however, involved quotes from members of the community.³⁵⁸ For instance, one West Indian youth is interviewed for the article, and is quoted as saying that, “They [police] pick you up for anything. They ask you what you have in your pockets, stand still, and if you try to explain yourself you can't.”, in reference to why youths were so frustrated.³⁵⁹ The voice of the community was also covered in the 11 July cover story, “Police struggle to contain mobs burning cars and looting shops.”³⁶⁰ The piece quickly runs through the events of the riots, but no voice is given to government officials or police. The causes of the riot that were highlighted in the article through a quote from an interview with a “young Rastafarian” who said that, “Everything has been alright for several weeks and then these men [police] come in here looking for trouble. We don't want this fight, we just want our friends released from prison. This is not a race riot. This is people who want their rights.”³⁶¹ In both pieces, however, race is mentioned only in reference to the predominantly

355 “Scarman Riot Brief Takes in Toxteth and Southall,” *Guardian*, July 8, 1981.

356 Ibid.

357 “1,000 On Rampage in Moss Side,” *Guardian*, July 9, 1981.

358 Ibid.

359 Ibid.

360 “Police Struggle to Contain Mobs Burning Cars and Looting Shops,” *Times*, July 11, 1981.

361 Ibid.

West Indian rioting crowds.

Just as quickly as the voices of affected communities re-entered the *Guardian's* headline coverage of the riots of the summer of 1981, emphasis shifted back to the government's response to the violence. Headline stories published on 14 and 15 July focused solely on the government's plans to re-enforce the arsenals and powers available to police officers during riots. The headline piece in the 14 July edition, "Whitelaw offers armoured vans" was paired with another article, "Military camps to hold riot prisoners", as they both dealt with new resources being provided by the government to police officers to deal with the ongoing riots.³⁶² The headline on 15 July, "New anti-riot weapons get Government's top priority", again dealt solely with the government's position in managing the ongoing riots.³⁶³ It was at this point, despite the fact that there were still riots ongoing, that riot coverage shifted from front page news to be solely covered by brief updates later in the paper and through analytical and investigative reporting.

The investigative and analytical pieces covering the riots of the summer of 1981, which were published in *the Times*, at times questioned the country's Conservative government, but on the whole tended to support the voices of Conservative officials responsible for dealing with the riots and their aftermath. Three major themes emerged in *the Times'* investigative and analytical reporting of the riots, the impacts of looting on non-rioting community members, parenting and the community, and most importantly the debate on militarizing the police. The prominence of these themes marks somewhat of a shift in the discussion of the riots, where issues of race, urban deprivation and community policing have ceased to be at the forefront. Despite no longer being at the centre of the discussion, race, urban deprivation and community policing do still feature, to

362 "Whitelaw Offers Armoured Vans," *Guardian*, July 14, 1981.

363 "New Anti-Riot Weapons Get Government's Top Priority," *Guardian*, July 15, 1981.

a degree, in the *Times'* coverage of the riots. The overall tone of the *Times'* analytical and investigative reporting stays close to their right of centre political stance, despite at times being critical of right-wing politicians.

Disregarding the underlying social causes of the rioting, a pair of analytical articles published in the *Times*, sought to portray the riots in terms of greed. *Times* reporter Nicholas Timmins' piece, "Liverpool counts the cost of chaos", focuses on the impact of the violence and looting on small businesses and residents of Toxteth.³⁶⁴ The tone of the article brings attention to the argument that the rioting was a wholly unacceptable form of protest, as it hurt more within the community than it could have benefitted. Describing Toxteth in the fallout of its first weekend of rioting, Timmins paints a picture of vehicles gutted by fire, smashed store fronts and business owners and residents surveying the damage to their properties.³⁶⁵ The descriptions of the destruction in the neighbourhood were meant to highlight the impact that the rioting and looting had on small business owners and those not involved in the rioting. Directing attention to the impact on business owners is highlighted by an interview with local pharmacist Chumilal Shah, whose chemist's shop incurred £60,000 in damages during the riots.³⁶⁶ Shah's statement that, "It's the local people who have done it, but its affecting their own shopping area." is used to point attention to the idea that the riots were wholly unhelpful to the community as a form of protest.³⁶⁷ Fear within the community is also highlighted by the piece, through a statement from Toxteth resident Brian Lee.³⁶⁸ At

the time of his interview, Lee was in the process of moving out of Toxteth for the sake of the

364 "Liverpool Counts the Cost of Chaos," *Times*, July 7, 1981.

365 Ibid.

366 Ibid.

367 Ibid.

368 Ibid.

safety of his children who, “don't have a chance here.”³⁶⁹

Another piece, co-written by Nicholas Timmins and Arthur Osman, entitled, “Greed and ferocious violence mark a collective madness”, again downplays the causes of the riots to highlight the fear and resentment amongst non-involved members of the community.³⁷⁰

Describing merchandise from local shops strewn about the streets, the authors point directly to the damage to the interests of community members when they stated that, “The road was littered inches deep in places with shoe boxes and their contents representing one small shopkeeper's life's investment, the remainder being spirited away to the gaunt blocks of flats on the nearby housing estate.”³⁷¹ The fear and anger of affected community members is punctuated by a comment from a frightened community member who said, “In heaven's name why have the police abandoned us, why don't they use rubber bullets or gas them as they would in Belfast?”³⁷²

The impact of parenting on the rioting also received attention in the *Times*. Attempts to shift some accountability for the riots away from the government and police and onto the parents of the rioters and looters. One piece, “Thatcher pleads with parents and teachers”, published on 9 July, which focuses on Prime Minister Thatcher's calls for parents to take more responsibility for their children.³⁷³ In the article, Thatcher states that, “Government and Parliament can make the law. Police and courts can uphold the law. But a free society will only survive if we, its citizens, obey the law and teach our children to do so.”³⁷⁴ The perspective of the *Times* with regard to parental accountability for the riots was punctuated by an article entitled, “Why so many children take to the streets”, in which a study of parental laxity and crime is used to

369 “Liverpool Counts the Cost of Chaos,” *Times*, July 7, 1981.

370 “Greed and Ferocious Violence Marks a Collective Madness,” *Times*, July 7, 1981.

371 Ibid.

372 Ibid.

373 “Thatcher Pleads with Parents and Teachers,” *Times*, July 9, 1981.

374 Ibid.

demonstrate that a great deal of delinquency in urban centres can be traced to parenting.³⁷⁵

According to the study, parental laxity leads to higher odds of children engaging in delinquent activities, and that lax parenting is prevalent in poor and crowded living conditions.³⁷⁶ The article also posits that the same lax parenting in suburban areas does not produce the same criminality that it does in urban centres.

Economic reasons do in fact have a major impact on parenting, the article, however, does not call for sweeping economic change, but rather implies that stricter parenting must be part of the first step toward social improvement.³⁷⁷ A further appeal to the aforementioned perspective on parenting came in the form of a quotation from Merseyside Deputy Constable Peter Wright, who stated that, “These people are destroying their own neighbourhood and it is mainly youngsters. It disturbs me to see youngsters throwing bricks as big as your fist at the police. They were obviously doing it for sheer excitement, and I feel sure their parents had no inclination of their whereabouts.”³⁷⁸

Perhaps the most important and widely covered theme being investigated by the *Times* was the debate surrounding the use of CS gas, rubber bullets and the increasing militarization of the police. A *Times* editorial published on 7 July entitled, “Sound the Alarm”, most acutely addressed the newspaper's position regarding the strengthening of police arsenals, a position which was shared by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and her Conservative government.³⁷⁹ The editorial speaks out strongly in favour of using water cannons and CS gas, should police see the need.³⁸⁰ The piece even goes so far as to state that the decision to provide police with better

375 “Why so Many Children Take to the Streets,” *Times*, July 11, 1981.

376 *Ibid.*

377 *Ibid.*

378 “Rubber Bullets-Yes, If Need Be,” *Times*, July 7, 1981.

379 “Sound the Alarm,” *Times*, July 7, 1981.

380 *Ibid.*

equipment was “belated”³⁸¹

Without introducing any dissenting voices, *the Times*' 7 July article entitled, “Home Secretary endorses use of CS gas against rioters”, presents several public figures giving their endorsements to the use of CS gas and the improvement of police arsenals and training.³⁸² After presenting William Whitelaw's endorsement of the use of CS gas, the article quotes Whitelaw giving his full support to the police as he said, “There is no question of waiting for reports of any sort. I have made clear my support for chief constables to take any action that they believe necessary...”³⁸³ The support for the Conservative government's stance on police powers is reenforced once more in the article by citing Eldon Griffith's position, without any opposing views, that not only should moves be made quickly to strengthen the police's arsenal, tactical training and “improving powers of police to stop and search for offensive weapons and liquor, those who might be going to cause disturbances.”³⁸⁴

Covering the assignment of William Whitelaw to act as Minister for Merseyside, *the Times* article published on 17 July entitled, “Ministers head team to help Merseyside”, again supports the position that positive policing and increased tactical training and arsenals were in the best interest of public order.³⁸⁵ The article cites the belief by police officers that the most effective means of dealing with riots and disturbances of the sort, through, “training officers and developing tactics for mobile and positive policing.”³⁸⁶ It was clarified in the article that these weapons and possible police powers were only to be used as a last resort, there was no discussion whatsoever of how to address the deprivation that led to the rioting or the issues inherent in

381 “Sound the Alarm,” *Times*, July 7, 1981. .

382 “Home Secretary Endorses Use of Cs Gas Against Rioters,” *Times*, July 7, 1981.

383 Ibid.

384 Ibid.

385 “Ministers Head Team to Help Merseyside,” *Times*, July 17, 1981.

386 Ibid.

further isolating police from the communities in which they are placed.

As early as the 7 July 1981 edition of the *Guardian*, investigative or analytical articles began to be published. The perspectives of community members did feature in the coverage, but the discussion in which the riots were placed had fundamentally changed. Despite being integral to the outbreak of violence in England's urban centres, unemployment, police racism, and poor housing, were no longer the key issues being discussed. The dialogue of the riots, in the wake of Toxteth and the other outbursts during the summer of 1981, was now primarily focused on the use of CS gas and the increasing militarization of police, the government and police's responses to the outbreak of violence, and the impact of the riots on community members who did not participate in the violence. Despite the shift in subject matter, the *Guardian's* investigative and analytical reporting of the riots continued to demonstrate a connection to the communities in question.

The government and police's response to the rioting, as covered by the *Guardian*, is largely constructed around blame. Although only a small number of articles were published on the subject, there exists a dialogue between right and left-wing perspectives, which are balanced within articles or with additional editorial pieces. For instance, from the 8 July edition of the *Guardian*, the article, "Merseyside police chief attacks parents over children's 'uncivilised rampage'", discusses Chief Constable Kenneth Oxford's statements surrounding where blame should lie in terms of the riots in Toxteth.³⁸⁷ In Oxford's opinion, bad parenting and a lack of discipline imposed upon youths in Toxteth had a major impact on the scale of the violence. Citing the arrests of 21 juveniles during the riots, one of which being a 10 year old girl arrested

³⁸⁷ "Merseyside Police Chief Attacks Parents Over Children's 'uncivilised Rampage,'" *Guardian*, July 8, 1981. July 8, 1981

for looting, Oxford stated that if the parents of the children were unwilling to discipline their children, then it became the responsibility of police to do, in the interest of public safety.³⁸⁸ Shifting responsibility for the riots to the parents meant possible fines for parents and the incarceration of more youths. Three days after this article was published, the *Guardian* included an editorial entitled, “When the children run wild”, which pointed out the flaws of imposing tougher laws on rioting communities, particularly when they are aimed at youths.³⁸⁹ The *Guardian* article did not directly take aim at Oxford's comments, but rather William Whitelaw's plans to impose punishments on the parents of rioting children, the piece takes aim at the idea that harsher penalties will improve the situation in urban centres.³⁹⁰ In specific, the article points out that imposing fines on families who are surviving on social assistance or locking up more youths in juvenile detention centres were more likely to cause more problems for police than they solved.³⁹¹

An article published on 17 July entitled, “Heseltine on mission to Liverpool”, focuses on the appointment of Michael Heseltine as Minister for Merseyside and the debate on what was to be done in Toxteth.³⁹² The article emphasizes Minister Heseltine's desire to avoid throwing money at the problem, but Heseltine's perspective was countered with statements from Shadow Home Secretary Roy Hattersley who believed that new employment programs were much needed to deal with the underlying socio-economic issues in the area.³⁹³ Further, the full spectrum of parliamentary debate was covered in the article, “Heseltine despatched to study

388 “Merseyside Police Chief Attacks Parents Over Children's 'uncivilised Rampage,” *Guardian*, July 8, 1981.

389 “When the Children Run Wild,” *Guardian*, July 11, 1981.

390 *Ibid.*

391 *Ibid.*

392 “Heseltine On Mission to Liverpool,” *Guardian*, July 17, 1981.

393 “When the Children Run Wild,” *Guardian*, July 11, 1981.

Liverpool's problems".³⁹⁴ The perspectives of prominent politicians on all sides of the debate were given a voice in the piece, from William Whitehall's calls for mutual tolerance between police and urban youth, Enoch Powell's threats of danger for the whole country, and Hattersley's calls for attempts to solve the deprivation in urban centres which was the root cause of the situations leading to the riots.³⁹⁵ Both of these articles were carefully crafted to ensure a balance in the discussion, but also to ensure that the perspective of the newspaper received attention in a dialogue dominated by cabinet ministers in the Conservative government.

The voices of the communities affected by the riots, being sought in their fallout, were different than those being sought by Guardian reporters after the riots in Bristol and Brixton. Community leaders, business owners and those trying to protect themselves and their property from the riots became the focal point. An article published in the 7 July edition of the Guardian, "Toxteth 'vigilantes' defy the looters", focuses on the stories of Toxteth business owners, and some supporters, arming themselves to defend their businesses.³⁹⁶ Not one of the testimonies of business owners addresses the causes of the riots or discuss those involved, but those interviewed were all small business owners and local inhabitants, and thus an important part of the community whose voice was not given prominence during the riots in Brixton.³⁹⁷ Raj Nayer of Leicester's council for community relations, was interviewed for an article in the 20 July edition of the Guardian, "Leicester riot 'summit' ends in frustration for community leader."³⁹⁸ The article focuses on Nayer's frustration with Leicester Chief Constable Alan Goodson's lack of "positive thinking for the medium or long term" and strong belief that the rioting in Leicester was

394 "Heseltine Despatched to Study Liverpool's Problems," *Guardian*, July 11, 1981.

395 Ibid.

396 "Toxteth Vigilantes Defy the Looters," *Guardian*, July 7, 1981.

397 Ibid.

398 "Leicester Riot 'summit' Ends in Frustration for Community Leader," *Guardian*, July 20, 1981.

completely a copycat situation.³⁹⁹ From Nayer's perspective, which was echoed by Labour Party leader of the local council Ken Middleton, the riots in Leicester were the result of longstanding tensions and social issues and certainly not simply a copycat event.⁴⁰⁰

One final article which dealt closely with the voices of community members and also looked to dismiss the idea that hostility toward the police did not constitute a wholesale rejection of British society was, "Our short hot summer of discontent", which was published in the 12 July edition of the *Observer*.⁴⁰¹ The article, like those in the fallout of the rioting in Brixton, does engage the voices of rioters and even addresses the root causes of the rioting; unemployment, lack of housing, policing issues.⁴⁰² The piece shifts away from the discussion of the perspective of non-rioters, but at the same time it ties together the root causes of the various riots occurring at the period and directs some of the blame for the riots at government policy.⁴⁰³ Further, the piece takes a jab at the way in which some of the more reactionary riot reporting has been carried out by the mainstream media, stating that,

"The materials to furnish a full-blown middle-class theory of the Apocalypse are at hand. As last week wore on, with newspaper descriptions of combat reminiscent of Agincourt and the flickering orange light of the Inferno on the Nine O'Clock News, the tone of some political and media comment hardened. Acknowledgment of the primary social and economic causes of discontent became overlaid by more immediate anxieties about public safety which were quickly exploited by moralising politicians."⁴⁰⁴

The discussion of the causes of the riots moved somewhat away from the factors covered in the article, but it is perhaps the most true to the *Guardian's* political stance. It seeks to understand

399 "Leicester Riot 'summit' Ends in Frustration for Community Leader," *Guardian*, July 20, 1981.

400 Ibid.

401 "Our Short Hot Summer of Discontent," *Observer*, July 12, 1981.

402 Ibid.

403 Ibid.

404 Ibid.

the frustrations of those in the communities where rioting erupted from and re-establish a dialogue regarding the underlying causes of the riots which have been largely ignored by both reactionary media and politicians.

The debate over the increasingly military-style tactics and arsenal available to police in dealing with riotous outbreaks, dominated the *Guardian's* analytical riot coverage. The *Guardian's* articles largely question the introduction of increased riot equipment to police forces and the arming of everyday British police, a process which the Conservative Thatcher government came out strongly in favour of. The articles published on the topic of riot equipment question the merits of further militarizing the police. For instance, "Gas and guns 'inevitable' police answers to riots", published in the 7 July edition of the *Guardian*, cites Eldon Griffiths, Parliamentary spokesman for the Police Federation who believed that, "the issue of guns to police in a riot was almost inevitably the next step down the road to what few, and in particular the officers themselves, want."⁴⁰⁵ Griffiths also points out, that most senior commanding officers lack the tactical and functional training to appropriately make use of CS gas and plastic bullets.⁴⁰⁶ In the same edition of the *Guardian*, reporter Malcolm Dean in his article, "You can't clear the air by just using more CS gas", addresses how increased police technology can be effective in protecting the police in case of a riot, but can further isolate officers from the community on a daily basis.⁴⁰⁷ Citing some improvement in community police relations in Handsworth, Birmingham, which were the result of a return to a more community-focused policing strategy.⁴⁰⁸ Overall, Dean posited that the increased arming of English police was more likely to increase social tensions in deprived urban centres and increased community policing efforts did not solve

405 "Gas and Guns 'inevitable' Police Answer to Riots," *Guardian*, July 7, 1981.

406 Ibid.

407 "You Can't Clear the Air by Just Using More Cs Gas," *Guardian*, July 7, 1981.

408 Ibid.

all problems alone, they certainly did relieve some pressure.

An editorial in the 8 July edition of the *Guardian* entitled, “Rubber bullets and despair”, furthers the paper's stance on the increasing militarization of English police.⁴⁰⁹ Specifically, the author states that, “Of course the police should be protected before such violence; no one can say justifiably that they were wrong to use tear gas as a measure of last resort. But after the crisis is past, it is much worse than useless simply to institutionalize such defenseless tactics and extend them into a wholly unacceptable paramilitary arena.”⁴¹⁰ The *Guardian's* anti-police militarization position is re-enforced once again in the article, “The mainland chinks in Whitelaw's armour”, from the 15 July edition of the *Guardian*.⁴¹¹ The article points out the flawed idea that paramilitary policing practices can simply be imported from the Northern Irish context to mainland Britain. Citing the possible blow-back of CS gas, forcing police to wear respirators during riots which limit their vision and the lethal potential of rubber bullets, among other factors, as reasons why these methods have no place in mainland English policing.

Both the *Times* and the *Guardian*, again, began their coverage of riots in England's urban centres in very much the same way. Headline news reporting, which was structured for the intent purpose of selling newspapers, saw both newspapers portraying very much the same messages. Just like in the reporting of the Brixton riots, as soon as analytical and investigative articles began to be published, the views of the two newspapers diverged. It is interesting to note, that although the major themes in reporting changed from Brixton to the summer of 1981, both newspapers, at times, appeared to be engaged in a dialogue with one another. Both were reporting on the same events and utilising quotations from the same public figures, but were

409 “Rubber Bullets and Despair,” *Guardian*, July 8, 1981.

410 Ibid.

411 “The Mainland Chinks in Whitelaw's Armour,” *Guardian*, July 15, 1981.

presenting them from different political standpoints. The differing standpoints of the two newspapers is of course most notable in the discussion of CS gas and arming the police, but throughout, where the *Times* dismisses or shifts focus away from the root causes of the riots, the *Guardian* shifts attention back. In discussing the effects of the rioting on the community, the *Guardian* portrayed community members banding together to protect their property, where the *Times* depictions focused on destroyed properties and angry residents. The clear divisions between the stances of the two papers became far clearer with the increased coverage which came with the larger events of the summer of 1981, as compared to Brixton and Bristol. For the most part, the urban unrest and rioting which had rocked England's cities was at an end, for at least 3 more years. While the embers were still hot in communities all over England and the West Indian community and the police remained at odds with one another, tensions between the white-Nationalist National Front and the suburban South Asian community reached a peak.

Chapter 4: Southall London, 1981

South Asian immigration to Southall was a key example in constructing the national trend. Workers, mostly from India, began to arrive in the early to mid-1950s, most of whom finding employment in the Woolf Rubber factory.⁴¹² The new immigration which bolstered the area's population in the late-1960s and early-1970s was composed primarily of middle-class business owners who were forced to leave Kenya and Uganda.⁴¹³ It was these Indian bourgeois who helped to make Southall the centre of Britain's Asian community with its own cinema's, banks, cafes, travel and insurance agents, among other amenities.⁴¹⁴ Within their own communities, South Asians, were largely able to remove the systematic unemployment and housing issues which were faced by the majority of West Indian communities. The development of such an affluent and self-sufficient Asian community in London's suburbs, however, was still met with hostility by some factions of the population.

Allegations of racist policing and both physical and verbal attacks on Britain's Asian communities painted their existence in Britain as social outsiders. The Singh family of Battersea, south London were targeted by racial harassment in their neighbourhood beginning in July of 1980. The Singhs were assaulted, had their windows broken and had stones thrown at their children.⁴¹⁵ Despite the seriousness of the harassment, police advised the Singh family to take out private prosecution and did not provide any protection.⁴¹⁶ Again in July 1980, British South Asian Akhtar Ali Berg was stabbed by Skinheads in east London and police dismissed the murder as an ordinary mugging, not racial in nature, and refused to disclose the identity of the

412 Ibid, 135.

413 Paula Richman, "A Diaspora Ramayana in Southall, Greater London", *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 67, no. 1 (March 1999): 36.

414 Ibid, 36.

415 Institute of Race Relations, *Policing Against Black People ...*, 59.

416 Ibid, 59.

victim.⁴¹⁷ These sorts of crimes, whose racialised nature was dismissed by police, were also prevalent in Southall. In March of 1981, Satvinder Sondh was attacked in Southall by three skinheads who carved “NF” and swastikas into his skin.⁴¹⁸ Police told the media that what happened to Sondh was not part of a pattern of racial violence in the Southall area but that his wounds were self-inflicted.⁴¹⁹ Sondh was charged with wasting police time.⁴²⁰

Organized racist protests and violence at the hands of fascist and nationalist groups also came to directly affect the lives of Southall's South Asian community. Founded in 1966, the National Front was certainly not Britain's first xenophobic nationalist political party.⁴²¹ Preceded by fascist political parties in the 1930s and 40s like Oswald Mosley's New Party and British Union of Fascists, ultra-Nationalist and anti-immigrant organizations were well established in Britain.⁴²² Founded in the midst of Britain's continuing de-colonisation project, the National Front came to exist in a socio-political climate in which the employment from the post-war reconstruction effort had dried up and citizens of Britain's former colonies still had full right of abode in the UK. David Edgar depicted the perspective of the National Front as being, “the organizational expression of anti-black prejudice in Britain”, but also that their impact as an anti-immigration pressure group was negligible.⁴²³ The National Front may have been a relatively weak political force in the early-1980s, but their message and activities made a major impact on immigrant and minority communities, especially when the police became involved

Just hours prior to the outbreak of violence in Toxteth, Liverpool on 3 July 1981, a very

417 Institute of Race Relations, *Policing Against Black People ...*, 58.

418 Ibid, 67.

419 Ibid, 68.

420 Ibid, 68.

421 Winder, *Bloody Foreigners*, 376.

422 Michael A. Spurr “Living the Blackshirt Life’: Culture, Community and the British Union of Fascists, 1932-1940”, *Contemporary European History* 12, no. 3 (August, 2003): 307.

423 David Edgar. “Racism, Fascism and the Politics of the National Front.” *Race and Class* 19, no. 2 (1977): 112.

different type of disturbance erupted in Southall, London. The rioting which has initially broken out in 1981 in London, returned to a borough just 30 kilometres west of Brixton, in Southall, however, existed a very different community. Unlike the other riots occurring around the country in 1981, the violence in Southall occurred in a largely suburban neighbourhood and was the result of tensions between the area's relatively affluent South Asian community, white nationalist organization the National Front and local police who found themselves caught in the middle. Members of the National Front arrived, in the largely South Asian suburb, in busloads for a concert at the Hambrough Tavern on Southall Broadway on the evening of 3 July.⁴²⁴ Precipitated by the assault of the wife of a local Asian shop owner and vandalism of other Asian shops by National Front members, the riot broke out as South Asian youths retaliated for these most recent fascist trespasses in their neighbourhood and previous complaints about racialised policing.⁴²⁵ As Nazi salutes and “British marching songs” were further riling up the crowd inside the Hambrough Tavern, hundreds of South Asian youths surrounded the pub, eventually setting it ablaze with petrol bombs.⁴²⁶ National Front members were allowed to retreat from the neighbourhood, under police protection, as the disruption in Southall continued between the police and South Asian community, throughout the weekend. Despite the nature of the rioting in Southall having developed from a fundamentally different set of circumstances, than were the riots in other parts of the country, the media coverage of Southall and the other riots of the Summer of 1981 were often thematically and contextually intertwined.

Three years before the 1981 disturbance in Southall, a very similar series of events unfolded in that very neighbourhood. On 23 April 1979, the Southall Asian community

424 “The Riots”, 225.

425 Ibid, 225.

426 Ibid, 225.

organized a massive sit-down protest outside of the Town Hall, where a National Front election meeting was being held.⁴²⁷ Despite the peaceful nature of the protest having been explained to police, 2,756 police officers were drafted into Southall.⁴²⁸ It is also important to note that the Representation of the People Act mandates that all election meetings be open to any members of the public.⁴²⁹ The thousands of South Asian demonstrators, however, were contained for hours within a police cordon away from the Town Hall unable to leave or access the meeting.⁴³⁰ According to eyewitnesses, police vans were driven straight at crowds of people and protesters were struck by police truncheons.⁴³¹ As many as 342 protesters were arrested and charged.⁴³² Accusations of racist behaviour by police officers were later raised by protesters including an officer having traced the initials “NF” on the misted window of a police van.⁴³³ Whether these events and accusations were true or not, they certainly demonstrate the loyalties of police and the sentiments of community members toward NF harassment and the objectivity of police.

With the growing lack of trust of the police and constant verbal and physical attacks on their community by the National Front, the frustration of Southall's Asian community was growing into the summer of 1981. Just as was the case with the National Front's 1979 election meeting in Southall, the Skinhead rock concert in the South Asian neighbourhood in 1981 was an extremely inflammatory act. The community was frustrated with the harassment from the National Front and the police's disregard for the racial dimension of attacks on their community and how past interactions with the NF were handled. Unlike in the other communities across the

427 Institute of Race Relations, *Policing Against Black People ...*,

428 Ibid, 75.

429 Ibid, 74.

430 Ibid, 77.

431 Ibid, 77.

432 Ibid, 78.

433 Ibid, 74,

country where riots were to break out over the course of July 1981, institutional racism in employment, housing and other social spheres were not major causes, despite having been a major factor in the development of Southall's Asian community.

The media coverage of the rioting in Southall was very much caught up in and consumed by the massive coverage given to Toxteth. Perhaps due to the larger-scale and wider connections between the occurrences in Toxteth, Moss Side and Brixton, but the coverage of the disturbance in Southall was minimal in both the *Times* and the *Guardian*. There were some headline stories dedicated to the disturbance in Southall, much of the analytical reporting, however, was the most evident casualty of the proximity of the Southall riot to the events in Toxteth. The analytical focus in the days following the riot in Southall focused primarily on the events in Toxteth, with mention of Southall thrown in with other events happening at the same time. The blending of analytical pieces shows a lack of regard for the unique circumstances which contributed to the outbreak of violence in Southall and likens the Southall riot to the very different events happening elsewhere in the country. The themes which were used to describe the rioting in Southall were very similar to those which had been previously used in the description and analysis of the events in Toxteth, Moss Side, Brixton and St. Paul's. Blame for the violence was placed on socially marginalized groups, the racial element was emphasized and the police were once again depicted as having been the victims of the events.

As it occurred in the midst of the nationwide urban riots of the Summer of 1981 and its comparatively small-scale, the media coverage of the Southall riot of 1981 was relatively minor. Despite the small scale of the coverage and the differing nature of the riot itself, the same trends which appeared in the coverage of the rioting across the rest of the country can also be found in

that of Southall. Very much like the newspaper coverage of Toxteth and the earlier riots in Brixton and St. Paul's, the headline news reports of the rioting in Southall depicted the scene of the violence as a battlefield.⁴³⁴ Both the *Times* and the *Guardian*, in their headline stories pointed the finger of blame for the violence on one rioting party or another, or even both at different times. For instance, *the Times'* headline story on 4 July, 1981, entitled, "40 Police hurt as Skinheads and Asians riot in Southall", variously blames the Skinhead contingent for inciting the rioting by smashing windows of South Asian businesses and attacking members of the South Asian community, but also points to the Asian community for having "hurl[ed] the first stones."⁴³⁵

Just four days later, when discussing the expansion of the Scarman Inquiry to cover Toxteth and Southall, the *Guardian's* headline story shifts attention away from the underlying causes and covers the blame being placed on the parents of rioters by political officials.⁴³⁶ Drawing attention to the allegations that parents were to blame for the riot minimizes what had happened by inferring that the rioters were all squabbling, destructive children. In the Southall coverage, both parties involved in the riot were painted as undesirable, the minority Asian community and the radical skinheads. Despite the minimal coverage, the headline stories covering the larger riots of the Summer of 1981 also worked to mute the analytical coverage of Southall, by drawing attention to race and attacks on English institutions.

Just as was the case with the headline coverage, much of the analytical coverage of the Southall riot became blended with that of the other riots occurring around the country. Both newspapers focused their attention on the destruction of English city-centres by minority groups,

434 "40 Police Hurt as Skinheads and Asians Riot in Southall," *Times*, July 4, 1981.

435 Ibid.

436 "Parents Blamed for Breakdown of Discipline," *Guardian*, July 8, 1981.

the newspapers' analysis again focuses on the differing views of the *Times* and *Guardian*. The *Guardian's* brief foray into analysis of the Southall riot began with an article published on 7 July, 1981 entitled, "Riotous Gentiles".⁴³⁷ In the article the writer, James Cameron, takes aim at all sides of the riot, the Asian community, the Skinheads and the police.⁴³⁸ Cameron called the Southall riot, "clearly a skinhead provocation", as the skinheads had set up their concert in Southall despite not living there or having any stake in the community.⁴³⁹ Cameron went on to blame the Asian community for reacting violently, despite watching their neighbourhood be attacked by Skinheads.⁴⁴⁰ He also took aim at the idea that a society could be de-racialized and that any and all attempts to do so resulted in failure.⁴⁴¹

The Times' analytical coverage of the Southall riot was brief, just as the *Guardian's* coverage had been. *The Times'* coverage, however, took an interesting approach in working to humanize skinheads and writing off their racism as being only "skin deep".⁴⁴² In a piece entitled, "The British youth rebellion: often only skin deep", a *Times* staff writer studies the dynamics of skinhead racism and seeks to demonstrate that it is little more than a form of youthful rebellion.⁴⁴³ Engaging a group of skinheads whose racism was sometimes only directed at one minority group, passingly South Asians, the article presents a soft image of skinheads, which accurate to some, whitewashes the image of the entire group.⁴⁴⁴ The author does well in complicating the image of the skinhead in the fallout of Southall by presenting all skinheads as generally good but misunderstood youth with passing ties to xenophobic groups like the National

437 James Cameron, "Riotous Gentiles," *Guardian*, July 7, 1981.

438 Ibid.

439 Ibid.

440 Ibid.

441 Ibid.

442 "The British Youth Rebellion," *Times*, July 22, 1981.

443 Ibid.

444 Ibid.

Front.⁴⁴⁵ The presentation of facts in the article oversimplifies the massive differences between National Front and British Movement skinheads and non-racist groups of teens in the wake of a violent attack on a minority group by one of the racist groups of skinheads.

There was little coverage of the outbreak of violence in Southall due to its temporal proximity to the larger riots in Toxteth, Moss Side, Brixton and elsewhere, the pattern of the coverage remained the same. Even with major differences in the reasons for the outburst, headline coverage was used to draw in readers without regard for the political stance of the newspaper. The analytical coverage of the Southall riot, although extremely minimal, followed the same pattern as the other riots of the same summer. The analysis was once again filtered by the political stance of the periodical, but was overshadowed by the attention grabbing headlines which set the tone of the events for the reader.

445 "The British Youth Rebellion," *Times*, July 22, 1981.

Conclusion

The end of the riots of 1980-81 did not result in massive social change, prevailing attitudes remained largely unchanged, the state of the news media selling current events headlines to the populace only developed further along the same path as new media emerged and the social position of the English West Indian population remained on the fringes. Despite piecemeal efforts to reverse the inequality in England's urban centres, made by the Thatcher Government through the findings of the Scarman Report, West Indian English youth continued to have problems with under-education, under-employment and still found themselves living with the immigrant stigma for years to come. The lack of change made after 1980-81 saw West Indian English youth at odds with the police yet again in 1985 and again later in 1991.

Decades of frustration, harassment, poverty and social isolation created a deep tension within England's urban West Indian communities. A lack of employment opportunities coupled with police harassment and insufficient social housing led directly to the English urban riots of the early-1980s. The rioters asked for the same opportunities and treatment as their white counterparts, but they continued to be targeted by policing operations in their own neighbourhoods and viewed as outsiders in the only country that they had ever known. When the tension in areas like St. Paul's, Brixton and Toxteth reached its apex, violence erupted. Whether the riots were a form of protest or a therapeutic release of crippling social tensions, they were viewed as an attack by the dominant group in society. A comfortable status quo for the white-dominated society had been disrupted by a group of destructive others, which were reflected directly in the portrayal of the riots in the news media.

The *Times* and the *Guardian*, among most other branches of the modern news media, are money-making ventures whose primary goal is to generate revenue. The secondary goals of

appealing to an underlying political stance or support for a particular group within society, created a product which attracted the widest possible readership possible. In mid to late-twentieth century England, the dominant social group was the white middle-class; they represented a large portion of the population and a huge news reader base. The majority group of the population set the cultural and social tone for the country, a social setting which favoured their accustomed position and challenged large-scale change. To grab the attention of the dominant group, the threat of major changes to the social order and violence against it took the centre-stage in the media's reporting of the English urban riots. The degree of emphasis and scale of the coverage varied from riot to riot, but over the two-year period studied here the riots were uniformly described in the headlines as attacks on English society. The headlines were designed to grab the attention of readers, and the deeper analyses of the riots were more closely reflect the political stance of the individual newspaper. The major newspapers however, presented opinions which were quite moderate in the socio-political landscape of white-English life.

The outbreak of violence in St. Paul's, Bristol in April of 1980 took England society by surprise, it was not, however, surprising to those living in the economically depressed neighbourhood. The police raid on the Black and White Cafe was officially carried out due to drug and gambling violations, but to the people of St. Paul's it was a direct attack on the social centre of their community and the culture that they had forged in their socio-economic isolation. The image of the riot which was transmitted to the rest of the country and world by the major newspapers, however, re-directed the focus of the violence as an attack on the police and English society by a group of outsiders. The Guardian referred to St. Paul's as a "poverty stricken black

ghetto” and in its initial headline coverage of the riot focused on “...black rioters [going] on a rampage on city streets.”⁴⁴⁶ *The Times'* headline coverage painted a very similar picture, depicting St. Paul's as a nearly post-apocalyptic ghetto inhabited by the poverty stricken living in broken down houses.⁴⁴⁷ In discussing the riot specifically the focus of the coverage was placed directly on the young West Indian rioters attacking the police.⁴⁴⁸

The analytical news coverage which followed the St. Paul's, Bristol riot, again, set the tone for how the coverage of the following riots was handled by the media. The differing analyses of the two newspapers began to present themselves in the deeper pages of their publications. Where the headline stories were primarily attention grabbing pieces which set the tone of the coverage as being aimed at the criminality of the young West Indian population and their attacks on English society, the deeper analysis which took place days and weeks later and were found deeper in the newspapers addressed the causes and politics of the riots. In the aftermath of the St. Paul's riot both newspapers gave at least some voice to the rioters, but often reflected only their anger and frustration with the police. The anger of the West Indian youth was perhaps most obvious in the *Times'* coverage where in an interview with a young rioter described the riot as the beginning of a war against the police.⁴⁴⁹ When the victims of the riots or police officials were being interviewed, the tone of the reporting shifted from criminality to victimization. The *Guardian's* coverage contained an interview with a St. Paul's pub owner who was quoted as being too frightened to leave his business for fear that it would be destroyed next.⁴⁵⁰ Even when voices were given to the public in the fallout of the St. Paul's riots, their

446 “19 Police Hurt as Rioters Burn, Loot City Streets,” *Guardian*, April 3, 1980.

447 “Black Youths Battle with Police in Bristol Riot,” *Times*, April 3, 1980.

448 *Ibid.*

449 *Ibid.*

450 “19 Police Hurt as Rioters Burn, Loot City Streets,” *Guardian*, April 3, 1980.

testimony was used to develop a sense of fear of the rioters and a relatability to the non-rioting locals and police.

When urban violence re-occurred in Brixton, London just over a year after the riot in St. Paul's, the national media's coverage seized upon the violence to engage in several weeks of headline coverage. The scale of the Brixton coverage, along with the size and scale of the riots, dwarfed that of the St. Paul's eruption one year earlier. The West Indian population of Brixton had for years been the target of large-scale policing efforts, with the presence of the Special Police Group and use of "Stop Under Suspicion" powers in their neighbourhood since the mid-1970s⁴⁵¹ In addition to the more intense police harrassment, Brixton's larger population, equally poor living conditions and perhaps deeper socio-economic isolation created the formula for an incredibly visible and powerful social disturbance. The headline stories covering the Brixton riot followed very much the same formula that those depicting the riots in St. Paul's did just a year before. The first headlines published by both newspapers focused directly on injuries to police officers at the hands of rioters. The *Times'* piece, "Police hurt in scuffles with blacks"⁴⁵² and the *Guardian's*, "Police hurt in running fight"⁴⁵³, were some of the first messages about the riots to be publicized to the English public. The public was intentionally being shown images of destruction and violence against English people and places by a group whose behaviour and culture was alien. The rioting West Indian population of Brixton was being painted as a threat to English life a disturbance to the working of society.

The analytical coverage of the riots, which began in the midst of the riot and carry on for weeks afterward, followed very much the same pattern as the coverage of the St. Paul's riot as

451 Wilson." Black in Brixton...", 806.

452 "Police Hurt in Scuffles with Blacks," *Times*, April 11, 1981.

453 "Police Hurt in Running Fight," *Guardian*, April 11, 1981.

well. The major difference being, that due to the scale of the coverage, the political stance of the *Guardian* became more central. Where in the coverage of the St. Paul's riot both newspapers' coverage was relatively similar, the analytical coverage of the *Guardian* shifted more to the left. The *Guardian's* coverage of Brixton was highlighted by an article entitled, "Brixton's Morning After", in which two *Guardian* correspondents interviewed numerous members of the Brixton community, from rioters to by-standers and business owners.⁴⁵⁴ Criminality and race were factors throughout the coverage of the riot, but the entire spectrum of perspectives of the riot were displayed for all of the paper's readership. The underlying causes of the violence were analysed, from failed youth employment programs to the effects of de-industrialization on the ethnic minority community.⁴⁵⁵ Analysis of the underlying causes of the riots was which engaged the background of the violence was typical of the *Guardian's* post-riot coverage.

The *Times's* coverage, on the other hand, remained rather similar to that of its coverage of St. Paul's, emphasizing the perspective of political officials, police and other English people affected by the violence. Some of the *Times's* analyses began to touch on some of the causes of the riots, as was the case in the article "Overcrowded Brixton: Attempt to alter racial housing imbalance", but most of the coverage was presented from the perspective of outsiders.⁴⁵⁶ Featuring interviews with Members of Parliament, Trade Union leaders and high level police officials, articles like "Brixton Riots: The Aftermath", were common in the *Times's* post-riot analyses, empowering the voices of those who garner respect in English society and not those involved in the rioting.⁴⁵⁷ The voices of the socio-economically isolated were further isolated by

454 Mike Phillips and Malcolm Dean, "Brixton's Morning After," *Guardian*, April 13, 1981.

455 Ibid.

456 John Young, Robin Young, and Diane Geddes, "Overcrowded Brixton: Attempt to Alter Racial Housing Imbalance" *Times*, April 13, 1981.

457 "Brixton Riots "Hattersley Attack On 'inadequate Basis' of Inquiry Into Riots: The Aftermath," *Times*, April 15, 1981.

the news coverage of their protest against their oppression.

The explosion of violence in Brixton was one of the largest news stories of 1981 in England, the addition of the eruption of more riots in Liverpool, Manchester and over a dozen other English cities brought an entire summer's worth of media attention to the urban deprived. The close temporal proximity between the outbursts of the Brixton riots in April and the violence of the Summer of 1981 meant an incredibly similar type of news coverage. The sheer length and scale of the Summer riots of 1981 meant months of news coverage, but featured extremely similar themes and styles to the coverage of the earlier riots. The *Times'* headline coverage featured stories which prominently discussed "no-go areas" for the non-rioting population, public evacuations and of course the race and criminality of the rioters, a continuation of the type of headlines which presented St. Paul's and Brixton to the public⁴⁵⁸ Citing many of the same sources as the same day's *Times* articles, the *Guardian's* headline coverage of the Summer riots, like that in "Police forced to retreat: Hand-to-hand fighting in the streets marks Liverpool's second night of rioting", saw extremely similar to that of the *Times*.⁴⁵⁹ Much attention was drawn to the race of the rioters, the havoc they were wreaking on cities across England and presenting the riots as a threat to English life.

Once again, the analytical coverage of the Summer riots also followed along the same continuum, with the *Times* focusing on the voices of policy-makers and the *Guardian* wavering between the same voices and those of the rioters and their communities. The *Guardian's* analytical coverage was very much two-fold, emphasizing the perspectives of rioters and community members but also empowering the voices of politicians and members of the

458 "Police Use Cs Gas After Admitting Riot Out of Control," *Times*, July 6, 1981.

459 "Police Forced to Retreat," *Guardian*, July 6, 1981.

mainstream. The *Times'* coverage on the other hand, relied far more heavily on the interviews with high-ranking police and government officials. When community members and rioters were engaged in the coverage, it was generally with a negative connotation. The socio-economic isolation of the minority communities involved in the riots was hardly addressed from their perspective, but the perspectives of political officials and 'experts' were prioritized.

Despite being a vastly different type of riot, the violence in Southall in the summer of 1981 was covered by the news media in very much the same way as the other outbursts that summer, just on a far smaller scale. Attention grabbing headlines overpowered the analytical stories found deeper in the paper as competition in the periodical business relied heavily on grabbing the attention of readers with headlines which appealed to their fears and social inclinations. In terms of Southall, both of the primary rioting groups, the Skinheads and the South Asian community, had blame heaped upon them for the riot. Both groups existed on the fringes of mainstream society and thus placing the blame for the riot on both was the most popular solution.

The news coverage of the riots of the early-1980s was very closely connected to the society in which it was produced. England of the 1980s was very much a society dominated by a hegemony of white, middle-class ideals. England underwent overwhelming changes over the course of the twentieth century, transitioning from a country dominated by a centuries old peerage system to a liberal democracy with an ever-growing minority population. The English people clung to an exceptionalism which developed in the middle of the twentieth century, during a time of extreme social and economic difficulties where a war threatened her very existence. A generation of young men fought on the battlefields of Europe for England, at the

same time that the rest of her population struggled to survive German air raids, food shortages and an ever shrinking morale. A national character was called upon to get the English people through a difficult period and remained tied to a national pride and social ideals through the arduous decades that followed.

England rejoiced at her people's strength at the end of the war, but her overseas empire, a major source of national pride, began to fall apart. Immigrant workers from the former British colonies flowed freely into England for decades in search of employment and a better existence than they faced in their home countries. What they found in England was menial employment and socio-economic isolation at the hands of an English people who relied heavily on a sense of exceptionalism as a part of their national identity. Times became difficult in England after the post-war reconstruction efforts, and the English people retreated to their national strength and separated themselves from the outsiders who now inhabited in their country. As those menial jobs which brought immigrant workers to England in the post-war period began to disappear, the children and grandchildren of those initial immigrants found it harder to find employment and to shed the outsider status of their immigrant forebearers.

The socio-economic isolation of the West Indian population led to more and more closed off enclaves in English inner-cities where minority communities found themselves cutoff from mainstream English society. These depressed urban centres saw rising crime-rates, rising unemployment and the development of unique cultures that merged everyday English experiences with socio-economic isolation of minority communities and the cultures of their countries of origin. Despite being born in England, the cultures that developed amongst the second and third generation minority populations were viewed as foreign by mainstream English

society, which further alienated that population. England was the only country that they knew, but they lived as outsiders both socially and economically. Socio-economic isolation and a lack of future opportunities in turn led to higher rates of street crime and higher intensity policing. All of these factors combined led to the riots of the early-1980s, a series of conflicts which further destabilized English race relations.

The years that followed the riots of 1980-81 were not devoid of conflict. Police investigations and an official government inquiry produced a set of recommendations to the government to prevent future outbreaks of violence by West Indian youths. *The Scarman Report*, the resulting document from the Scarman Inquiry into the riots of 1981, found that both local leaders and police were to blame for the degradation of police-community relations leading up to the violence.⁴⁶⁰ Scarman stated in his conclusion that, “the police do not create social deprivation or racial disadvantage: they are not responsible for the disadvantages of the ethnic minorities. Yet their role is critical.”⁴⁶¹ Scarman went on to state that the causes of racial disadvantage had to be more directly addressed by the central government in concert with community leaders to ensure that the appropriate funding and programs was put into place.⁴⁶²

Despite the best intentions of the Scarman Inquiry findings, the social programs that were put into place failed to gain traction in reversing social and economic inequalities. Some of Scarman's policing reforms were implemented, but many of the social and economic reforms that he suggested were inadequately implemented or completely ignored.⁴⁶³

By 1985, with little having changed since the outbreak of violence in 1980 and 1981, the enthusiasm over the promise of social acceptance and equality of opportunity had faded among

460 Clive Bloom, *Violent London*, 406.

461 Scarman, *The Scarman Report*, 209.

462 Ibid, 210.

463 Stuart Hall, “From Scarman to Stephen Lawrence”, *History Workshop Journal* no. 48 (Autumn 1999): 189.

the urban West Indian population. The tension rose again as police increasingly militarized and engaged in organized anti-drug operations in West Indian neighbourhoods.⁴⁶⁴ Rioting erupted again all across the country in the summer of 1985 beginning in Handsworth, Birmingham before spreading to Brixton, Toxteth, Peckham and Tottenham.⁴⁶⁵ The resurgence of large-scale street violence brought a significantly tougher response from a more prepared police force. Used for the first time in mainland Britain were, CS Gas, riot gear, plastic bullets and paramilitary policing tactics which changed the face of English policing.⁴⁶⁶ Urban West Indian communities were now faced with similar opposition to that which had previously been reserved for the IRA in Ireland, as their socio-economic isolation continued to deepen and suggestions to improve their situation were ignored by policy makers.

Xenophobic undertones existed in the English national identity, and the new conservative ideology of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative party enabled those undertones to enter the mainstream. The Thatcherite national identity was constructed, according to Peter Riddell, on the moral values of the suburban and provincial English middle-class.⁴⁶⁷ David Dixon built upon the formation of the English identity in the middle-class stating that the Thatcherite national identity involved a shedding of the "white man's burden", in that there was a belief that the free-market and a homogenized construction of society created the illusion of equality of opportunity and the erasure of disadvantage.⁴⁶⁸ The Thatcherite social order set an expectation that social disadvantages equalized as the free-market was a colour-blind entity and that economic fortunes were won by those most deserving. Cultural assimilation was part of the social framework, but it

464 Hall, "From Scarman to Stephen Lawrence", 190.

465 Ibid, 190.

466 Ibid, 190.

467 Riddell, "The Thatcher Decade...".

468 Dixon, "Thatcher's People..." 173.

was presented as being socially inclusive, when in reality all appeals to white-Englishness remained rather exclusive.

The media acts as the voice of the dominant social group and its informer. As a capitalist industry the news media takes cues from the society in which it operates, but also serves a role in shaping that society. The media coverage of the English riots of 1980-81 very much demonstrates how carefully news organizations walked the line between appealing to English society and informing it, between seeking attention through appeals to social undercurrents to expressing moderate political views. Both the *Times* and the *Guardian* operated as entities with the same goals, to operate as successful capitalist enterprises, but also to shape the perceptions of society with their coverage of current events. Appeals to middle-class English sensibilities took the centre-stage for both periodicals. Drawing in readership was primarily accomplished with powerful headlines and shocking imagery. In the coverage of the riots, the focal point of headline news stories was almost universally connected to race, violence against police and the destruction of English places. Images of burning cars, damaged businesses and angry mobs of West Indian youth were used in order to sell more newspapers. The struggle of the urban West Indian communities against social and economic disadvantage was capitalized on by the press.

The deeper analytical pieces from the *Times* and *Guardian* were more true to the political stances of the two newspapers, but they were easily overshadowed by the much more visible headlines which indelibly set the tone for the rest of the riot coverage. The headline stories introduced readers to the riots and their depictions of angry West Indian rioters destroying England's cities helped to inform the English public and worsen the isolation of the minority communities. Analytical and investigative articles sought to demonstrate the real truths of the

riots, through a partisan political lens, their impact was seriously lessened by attention grabbing headline stories. The social attitudes presented in the headline coverage of the *Times* and the *Guardian* were not, however, solely the creation of the news media. Just as the police were not to blame for the social and economic situation of the urban West Indian communities, despite exacerbating the existing tension. The media played upon themes which had been developing in English society for decades and were re-enforced by Thatcherite social policy. A distrust of difference, appeals to the protection of English places and a healthy dose of xenophobia, were all parts of English culture prior to the riots, but the newspaper reporting of the riots brought them into the mainstream.

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