

MIGRATING PERIPHERIES: INTERNAL EMPIRE WITHIN THATCHER'S BRITAIN

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the imperial legacies of urban life in 1970s and 1980s Britain. It links attitudes of Britons and British officials toward race to the imperial past. It uses a series of racially influenced events in 1981 as a lens to show that Britons reimagined their former empire upon immigrant heavy urban spaces.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“The British character has done so much for democracy, for law and done so much throughout the world that if there is any fear that it might be swamped people are going to react and be rather hostile to those coming in.” –Margaret Thatcher 1978

“You need an awful lot of policemen to look after 800 marauding young blacks”
–Sir David McNee

“You can crush us
You can bruise us
But you'll have to answer to
Oh, the guns of Brixton”
-The Clash “Guns of Brixton” 1979

When Margaret Thatcher won the British General election of 1979, people living in impoverished inner city communities across Britain quickly realized that major changes were coming to their lives. Thatcher promised to usher in a new era of conservatism. She promised to be tough on crime, cut public spending, and to further limit the abilities of Commonwealth citizens to move freely into the United Kingdom. A series of crises defined Thatcher's early years in office. Britain hit record high levels of unemployment in the seventies, which peaked in 1981 after the Thatcher government initiated record cuts. It was at the height of unemployment and government contraction, in the summer of 1981 when Britain's cities erupted with the most intense rioting in over a century.

The first, and most iconic, riots of 1981 occurred in the South London district of Brixton. Brixton was at the heart of London's West Indian community, home to large numbers of immigrants from former British colonies in the Caribbean and

their children. The Thatcher cuts hit Brixton exceptionally hard, and unemployment for black youths in the district was greater than fifty percent. Additionally, the traditional idea of policing with consent was a notion of the past as mostly white police officers maintained iron fisted control of the district.¹ The riots began on a Friday night in April when police, responding to a stabbing, were falsely accused of trying to arrest the victim instead of seeking medical attention. When confronted with crowds of protesters, the police responded with overwhelming violent force and for the next three days thousands of youths and police officers engaged in street level battles for control of the district, destroying businesses and cars and sending hundreds to the hospital. It should be noted that black youths were not the only participants in the 1981 riots, but public reaction and media coverage of the events played up the racial elements. As such much of the reaction, on both sides of post-riot debates, has focused upon the riots largely in racialized terms.

This paper argues that as Britain transformed from a global imperial superpower into a postcolonial society, British identity transformed through a national re-imagination of urban spaces. Following a series of manufactured 'crises', and heightened by the rise of Thatcherism in the late 1970s, Britons reimagined new internally colonized spaces upon their crumbling urban landscape. These spaces were populated largely by immigrants from the former Empire and their children. Using a significant string of events in 1981 as a lens this paper shows how contested ideas of who and what the British nation was clashed in these 'new imperial peripheries'. This string of events is capped by the 1981 riots in Brixton

¹ Martin Kettle and Lucy Hodges, *UPRISING! The Police, The People and the Riots in Britain's Cities*, (London Pan Books, 1982); Stuart Hall, Chas Cricker, Tony Jefferson, Jon Clarke, and Brian

and cities across Great Britain, which provided an opportunity for a nationalistic, nostalgic Thatcher government to take a stand against what can be interpreted as colonial rebellion.

Scholars have examined relationships between race, class, nation, and citizenship during the recession of the James Callaghan and early Margaret Thatcher premierships.² During these years British national identity grew stronger and solidified as a white identity.³ Black Britons became a permanent immigrant class, even those born in the country. Similarly Jon Lawrence and Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite argued that it was in this era that class politics in Britain died and a national ideal of middle class British sensibility became the adhered to cultural norm. This British, middle class sensibility was a nationalistic image of Britain. They have also looked into the relationship between Margaret Thatcher's brand of Conservatism and the decline of the Empire as well as the impact this had on race relations and racial geography.⁴ Stephen Howe argued that British policy can and should be viewed through the lens of post-colonial trauma and Camilla Schofield

² Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Tara Martin Lopez, *The Winter of Discontent: Myth, Memory and History* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014); Robert Saunders, "Crisis? What Crisis? Thatcherism and the Seventies," in Ben Jackson and Robert Saunders eds. *Making Thatcher's Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012,); Jon Lawrence and Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, "Margaret Thatcher and the Decline of Class Politics," in *Making Thatcher's Britain*; John A MacKenzie, "The Persistence of Empire in Metropolitan Culture," in Stuart Ward ed. *British Culture and the End of Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).

³ Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*

⁴ Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies, *Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70's Britain*, London: Routledge, 1982, Camilla Schofield, *Enoch Powell and the Making of Postcolonial Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Stephen Howe, "Internal Decolonization? British Politics Since Thatcher as Post-colonial Trauma," *Twentieth Century British History*, 2003; "Decolonization and Imperial Aftershocks," in *Making Thatcher's Britain*; Jacqueline Nassy Brown, *Dropping Anchor, Setting Sail: Geographies of Race in Black Liverpool* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

took that lens and applies it to Conservative firebrand Enoch Powell, an approach that can be applied to British Conservatism in General, especially during the ‘crisis’ years from the mid-seventies through the mid-eighties. This paper will be largely London focused, but the riots that followed, including most significantly those in the Toxteth district of Liverpool do feature in analysis.

This paper looks at both governmental and popular sources surrounding the lead up to the 1981 riots and responses to the riots including the Scarman Report and the British Nationality Act of 1981. This paper will begin with a brief summary of the history of post-World War II black migration to Britain. It will then fast forward to the industrial strife of the 1970s and the rise of both Margaret Thatcher and anti-immigration National Front Party. I will demonstrate how Margaret Thatcher invoked images of imperial nostalgia and positioned herself as a more moderately conservative force on immigration when compared with the National Front.⁵ Yet she found a way to do so while remaining starkly anti-immigration. I will then show how the drastic cuts in everything but policing turned Britain’s inner cities into internal imperial peripheries.⁶ Finally, I will show how official and popular responses to the rioting both solidified and challenged the notion of internal imperial peripheries. While some in power argued for a fierce clampdown

⁵ This nostalgia fell in line with Thatcher’s rhetorical fascination with “Victorian Values” Raphael Samuel, *Island Stories: Theatres of Memory Volume II* (London: Verso, 1998) 330-348.

⁶ Here I plan to employ Stephen Howe’s definition of Empire in *Empire: A Short Introduction*, where he describes empire as ‘formed...by conquest, out of a dominant core and a dominated, often economically exploited periphery.’ He goes further to describe the situation this paper will explore as internal colonialism where ‘geographical lines...might be blurred. Core and periphery might even be closely intermingled inhabiting the same physical spaces.” *Empire: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 19 I also borrow theoretical background here from Georgie Wemyss, *The Invisible Empire: White Discourse, Tolerance and Belonging* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2009).

on the rioting regions, and the national 'others' behind the riots, others in power sought to understand the plight of their fellow Britons and sought to turn the riots into an opportunity for conversation and reform.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

For my analysis in this thesis I benefit from new imperial historians like Bill Schwarz and Jordanna Bailkin who discuss how the legacies of the empire played out in the everyday life of postwar Britons.⁷ Both scholars discuss in detail how the racial and gender structures carried through from the high periods of imperial Britain into the postwar realities of postcolonial Britain. Bailkin and Schwarz tend to end their analysis in the 1960s, and I intend to expand their theoretical frame into the Thatcherite era, going as Kennetta Hammond Perry convincingly argues “Beyond Windrush,” but I intend to expand into a second postwar generation.⁸

This paper deals with race and racism primarily from a black perspective. It is not meant to suggest South Asians did not experience racial discrimination, but the historiographical narrative surrounding these communities is largely separate from African and Afro-Caribbean Londoners, because as the communities grew, they settled in different parts of the city. Moreover, the society into which they were integrating tended to view them as separate groups.

Camilla Schofield, in her aptly named book, *Enoch Powell and the Making of Postcolonial Britain*, takes the figure of the anti-immigrant hyper-nationalist

⁷ Jordanna Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire* and Bill Schwarz, *The Memories of Empire Pt. 1: The White Man's World*. Additional historians who fall into this school are Antionette Burton, Sonya Rose, Catherine Hall, Stuart Ward, John Mackenzie. They tend to focus more exclusively on the high era of the British Empire, but their perceptions of the impact on British society will guide my research.

⁸ Schwarz has indicated that his theoretical frames can apply to the new right through discussions of Enoch Powell and others in the reflective introduction to *The White Man's World*; Kennetta Hammond Perry, “Black Britain and the Politics of Race in the Twentieth Century,” *History Compass* 12, no. 8 (2014): 651–663; Jacequeline Nassey Brown’s *Dropping Anchor: Setting Sail :Geographies of Race in Black Liverpool* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

conservative Enoch Powell and attempts to explain his character and behavior through a postcolonial lens. She effectively argues that Britain, and British society can only effectively be viewed through the postcolonial lens. Just as colonialism represented a trauma for the colonized, the end of colonization represented a trauma through which later society must be read.

I intend to show that even through the formal empire fell during the 1950s and 1960s, that the British sought to recreate the structures of imperialism within their own borders and that new commonwealth immigrants and their descendants served the same function in the new, neoliberal empire, that their ancestors had served in the earlier age of imperialism.⁹

The neoliberal internal empire I refer to was a socio-political construction that emerged as Britons and British society sought to come to terms with their changing position in the global power spectrum. Its roots lay in the 1960s, but the system solidified under the Thatcherite state. Central to the Thatcherite 'neoliberal empire' was the creation of imperial peripheries in Britain's crumbling urban cores, peripheries that served as test sites for neoliberal policies.¹⁰ These areas tended to contain large populations of people who had either themselves come from the peripheries of the since fallen British Empire, or whose parents

⁹ Edward Pilkington, *Beyond the Mother Country*; Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1997); Randall Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration in Post-War Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Lorna Chessum *From Immigrants to Ethnic Minority: Making Black Community in Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000); In *Mongrel Nation: Diasporic Culture and the Making of Postcolonial Britain*, Ashley Dawson writes from the perspective of Asian, African, and Caribbean migrants "colonizing Britain in reverse," a unique perspective on postcolonial Britain, but one which I feel does not most accurately describe the hegemony and power dynamics presented in the British state into which the migrants are moving.

¹⁰ In *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005), David Harvey stresses the importance of having peripheral test sites as models for "the formulation of policies in the centre" (p. 8). He is speaking of American trained neoliberals implementing policy in Latin America, but in Thatcher's case, the inner cities of Britain can be seen in the same peripheral lens.

had. The new, neoliberal right in Britain ran a nostalgic campaign, a campaign that looked back fondly at the era of British free market liberalism. One important element of free market liberalism was liberal imperialism.

The new imperial structures survived in a similar fashion to the old structures. The ruling classes had to convince the working classes, and did to some extent, that the people from the commonwealth, who lived in ghettoized spaces, beyond the neoimperial borders, were below them. The New Right coalition seized power in 1978 and held it throughout the rest of my period of investigation, I will seek to explore how the neoliberal-imperial subjects fought back.

Part of the narrative that helped to create the new right coalition was one of decline and crisis. In 1978, led by Stuart Hall, a number of scholars associated with the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham wrote *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, The State, and Law and Order*. In this text Hall's team introduces the scholarly community to ideas related to the 'moral panic' surrounding the 'crisis' of 'street crime' and 'muggings.' They argued that notions of crime and law and order became racialized during the 1970s. Further historical research shows that during this same period Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative tabloid press latched onto the issues of muggings and street crime and rode a law and order manifesto that stressed a nostalgic era when the streets were safe to the ballot boxes in the 1979 election.¹¹

¹¹ See Michael Rowe, *The Racialisation of Disorder in Twentieth Century Britain* (London: Ashgate, 1998); For examples of Thatcherite rhetoric around race, crime, and immigration in the build up to the 1979 election see, Thatcher Archive, "Speech to Conservative Party Conference ("Confrontation with reality")" October 14, 1977, Document 103443; Thatcher Archive, "Conservative General Election Manifesto 1979." Document 110858; Churchill Archive Centre:

The Callaghan and Thatcher years have frequently been defined by a number of crises and panics. Historians have grappled with the contradictions that Britain faced during the time period with surprising levels of prosperity competing with pessimistic popular narratives and historical memory of the era.¹² Popular memories of the 1970s, including the epic “Winter of Discontent,” are of labor unrest, untended refuse piles, unburied dead, and economic decline. Despite this narrative in peoples’ memories, the 1970s actually saw Britain’s economy grow and individual incomes rise substantially. It also saw the beginnings of the divided society that the Thatcher years accelerated the production of divisions, between rich and poor and increased gaps between white and black. Through my narrative we can see how racist dog whistle tactics and increasing state and anti-state violence widened these gaps.

This of course ties into the historiography of London’s postwar migrations. Historians have demonstrated that London attracted a great number of peoples from across the empire, Europe, and the world during the postwar period. Some came, like many Black Britons did for work, but others did so for education (the majority of early African migration) or to be with family members already living in the United Kingdom. London became a receiving ground for all of these migrations to the point where contemporary London is nearly 40% foreign born.

Thatcher MSS (2/1/1/39), “Speeches: Sir Keith Joseph to MT (proposed draft speeches) [Eldon Griffiths, Letwins, Utley, Bruce-Gardyne],” Document 111839.

¹² For discussion of how Margret Thatcher and the Conservatives seized on the narrative of crisis see Robert Saunders, “‘Crisis? What Crisis?’ Thatcherism and the Seventies,” in Ben Jackson and Robert Saunders eds. *Making Thatcher’s Britain*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012,); for historical narrative see; Tara Martin Lopez, *The Winter of Discontent: Myth, Memory and History*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014) and Nick Tiratsoo, “Never had it so Bad: Britain in the 1970s” in Nick Tiratsoo, ed. *From Blitz to Blair: A New History of Britain Since 1939* (London: Weidenfeld, 1997); Joel Krieger, *Reagan, Thatcher and the Politics of Decline*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

Historians and sociologists have shown how immigrant communities clustered in certain areas but in others, like the inner London borough of Newham no particular group became dominant, and that it was in areas like Newham that real cross-cultural alliances could thrive and prosper.¹³ Similar communities existed on council estates in inner London Boroughs like Southwark and Hackney.¹⁴

London's deindustrialization and the closure of the docks created massive pockets of depravity in the midst of a city that also contained huge sections that prospered with new economic models. The subjects of my research tended to live in the former category where they suffered high unemployment and hostile relationships with the communities who had lived for generations in the areas where they settled.

¹³ The Campaign Against Racism and Fascism and the Newham Monitoring Project, *Newham: The Forging of a Black Community* (London: Institute of Race Relations, 1991).

¹⁴ Their stories can be found in Tony Parker, *The People of Providence: A Housing Estate and Some of its Inhabitants* (London: Hutchinson 1983), and Patrick Wright, *A Journey Through the Ruins: The Last Days of London* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993 and 2009).

CHAPTER 3

BLACK BRITAIN BEFORE THE RIOTS:

Black history in Great Britain stretches back millennia, to at least the Roman era.¹⁵ In Elizabethian times, there was a large enough black population that the Queen found the population to be significant enough to expel them from London. With the expansion of the African trade, Britain's ports saw increases in black population, and after abolition, the number of blacks in ports grew. Colonial shippers often hired African seamen and housed them in port cities for weeks, or months at a time. Prior to 1925, these seamen, treated as equal British subjects had the freedom as British subjects to remain in these port cities should they choose to.¹⁶ After 1925, more restrictions were placed on the rights of colonial sailors, but those who had already settled in Britain and their British born children were legally allowed to remain.

The Black population in Britain was still miniscule though, under 15,000.¹⁷ It was not until after World War II, during which thousands of black colonial subjects risked their lives fighting for the imperial mother country, that black immigration to Britain began to occur in greater numbers. In 1948 a ship carrying 492 West Indian

¹⁵ Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*, (Reprint), (London: Pluto Press, 2010); Citation Divya P. Tolia-Kelly, "Narrating the postcolonial landscape: Archaeologies of race at Hadrian's Wall," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 36, no. 1 (2011), 71-88.

¹⁶ Jacqueline Nassey Brown, *Dropping Anchor, Setting Sail: Geographies of Race in Black Liverpool* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 19.

¹⁷ Ceri Peach, "Patterns of Afro-Caribbean Migration and Settlement in Great Britain: 1945-1981," In Colin Brock, *The Caribbean in Europe: Aspects of the West Indian Experience in Britain, France and the Netherlands* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1986), 62-84.

men arrived in England and the large-scale post-war migration began. While scholars debate whether this particular arrival marked a distinct break in the narrative arch of black British history, it does bring the first of the hundreds of thousands of West Indian migrants who settled in Britain in the post-war era.¹⁸

Attitudes of politicians and state actors transitioned over the following two decades from viewing blacks from the Commonwealth as useful laborers to the source of race ‘problems.’ In 1962, Parliament passed the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962, which required commonwealth citizens to obtain permits before entering into the United Kingdom for work. 1962 happened to be the same year that a number of Britain’s West Indian colonies were granted independence. In 1968, the state placed further restrictions on West Indian migrants, then needed familial ties to Britain to be allowed legal residence. Even after the state imposed these increased restrictions on entry, blacks remained in Britain and their community grew. By the 1970s the Black community included a large number of citizens born in Great Britain.

This generation represented a more alienated, radical group of British citizens than their parents.¹⁹ The economic climate in which they grew up was direr than their parents’. Instead of the seemingly unlimited labor opportunities that post-war reconstruction presented, these black Britons grew up in a climate of deindustrialization and conflicts between management, the state, and labor. Many complained that the education system in Britain had failed them, placing them in

¹⁸ Kennetta Hammond Perry, “Black Britain and the Politics of Race in the Twentieth Century,” *History Compass* 12, no. 8 (2014): 651–663.

¹⁹ Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, (London: Methuen and Co, 1979).

classes taught at the same level as recent Commonwealth arrivals from India and Bangladesh who spoke no English.²⁰ It was this generation of black Britons who eventually revolted in 1981.

British responses to black immigrants were mixed. Some Britons welcomed commonwealth immigrants as members of a greater imperial nation. Others were skeptical, but largely unaffected by the new arrivals, and still others fought vehemently against turning Britain into a multicultural nation. The most prominent and radical critics of immigration were Conservative MPs Peter Griffiths who ran under the famous slogan, "If you want a nigger for a neighbour. Vote Labour" and Enoch Powell who described allowing 50,000 commonwealth immigrants to enter the UK per year in the late 1960 as watching, "a nation, busily engaged in heaping up its own funeral pyre."²¹ While both men were alienated from the Conservative party's leadership, it was not as much for their opinions on immigration, as for the rhetoric they used to describe it. Both men remained in Parliament for Margaret Thatcher's first two governments.

With this information, it is clear that uneasiness surrounded the relationships between Commonwealth immigrants, their children, and British society more broadly. Many migrated to Britain with the expectations of making it big in the mother country only to likely find themselves just as marginalized, filling the same peripheral roles in the mother country as they had in the Caribbean.

²⁰ David Upshall, *Windrush* (TV Documentary), BBC, 1998.

²¹ Enoch Powell, "Rivers of Blood" Speech, April 20, 1968 before the West Midlands Area Conservative Political Centre.

CHAPTER 4

BRITAIN IN CRISIS

The 1970s serve in popular memory as some of the darkest years in modern British history. Inflation had spiraled out of control and conflict raged between labor and management. Mining strikes led to power shortages, and the government was forced to institute three-day workweeks for certain facilities. Things got so bad during the so-called, 'winter of discontent,' that, in response to repeated disappointment in collective bargaining attempts, trash collectors and gravediggers went on strike. These led to the powerful images of unburied corpses in Liverpool storehouses and London's iconic Leicester Square, the heart of the tourist West End, filled to the brim as a designated rubbish collection site.



Fig 1. Trash Piled in Leicester Square. AP Images John Glanville January 1979

One way that many working class Britons responded to the crisis was in joining the National Front, a far-right, anti-immigration, nationalist party.

Christopher Husbands, the leading academic expert on the National Front in the 1980s explained the rise of the party, especially in cities, as a failure of British society to adapt to a cosmopolitan challenge.²² The group formed in the 1960s and pushed for immigration reforms, some of which eventually became the Commonwealth Immigrants act of 1968. As the economy worsened in the 1970s however, The National Front's popularity rose.

The National Front represented a threat to both parties. Traditional Labour territory in London's old East End became the geographic heart of the National Front's urban strategies in the late seventies.²³ The National Front also made headway in its relationship with conservative policy organization, the Monday Club.²⁴

Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative Party rhetorically distanced themselves from the sensationalist rhetoric of the National Front, but latched onto the movement's popularity by making significant rhetorical noise about immigration and crime with. Thatcher famously stating in February 1977 that, "People have asked me whether I'm going to make the fight against crime an issue at the next election. No, I am not going to make it an issue, it's the people of Britain who are going to make it an issue."²⁵ In a climate where for the Conservative party, cuts to government spending represented the essence of the solution to Britain's

²² Christopher Husbands, *Racial Exclusionism and the City: The Urban Support of the National Front*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983, 2.

²³ *ibid*, 13.

²⁴ *ibid*, 7.

²⁵ Thatcher Archive, "Speech to Conservative Party Conference ("Confrontation with reality"), October 14, 1977, Document 103443.

woes, Thatcher promised to raise spending on police forces to encourage greater law and order.

How much the 'people' made the fight against crime was a subject of debate even during the time period. Stuart Hall and others at the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies explored increased references to 'crime,' 'street crime,' and 'muggings' in the 1978 study *Policing the Crisis*. They argued that the notions of crime and of law and order had become racialized in the years when Thatcher was leader of the opposition in parliament. The tabloid press induced a 'moral panic' with regards to muggings by young black men against whites, and the Conservative party latched on to the issue as something to run on in the upcoming general elections.²⁶

Thatcher and her subordinates mentioned crime and immigration in numerous speeches and the official party manifesto for the 1979 election.²⁷ Usually they did not directly link the two, but they often showed up in the same conversations. One document shows Margaret Thatcher, in her capacity as leader of the opposition, prepping a close ally on upcoming political speeches. She approved of language "on Patriotism and Unity of the United Kingdom" and "To stress that violent crime at current levels must stop and that Labour has no such intention."²⁸ In her most infamous remarks prior to the 1979 election she tried to explain her understanding of the frustration that led many to join the National Front. "The British character has done so much for democracy, for law and done so much

²⁶ Hall et. al. *Policing the Crisis*.

²⁷ Thatcher Archive, "Conservative General Election Manifesto 1979," Document 110858.

²⁸ Churchill Archive Centre: Thatcher MSS (2/1/1/39), "Speeches: Sir Keith Joseph to MT (proposed draft speeches) [Eldon Griffiths, Letwins, Utley, Bruce-Gardyne]," Document 111839.

throughout the world that if there is any fear that it might be swamped people are going to react and be rather hostile to those coming in.”²⁹ This was her way of reaching into the voter pool of those who may otherwise support the National Front by showing she shared their concerns, just perhaps not precisely the same solutions.

In the Conservative Manifesto for 1979, immigration and race relations fell under the category “Rule of Law.” In the text the party stated, “But firm immigration control for the future is essential if we are to achieve good community relations. It will end persistent fears about levels of immigration and will remove from those settled, and in many cases born here, the label of 'immigrant'.”³⁰ Instead of putting the onus on British society to accept people of diverse cultures into their fold, Thatcher and the Conservatives essentially argued that the only way to ensure that the black community would be accepted into British society was if they stopped allowing immigration. While this may sound extreme, those to the right of them were demanding mass deportations, and thus the Conservatives seemed more moderate.

The Conservative party ran a campaign that glorified the days before the chaos of the seventies. Part of this glorification included invoking images of the Empire. In a 1978 speech railing against the woes of socialism Thatcher said, “The loss of empire did not mean the eclipse of everything for which this country stood in the past. On the contrary, if all the various achievements of Britain in history were totted up, our role in evolving a political democracy with a record of tolerance

²⁹ Thatcher Archive, “TV Interview for Granada *World in Action*” January 27, 1978, Document103485.

³⁰ Thatcher Archive, “Conservative General Election Manifesto 1979.”

second to none would probably rank first.”³¹ She evoked the image of the empire as a peaceful, tolerant space in direct contrast to the world that the Soviet Union hoped to shape, but also in contrast to the chaotic unrest that had befallen Britain under the contemporary Labour government.

The Conservative rhetorical strategies succeeded in the 1979 General Election and Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister with 53% of the seats in Parliament. The conservative Party cobbled together an electoral coalition that led to the largest electoral swing in recent history. One way that Conservatives were able to unite their voters was through a rhetoric that downplayed class and emphasized nationality.³² In doing so, Thatcher was able to create a community of nationalist Britons ready to take the next step in moving forward by looking back.

³¹ Thatcher Archive, “Speech to the Bow Group (“The Ideals of an Open Society”)", May 6, 1978, Document 103674.

³² Jon Lawrence and Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, “Margaret Thatcher and the Decline of Class Politics,” 132-147.

CHAPTER 5

THE THATCHER YEARS AND THE NEW IMPERIALISM

The economic policies that Thatcher and her Conservative colleagues employed harkened back to the liberal state of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, before the great welfare state. Key to the success of the liberal state was the success of the British imperial project. The empire required peripheral spaces—spaces with fewer resources, spaces from which labor could be pulled but jobs were not guaranteed. The subjects in these spaces also necessitated heavy policing. In Margaret Thatcher's Britain, the poor inner city cores, most notably Brixton, functioned as the imperial peripheries to a new internal empire. The inhabitants of these peripheries (probably not coincidentally) also happened to have migrated themselves from the old peripheries or had parents who had done so.

Margaret Thatcher and her Conservative allies had a grand, new vision for a Britain of the future. In order to achieve this vision parliament needed to initiate cuts. Both the budget and taxes needed cutting in order for the new Conservative order to come into fruition. The Thatcher government sent Britain into a deep recession While cutting what seemed like essential services to the impoverished communities and cutting state sponsorship of the industries that employed their populations,.

The cuts hit poor areas that had been dependent on industrial jobs exceptionally hard. Britain's cities had large pockets where industrial jobs had once allowed for a thriving working class, but now only empty factories survived. Thatcherism sped up the deindustrialization process, but was by no means entirely responsible. The poor and immigrant heavy areas of Britain's cities had experienced the loss of jobs and factories for years, what was unique with the new reforms was the cutting of the social safety net that had protected residents of these areas.

As Thatcher cut public service and demonized unionized government employees, she bolstered the domestic police force. In fact while spending in most government sectors waned during Thatcher's premiership, spending on law and order increased by 53%.³³ In a speech in 1979 she brought significant fanfare to a police academy graduation in Nottingham. While there she reiterated the Tory mantra on crime, stating, "the threat to the rule of law is more real in Britain than ever before."³⁴ As Hall et al have pointed out, statistical analysis flew directly into the face of these claims.³⁵

The claims of unprecedented crime nevertheless carried significant water in the Britain of the seventies, and crime became racialized. The era of the mugging crisis was also the era of heightened hooliganism by white football enthusiasts, but only the former was viewed as an existential threat. Look at the way the police officer in the photo below is handling a bloodied hooligan in a 1978 football match

³³ Nigel Lawson, *The View from No. 11: Memoirs of a Tory Radical* (London: Bantam Press, 1992), 159

³⁴ Thatcher Archives, "Speech to Nottingham Police Academy," July 20, 1979, Document104118.

³⁵ Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis*, 13.

at the notorious hooligan breeding ground, Millwall's The Den. The look on his face suggests that the young man is a nuisance, but not a real threat. He is not wielding a weapon or wearing riot gear, despite the fact that the match in question led to a brawl that left dozens injured and witnessed supporters throwing glass bottles at police.



Fig 2. Hooligans at a Millwall Football Match 1978. *Sunday Post*

Mugging on the other hand was portrayed in the press as an existential threat. The language behind the crisis is worth analyzing. While the 'moral panic' surrounding the so-called mugging crisis was imported from across the Atlantic, its impact on British society was profound. Muggers were described in dehumanizing terms like

'vermin' and 'scum.'³⁶ More critically though, when viewed through the lens of empire, is the usage of the term thug.

Description of muggers as thugs had a distinctive racial and imperial tinge. Historically Thug was a description of a murderous Indian cult called Thuggee. Thugs, presented a problem to the colonial administration in Britain, and represented a threat to British authority in India. In the 1830s the eradication of Thugs in India was one of the first successful examples of state policing.³⁷ Drawing the contemporary behavior in the impoverished, minority heavy neighborhoods of Britain's cities, in to the rhetorical framework of colonial policing helped to justify the heavy police presence.

The word thug was so prevalent in describing street crime that it made it into official party rhetoric both on the floors of parliament and in the official Conservative Manifesto of 1983. In the week following the rioting in Brixton, during Prime Minister's questions, the word 'thug' was used to describe the rioters. While the speaker framed the statement to include all rioters, "regardless of colour," the implication was clear that immigrants were to be viewed as problems, especially when readers note that the statement was an argument in favor of the 1981 British Nationality act.³⁸

Police responded to a nineteenth century problem with a nineteenth century solution. To combat the rise in street crime (even if this rise was not as drastic as the media led people to believe), police, especially in London reached deep into the legal

³⁶ Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis*, 132.

³⁷ Mike Dash, *Thug: The True Story of India's Murderous Cult* (London: Granta Books, 2005).

³⁸ Thatcher Archive, Hansard HC [3/646-50], House of Commons PQs April 28, 1981, Document 104638.

archive and revived the 'sus,' or suspected person law. Officially known as, The Vagrancy Act of 1824, it stated that,

“every suspected person or reputed thief, frequenting any river, canal, or navigable stream, dock, or basin, or any quay, wharf, or warehouse near or adjoining thereto, or any street, highway, or avenue leading thereto, or any place of public resort, or any avenue leading thereto, or any street, or any highway or any place adjacent to a street or highway; with intent to commit an arrestable offence...shall be deemed a vagabond...it shall be lawful for any justice of the peace to commit such offender to the house of correction”³⁹

Under this justification, urban police officers could profile those that they suspected of thuggery. From 1977-79, three quarters of those arrested under 'sus' were black.⁴⁰

Sus arrests furthered the image in the minds of police and society that crime was up. It is hardly surprising that when police can make arrests for suspected intent to commit crime, arrest rates, and thus the reported crime rate, goes up. The spatial element of sus laws furthered the creation of a zone of otherness within Britain's cities. Hall eloquently sums up this problem in *Policing the Crisis*,

[The problem] in short, is nothing less than the synchronization of the race and the class aspects of the crisis. Policing *the blacks* threatened to mesh with the problem of policing *the poor* and policing the *unemployed*: all three were concentrated in precisely the same urban areas—a fact which of course provided that element of geographical homogeneity which facilitates the germination of a militant consciousness.⁴¹

The militant consciousness of police derives from being placed in an unfamiliar environment, a place with a sense of foreignness. This is similar to how

³⁹ Vagrancy Act, 1824, Geo. IV, Cap. 83.

⁴⁰ George Greaves, “The Brixton Disorders” in *Scarman and After: Essays reflecting on Lord Scarman's Report, the Riots and Their Aftermath* ed. John Benyon, (Leicester: Pergamon Press), 1983.

⁴¹ Hall, *Policing the Crisis*, 332.

colonial soldiers responded when sent into unknown territories. Instead of community policing, officers acted as essentially an occupying force.

By 1980-81 the foundations of the new empire had been laid, but the system was not yet perfected. It stood poised to face its first real test, and the 1981 riots in Brixton, and other British cities would provide that test. Leaders' and the community reacted in a way that solidified the status.

CHAPTER 6

COLONIAL REBELLION

The elite class's neoliberal ideals behind creating colonies within were put to the test in 1981. The riots in Brixton, Toxteth, Southall and Moss Side presented the neoliberal British Empire with its first rebellion. Some responses to the riots were typical of imperial desires to suppress, but the spatial element of the rioting led to cracks in the new system.

The origins of the 1981 riots in Brixton, the tinderbox where the national uprisings began can be traced to a number of long-term and proximate factors. The broad, longer-term origins were high unemployment and poor relations between police and communities. During BBC coverage of the riots an unidentified man shouted in a Jamaican accent, "We want to be able to walk the streets. We want jobs. We want better opportunities! We are frustrated! We are fed up!"⁴² This perfectly sums up the sentiment that many West Indians living in Brixton expressed.⁴³ The general tiredness of the community with the long term factors that led to the rioting can be seen in the Clash's song "Guns of Brixton" which correctly predicted a violent reaction in the district two years before the riots took place. While long-term factors played into the riots, there were more proximate causes including a massacre and a military style police operation, and the spread of a fateful rumor through the local

⁴² BBC Radio, *Reunion*, "Brixton Riots" time mark 30:15, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00zl4dq>

⁴³ Lambeth Council, "Report of the Working Party on Community/Police Relations in Lambeth," 1981

population. The long term factors are examined above, but the proximate causes bear equal scrutiny in the context of internal colonization.

Colonialism's link with violence is long established. One effective tool that colonizers used to impose colonial policy was the massacre. Massacres either tended to occur as collective punishment or as an unbalanced response a perceived or real threat. One massacre, although it technically remains unsolved, was an arson attack against unarmed black teenagers at a birthday party that left 13 dead and dozens more emotionally scared.⁴⁴ What was almost equally as disturbing as the murder of defenseless teenagers was the official response to the fire. A generation before New Cross, the British state massacred hundreds of Kenyans at camps in Hola. There were rumors of state condoned violence, but far from a substantial national outcry. This asymmetric violence was then hidden from the public's eye for decades, denounced as rumor until it was only recently that historians discovered documents that revealed the truly brutal nature of Kikuyu treatment during Mau Mau. In 1948, the British army murdered unarmed villagers in Malaya and set fires to their homes. Although some inquiries were held, no charges were filed. The massacre in January 1981 was different though, because it was on metropolitan British soil.

The massacre occurred at a house party in the impoverished Southeast London neighborhood of New Cross within the London Borough of Lewisham. New Cross was a front line of racial tensions in London at the time. The neighborhood was home to a number of black immigrants and their families but also remained

⁴⁴ K. R. Prowen. "After the New Cross fire." *Times* (London), 17 Mar. 1981, 13, *The Times Digital Archive*, 5 May 2015

home to a sizable contingent of white working class Londoners. Lewisham was on the receiving end of a number of economic blows at the time. The container ship revolution had seen all of London's once mighty docks close by the mid 1970s. This struck a significant blow to the working class identity of East and Southeast London, which had largely revolved around working on the docks.

The working classes of Lewisham had high rates of participation in far right organizations like the National Front. Just a few short years before the massacre, Lewisham was the site of a famous confrontation between National Front marchers, protected by police escorts, and pro-immigrant, pro-black organizations.⁴⁵

A birthday house party was crowded on the night of January 18, 1981, when someone started a fire inside of the house. Police suspected arson, but no arrests were ever made as a result of the investigation. Time passed and the story of thirteen children's murder fell out of the national consciousness. Groups like the Black Parents Movement (BPM) and the New Cross Massacre Action Committee (NCMAC) worked to spread awareness and to achieve justice, but to no avail. In fact, police worked to dispel the notion that the fire was a racially motivated attack.⁴⁶

Eventually, in March, Black Britons determined that enough time had passed where it became necessary to demand a response. They had hoped for some sort of charges to be filed or at least a public acknowledgement of sympathy from the government or the Queen. When no such sympathy emerged they organized.

⁴⁵ Peter Evans, "Yard looks at police tactics on demonstrations." *Times* (London, 17 Aug. 1977), 2. *The Times Digital Archive*. Web. 5 May 2015.

⁴⁶ John LaRose, "Interview with *Socialist Challenge*, 17 June 1981. From *The New Cross Massacre Story: Interviews with John La Rose*, (London: New Beacon Books and George Padmore Institute, 1981), 14. In the interview La Rose claimed that the reason that police tried to dispel the notion of racially motivated attack was to limit the number of people who would take to the streets in protest.

NCMAC formed from concerned Black Britons, primarily activists associated with the BPM and allies.⁴⁷ They drafted charter documents and united behind a declaration that declared that there would be no peace while Blacks in Britain were “attacked, killed, injured and maimed with impunity on the streets or in (their) homes.”⁴⁸ The organized march in response was billed as the Black Peoples’ Day of Action. The march weaved in a peaceful fashion through South London and across the Thames into the City of London. Organizers urged peace and dedicated certain members of the committee to the supervision of marchers.⁴⁹ Once they reached the city, some marchers were involved in a minor skirmish with police, which resulted in a few broken windows and one looted shop. Twenty five protesters were arrested on minor charges⁵⁰ The headline the next day in the *Daily Express* was “Rampage of a Mob,”⁵¹ and led *The Times* to publish an editorial proclaiming that a “Ban on Marches will avoid grave disorder.”⁵² Suddenly an event organized to raise awareness of an injustice against the black community transformed into justification for police crackdowns in black-majority spaces.

This led to the second proximate cause in Brixton. In the days leading up to the rioting in Brixton the police engaged in a military style operation, Operation Swamp. While it is unlikely that the name of the operation harkens back to Margaret Thatcher’s 1978 comments about British Society being swamped with people from other countries the choice of ‘swamp’ as an operation name was still poor. Instead

⁴⁷ La Rose 13.

⁴⁸ NCMAC, “The Declaration of New Cross,” in La Rose *The New Cross Massacre Story*, 57.

⁴⁹ George Padmore Institute, NCM/1/2.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Kettle and Hodges, *UPRISING!*, 21.

⁵² “Ban on marches will avoid grave disorder.” *Times* (London), 6 Mar. 1981, 8. *The Times Digital Archive*. 3 Apr. 2015.

police were to swamp the Brixton district and employ heavy handed policing to crack down on the street crime the area had been associated with. Over a period of five days police arrested 82 people under the previously discussed sus law and harassed hundreds.

The idea that crimes took place in Brixton was not simply imagined. The police did have reason to view the district, especially the area around Railton Road as a trouble area. However, Operation Swamp was a miserable failure in terms of police/community relations and civil rights.⁵³ Brixton had become, according to one local councilor, an occupied territory.⁵⁴ Eighty two individuals were arrested despite not having committed a crime.

It was in this circumstance that rumors swirled, and eventually led local residents to attack police officers. Around 6:00 PM Police Constable Stephen Margiotta was on the beat in Brixton when he noticed a black youth running through the street. After pursuit he noticed the young man was bleeding, having suffered from a stab wound. Police tried to take the young man to the hospital in the police van, but the local community stopped them from doing so believing them to be trying to arrest a young man clearly in need of medical attention. Eventually, an ambulance came and took the young man to hospital, but rumor spread that the police had delayed his treatment and the young man had died.⁵⁵ As the rumor spread, violence broke out and continued on and off for three days.

⁵³ Lord Leslie Scarman, *The Scarman Report: The Brixton Disorders 10-12 April 1981 With a New Introduction*, (London: Penguin Books,) 1981.

⁵⁴ Martin Huckerby, Nicholas Timmins, John Witherow, Stewart Tendler, and David Nicholson-Lord, "Brixton Streets Boil for the Fourth Night," (London, England), Tuesday, Apr 14, 1981, pg. 1.

⁵⁵ *Scarman Report* 38-44.

The riots left Brixton severely damaged. Rioters burned to the ground many local businesses, especially those that had purportedly discriminated against black customers.⁵⁶ They destroyed cars and left the streets littered with broken glass and ashes. Two months after Brixton, riots spread to Liverpool, Manchester and Leeds. The rioting youth in each city lived in similar circumstances to the rioters in Brixton.

Political leaders lined up to condemn the rioters for their action, discrediting a variety of potential motives. In an April 17, press conference (the Friday after the riots began) Margaret Thatcher used the riots as evidence that too many immigrants in the country bred instability, and that a new immigration act was needed in order to ensure racial harmony.⁵⁷

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade Normann Tebbit, gave a famous speech where he discredited the idea that unemployment was behind the rioting. He told a Conservative audience that, "I grew up in the 30s with an unemployed father. He didn't riot; he got on his bike and looked for work and he kept looking 'til he found it."⁵⁸ This message resonated with the English nostalgia that had helped the Conservative electoral cause just two years before. He links the economic hard times that Britain was experiencing to an earlier crisis era that many Britons could fondly remember as a time when the nation pulled itself up by its bootstraps. The new immigrants, Tebbit implied, were of a different character than good, hard-working British people, like his father and the thousands of others who 'looked for work' during the depression.

⁵⁶ An example of this is The George on Railton Road.

⁵⁷ Thatcher Archive, "Press Conference leaving New Delhi," April 17, 1981, Document 104627.

⁵⁸ Speech to the Conservative Party Conference, October 1981.

The police responded swiftly to the rioting. According to an officer interviewed in a reunion of officers, rioters, and community leaders twenty-seven years after the rioting, "One officer took great joy because he got a six foot three young black man convicted of stealing a size five ladies shoe."⁵⁹ Chief of the Metropolitan Police Force David McNee argued , "You need an awful lot of policemen to look after 800 marauding young blacks," when asked why so many police were brought in to combat what started as a minor disturbance.

Thatcher proved a vital ally for the police, as some considered them partly to blame for the rioting. She quickly condemned the rioters, "Nothing, but nothing justifies what happened...No one should condone the events. They were criminal." And she both publically and privately assured police officers that they were in the right. In a letter to David McNee, the man who called for "an awful lot of policemen to look after 800 marauding young blacks," Thatcher passed along word that, "(she has) always been proud of the police. I am especially proud now. I am sure the vast majority of people in this country share my feelings."⁶⁰ Thatcher actually watched the Brixton riots on the night of Saturday 11, April from New Scotland Yard, the Metropolitan Police headquarters and likely had information filtered to her through the lens of the police.

The fact that the sitting Prime Minister would condemn rioters and thank those trying to suppress them was not in itself remarkable. What is unusual is the length to which Thatcher went to offer support and the lack of willingness to

⁵⁹ BBC Radio, *Reunion*, "Brixton Riots" time mark 26:35, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00zl4dq>.

⁶⁰ National Archives, PREM 19/484, Letter from Margaret Thatcher to David McNee July 17, 1981.

personally examine structural problems with British policing, both in the time leading up to the first rioting in Brixton and during the period between April and July, when the next rounds of rioting occurred. McNee made some exceptionally provocative remarks, which would likely have been condemned by other ministers, and the crowd control techniques of the police force were widely criticized, but the Tory line held strong.

While official responses to the rioting initially towed the party line, documents reveal that behind closed doors dissent grew. During the six months between the April rioting and the November release of the report, members of the Cabinet were more divided in their assessments of the riots and the administration's response to the riots. For example, Home Secretary William Whitelaw requested that the Secretary of State for Defence, John Nott provide some of the military's non-lethal defense technology to local police forces in Britain. The equipment was marked for use outside of Britain to control the anti-British movements in Northern Ireland, a front line in the fight to hold onto elements of the British Empire. Nott strongly advised against arming the police with military technology, but ultimately gave in to Whitelaw's request.⁶¹

This exchange illuminates how for Whitelaw, the Home Secretary, the man in charge of Britain's police forces, the rioting in the city was at a level that demanded a response similar to that of a rebellion in the colonies. He requested the same military equipment that would be used against the IRA in Ireland. However, for Nott it appears that military responses were best left to those trained to be military

⁶¹ NA, PREM 19/484, Letter from John Nott to William Whitelaw, July 30, 1981.

personnel and that military technology in the wrong hands could escalate violence and prove counterproductive.

Furhter proof that the riot spaces were viewed separately from metropolitan Britain was the use of CS gas, a substance that at a Cabinet meeting was acknowledged should not be used against crowds.⁶² Police fired tear gas cannons at a crowd of protesters in Merseyside when rioting broke out in the largely black Toxteth district of Liverpool. This drastic of crowd control techniques had never been used in metropolitan Britain and further drove a wedge between the disenfranchised, rioting population and the power structures represented by the police.

While Nott and Whitelaw were debating arming police with military technology, Lord Scarman, a Tory judge who had earned respect as an impartial arbiter of justice, was performing his investigation. Letters between Home Office officials indicated that it was unclear to those in power what exactly Lord Scarman was going to report. Stories coming from the inquiries indicated that black voices were being given a credible platform to air grievances. During the July Riots, Lord Scarman made a good will visit to Brixton and was greeted by the some in the community as a hero, a celebrity, told by crowds, "You can come back here any time you want Lord Scarman. You don't need no police. Come back any time you want.

⁶² NA, PREM 19/484, Cabinet Meeting July 1981

Have no fear.”⁶³ This worried officials, who saw what seemed to be a prime moment for a clampdown becoming a hot controversy.⁶⁴

The official tone in response to the riots changed when Lord Scarman issued the report of his government inquiry into the Brixton events. Scarman’s inquiry found that police were culpable in creating the conditions that led to the riots and in the escalation of the rioting to the levels that it reached through heavy handed responses, inciting more violence. Scarman’s report argued that the young men living in Brixton suffered from institutional racism. However, he refused to use the term racism, arguing that calling it systemic racism or not was a semantic quibble. The tone of the report was a sharp contrast to what had been strict party line condemnation in public.

The response to Scarman’s report was mixed. The British press, liberal and conservative praised the report.⁶⁵ Others on the extremes were less satisfied. The left-wing leader of the Lambeth Council called it misleading, and Caribbean Radical Darcus Howe called it “mere tinkering.”⁶⁶ In spite of its critics’ dissatisfactions, the report was still fundamental in pushing for police reforms in Great Britain.

The underlying strands of criticism presented flaw in the neoliberal empire that the new Conservatives were constructing. The new peripheries of empire were not separated from the core by thousands of miles or by large bodies of water. The

⁶³ David Nicholson-Lord, “Lord Scarman braves the front line,” *The Times* (London, England), Thursday, Jul 16, 1981, pg. 1.

⁶⁴ NA, PREM 19/484, Prime Minister’s Diary, 1981 Cabinet Meeting.

⁶⁵ The Book features review blurbs from both *Guardian* and *Sunday Times* calling the book “a watershed in policing policy,” and “A masterly document.”

⁶⁶ Lord Leslie Scarman, *The Scarman Report: The Brixton Disorders 10-12 April 1981 With a New Introduction*, London: Penguin Books, 1981; as mentioned earlier, the Penguin edition features notable responses to the report.

new peripheries were a thirty-minute bus ride away. It is not that the men discussed above were staunch anti-imperialists. John Nott served in the Army as they tried to hold onto Malaya. Lord Scarman fought in Africa World War II, protecting imperial interests there. But it appears that both men saw empire as something that did not belong *in* Britain.

Something was fundamentally different about colonialism where the periphery of the empire was within walking distance of the metropole. This lay at the heart of the tensions between the communities where the rioting took place and the new neoliberal imperialists, as well as between those who may have found the rioting condemnable but still the work of sympathetic figures.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION AND EPILOGUE

The riots in 1981 were the culmination of a number of crises, both systemic and manufactured. The crises challenged notions of race, citizenship, and empire within Britain. Blackness had become criminalized and the black spaces of London and other British cities had become the colonial peripheries to a new neoliberal empire centered in the City of London.

The riots brought about a national conversation about systemic racism and police brutality on one hand and about the need for stricter immigration laws on the other. In the Fall of 1981, the Conservative majority, fueled by momentum from the public outcry against the rioting was able to pass the British Nationality Act of 1981, which eliminated birthright citizenship and demanded that children born in the United Kingdom must be children of legal permanent residents, instead of those on work permits, in order to establish citizenship at birth.

The tension that emerged out of the riots was something that Britain has been forced to grapple with in the decades since the rioting. Britain is clearly more heavily invested in being a multicultural nation now than it was when the sun appeared to set on the British Empire in the 1960s. However, British citizens with ancestral ties outside of Great Britain are still alienated from society at large. Novelist Diran Adebayo argues that British society is confused about the legacies of empire and of present day race relations. He argues that although urban Britain is becoming more multi-cultural, more ethnically mixed, people of different cultures

and backgrounds still live their lives in separate spaces within the same urban landscape. They often experience the same world in different ways.⁶⁷

Police and community relations remain problematic as well, as we saw with the rioting in 2011. While some of the protesters may have been opportunistic looters, the protests began under the banner of rallying against the police murder of a young black Briton. Even within the past year, the streets of Brixton were alive with protesters, fighting against conservative policies, smashing storefronts and clashing with police officers. These protests were not nearly on the scale of the rioting in 1981, but they show that tensions between Brixton residents and London's elite still exist.

Brixton, and other districts like it remain marginalized spaces, but as property values in the cities rise with gentrification, the spaces I have referred to as internal peripheries have become home to a growing number of people from the neoliberal aristocracy. The coming years will either see a spatial shift of the peripheries or at least a partial collapse of the system set into motion in the 1980s.

⁶⁷ Diran Adebayo, "Young, gifted, black...and very confused," *The Observer*, November 25, 2001.

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