

## UPRISINGS

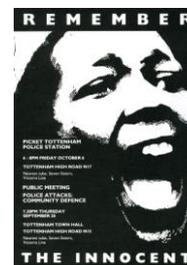
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Ref. PHOTOS/57



Ref. MCKENLEY/4/1



Ref. EPHEMERA/45

### Background

This guide covers the uprisings of the 1980s which were primarily caused by racism and hostility towards Black and ethnic minority communities. Although there has been a Black presence in Britain for many centuries, the large numbers of Black immigrants at the end of the Second World War caused an overwhelming reaction of hostility and hatred. This culminated in an environment of open aggression and opposition by the White population towards the rights of Black and ethnic minority communities to live in Britain and enjoy the benefits of citizenship.

In addition to the racism faced by many on a daily basis, there were key sources of tension which sparked the riots of the 1980s based on policing attitudes and difficult employment and economic conditions.

### Policing

Strict policing, or over-policing, of urban areas and the use of police powers such as stop and search, which was also known as the 'Sus Law' became a main point of contention. These powers were granted under the 1824 Vagrancy Act and gave the police power to stop and search citizens who were considered to be 'loitering with intent' without any evidence.

Stop and search powers disproportionately targeted young African-Caribbean men, who felt that they were being harassed and victimised by the police. The police used the tactic of high-profile, visible policing in urban areas to try and stem the threat of street crime, such as mugging, which was stereotyped as being perpetrated by young Black men, most notably in Brixton under 'Operation Swamp'. When arrested under "Sus" many were racially abused by the police and complaints by victims were often ignored.

In addition, the police showed little regard for the safety of the Black and Asian communities who were facing daily harassment and abuse at the hands of right wing extremists and political parties, such as the National Front, contributing to the racial tension between Black and white communities.

### Employment and Economic Conditions

From 1974 Britain had been experiencing high inflation rates and recession due to the high price of oil. Manufacturing had also begun to decline as Britain began to be priced out of international and domestic trade markets with motorcars, shipbuilding, steel and textiles industries being most affected.

Between 1979 and 1981 unemployment had almost doubled, taking the number of unemployed to nearly 3 million. In Brixton, at the time of the 1981 uprisings there were over 917,000

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registered jobless under the age of 25 of whom 60,000 were under eighteen. Although unemployment affected many, it was the Black community who suffered most. Years of racism and the 'colour bar' had placed many Black youths at the bottom of the educational attainment and employability.

There had also been a significant cut in public spending, particularly at Local Government level. In areas such as Brixton and Tottenham, the housing stock was sub-standard and many struggled to find housing in the private rental sector due to direct and indirect racism. Housing policies of the Councils added to problems, such as on Broadwater Farm (Tottenham) where residents had been complaining about the Council's response to their needs.

## Timeline of the Uprisings: Key Events

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**BRIXTON:** The weekend of the 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> April 1981 saw violent scenes and clashes between the predominantly Black youth of Brixton and the Metropolitan police force. The uprisings were sparked by an incident centred upon a Black youth who after being stabbed in a previous altercation, had been stopped on a few occasions by the police, culminating in a scene where the police had removed the youth from a taxi on his way to hospital. A small group of people surrounded the officers, took the youth from them and sent him to hospital themselves as they felt that the police were doing little to help him. Rumours quickly began to circulate ranging from a belief that the police had prevented the youth from going to hospital in order to question him, to suspicions that they had caused the injury themselves. As the crowd began to grow in number, police officers quickly requested the assistance of further police. When extra police turned up the scene degenerated into violence and disorder. Violence also erupted the next day after the police resumed their operations of stop and search and continued into Sunday.

By the end of the disturbances, 82 people had been arrested, 45 members of the public injured (although there were probably more), 61 private vehicles and 56 police vehicles were damaged or destroyed and 145 premises damaged; 28 of them by fire.

**SOUTHALL:** On Friday 3 July 1981, a confrontation between a group of white skinheads and young Asians turned into a confrontation between the police and the young Asians. The disorders began when a large group of white skinhead youths, mainly from the East End of London, were on their way to attend a concert at the Public House began to smash shop windows in the Broadway area of the town, where many Asian residents lived and had shops. The disorders which ensued appear to have been a response to what the local Asian community saw as an intrusion into its area by a racially hostile group of white youths. It was also an indication of the poor relations between the community and the police, who thought it better to take matters into their own hands and to attack the police who they felt were doing little to help.

**TOXTETH:** On Friday 3 July 1981 disturbances arose in Toxteth, Liverpool after the heavy-handed arrest of Leroy Alphonse Cooper by the police. Prior to this there had been a lot of tension between the community and the police around claims of police harassment and the planting of drugs on youths. The disturbances that followed erupted into full-scale rioting, with police use of CS gas for the first time in the UK outside Northern Ireland.

In all, the rioting lasted nine days, during which one person died after being struck by a police vehicle trying to clear crowds, 468 police officers were injured, 500 people were arrested, and at least 70 buildings were damaged so severely by fire that they had to be demolished. Around 100 cars were destroyed, and there was extensive looting of shops. Later estimates suggested the numbers of injured police

There were other similar disturbances which took place in Moss Side, Manchester and Handsworth, Birmingham in 1981. The Scarman report, 1981 which investigated the Brixton uprising, concluded that these later uprisings were copycat disturbances although the areas in which they occurred also suffered from high unemployment and high levels of police stop and search.

**HANDSWORTH:** On the weekend of the 9<sup>th</sup>-11 September 1985 a series of disturbances swept through the Birmingham suburb of Handsworth. The disturbances started when the police stopped and attempted to arrest a young Black man over an illegally parked car, who then fled the scene. The man resisted arrest and fled into a local cafe. When officers arrived to assist they were pelted with stones, bottles and staves. Hundreds of people attacked police and property, looting and smashing, and setting off fire bombs

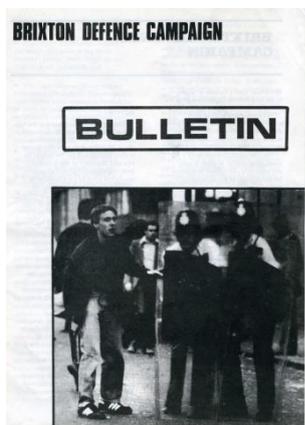
During the disturbances two local men were burned to death in their post office, which they had stayed behind to try to protect.

**BRIXTON:** On 28<sup>th</sup> September 1985 the Metropolitan police raided the home of Cherry Groce in search of her son Michael Groce. In the process of the raid Mrs Groce was shot by a policeman, which subsequently left her paralyzed. Anger over the shooting led to a protest outside of the police station which descended into violence and skirmishes between the police and the community.

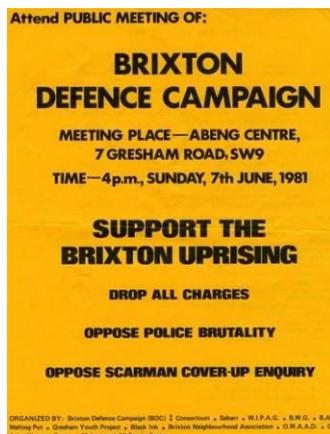
**TOTTENHAM:** On October 5 1985 a police officer stopped and questioned 24-year-old Floyd Jarrett. Later that day police raided and searched Jarrett's home near the Broadwater Farm Estate during which time Floyd's mother who had been suffering from heart problems collapsed and died. The following day a crowd gathered outside of Muswell Hill police station to protest the death of Cynthia Jarrett. Stones were thrown and two police officers were injured. The violence escalated and soon a full scale uprising erupted, lasting for two days. In the midst of the disturbances, police constable Keith Blakelock was stabbed to death.

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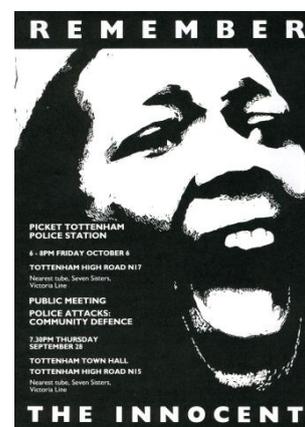
## Collections



Ref. MCKENLEY/3/1



Ref. MCKENLEY/3/1



Ref. EPHEMERA/45

### 3.1 'UPRISINGS' (Ref. UPRISINGS)

The BCA has a unique collection of unpublished primary and secondary sources covering the Brixton uprising, these include *photographs*, *police reports*, *campaigning literature*, *press cuttings*, and *eye witness accounts*. These items have been acquired over a number of years and form the collection 'UPRISINGS'.

This collection is split into two areas, **UPRISINGS/1** and **UPRISINGS/2**.

UPRISINGS/1 contains mainly witness reports and statements made in connection with the Scarman Report. These include *Local Witness Accounts (UPRISINGS/1/1-2 and /6)*, featuring a notable account from a local Reverend Peterson, tape transcripts, and a provisional list of witnesses to feature in the 'Scarman Report'; and *Police Figures and Reports (UPRISINGS/1/3-5/7)* related to 'Operation Swamp'.

**UPRISINGS/2** contains press extracts taken from national tabloids and broad sheet papers in the UK. The extracts focus on the uprisings of 1981 including the uprisings of Brixton, Southall, and Toxteth.

**UPRISINGS/2/1** contains press cuttings relating to the shooting of Cherry Groce and the 1985 Brixton uprising.

### 3.2 The Runnymede Collection (Ref. RC/RF)

The Runnymede Collection was transferred to BCA in 2011 and contains the library and archive of the Runnymede Trust, which was established in 1968. It has worked for four decades to challenge racial discrimination and promote a successful multi-ethnic Britain.

The Collections covers all aspects race relations but of particular interest is the series on Policing and Crime (ref. **MDXRT/16/16**; and **MDXRT/16/17**) and which covers the disturbances in Brixton, Toxteth, Handsworth and Tottenham.

The Runnymede also has an extensive library and periodical collection. See "Periodicals" and "Further Reading" below for references.

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## 3.3 PERIODICALS (Ref. PERIODICALS)

BCA also holds a large collection of publications and periodicals which feature national and grass roots publications. This series features over 100 periodicals from BCA's collection and the Runnymede.

### Runnymede (Ref. RC/PERIODICALS)

The Runnymede Periodicals collection holds a wide range of periodicals relating to the issue of race, class and immigration. The Collection holds a wide range of journals, from 'Race and Class' (RC/PERIODICALS/323) to 'Britain First' and 'Bulldog', which are newsletters published by the National Front (RC/PERIODICALS/70 and 65) from the 1970s.

### Periodicals

Periodicals of particular interest from BCA's collection are:

- **LIBFRONT/1**: Black Liberation Series, including 'Racism' and 'Understanding Society'
- **PERIODICALS/1**: The Voice
- **PERIODICALS/14**: Black Voice: Black Unity and Freedom
- **PERIODICALS/54**: Brixton Defence Campaign Bulletin
- **PERIODICALS/116**: The Voice of Rasta
- **PERIODICALS/138**: New Equals

## 3.4 The Papers of Jan Mckenley (Ref. MCKENLEY)

Jan McKenley was born in Brixton in 1955. Her parents migrated to Britain from Jamaica. Her family moved to Manchester for five years then back to Tottenham, London.

McKenley was a feminist and applied for the co-ordinator post for the National Abortion Campaign at 374 Grays Inn Road which was home to various feminist organisations.

Through her membership in the 'Brixton Women's Group', McKenley was involved in the 'Brixton Defence Campaign' following the Brixton uprisings in 1981, **MCKENLEY/3/1** and **MCKENLEY/4/1** which contains printed items against racial harassment.

## 3.5 The Papers of Stella Dadzie (Ref. DADZIE)

Stella Dadzie is a published writer and historian, best known for *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's lives in Britain*, which won the 1985 Martin Luther King Award for Literature.

Her career as a writer and education activist spans 25 years. She has written numerous publications and resources aimed at promoting an inclusive curriculum and good practice with black adult learners and other minorities.

She is well known within the UK for her contribution to tackling youth racism and working with racist perpetrators, and is a key contributor to the development of anti-racist strategies with schools, colleges and youth services.

Dadzie has been involved in a number of activities particularly **DADZIE/1/1/27** which is a report on 'Brixton, New Cross and their effect on the Black Struggle'.

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## 3.6 The Papers of Ansel Wong (Ref. WONG)

Ansel Wong was born on 4 October 1945 in San Fernando, Trinidad & Tobago. In 1965 Wong arrived in the UK to attend Hull University, and in the early 1970s Wong was involved in the West Indian Students' Union/West Indian Students' Centre. Prior to the 1980's Uprisings, Wong was involved in the Black defence organisation, **WONG/6/35**.

## 3.7 Images (Ref. PHOTOS)

Beyond the published images in the press coverage, visual records such as photography taken during the 1981 uprisings are unsurprisingly limited. BCA does hold a colour contact print with 36 images (Ref: **PHOTOS/57**) that visualises the collateral damage caused by the uprising. Notable images are of the damage to: Woolworths; Dr. M.A Khan's surgery; and burnt out store fronts.

## 3.8 HANSIB (Ref. HANSIB)

BCA holds the newspapers published by HANSIB which includes, Caribbean Times (1981-2001), African Times (1984-1988) and Asian Times (1983-2000) although the collection is missing some issues.

These newspapers are campaigning weeklies which touch on issues affecting the respective communities, including race relations, employment, housing and sports.

## 3.9 Dick Wilson Press Cuttings Collection (Ref. AC2010/09)

In this uncatalogued collection there is a binder featuring press cuttings relating to the regeneration of Brixton after the 1981 uprising. Most of the press cutting folders relate to race issues and immigration from 1970 onwards.

## 3.10 Remembering '81 (AC2011/16)

To commemorate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Brixton uprisings, a community led event was held in Windrush Square and at Brixton Tate Library. The event included speakers such as Paul Reid, Director of BCA and Devon Thomas and performances by Linton Kwesi Johnson. BCA has a film of the event (ref. **AC2011/06**) which can be viewed in the reading room.

## 3.11 The Papers of Cecil Gutzmore (Ref. GUTZMORE)

This series consists of papers of, and relating to, the Brixton Defence Campaign, donated by Cecil Gutzmore to Black Cultural Archives in 2015. The series includes minutes from the meetings held by the Brixton Defence Campaign, bulletins published by the campaign, copies of transcriptions from the Scarman enquiry, papers relating to the campaign's demand to boycott the Scarman enquiry, ephemera from the campaign, and other related material.

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## Further Reading

These books relate directly to the uprisings:

- Scarman Report: The Brixton Disorders (Penguin). **Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1981**
- Broadwater Farm Revisited. **Karia Press, 1989**
- The Broadwater Farm Inquiry. **Lord Gifford, (ed.) 1986**
- Uprising! (Pan). **M. Kettle & L. Hodges, 1983**
- Behind the Frontlines. **Ferdinand Dennis, 1988**
- Blood on the Streets, **Bethnal Green & Stepney Trade Council, 1978**
- Racism, Resistance and Revolution (Bookmarks). **P. Alexander, 1987**

These books relate to race relations in Britain:

- Because they're Black (Penguin). **D. Humprey & G. John, 1972**
- The State of Black Britain (Hansib). **A. Haynes, 1983**
- Talking Blues, **P. Bishton & B. Homer, 1982**
- Deportations & Removals. **P. Gordon**
- It's the Same Old Story, **Steve Cohen, 1987**
- Police Racism and Union Collusion, **Convention of Black Teachers**

## Other Sources

BBC Radio 1 extra: **Black History**, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/1extra/blackhistory/years/1981>  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/1extra/blackhistory/years/1985>

BBC World Service: **Witness 'Brixton Riots'**, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00716sj>

BBC Radio 4: **The Reunion 'Brixton Riots'**, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00zl4dq>

Metropolitan Police: [http://www.met.police.uk/history/brixton\\_riots.htm](http://www.met.police.uk/history/brixton_riots.htm)

Middlesex University: **Bernie Grant Archives**: <http://www.berniegrantarchive.org.uk/>

The National Archives: **AT 88/138**, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/catalogue/>