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There's a South Central in Every City: Britain and the Transatlantic
Legacy of the 1992 Los Angeles Uprising

THESIS

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in History

by

Leonard Cruz Butingan

Thesis Committee:
Assistant Professor Andrew R. Highsmith, Chair
Professor David B. Igler
Professor Douglas M. Haynes

2017

DEDICATION

To

the black, brown, yellow, LGBTQ, and womxn
resistance fighters in Los Angeles, Britain, and
all over the world.

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

There's a South Central in Every City: Britain and the Transatlantic Legacy of the 1992 Los Angeles Uprising

By

Leonard Cruz Butingan

Master of Arts in History

University of California, Irvine, 2017

Assistant Professor Andrew R. Highsmith, Chair

There's a South Central in Every City examines British newspaper coverage of the 1992 Los Angeles Uprising. The event has largely been framed as exclusively part of the American story. However, it too made shockwaves in Great Britain. The mainstream media in Britain, along with the public, used the Uprising as a platform to discuss their country's own racial, economic, and social trends. I argue that at its most fundamental core, tracing such discussions decenters social rebellion and police violence as events exclusive to the American landscape. Such conversations also illuminate fault lines within the British public. Largely, both right and left wing publications framed the Uprising as a response to LA's classism. Race was largely unlinked from class analysis. This highlights the limitations of Britons, and specifically the left, in discussing race and in the envisioning of a black British proletariat. I argue that this silencing of race is a preservation of Britain's colonial tradition. A tradition in which state leadership and the public, sought to represent the British Empire as a bastion of egalitarian values--devoted to the preservation of democracy and free from the perils of racism.

INTRODUCTION

The 1992 Los Angeles Uprising reverberated across the globe.¹ It provided British journalists and citizens with a platform to discuss racial, social, and economic trends. The United Kingdom's police forces and mainstream media used the eruption across the Atlantic as a mirror for the socioeconomic crises that came to define life in twentieth-century Britain. At times, journalists singularized and compartmentalized the Uprising, framing it as either a response to years of class conflict or a consequence of racial stratification in America. In such instances, British reportage actively delinked the two socioeconomic categories as causal factors of the Uprising. Even from the point of view of some journalists, the Uprising simply served as a "volcanic reminder that racism is as American as apple pie."²

While many in the British media disparaged Angelenos' revolt against the racism and classism that ran rampant in the U.S., it was the British State that worked to misrepresent the reality of socioeconomic relations in the U.K.. The conservative regimes of Margaret Thatcher and John Major represented the British Empire as a bastion of egalitarian values--devoted to the preservation of democracy and free from the perils of racism. This fictional depiction signaled a denial of Britain's racist dynamics and a return to the nation's colonialist tradition. Twentieth-

¹ While it is often referred to by the media as the Los Angeles "Riots," I have chosen to use the terms Rebellion, Uprising, and even Insurrection. The term "Riot" has a connotation of something without a purpose. It thus, diverts the public's attention away from LA's issues with police violence, state neglect, racism, classism, and sexism. Many historians/scholars, journalists, and activists have analyzed riot versus uprising and the racial connotations of each term, for more see: Martin Kettle and Lucy Hodges, *Uprising!: the Police, the People, and the Riots in Britain's Cities* (London: Pan Books, 1982); Robert Gooding-Williams ed., *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995); James Hirsch, *Riot and Remembrance the Tulsa Race War and Its Legacy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002); Sheila Smith McKoy, *When Whites Riot: Writing Race and Violence in American and South African Cultures* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012); Katy Waldman, "Is Baltimore Beset by Protests, Riots, or an Uprising?," *Slate*, April 29, 2015; Joshua Clover, *Riot. Strike. Riot: The New Era of Uprisings* (London: Verso, 2016).

² "When the Melting Pot Boils Over," *Daily Mail* (London, United Kingdom), May 1, 1992.

century conservatives used rhetoric that resembled their eighteenth-century counterparts. Just as eighteenth-century Britons often portrayed themselves as the magnanimous heroes of the slave trade, rescuing the simple and benighted savage, rather than as a vicious conqueror, twentieth-century conservatives spoke of a mythic Britain, a nation that led the world in peace and economic prosperity. Journalists supported this myth, and used the LA Rebellion to take it further—to position Britain as the moral foil of the corrupt and greedy United States. Therefore, the media’s dismissive interpretations of the LA Uprising and similar events in Britain was symptomatic of larger deficiencies within the British government, namely the ways in which Downing Street mishandled rising tensions between impoverished minorities and law enforcement.

Still, it was not just the State that worked against marginalized populations. Seemingly “progressive” academics and activists betrayed their leftist traditions in order to further perpetuate the myth of an egalitarian Britain. Intellectuals credited white males as the main agents of social change and excluded women, particularly women of color, from the historical narrative. Likewise, many artists upheld this fiction, using their work to laud Britain’s moral triumph over greed and dissolution.³

“There’s a South Central in Every City” explores the ways in which bureaucrats constructed the myth of the egalitarian empire and the methods journalists used to circulate this

³ For examples and deconstructions of the betrayal of the leftist tradition in the U.S. and the U.K. see: Hazel Carby, “White woman listen! Black feminism and the boundaries of sisterhood,” in *The Empire Strikes Back Race and Racism in 70s Britain*, eds. Centre for the Contemporary Cultural Studies (London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd, 1982), 211-234; Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 29-41; Paul Gilroy, *‘There Ain’t no Black in the Union Jack’ the Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 15-42, 114-152; Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (London: Verso, 1988); Mike Davis, *City of Quartz Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (London: Verso, 1990), 265-322; Penny von Eschen, *Race Against Empire Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Carol Anderson, *Eyes off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); *The Spirit of ’45*, directed by Ken Loach (2013).

fantasy. An exploration of the oversimplified framing of race and class in reportage of the 1992 Uprising destabilizes the hegemonic representation of an egalitarian Britain by examining the disparity between the cultural tensions at play in twentieth-century English society and the mainstream media's fictional representation of these same relationships. This discrepancy will identify the ways in which political proposals were dependent on this fantastical image, forcing readers to see why the governmental approach to racial divides failed to address the realities and needs of the state and its citizens. To that end, this essay offers a three-part study. The first part explores the underlying structures informing discussions of race in late twentieth-century Britain, focusing on the manner in which the country looked towards the United States as a cautionary tale. It next presents an in-depth analysis of the reportage, noting how the mainstream media distorted the reality of social inequality in the U.K.. The final section of the essay builds upon a close reading of primary sources and establishes how governmental bodies operated under the same misconceptions as the media.

The Betrayal of the British Left and the Myth of Egalitarianism

My study joins a substantial body of work examining the treatment and representation of race in modern Britain. In the late 1960s, historian David Brion Davis observed that the historiography of slavery was often promulgated through the “free soil myth.” Essentially, many academics believed that slavery was “out of sight and out of mind” for early-modern Britons, because it was not formally legalized in the metropole.⁴ This elision paved the way for the facile representation of the British anti-slavery and abolitionist movement as one driven by moral humanitarianism. According to textual scholar Marcus Wood, abolitionists were deified as carriers of freedom in the annals of not just historiography, but also public culture, iconography, and archives. In addition to scholars, many filmmakers, archivists, artists, novelists, and the defenders of empire, presented and preserved these god-like beings as the ultimate forces that triumphed over the evils of slavery and the slave trade. By contrast, black slaves, as recipients of the “gift of freedom,” were long iconized as differential and complacent disciples.⁵ This neglected and silenced black slave-led violent insurrections and the textual resistance propagated by ex-slave intellectuals.⁶ Scholars and activists, beginning most notably with C.L.R. James, Eric Williams, and Darcus Howe, and, in more recent years, Christopher Brown, Hilary Beckles, and Catherine Molineux, have worked to debunk this thinking, largely through analyzing slavery’s

⁴ David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966). British historians in particular had long highlighted that a humanitarianism and altruism resulted in the abolition of the slave trade, see: Folarin Olawale Shyllon, “British Historians and Capitalism and Slavery,” *Transition*, no. 50 (1975), 100-102. For works perpetuating this see: W.L. Mathieson, *British Slavery and Its Abolition, 1823-1833* (London: Longmans, 1926); Reginald Coupland, *Wilberforce: A Narrative* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923); Reginald Coupland, *The British Anti-Slavery Movement* (London: Cass, 1933).

⁵ Wood notes that this representation continues to this day. He traced this discourse to British celebrations of the bicentennial of the 1807 Slave Act. See: Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America* (London: Routledge, 2000); Marcus Wood, *The Horrible Gift of Freedom Atlantic Slavery and the Representation of Emancipation* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010). For movies that have promulgated this myth see: *Sanders of the River*, directed by Zoltan Korda (1935); *Amazing Grace*, directed by Michael Apted (2006, Momentum Pictures).

⁶ In addition to violent insurrection, slave narratives led the way in the resistance movement. For an analysis on intellectual resistance see: Vincent Carretta, *Equiano the African Biography of a Self-Made Man* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), XII.

relationship to capital accumulation, political discussion in the metropole, the black presence in early modern Britain, and material culture in the metropole.⁷

Left wing radical activists and scholars also preserved and propagated this imagined tradition of egalitarianism. The historians and intellectuals of the UK's New Left coalition in the 1960s, individuals such as E.P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm, played an important role in dramatically transforming social history from an analysis of statistical "measurements" to a discussion of day-to-day cultures and the insurgency of the working class. However, within this literature, white males were often presented as the primary agents who pushed for change. Despite the empire's involvement with the slave trade and the emergence of prohibitive immigration legislation in the 1960s, the Women's Liberation Movement, and black British female activist groups, people of color and women were often excluded in the process of the "making of the English working class."⁸

⁷ C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins* (London: Secker & Warburg Ltd., 1938); Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944); Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*; James Walvin, *The Black Presence: A Documentary History of the Negro in England, 1555-1860* (London: Orbach and Chambers Ltd, 1971); Edward Scobie, *Black Britannia: a History of Blacks in Britain* (Chicago: Johnson Pub. Co, 1972); Folarin Olawale Shyllon, *Black Slaves in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974); Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: the History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), 1-64; Ron Ramdin, *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain* (London: Verso, 1987). For scholarship on representations and memorialization of slavery see: Wood, *Blind Memory*; Linda Colley, *Captives Britain, Empire, and the World, 1600-1850* (New York: Anchor Books, 2002); Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830-1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2003); Christopher Brown, *Moral Capital Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Wood, *The Horrible Gift of Freedom*; James Walvin, *The Zong A Massacre, the Law and the End of Slavery* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011); Catherine Molineux, *Faces of Perfect Ebony: Encountering Atlantic Slavery in Imperial Britain* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012); Hilary Beckles, *Britain's Black Debt: Reparations for Caribbean Slavery and Native Genocide* (Mona: University of the West Indies Press, 2013); Catherine Hall, Nicholas Draper, Keith McClelland, Katie Donington and Rachel Lang, *Legacies of British Slave-Ownership Colonial Slavery and the Formation of Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁸ EP Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage, 1963), 11; Emma Griffin "Working-Class History," *History Today* 65, no. 2 (2015); Emma Griffin, "The Making of the English Working Class," *History Today* 66, no. 4 (2016). For other foundational histories of the British working class see, Eric Hobsbawm, "Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour," (New York: Basic Books, 1965); Eric Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire The Birth of the Industrial Revolution* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1968); Gareth Steadman Jones, *Languages of Class Studies in English Working Class History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). For more recent works see, David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain 1945-1951* (London: Walker Books, 2008); *The Spirit of '45*, directed by Ken Loach (2013); Julia-Marie Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working*

In the late 1970s, historians, sociologists, and cultural theorists challenged the British New Left's exclusionary representation of a white male working class. Theorists from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham were among the most prominent voices in documenting the more complex realities of modern Britain. Building on the intellectual resistance by theorist Stuart Hall, and, the labor strikes and workplace insurgency of Jayaben Desai and other post-World War II black and brown British activists and factory workers, CCS theorists documented the centrality of non-white migrant labor. They argued that it was vital to Britain's capitalistic accumulation. The works of Hazel Carby and Pratibha Parmar were amongst the earliest to critically examine the role of black and Asian women in resisting sexism and exploitation within the working class.⁹ Challenges to the New Left orthodoxy illustrate that the myths of an egalitarian Britain endured throughout the twentieth century.

Class, 1865-1914 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). Refer to footnote number 3 for histories of leftist exclusion of black men and women.

⁹ Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, *The Empire Strikes Back*; Ron Ramdin, *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain* (London: Verso, 1987). In the 1990s key challenges came from foundational gender historians, see: Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches Gender and the Making of the English Working Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999). Also refer to pages 3-4 here, as the interventions in the history of Britain's involvement with the slave trade often also connected to works that challenged the image of the purely white working class.

Simmering Discontent: the Making of the 1992 Los Angeles Uprising

Across the Atlantic, the American media long framed the LA Uprising as a racial story, divorcing it from its roots in class conflict. The Angelenos who rebelled in April 1992 did so not simply in response to the acquittal of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) officers on charges of excessive force and assault on African American motorist Rodney King; but also in an effort to shed light on the cultural and economic struggles of the African-American community. By the 1970s, Los Angeles had transformed from a beacon of industrial prosperity to something approaching a commercial wasteland. Manufacturers began outsourcing the jobs that had attracted African Americans during the Great Migrations to the west coast.¹⁰ By the 1984 Olympics, black male unemployment had risen to forty-five percent.¹¹ Tourism and service positions took the place of factory jobs. These industries typically relied on Latino and Asian labor, exploiting the desperation of the recent immigrants in order to augment their ever-increasing profit margins.¹² Although local worker unions attempted to call public attention to

¹⁰ For scholarship on LA's Pacific Rim development and deindustrialization see: Paul Ong, Edna Bonacich, and Lucie Cheng eds., *The New Asian Immigration in Los Angeles* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); John H.M. Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough Los Angeles Workers, 1880-2010* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 267-297; Edward Soja, *My Los Angeles: From Urban Restructuring to Regional Urbanization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014). For the history of African American migration to LA, see: Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West 1528-1990* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 192-278; Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles From the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Douglas Flamming, *Bound For Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (New York: Random House, 2010), 230-248; Marne L. Campbell, *Making Black Los Angeles Class, Gender, and Community 1850-1917* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016); Philip Ethington, *Ghost Metropolis: Los Angeles From Clovis to Nixon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming).

¹¹ Many commentators and Angelenos have credited the 1984 Olympics for creating thousands of jobs created, modernizing of facilities, and for putting LA on a global/international stage. However, in addition to rising black male unemployment, the LAPD concerned about the visibility of homeless people and the drug trade, heavily policed South Central. They implemented curfews and sanctioned invasive raids. For the policing of South Central LA during the Olympics see: Davis, *City of Quartz*, 265-322; Dave Zirin, "Want to Understand the 1992 LA Riots? Start With the Olympics," *The Nation*, April 30, 1992.

¹² For a history of working class activism and exploitation in LA see: Hector L. Delgado, *New Immigrants, Old Unions: Organizing Undocumented Workers in Los Angeles* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993); Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Doméstica: Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence*

these unethical practices, lawmakers ignored their efforts and turned a blind eye in the name of capitalism. The resultant lack of economic mobility among non-white groups in LA bred the interethnic conflicts that prefaced the Uprising.¹³

For decades, Los Angeles simmered with discontent. The state of unrest came to a head in 1992, with the announcement of the Rodney King verdict. For six days, the City of Angels burned. To spare their businesses, some stores posted signs that read “Black Owned,” evidence of the interethnic tensions at play. In the aftermath of the Uprising, both African-Americans and Koreans would march in a rally for peace and worked collaboratively to achieve such efforts, but as in a rally that followed the protests, Congresswoman Maxine Waters stated that the event “turned good but poor people into looters.” Rather than condemn the looters, she explained that this was a chance “for women who wanted shoes for their children and bread” to get what society had long deprived them.¹⁴ Waters’ remarks spoke to the deterioration of living conditions in the community, demonstrating how class tensions had contributed to the Uprising.

(Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); UNITE HERE, “City on the Edge,” video, 12:36, September 21, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i6gDA0Agh3M>; Ruth Milkman, Joshua Bloom, and Victor Narro eds., *Working for Justice: The L.A. Model of Organizing and Advocacy* (Ithaca: ILR, 2010); Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*; Josh Kun and Laura Pulido eds., *Black and Brown in Los Angeles Beyond Conflict and Coalition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

¹³ Interethnic conflicts were particularly exposed to the public following the fatal shooting of African American teenager Latasha Harlins, in *Empire Liquor in South Central* by Korean migrant Soon Ja Du, see: Nancy Abelmann and John Lie, *Blue Dreams Korean Americans and the Los Angeles Riots* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1995); Kwang Chung Kim ed., *Koreans in the Hood Conflict with African Americans* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1999); Edward Chang and Jeannette Diaz-Veizades, *Ethnic Peace in the American City: Building Community in Los Angeles and Beyond* (New York: New York University Press, 1999); Brenda Stevenson, *The Contested Murder of Latasha Harlins: Justice, Gender, and the Origins of the Los Angeles Riots* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); *Let It Fall: Los Angeles 1982-1992*, directed by John Ridley (2017).

¹⁴ Maria Newman, “AFTER THE RIOTS: Washington at Work; Lawmaker From Riot Zone Insists On a New Role for Black Politicians,” *New York Times*, May 19, 1992.

Transatlantic ‘Los Angeles-Style’ Violence

Word of the LA violence quickly spread to Britain. The calamity in the States provided Britons with a lens to examine recent events their own country. On June 9, 1992, Bernie Grant, one of the first black people elected to Parliament, urged the House of Commons to address the escalation of violence in Tottenham, his home district. In a compelling appeal for financial support, Grant shed light on a number of disturbing trends, forcing the British government to confront how the increased rates of unemployment among minorities heightened community-wide tensions between law enforcement and minorities. The strain of this relationship resulted in a spike in racially motivated attacks, police violence, interethnic conflicts, and drug trafficking amongst the youth population. Grant insisted that these issues were not unique to Britain, but were instead a plague to Europe as a whole. Thus, if the British government ignored his appeal, it would be at the peril of the nation as well as to the European continent. Grant noted, “The youth workers also tell me that there is tension on the streets and that youths are planning a Los Angeles-Style riot or disturbance in my area...They say that unless something is done, during the summer months, we can expect trouble.”¹⁵

Grant’s language, especially the descriptor “Los Angeles-Style,” called attention to the global impact of the 1992 Los Angeles Uprising. The extensive coverage of the riots by the American media reached across the Atlantic and provoked a long-overdue conversations regarding the systemic violence inflicted upon the black community by law enforcement.¹⁶

¹⁵ House of Commons Debate, 09 June 1992, vol 209, cc149-202; Malcolm MacLister Hall, “Fighting Street-Fighting Man,” *London Times*, August 01, 1992.

¹⁶ In 1988 journalist Edward Pilkington lamented the fact that he could not find information in mainstream press or academic sources on the 1958 Notting Hill White Riots, in which black Britons were attacked by white mobs and neglected by the police. Shocking considering that it made headlines all across the country. This illustrates the silencing of race and police violence in the general sphere. See: Edward Pilkington, *Beyond the Mother Country West Indians and the Notting Hill White Riots* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co LTD, 1988), 1-4; Fryer, *Staying Power*, 376-381. Black and Asian Britons and migrants had long before 1992 discussed such topics in scholarship, pop

Finally, discussions of race, class, and the efficacy of the criminal justice system that had previously only been a topic of discourse amongst black Britons, were now taking place throughout the country and on mainstream media outlets.

Grant's language is just an example of the manner in which British society viewed the Los Angeles Uprising. This interest in American events and issues, however, is not surprising. Since World War II, the US and UK have been linked in a collaborative partnership which has dictated diplomatic, economic, and national security measures. Prime Minister Winston Churchill famously termed the two countries kinship as the "Special Relationship." As a result, American race relations have informed British cultural conversations since the late nineteenth century, and vice versa.¹⁷ By the twentieth century, race ideologies from across the Atlantic,

culture, and pamphlets, see: Samuel Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (Harlow: Longmans, 1956); Obi Benue Egbuna, *Destroy This Temple: The Voice of Black Power in Britain* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1971); *Pressure*, directed by Horace Ove (1976: London, Crawford Films, Ltd.); Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke and Brian Roberts, *Policing the Crisis Mugging, the State and Law and Order* (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press LTD, 1978), Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, *The Empire Strikes Back Race and Racism in 70s Britain* (United Kingdom: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd, 1982); Joan Riley, *The Unbelonging* (London: The Women's Press, 1985); Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie, Suzanne Scafe, *The Heart of the Race Black Women's Lives in Britain* (United Kingdom: Virago Press, 1985); Gilroy, 'There Ain't no Black in the Union Jack'; Institute of Race Relations, *Deadly Silence: Black Deaths in Custody* (London: Institute of Race Relations, 1991). For later studies and case of activists in pre-1992 Britain see: Julia Sudbury, 'Other Kinds of Dreams' *Black Women's Organisations and the Politics of Transformation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998); Rozina Visram, *Asians in Britain 400 Years of History* (London: Pluto Press, 2002); Rahila Gupta ed., *From Homebreakers to Jailbreakers Southall Black Sisters* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2003); Carole Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones* (London and Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Anandi Ramamurthy, *Black Star: Britain's Asian Youth Movements* (London: Pluto Press, 2013); Evan Smith and Marinella Marmo, *Race, Gender and the Body in British Immigration Control: Subject to Examination* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Robin Bunce and Paul Field, *Darcus Howe A Political Biography* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014); Kennetta Hammond Perry, *London is the Place for Me Black Britons, Citizenship, and the Politics of Race* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

¹⁷ The term "race narratives" was quoted in Kennetta Hammond Perry, "'Little Rock' in Britain: Jim Crow's Transatlantic Topographies," *Journal of British Studies* 51, no. 1 (2012), 155-177. For further history of the transatlantic travel of American race ideologies see: Brian Ward, "A King in Newcastle: Martin Luther King Jr. and British Race Relations, 1967-1968," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 79, no. 3 (1995), 599-632; Hazel Carby, *Cultures in Babylon Black Britain and African America* (London: Verso, 1999); Nicole King, "'A Colored Woman in Another Country Pleading for Justice in Her Own': Ida B. Wells in Great Britain," in *Black Victorians Black Victoriana*, ed. Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 88-110; Susan Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich Race and Political Culture in 1930s Britain* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009); Anne-Marie Angelo, "The Black Panthers in London, 1967-1972: A Diasporic Struggle Navigates the Black Atlantic," *Radical History Review* 103 (2009), 17-35; Minkah Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London 1917-1939* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Cornelis Van Minnen and Manfred Berg eds., *The U.S. South and Europe: Transatlantic*

particularly related to “riots” or uprisings, influenced the perceptions of Britain’s own burgeoning multiethnic population. Some prominent politicians viewed American multiculturalism with caution. Influenced by the disturbances of the Long Hot Summer of 1967 in which numerous African-American communities exploded in Rebellion, Shadow Secretary Enoch Powell argued for more restrictive immigration laws and the dismantling of racial protections in his 1968 “Rivers of Blood” speech. Warning against a proposed bill that would criminalize racial discrimination, Powell said:

For these dangerous and divisive elements the legislation proposed in the Race Relations Bill is the very pabulum they need to flourish. Here is the means of showing that the immigrant communities can organize to...campaign against their fellow citizens, and to overawe and dominate the rest with the legal weapons which the ignorant and ill-informed have provided... That tragic and intractable phenomenon which we watch with horror on the other side of the Atlantic but which there is interwoven with the history and existence of the States itself, is coming upon us here by our own volition and our own neglect.¹⁸

Relations in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2013); Stephen Tuck, *The Night Malcolm Spoke At the Oxford Union A Transatlantic Story of Antiracist Protest* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014), Robin Kelley and Stephen Tuck eds., *The Other Special Relationship Race, Rights, and Riots in Britain and the United States* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Marc Matera, *Black London The Imperial Metropolis and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 280-320; Clive Webb, “Reluctant Partners: African Americans and the Origins of the Special Relationship,” *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 14, no. 4 (2016), 350-364; Clive Webb, “Special Relationships: Mixed-Race Couples in Post-War Britain and the United States,” *Women’s History Review*, no. 1 (2016), 110-129. Foundational works in the transnational turn of US history include: Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); von Eschen, *Race Against Empire Black*; Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth Century America* (London: Verso, 1999); Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*.

¹⁸ Enoch Powell, ‘Rivers of Blood,’ (1968), in the *Telegraph* (November 6, 2007). Powell was not the only one to believe in American multiculturalism as a cautionary tale. In more recent years especially, scholars have examined the transatlantic spread of white supremacist and segregationist thought, see: Graham Smith, *When Jim Crow Met John Bull: Black American Soldiers in World War II Britain* (London: Tauris, 1987); Paul Jackson and Anton Shekhovtsov eds., *The Post-War Anglo-American Far Right A Special Relationship of Hate* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Daniel Geary and Jennifer Sutton, “Resisting the Wind of Change the Citizens’ Councils and the European Decolonization,” in *The U.S. South and Europe: Transatlantic Relations in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, eds. Cornelis Van Minnen and Manfred Berg (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2013), 265-282; Clive Webb, “Britain, the American South, and the Wide Civil Rights Movement in *The U.S. South and Europe: Transatlantic Relations in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, eds. Cornelis Van Minnen and Manfred Berg

The manner in which Powell described the Race Relations Bill reflects longstanding conservative attitudes towards diversity. He utilized militaristic descriptors when discussing the bill, insisting that it was “dangerous” — a “legal weapon” that immigrants could use against British citizens. Powell’s claim that the immigrants could weaponize the Race Relations Bill suggests that these communities were at war with their British citizens—that they were the enemy of the British public. In other words, Powell feared that Britain would implode in the same way US cities did if Britain was not kept white. The Shadow Secretary’s comments displayed an uglier flip side of the Special Relationship—its agreement that racial uplift was better left to the private realm if not ignored entirely.

While the Special Relationship influenced British interpretation of race relations to an extent, the public’s obsession with the 1992 eruption stemmed more from the anomalous nature of this uprising. Britons’ attention to the rebellion derived largely from two unique qualities: the extent of destruction to the city and the spate of media coverage devoted to the event.

The Los Angeles Uprising occurred at a pivotal moment in American history. Although numerous rebellions swept through the cities of post-World War II America, the uprisings tapered off in the early 1970s.¹⁹ Although there was not total peace in the 1970s, the British keenly watched developments in the US, particularly as several violent uprisings in cities and in the workplace engulfed the country in the 1980s. Alan Eastwood, Chairman of the Police

(Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2013), 243-264; Clive Webb, “Brotherhood, Betrayal, and Rivers of Blood: Southern Segregationists and British Race Relations,” in *The Other Special Relationship Race, Rights, and Riots in Britain and the United States*, eds. Robin Kelley and Stephen Tuck (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 225-242.

¹⁹ With the exception of the 1980 Miami “riots,” which was sparked by the death of former marine Arthur McDuffie in an arrest by Miami-Dade police officers, American cities had not burned since the early 1970s, see: Alejandro Portes and Alex Stepick, *City on the Edge: The Transformation of Miami* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Michael Katz, *Why Don’t American Cities Burn?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); Cathy Lisa Schneider, *Police Power and Race Riots: Urban Unrest in Paris and New York* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 3.

Federation, recalled that the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) flew in American police chiefs to discuss how they were able to control the decline of fiery revolutions.²⁰

²⁰ Duncan Campbell, "Officers Warn Clarke to Come Quietly," *Guardian* (London: United Kingdom), May 9, 1992.

The Lens, the Mic, and the Pen: Media and the 1992 Uprising

The LA Rebellion undermined the myth of racial peace in America, as one of the world's premier "melting pots boiled over."²¹ On the first day of the event, the LAPD was greatly outnumbered and were instructed to retreat. City Council member Zev Yaroslavsky proclaimed this to be "the Pearl Harbor of the LAPD."²² With no police in sight, the city burned and violence erupted. Protesters engulfed Parker Center, the headquarters of the LAPD, and decried the King verdict. Many of the indelible images of the event were captured from the sky by broadcast reporter Zoey Tur, the individual credited by some as the pioneer of the modern news helicopter. Her lens zoomed in from above as truck driver Reginald Denny was pulled from his construction truck and was nearly beaten to death at the intersection of Florence and Normandie. Footage of armed Korean business owners shooting back at potential looters further exposed the multiethnic conflicts of the city. The chaos resulted in the arrests of eleven thousand people, the death of sixty-three individuals, the destruction of over one thousand properties, and an estimated cost of one billion dollars in damages.²³

In addition to the catastrophic violence caused by the LA Uprising, the extent of the media coverage surrounding the upheaval also sets it apart. Although television had thoroughly covered similar events in American history, the advent of cable television and twenty-four hour news ensured that the footage could be accessed by and transmitted to more households at a faster rate.²⁴ Thus, there was more of a means to consume the action from afar. And Britons did

²¹ Quoted in "When the Melting Pot Boils Over," *Daily Mail* (London, United Kingdom), May 1, 1992.

²² Lou Cannon, "When Thin Blue Line Retreated, L.A. Riot Went Out of Control," *Washington Post*, May 10, 1992.

²³ For more on Tur's career in journalism see Matthew Deluca, "Bob Tur, the L.A. Riots' Eye in the Sky, on Reginald Denny & More," *Daily Beast*, April 26, 2012. Los Angeles Times Graphics Staff, "L.A. Riots by the Numbers," *Los Angeles Times*, April 26, 2017.

²⁴ Media studies scholars have largely discussed the role of television and media in the framing of social rebellions since the inception of TV and network news, see: Erna Smith, "Transmitting Race: The Los Angeles Riot in Television News," *Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy* (1994), 1-18; John Thornton Caldwell, *Televisuality Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University

just that.

Furthermore, alternative forms of media captured the most memorable events of the LA Rebellion. From the balcony of his Lakeview Terrace apartment, Sony camcorder in hand, George Holliday taped King's assault. A day after the beating, Holliday contacted the LAPD and was met with silence. Shortly thereafter, he walked into the offices of KTLA-TV and submitted the evidence. Rooted in the Black Panther Party's active police observations of the 1960s and 70s, George Holliday's act was one of the first acclaimed examples of American citizenry "policing the police" through a video lens.²⁵ After seeing the footage on the news, filmmaker and South Central Los Angeles native John Singleton recalled that he was "appalled" yet "at the same time I was cheering...they finally got them [LAPD] on tape doing this."²⁶ As Singleton's comment insinuates, the mass circulation of the footage in the so-called post-Civil Rights era launched sustained, if frustrating, discussions of police racism and brutality.

Press, 1995), 302-335; Darnell Hunt, *Screening the Los Angeles "Riots" Race, Seeing, and Resistance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Sasha Torres, *Black White and in Color Television and Black Civil Rights* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003); Christine Acham, *Revolution Televised Prime Time and the Struggle for Black Power* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Tim Kiska, *A Newscast for the Masses: The History of Detroit Television News* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2009), 64-88.

²⁵ Holliday, felt exploited by the media following the Rodney King tape, see: Gil Troy, "Filming Rodney King's Beating Ruined His Life," *Daily Beast*, March 3, 2016. However Holliday's act popularized policing the police through a video lens, see: Summer Harlow, "20 Years After Rodney King's Beating was Caught on Tape New Technologies Allow Anyone to be a Citizen Journalist," *Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas at the University of Texas at Austin*, March 4, 2011; Eric Deggans, "How the Rodney King Video Paved the Way for Today's Citizen Journalism," *CNN*, March 7, 2011; Erik Ortiz, "George Holliday, Who Taped Rodney King Beating, Urges Others to Share Videos," *NBC NEWS*, June 9, 2015; Ethan Zuckerman, "Why We Must Continue to Turn the Camera on Police," *MIT Technology Review*, July 11, 2016. He was not the first to "police the police," see the history of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense: Joshua Bloom and Waldo Martin, *Black Against Empire: the History and the Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 45-62; *The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution*, directed by Stanley Nelson (2015: Arlington, PBS).

²⁶ *Vh1 Rock Docs*, season 1, episode 37, "Uprising Hip-Hop and the LA Riots," aired May 1, 2012, on VH1.

As Holliday's footage demonstrated, African-Americans crafted and relied on their own distinct forms of media. In the face of underlying societal structures that worked to delegitimize rebellion, alternative sources provided minority populations with an outlet that depicted the grisly reality of the cultural crisis, allowing them to feel accurately represented and heard.²⁷ Across the Atlantic, in times of upheaval and rebellion, black people in Britain have similarly created their own alternative media. Historically, the two foundational black newspapers in the U.K., the now defunct *West Indian Gazette* (1958-1965) and the *Voice* (1981-present), were organized largely in response to the 1958 Notting Hill White Riots and the 1981 Brixton Uprising. The papers offered an unprecedented outlet for news on the black global and domestic diaspora.²⁸ Like rap and hip-hop in the United States, artists of West Indian musical traditions served as the country's "organic intelligentsia" and "black [Britain's] CNN."²⁹ In their performances, rappers and dub poets such as Rodney P and Linton Kwesi Johnson, discussed racism, police violence, class stratification, and other troubling realities of the black British experience. As Johnson explained, "Writing was a political act and poetry was a cultural weapon."³⁰ Calypsonians, musicians who wrote and performed Caribbean Calypso music,

²⁷ Davis, *City of Quartz*, 86; George Lipsitz, "Cruising Around the Historical Bloc: Postmodernism and Popular Music in East Los Angeles," *Cultural Critique*, no. 5 (Winter 1986-87), 157-177; Brian Cross, *It's Not About a Salary...Rap, Race and Resistance in Los Angeles* (London: Verso, 1993); Todd Boyd, *The New H.N.I.C.: the Death of Civil Rights and the Reign of Hip Hop* (New York: New York University Press, 2004); Mosi Reeves, "15 Songs That Predicted the L.A. Riots," *Rolling Stone*, April 28, 2017.

²⁸ "Existing black newspapers like the Caribbean Times and the Jamaican Gleaner, which had been imported since 1951, wrote more for older immigrants, with an eye for news back "home," quoted in Andy Beckett, "The Voice in the Wilderness," *Independent* (London: United Kingdom), February 11, 1996. For more on the black press in Britain see: Davies, *Left of Karl Marx*, 69-98; Bill Schwarz ed, *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003); Olatunji Ogunye, "The News Agenda of the Black African Press in the United Kingdom," *Journal of Black Studies* 37, no. 5 (2007), 630-654; Amanda Bidnall, *The West Indian Generation Remaking British Culture in London 1945-1965* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017).

²⁹ Quoted in Davis *City of Quartz*, 86.

³⁰ Linton Kwesi Johnson and Nicholas Wroe, "'I Did My Own Thing,'" *Guardian* (London: United Kingdom), March 8, 2008. In addition to musicians and poets, novelists and filmmakers also captured the black and Asian British experience outside of the mainstream media, see the works of: Horace Ove, Joan Riley, Zadie Smith, Samuel Selvon, George Lamming, Hanif Kureishi, Salman Rushdie, Andrea Levy, Isaac Julien, Buchi Emecheta, Beryl Gilroy, and Caryl Phillips. For scholarship on black British popular culture see: Stephen Bourne, *Black in the British Frame* (London: Continuum, 2001); David Hesmondhalgh and Caspar Melville, "Urban Breakbeat Culture

embodied Johnson's views of performance art, as many were imprisoned by British colonial officials for performing songs about civil rights and decolonization.³¹

Even President George H.W. Bush, who, during the 1988 presidential campaign, released race-baiting political ads, focused on the role of the media and its ability to expose the dark and “ugly” side of America rather than address the root of the disturbing events the media had covered.³² As LA burned, President Bush addressed the nation from the Oval Office, stating, “Television has become a medium that often brings us together. But its vivid display of Rodney King's beating shocked us. The America it has shown us on our screens these last forty-eight hours has appalled us.” He proclaimed, “None of this is what we wish to think of as American.” The President further remarked, “It's as if we were looking in a mirror that distorted our better selves and turned us ugly.”³³ These remarks demonstrate the divided nature of the country at this historical moment. Some media sources adopted a similar approach by maintaining that those six days exposed the savagery of the Angelenos. This point of view disregarded the underlying cultural crisis at hand and, contributed toward legitimizing the event as a disorderly riot. Others, including alternative media sources, recognized this event as an uprising that should be treated as the symptom of a larger issue: the surge of racism and brutality in American police forces and class stratification in the western and modern world.

Repercussions of Hip-Hop in the United Kingdom,” in *Global Noise Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA*, ed. Tony Mitchell (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 86-110; R. Victoria Arana and Lauri Ramey, *Black British Writing* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

³¹ Joshua B. Guild, “ ‘Nobody in This World Is Better Than Us’: Calypso in the Age of Decolonization and Civil Rights,” in *The Other Special Relationship Race, Rights, and Riots in Britain and the United States* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), eds. Robin Kelley and Stephen Tuck 155-172.

³² For more on Bush's race baiting during 1988 Presidential campaign and its foundations, see: Martin Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare Race, Media and the Politics of Antipoverty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); *Boogie Man: The Lee Atwater Story*, directed by Stefan Forbes (2008: New York, Interpositive Media LLC). For examples see the following political ads: “Willie Horton” and “Revolving Door.”

³³ George H.W. Bush, “Address to the Nation on the Civil Disturbances in Los Angeles, California” (Washington D.C., May 1, 1992).

Similar to their American counterparts, Britons maintained many different views of race and class relations, and this similarity manifested itself in the coverage of the 1992 Uprising. Some journalists echoed the sentiments of President Bush. For example, The *Daily Mail*'s coverage played on fears of the violence in describing the protestors as lawless mobs. Racism was often framed as a distinctly an American issue.³⁴ In contrast, newspapers, such as the *Guardian/Observer* and the *London Times* used the rebellion as a platform to warn the public about Britain's own rising racial tensions.

Although the Uprising served as a mirror for British society, many articles nonetheless contained elements of the myths of egalitarianism that were solidified in the nation's involvement with the slave trade and the portrayals of working class radicalism. A deconstruction of reportage that viewed the event as a wake up call reveals that the existence of race and racism in Britain was silenced. In fact, many viewed LA '92 itself as being the unheard voices of the economic underclass, while actively separating race as an important factor in the eruption. In summation, as one *Daily Mail* article proclaimed, "The riots is just another reminder that racism is as American as apple pie."³⁵ Thus, by 1992 the British colonialist tradition and the attempts to revise it were still alive and well.

³⁴ Peter Sheridan, "Amid the Gunfire Even Bullet-Proof Vests Were of No Use, *Daily Mail* (London: United Kingdom), May 1, 1992; Peter Sheridan, "LA Riot Fear as Police are Cleared of Video Attack," *Daily Mail* (London: United Kingdom), April 30, 1992; Peter Sheridan, "Hollywood Stars Flee the Streets of Terror," *Daily Mail* (London: United Kingdom), May 2, 1992

³⁵ "When the Melting Pot Boils Over," *Daily Mail* (London, United Kingdom), May 1, 1992.

The Underclass Strikes Back: Race, Class, and Uprisings in Britain

Indeed, throughout the twentieth century, tensions between minorities and law enforcement grew.³⁶ This hostility only increased with Operation Swamp '81, an initiative that authorized officers to implement stop and search procedures in the community. On April 10th, the disquiet came to a head, and the working-class minorities of Brixton, a predominantly black neighborhood, began their protest. For two days, citizens rallied against rising unemployment and inhumane housing conditions. Tensions were so high that the Brixton Defense Campaign was formed. According to Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie, and Suzanne Scaff—all foundational members of the group and the black British women's movement—the Campaign was created with the task “of defending our communities under siege.” One of the goals of the campaign and group was to counter “the media's coverage of ‘Black Mobs on the Rampage’ and ‘Black Masses Rioting’” during the uprising.³⁷ This discourse, along with the Brixton uprising itself, was merely the initial stage of a powder keg waiting to explode. Shortly after Brixton, in July of 1981, black rebellions against the police took place in Handsworth, Birmingham, Southall, London, Toxteth in Liverpool, Moss Side in Manchester, Leeds and Leicester, Halifax in Southampton, Bedford in Gloucester, Wolverhampton, Coventry, Bristol, and Edinburgh. Pre-1981, in 1980 black Britons fought back against the police in St. Paul's in Bristol, an uprising that has been less analyzed by scholars. In the second half of the decade, rebellions occurred in Brixton (1985), Handsworth (1985), Broadwater Farm (1985), Chapeltown (1987), and Dewsbury (1989). By the time of the 1992 Los Angeles Uprising, tensions were still simmering

³⁶ Mistakenly, many have believed that the older generation of black and Asian arrivals to Britain stood passive against violence and racism, however the pre-WWII generation and after, actively resisted, see: Pilkington, *Notting Hill*; Winston James and Clive Harris eds., *Inside Babylon the Caribbean Diaspora In Britain* (London: Verso, 1993); Tabili, *We Ask for British Justice*; Davies, *Left of Karl Marx*, Jacqueline Jenkinson, *Black 1919: Riots, Racism and Resistance in Imperial Britain* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009).

³⁷ Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie, Suzanne Scaff, *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain*, (London: Virago Press, 1985). 177-178.

in working-class British neighborhoods. Between 1991 and 1992 twelve of the thirteen recorded “disturbances” in the UK occurred in council estates, areas marked by high unemployment rates and higher concentrations of young Britons.³⁸

Working-class Britons also rebelled in the workplace. In 1979, unions struck for a combined total of twenty-nine million working days.³⁹ After sanitation workers went on strike that winter, piles of “rubbish” engulfed Leicester Square, one of London’s most iconic sites. The Square was so littered that it was referred to as “Fester Square.” Others from the public sector such as school cafeteria workers and gravediggers joined sanitation workers in striking. Various British news sources expressed shock upon learning that even gravediggers were leaving bodies unburied.⁴⁰ These conflicts became so visible and debilitating to the country that the editor of the *Sun*, Larry Lamb, classified the winter of 1978-79 as the Winter of Discontent.⁴¹ Labor strikes during the period also often resulted in contentious exchanges between labor union leaders, as well as violent clashes between strikers and the police.

The Winter of Discontent and the Miners’ Strike were followed by further citizen unrest, which was met with police brutality. The mainstream British print media was heavily affected during this period. In 1986, media magnate and owner of News International, Rupert Murdoch,

³⁸ See the following for information on the black and Asian led rebellions in 1980s Britain: Duncan Sim, M.J.A. Keith, Ceri Peach and Chris Hamnett, “The Conditions in England’s Inner Cities on the Eve of the 1981 Riots,” *Area* 15, no. 4 (1983), 314-322; Fryer, *Staying Power*, 387-400; *Handsworth Songs*, directed by John Akomfrah (1986: London, Black Audio Film Collective); Ramdin, *The Making of the Black Working Class*; Jennifer Davis, “From ‘Rookeries’ to ‘Communities’: Race, Poverty and Policing in London, 1850-1985,” *History Workshop*, no. 27 (1989), 66-85; Anne Power and Rebecca Tunstall, “Riots and Violent Disturbances in Thirteen Areas of Britain,” *Social Policy Research* 116 (1997) 1-2; Anne Power and Rebecca Tunstall, *Dangerous Disorder: Riots and Violent Disturbances in Thirteen Areas of Britain 1991-92* (York: York Publishing Services 1997); David Waddington, Fabien Jobard, and Mike King eds., *Rioting in the UK and France A Comparative Analysis* (Abingdon: Wilian Publishing, 2009); Ramamurthy, *Black Star*; Andy Beckett, *Promised You a Miracle: UK 80-82* (London: Penguin Books, 2016).

³⁹ Charlotte Lomas, “Current Spate of Strike Action ‘Has Echoes of Winter of Discontent,’” *Sky News*, December 26, 2016.

⁴⁰ Anne Perkins, “Then Was the Winter of Our Discontent,” *BBC*, September 5, 2008; “Winter of Discontent Led Callaghan to Brink of Calling in the Army, 30-year Papers Reveal,” *Daily Mail*, December 29, 2009.

⁴¹ Colin Hay, “Narrating Crisis: The Discursive Construction of the Winter of Discontent,” *British Sociological Association* 30, no. 2 (1996), 254.

incorporated new technology into the printing process. The resultant job losses triggered the Wapping Dispute—a strike that lasted fifty-four weeks. Police brutalized strikers and arrested thousands. News International, however, profited: no production time was lost during the strike. Both the Miners Strike and the Wapping Dispute were defeats for the union and debilitated workers rights in Britain.⁴²

⁴² K.D. Ewing and B.W. Napier, “The Wapping Dispute and Labour Law,” *Cambridge law Journal* 45, no. 2 (1986), 285-304; Donald Macintyre, “Wapping Dispute 30 Years on: How Rupert Murdoch Changed Labour Relations-and Newspapers-Forever,” *Independent*, January 21, 2016.

‘The Enemy Within’: Transatlantic State Repression

The State’s response to these events reveals their notions of Britishness and the conception of national identity.⁴³ Margaret Thatcher’s regime transformed the landscape of cultural and economic discourse in Britain and dictated how the State treated strikes and uprisings from the working class. Thatcher urged Britons to embrace “British character” and reject “socialist” concepts of class. She promised working-class Britons that this renunciation of class rhetoric would be the key to their social mobility, while simultaneously condemning organizations and policies that represented their interests. By controlling the terms of debate, Thatcher successfully marginalized discussions of not only class, but race as well—equating any sort of social solidarity with socialism and, thereby, branding it as a threat to the national identity of Britain.

In an interview with Gordon Burns of Granada TV on January 27, 1978, shortly before her tenure as Prime Minister began, the then Tory Leader of the Opposition advocated for restrictive immigration policies. She supported this view by utilizing fear-mongering, building upon the British myth of egalitarianism in order to portray immigrants as the villainous other. When asked how she would cut down the number of immigrants allowed in Britain, Thatcher answered,

⁴³ Noted political scientist Benedict Anderson defined nations as “imagined communities.” Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983). Scholars of British studies have noted that the “imagined community” of Britishness is largely dependent on the definition of the “outsider.” Often ethnic minorities and LGBTQ people, in addition to the radical working class have been coded as the “outsider,” see: Anna Marie Smith, *New Right Discourse on Race and Sexuality Britain 1968-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1997).

...I think it means that people are really rather afraid that this country might be swamped by people with a different culture and, you know, 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.⁴⁴

She characterizes angry Britons as fearful citizens, rather than hostile ones, insisting that “people are really afraid” and that any racial violence against immigrants stems from this fear: “if there is any fear that it might be swamped, people are going to react and be rather hostile to those coming in.” For Thatcher, Britons’ inimical, and often brutal, treatment of immigrants was simply a “reaction”-- an understandable response to a sinister invasion. Indeed, Thatcher’s repeated use of the word “swamped” carries with it connotations of invasion. Britain, after all, is an island. ‘Swamped’ creates an image that goes beyond overwhelming chaos; it paints a picture of Britain, the savior of democracy and the servant of global law and order, being sunk and attacked by floods of violent immigrants. Thus, those who are “with a different culture” are not just different--they are dangerous.

Thatcher applied this same ideology to her representations of class politics. She equated workers’ strikes as collectivist attacks against the harmony and hope she had promised. Of all her remarks, her now infamous “enemy within” speech to Conservative Members of Parliament (MP) during the 1984-85 miners’ strike encapsulates the Iron Lady’s treatment and characterization of labor unions: “[Leopoldo] Galtieri and the Argentinians were the enemy

⁴⁴ Margaret Thatcher, interview by Gordon Burns, *World in Action*, Granada, January 27, 1978.

without. Arthur Scargill and the miners are the enemy within.”⁴⁵ The antagonistic nature of her speech embodies Thatcher’s draconian attitude towards uprisings of this sort. Under the Iron Lady, unions, and those who stood to defend them, were tangible threats to the well-being of the State. In this way, Thatcher’s words characterized strikes as more than a criminal act: they were an act of war. This brand of language worked to justify her use of anti-democratic measures to undermine the miners’ union and discredit its leaders.

Thatcher’s successor, John Major, echoed these sentiments in his 1991 Conservative Conference speech, an address intended to pay tribute to Thatcher while outlining his vision for Britain. Like his predecessor, Major urged his listeners to reject all notions of class: “It’s a matter of breaking down false and futile divisions, based on class and envy...they are wholly artificial. Labour fosters those divisions. It thrives on them. Our task is to end them for good.” His description of class as a division echoes Thatcher, implying that it is not the income gap or the unfair treatment of workers that provoked class warfare. Instead, it was due to the enviousness of disruptive citizens and the encouragement of the Labor party that Britain now existed in a state of tension and malcontent.

He went on to address the recent disturbances in the council estates: “The recent outbreaks of violence in some of our council estates involved a brutal disrespect for people and their property.” Major assigned blame to the workers on strike, refusing to even acknowledge the reasons behind their rebellion. For Major, this strike was not a rebellion. It was a destructive act, a violent outbreak rooted in “brutal disrespect for people and their property.” This idea of ownership and property was a key part of Major’s vision for Britain. The “right to own”, as he

⁴⁵ Margaret Thatcher, “ ‘the Enemy Within’ ” (speech, 1922 Committee, House of Commons, London, July 19, 1984).

called it, was intrinsically tied to “the right to choose.”⁴⁶ In short, with liberty, came property. Therefore, by accusing the strikers of harboring a contempt for property, Major also charged them with a flagrant disregard for individual liberty. In Major’s Britain, those who choose to support unions are not fighting for the common worker, but are in fact advocating for criminality, for violence, and are enabling destructive seditionists to rob innocent Britons of freedom and choice.

Across the Atlantic, President Bush’s address to the nation during the 1992 Los Angeles Uprising mirrored Thatcher and Major’s disdain for unions and strikes. He proclaimed, “What we saw...in Los Angeles is not about the great cause of equality...It’s not a message of protest. It’s been the brutality of a mob, pure and simple.”⁴⁷ Like his British counterparts, Bush separated the riot from any sort of ideological agenda, insisting that the event was “not about the great cause of equality.” Moreover, his rhetoric recalls American values of free speech and equality. By divorcing the LA Rebellion from these distinctly American ideals, Bush implies that this uprising, and others like it, are not only destructive, but are also un-American. These brutal “mobs” endanger the lives and, most importantly, jeopardize the inalienable liberties of ordinary American citizens.

⁴⁶ John Major, “Conservative Party Conference Speech,” (October 11, 1991).

⁴⁷ George H.W. Bush, “Address to the Nation on the Civil Disturbances in Los Angeles, California” (Washington D.C., May 1, 1992).

British Media and the 1992 Los Angeles Uprising

As sociologist Darnell Hunt observed of the coverage of the '92' Uprising, "a large measure of what people 'knew' about the events and the conditions leading up to them was undoubtedly based on media depictions."⁴⁸ Newspaper journalists held "anonymous power" in that they were the faceless voice and narration of the riots. This power gave a feeling of transparency for the reader and a sense of truth.⁴⁹ An analysis of reportage from widely circulated British newspapers allows for an understanding of how the public viewed the events from across the Atlantic. Both the writings of journalists and readers (in their letters to the editor) injected their own narratives into the story. Race, class, the state, and policing were widely discussed as causal factors. Since the U.K. has a plethora of newspapers and tabloids with various political leanings, ranging from conservative to centre-right to centre-left, there was hardly a consensus response to the uprising.⁵⁰ Some journalists, particularly those from the *Daily Mail*, saw no purpose in the violence. They believed that criminal elements were responsible for their ally's devolution. For the *Guardian/Observer* and the *London Times*, LA '92' was a platform to warn Britons about their own country's growing racial and class divides. In this reportage, parallels were drawn between contemporary Britain, the tumultuous past, and the city of Los Angeles.

⁴⁸ Darnell Hunt, *Screening the Los Angeles 'Riots': Race, Seeing, and Resistance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 2.

⁴⁹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Pantheon Books: New York, 1977).

⁵⁰ In 1992 the circulation numbers for some newspapers were: *Daily Mail* at 1,675,453, followed by *Guardian* at 428,010, and then *London Times* at 386,258. See: Ivor Crew and Brian Gosschalk eds, *Political Communications the General Election Campaign of 1992* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 172. Although the *Observer* and the *Guardian* were separate newspapers in 1992, the paper was acquired by the *Guardian* Media Group in 1993, which is why they are paired together here, for more see: "History of the Observer," *Guardian*, June 6, 2002.

Although there was a wide range of framings, one constant pattern emerged: the way in which journalists and readers discussed class and racial divides was laden with the myths of egalitarianism. Each publication disseminated competing definitions of Britishness through this myth. The *Daily Mail's* expressed their vision by painting racism and classism as exclusively American problems. Britain for the paper's writers and readership was exceptional because it was free of social issues. The *Guardian* and the *London Times* simplified the uprising of LA's racial minorities as either a class or a race struggle. In failing to see the connections between race and class, the two publications neglected the history of U.K. white working class racism, state repression of a black British working class, and the number of urban and workplace social rebellions of the recent past.

Former tabloid writer and current freelance journalist Adrian Addison insightfully dubbed the *Daily Mail* as "The Paper that Divided and Conquered Britain." The paper elicited a polarized response. Criticism came from politicians on various sides of the spectrum such as Michael Heseltine, a former Thatcher and Major cabinet member, and Jeremy Corbyn, current Labour Leader of the Opposition. They accused the tabloid of "carrying politics...that is just demeaning" and of being "overwhelmingly hostile."⁵¹ Editor-In-Chief Paul Dacre unapologetically praised his publication's conservatism. He also framed the mainstream medias as leftist propaganda, which says, "Britain is a shameful nation with a shameful history and a culture and people who are inherently racist, sexist and anti-European." He further claimed that left has engulfed society with the belief that "nuclear family is outmoded and that injustice in

⁵¹Jessica Elgot and Kevin Rawlinson, " 'People Saw Through It': Corbyn Hits Back at Daily Mail Attacks," *Guardian* (London, United Kingdom), September 27, 2017.

education and liberal progressive values must prevail.”⁵² Despite such ire and the paper’s explicit right wing leanings, its 1992 circulation numbered over one million. The *Mail* has also been honored and praised for their reporting on racism as recently as the 1990s. Their coverage on the racially motivated murder of black British teenager Stephen Lawrence, earned them praise from Labour MP Ed Miliband and the slain teen’s parents, Doreen and Neville Lawrence, who credited the publication for upholding “justice” in an “honorable” manner.⁵³

The *Mail*’s analysis of the ‘92’ Uprising however, skewed more toward sensationalism and portrayed the event as a spectacle for consumers. The reportage upheld Dacre’s view of British exceptionalism. Often, writers painted the event as an explosion of savagery and mindless violence. It was a story of good versus evil; the destruction and mentality of the perpetrators were depicted as war-like. Descriptions mimicked Thatcher, Major, and Bush’s discourse by stressing the criminality of the protestor. Journalistic images of the defenseless included a wide range of people and groups including the police, firefighters, and Hollywood actors. Interestingly, particularly in the columns of the tabloid’s most prolific writer on the 92’ Uprising, Peter Sheridan, the victimized were also ethnic minorities.⁵⁴ Through this framing, Sheridan legitimized racism as a causal factor of protest and further strengthens the notion that the riots were defined by gratuitous violence. Unlike the other newspapers, the *Mail* denied the realities of violence, racism, and classism in the U.K.. These were distinctly American issues, they argued, thus preserving the idea of an egalitarian Britain.

⁵² Adrian Addison, *Mail Men, The Unauthorized Story of the Daily Mail- The Paper that Divided and Conquered Britain* (London: Atlantic Books, 2017) 21.

⁵³ Lisa O’Carroll, “Stephen Lawrence’s Parents Thank Daily Mail for ‘going out on a limb,’ ” *Guardian* (London, United Kingdom), January 4, 2012.

⁵⁴ Peter Sheridan, “Amid the Gunfire Even Bullet-Proof Vests Were of No Use, *Daily Mail* (London: United Kingdom), May 1, 1992; Peter Sheridan, “LA Riot Fear as Police are Cleared of Video Attack,” *Daily Mail* (London: United Kingdom), April 30, 1992; Peter Sheridan, “Hollywood Stars Flee the Streets of Terror,” *Daily Mail* (London: United Kingdom), May 2, 1992.

Like many of his Californian counterparts, Sheridan's stories focused on the violence of the Uprising. This framework redirected discussions away from the city's years of economic and social injustice. People on the streets were not out for justice, but were engaged in destructive behaviors, he consistently maintained. Throughout various articles, he framed them not as protestors but as "Mob terror," "Gangs," "rioters," and "looters." Sheridan's headlines and stories such as, "Flames of Hate in the City of Angels," "Hollywood Stars Flee the Streets of Terror," and "Amid the Gunfire Even Bullet-Proof Vests Were No Use," offered almost pornographic depictions of the "mob's" destruction and savagery.⁵⁵ In particular, these headlines depicted the violent power and capacities of the rioters. Sheridan associated the "mob terror," with the imagery of war and the power of an army. Los Angeles was described as if it was a war-torn region. This trope was featured in his articles in large, bold, and centered print. For example, his page one commentary, "Flames of Hate," in bold block letters described the city as, "RIOT AREAS LOOKING LIKE KUWAIT AFTER GULF WAR," "FLAMES ACROSS LOS ANGELES," and "FIREBALLS VISIBLE FROM SPACE AS RAMPAGE LEAVES."⁵⁶ Sheridan presented himself as the watchful eye, offering his perspective as a live witness to the war-torn violence. He observed, "As I walked the midnight streets-made brighter than day by the fires- the acrid aroma of destruction hung like a shroud over the city, soaking my hair and clothes."⁵⁷ The hypervisibility and graphic descriptions presented in these articles gives the appearance of transparency and the illusion that the state is constantly surveilling the violence.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Peter Sheridan, "Amid the Gunfire Even Bullet-Proof Vests Were of No Use, *Daily Mail* (London: United Kingdom), May 1, 1992; Peter Sheridan, "Flames of Hate in the City of Angels," *Daily Mail* (London: United Kingdom), May 1, 1992.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ For more on surveillance on the news see panopticon in Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment*.

In some instances, both Sheridan and his colleagues described the violence in LA in explicitly racial terms: the mob wasn't just a mob--it was specifically a black mob that drove the violence in LA. In the vein of colonialist tropes, blacks were a mob who needed to be wrangled and controlled. In two of his articles, for example, Sheridan singled out African Americans as inciting the violence, neglecting the fact that many non-black people were arrested during the Uprising. He specified that, "Black activists have been threatening mass violence" and in another report, "Blacks infuriated by the not guilty verdicts....went on a spree of destruction."⁵⁹ Rather than contextualizing the repeated patterns of police racism and brutality, black people were dehumanized in his articles as reckless and mindless savages. George Gordon, another heavily featured columnist in the *Mail's* coverage, attempted to contextualize the history of race in America by continuing the discourse of the unruly black mob. In the years since the 1965 Watts Riots and the killing of civil rights leaders, he maintained that black people have not been held accountable for their behavior. Gordon wrote, "Blaming blacks has been off limits for American politicians" and that "...the mere mention of blame has brought down charges of racism." African Americans he maintained were irresponsible for blaming whites for "black on black crime."⁶⁰ From his vantage point, black people were the social problems and too much blame was being placed on the police and on racism. Gordon's work further contributed to the journalistic framing of the dehumanization of African Americans by presenting them as an homogenous mob that needed to be socially and politically controlled. These vantage points contributed to the racist images of black criminality which, essentially denoted that black people must be kept "in their place."

⁵⁹ Sheridan, "LA Riot Fear; Sheridan, "Flames of Hate."

⁶⁰ George Gordon, "The White Anger That Fired This Mayhem," *Daily Mail* (London: United Kingdom), May 1, 1992.

Mail journalists, framed racial minorities as both part of the mob and the victimized. In the same article, Sheridan mapped the actions of the black mob. He allowed ample column space and a picture layout of Sharon Hill, a thirty-five year old African American housewife. Hill was described to have been found by police, hiding for over an hour with “her face laced with blood, hand sliced openly by broken glass.” She was distraught, having witnessed her husband shot by the mob. Hill was a quintessential example for the *Mail* because, as a housewife, she epitomized traditional gender roles and respectability. In the same column, Sheridan was sure to highlight the fact that a Hispanic man had died of a gunshot wound at the hands of the mob.⁶¹ *Mail* columnists indicted the “black mob,” for attacks on their own and other people of color, which further lent credence to the idea of the Uprising as an uncontrolled riot. While Sheridan and his colleagues were occupied with blaming 1992 on black on black crime and interethnic conflict, there were hardly any discussions on black people as victims of the LAPD. This framing was at odds with local claims that the Uprising represented the voices of people protesting against police violence on black residents.

While the *Mail*’s commentary on racism and classism in the U.S. was pernicious, the publication was deafeningly silent on the existence of such realities in the U.K.. Such social divisions were exclusively pinned as a larger part of the American crucible. The event represented a country that had long drowned in racism and ethnic tensions. For journalist Keith Waterhouse, 1992 was a repetition of history: a devolution back to America’s 1950s “apartheid-like political climate.”⁶² The narratives of repetition and devolution were further exemplified by various letters to the editor, which described 1992 as a year “When the melting pot boils over”

⁶¹ Sheridan, “Flames of Hate.”

⁶² Keith Whitehouse, “To Have and Have Not,” *Daily Mail* (London, United Kingdom), May 4, 1992.

and as “A volcanic reminder that racism is as American as apple pie.”⁶³ Framing racial stratification as distinctly a U.S. issue, here thus assisted in the preservation of British egalitarianism. In comparison to their partner in the Special Relationship, the U.K. is able to separate itself as a social utopia.

Commentators and Britons at large have long portrayed the *Guardian* as a foil to the *Daily Mail*. Unlike their counterpart, the paper has been unapologetic about its leftist leanings. For instance, the introduction to the *Guardian* News Media (GNM) Archives reads that during the 1970s and the 1980s, the paper became the “unchallenged...voice of the left,” due to its coverage of the Miners Strike and the Labour Party.⁶⁴ This indicates that leading up to the 92’ Uprising, the paper heavily prioritized being an outlet for the working class. In various articles throughout the 1992, the journalists decried the *Mail* as a voice and platform for unethical methods of reportage, right wing Tory propaganda, “red-herrings,” and hate.⁶⁵ The *Guardian*’s leftist views have also been of subject to the public. In a letter to the editor, Charles Foster summed up the differences in the target audience observing, “the *Guardian* whose snobby metropolitan-left editorials, op-ed articles and letters may offend the many more who read the *Mail*.”⁶⁶

In stark contrast to the *Mail*, the *Guardian*’s journalists and readership largely used the news of the rebellion to draw parallels about their own society. Toward the end of the 1992 Los Angeles Uprising, journalist Ben Laurance of *The Guardian* penned his reflections on the event. He wrote, “Watching the terrifying television pictures of great areas of Los Angeles ablaze, the

⁶³ “When the Melting Pot Boils Over,” *Daily Mail* (London, United Kingdom), May 1, 1992.

⁶⁴ GNM Archive, “History of the Guardian,” *The Guardian*, June 5, 2002.

⁶⁵ “A History of Red-Herrings,” *Guardian* (London, United Kingdom), January 20, 1992.

⁶⁶ Charles Foster, “Daily Mail v Guardian: An Open Minded Reader’s View,” *Guardian* (London: United Kingdom), June 22, 2017.

temptation is to think only that it's a long way away and it's not our problem."⁶⁷ Laurence observed that the same issues that ignited the Los Angeles Uprising also plagued British society. In many commentaries, America's long-standing class divides ignited the fuel to the fires in Los Angeles. News articles and letters to the editor warned that the fires had the potential to spread across the Atlantic. While, writers drew attention to the U.K.'s socioeconomic problems, classism was often prioritized over racism. In various instances, the two issues were largely viewed as separate entities and many journalists and letters from the public actively unlinked them. Thus, the *Guardian's* reportage reveals fissures on the left. Though the publication served as a voice for the working class, it failed to recognize the left's own inability to comprehend race and racism in Britain.

Journalists and letters to the editor often took aim at American economic policies. Reporter Will Hutton summed up the explosion of LA as a "profound warning of where extended market principles deep into societal structures can lead."⁶⁸ Two days later, at the closing of the Uprising, Laurence wrote, "There are riots in the ghettos because there are ghettos."⁶⁹ These early pieces of reportage set the tone by defining the parameters of Los Angeles's class problem. Poverty or ghettos did not simply appear out of thin air. In the words of Hutton "market principles" and by extension the state actively sanctioned class and economic stratification.

Letters to the editor mirrored the journalistic analysis of Hutton and Lawrence. Those who penned letters framed America as both an economically and morally bankrupt nation. In "Lessons Britain Can Learn from the Los Angeles Riots," Rae Street examined the state of American "social structures" which paved the way for rebellion in 1992. Street explained that

⁶⁷ Ben Laurence, "Privilege's Hidden Price," *The Guardian* (London, United Kingdom), May 2, 1992.

⁶⁸ Will Hutton, "Taking the Yellow Brick Road to Ruin," *The Guardian* (London, United Kingdom), May 4, 1992.

⁶⁹ Laurence, "Privilege's Hidden Price."

U.S. state leadership, specifically the conservative administrations of Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush, placed a large emphasis on the country's defense budget. Leading up to 1992, federal officials invested a disproportionate amount of financial resources in the military. As a result, America outranked the world in defense spending, technology, and weaponry. Street juxtaposed this with the U.S.'s lackluster ranking in social welfare services. For instance, while America outranked the world in defense spending, they ranked "eighteenth in infant mortality rate per 1000 live births" and "eighteenth in population per physician."⁷⁰ This prioritization of weaponry, war, and global dominance at the expense of their citizen's welfare thus illuminated the American state's lack of a moral conscience.

Additional letters further internationalized this sense of governmental neglect and moral bankruptcy. One writer believed there to be a, "transatlantic misconception" in that President Bush summarized LA as a "law-and-order problem, to be cured by National Guardsmen and troops." Bush's characterization conjured up memories of Britain's own experience in dealing with social rebellion in that, "the last time Britain's inner cities went up in smoke...the then Home Secretary Mr. Douglas Hurd, called the riots 'not social phenomena but crimes.'⁷¹ Like Bernie Grant, these letters warned that if state leadership continued to neglect the needs of the working class in the same way America's governing officials did, Los Angeles-style social discord could potentially manifest itself in the U.K..

Some journalists were alarmed by such predictions. Despite differences between the two countries, reporters saw that parts of Britain contained, "a general relative deprivation not so very different from southern-central LA." Major's rhetoric served as a prevalent target for journalists. A reporter in the *Observer* noted that "the dust over Los Angeles" in 1992, was

⁷⁰ Rae Street, "Lessons Britain Can Learn from the Los Angeles Riots," *The Guardian* (London: United Kingdom), May 5, 1992.

⁷¹ "Race is Also Our Dilemma," *The Observer* (London: United Kingdom), May 3, 1992.

further proof that “Since 1981, Mr. John Major’s vision of a classless society has slipped further and further from reality.” Furthermore, “The issue, in short, is poverty,” which has been spread in part due to “Mr. Major’s “ineffective vision.”⁷² In her analysis of the Los Angeles uprising, Mary Honeyball wrote that, “It was poverty above all that caused the Los Angeles Riots,” and, “John Major and his government have obviously chosen to disregard the strong messages coming out of the US in the wake of the worst urban riots for over 20 years.”⁷³ Thus for the public, Major represented the antithesis of British exceptionalism. He became the face of negligence and moral bankruptcy.

By tracing the similarities between LA and British societal issues, the *Guardian* offered to a counterpoint to the *Daily Mail*’s American framing of the event. Although this may appear to further illustrate stark journalistic differences between the two papers, one pattern emerged: both publications largely silenced racial issues during the uprising.⁷⁴ Writers, particularly in the *Guardian/Observer*, often took a singular focus in analyzing issues. This is encapsulated in an *Observer* article titled, “Race Is Also Our Dilemma,” which was published toward the end of the Rebellion. This title is misleading in that race, aside from appearing in the headline, was virtually nowhere to be found in the article. Instead, the reporter simplified American and British problems in light of the Uprising by writing, “The issue, in short, is poverty.”⁷⁵ This singular emphasis on class is also seen in Dianna Gould’s letter to the editor, which analyzed the “the roots of riot.” For her, “It was poverty above all that caused the Los Angeles riots. Poverty on the UK is on the increase.”⁷⁶

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Mary Honeyball, “Letters to the Editor: Urban Decay and the Roots of Riot,” *The Guardian* (London: United Kingdom), May 8, 1992.

⁷⁴ Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*.

⁷⁵ Race is Also Our Dilemma.”

⁷⁶ Honeyball, “Urban Decay and the Roots of Riot.”

A further examination into British newspaper class analysis reveals a more disturbing trend. Race was not just silenced; it was actively unlinked from class. Street's letter, "Lessons that Britain Can Learn From the Los Angeles Riots" in the *Guardian*, highlights this tendency. First, the letter contained no reference to the racial connotations of the Uprising and race relations in Britain. In fact, Street explicitly called for the spotlight to be squarely on poverty over race. The letter read, "While the riots in Los Angeles have focused attention on racial tension in the US, it's high time there was more comment on the growth of poverty in that rich country and the gross disparity between the rich and poor."⁷⁷ Rather than tying race and class together, Street presented the importance of the rebellion as a one sided issue. This active effort is also seen yet again in the article "Race is Also Our Dilemma." The absence of race in the article epitomizes the lack of media coverage on racial violence in Britain. For this writer LA was akin to the U.K.'s recent past. The writer observed that Britain experienced, "Not race riots, but class riots: the clashes in Trafalgar Square two years ago, and the five nights of disorder in Newcastle last summer, mainly perpetrated by whites were a warning. The underclass twitched: it did not rise up. We need to act before it does."⁷⁸ This comment neglects the plethora of black led urban uprisings in the 1980s.

Following the uprising, some journalists were increasingly emboldened to question the Special Relationship. Post-uprising reporter Edward Pearce pondered, "Who are our friends? With whom do we wish to keep company?" Pearce, as his other colleagues in the *Guardian* did, proposed that Britain should tie itself closer to Europe than to America. His reasoning stemmed, from not only the 92' Rebellion, but also, America's "extensive poverty" which "is found, like

⁷⁷ Street, "Lessons Britain Can Learn"

⁷⁸ "Race is Also Our Dilemma."

more flourishing Indians, on reserves.” Much like the journalists in *Mail*, America here served as a measuring stick. LA 92’ represented the narrative of the decline of the U.S. and the rise of European exceptionalism. He praised Europe in comparison to the U.S. as, “a more mature society, its rich less predatorily dominant, its poor better attended to, all its social classes more involved in debate.”⁷⁹ In his notion that Europe has a more friendly class system than America, Pearce revised Britain’s history of working class protest. Also however, he glossed over the U.K. and Europe’s own rise of nativism in the 1990s.⁸⁰

The *London Times*, a centre-right leaning newspaper, appeared to be a counterpoint to both the *Daily Mail* and the *Guardian*. Though the paper took a similar approach to the *Guardian*, by comparing LA’s social issues to Britain’s, journalistic commentaries and letters to the editor focused more on race. For the publication, the courts, police, and other elements of the criminal justice system defined the 1992 Los Angeles Uprising as a response to a long history of institutional racial injustice. The headlines such as “Black Look at White Justice” and “Coppers Without Convictions,” highlight that a repeated pattern of injustices against black people within the mechanisms of policing and law planted the seeds for the volcanic eruption across the Atlantic.⁸¹ More so than the other papers examined in this study, the *London Times* emphasized racism as a major causal factor of the 92’ Uprising. By, extension, the *Times* saw racism as a historical pattern within their own shores.

⁷⁹ Edward Pearce, “The Company of Wolves: Commentary,” *The Guardian* (London: United Kingdom), June 10, 1992.

⁸⁰ Theorist Stuart Hall discussed the Europe’s rising nativist backlash in the 1990s in an essay called “Our Mongrel Selves,” see: Stuart Hall, *Selected Political Writings: The Great Moving Right Show and Other Essays* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 275-282.

⁸¹ Kate Muir, “Black Look at White Justice,” *London Times*, May 15, 1992; P.A.J. Waddington, “Coppers Without Convictions,” *London Times*, May 21, 1992.

These patterns of racial injustices were not just a part of the American story. The media attention by the *Times* internationalized it by drawing parallels between the court systems of the U.S. and the United Kingdom. Journalist Katie Muir, drawing specifically on the overwhelmingly white Simi Valley jury, revealed the lack of racial representation on British juries. All-white juries were, as Muir maintained, a familiar scene for black and Asian Britons. She contended that in the U.K., the lack of multi-racial juries often led to acquittals in police murder cases.⁸² Unlike the *Mail's* portrayal of the LAPD as victims, writer P.A.J. Waddington, pondered, “why they [police officers] are not more often prosecuted?” In a comparative analysis of the LAPD non-guilty verdict in the King case, along with notable cases in the U.K., Waddington found a common thread. Often, the public, media, and police officers themselves largely portrayed “the officers who pulled the triggers” as “men of integrity” who were victims of a difficult job.⁸³

The public's letters substantiated journalistic claims of legal injustices. Unlike the *Daily Mail*, rather than portraying LA as a mindless snap reaction to the LAPD's acquittal in the King beating, the public historicized the making of LA '92. In light of Rodney King, one letter titled “Flames of Racial Rage,” called for Britain and the rest of the western world to examine their criminal justice system's own flaws. The writer proposed that, “Each country should turn back to its own indigenous conflicts to ponder the flashpoints and remedies.” In recent history, Britain's legal system had “yet to correct all the wrongful convictions in alleged IRA [Irish Republican Army] bombing cases” and also failed to address the police brutality, which incited the Brixton

⁸² Muir discussed the cases of Cherry Groce (1985), John Shorthouse (1985), and Clinton McCurbin (1987), see: Muir, *Black Look*.

⁸³ Waddington, *Coppers*.

Uprising.⁸⁴ This neglect and miscarriage of justice had incited “Flames of Racial Rage,” in not only LA but also in Brixton and all over the world. Like Waddington and others before him, James Lavin, an American expatriate, wrote to the *Times*, criticizing both policing practices and the court system. Lavin, while noting that he was surprised that LA did not explode more often, observed, that the LAPD sanctioned “beatings and illegal raids” created black mistrust of the police and legal system. He explained the “Rodney king case is no one-off anomaly,” adding “Blacks perceive white policemen, white jurors and white judges as one big system designed to hold them down.”⁸⁵ Essentially, if the state and the public continued to neglect and compartmentalize their country’s own racism within the legal system, Britain will experience a social uprising akin to LA’s.

On the surface the *London Times* presented a counterpoint to the portrayal of Britain as an egalitarian society. Throughout the publication’s coverage of the ‘92 Uprising, both journalists and the public decentered racism and the injustices of the legal system as exclusively American events. As Muir observed, “Following the Los Angeles Riot the Americans are scared and the British are scared. People don’t want to make the international connection because it’s their worst nightmare.”⁸⁶ Muir, her colleagues in the *Times*, and the paper’s letters to the editor, confronted and faced this “nightmare.”

However, with the exception of James Lavin’s letter, the role of class stratification as a spark of the Uprising is all but missing from articles in the *Times*. The paper ran stories that reduced the social eruptions of Los Angeles and Britain’s recent past, as responses to racial tensions. The people who took part in such social uprisings were not only victims of police racism and violence. Those who took to the streets in South Central, Brixton, and Handsworth

⁸⁴ “Flames of Racial Rage,” *London Times*, May 1, 1992.

⁸⁵ James Lavin, “US Riots That Were Waiting to Happen,” *London Times*, May 2, 1992.

⁸⁶ Kate Muir, “Black Look at White Justice,” *London Times*, May 15, 1992.

were also the unemployed and residents of dilapidated housing. LA and Britain's ethnic minorities were thus part of the working class. By continuing to simplify black-led insurrections as merely racial protest, this further silences black roles in the proletariat struggle. This is a continuation of the tradition, pervasive amongst the working class left in Britain and even in America.

Afterward & Conclusion: 1997-2011 Britain High Hopes and Unresolved Issues

In the aftermath of the 1992 Los Angeles Uprising, Britain experienced tremendous social progress. The 1997 election of Tony Blair to Prime Minister brought much hope and change. Blair and the new Labour coalition embodied the spirit of Cool Britannia, which rebranded the nation as a young and progressive country, following almost two decades of Tory conservative rule. A large element of the ethos of Cool Britannia was the idea of a multicultural United Kingdom.⁸⁷ Labour in the late 90s, unlike the Tories and Labour parties of yesteryear, did not shy away from this ideology. In fact, The *Observer* lauded the election of the new Prime Minister. They welcomed his presence in a front page headline that read “Goodbye Xenophobia.”⁸⁸ At the twilight of the twentieth century, the United Kingdom looked ready to put the country’s false sense of egalitarianism in the past. It appeared as if Downing Street was providing black and Asian Britons with its most active and visible allies to date. However, the same state and media narratives continued to circulate about the criminalization of black and brown individuals.

While many rejoiced the coming of a new multicultural Britain, by 2001 working class Pakistani, South Asian, and black British neighborhoods exploded in violence. The uprisings and riots were sparked by deindustrialization, mass unemployment, the rise of fascism, white working class racism, and interethnic conflicts.⁸⁹ From spring to summer, Oldham in Manchester erupted in protest, followed by Harehills in Leeds, Burnley in Lancashire, and Bradford in

⁸⁷ For histories of Cool Britannia see: Rebecca D’Monte and Graham Saunders, *Cool Britannia?: British Political Drama in the 1990s* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2007); Katja Valaskivi, *Cool Nations Media and the Social Imaginary of the Branded Country* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016); John Harris, “Cool Britannia: Where Did It All Go Wrong?,” *New Statesman*, May 1, 2017.

⁸⁸ Quoted in David Gillborn, “Tony Blair and the Politics of Race in Education: Whiteness, Doublethink and New Labour,” *Oxford Review of Education* 34, no. 6 (2008), 714.

⁸⁹ The term riots is used here because far-right wing groups went on rampages attacking ethnic minorities. The term uprising here denotes the responses by black and Asian Britons to far-right wing violence and deteriorating living conditions.

Yorkshire. Much in the same way South Central LA appealed to African Americans during the post-WWII era, these neighborhoods for incoming black and Asian migrants offered industrial jobs. However, much like LA in the late 1960s, the U.K. increasingly outsourced such jobs, causing mass deindustrialization. Far right groups, such as the National Front and the British National Party, blamed the lack of employment on the mass influx of Asian migrants. For much of the year 2001, black and Asian Britons fought back against violent attacks from radical right groups and the white working class⁹⁰

In the aftermath of the 2001 Bradford Riots, Roy Hattersley, a member of the old guard of the Labour Party, defended the violent acts by Asian Britons. He explained that “These young Muslim men...believe they are being neglected.” Hattersley further said, “They believe their legitimate claims are not being heard, they believe that the economic opportunities that the rest of society enjoys are not being provided by them.”⁹¹ However, the response of Tony Blair, the face of New Labour’s multiculturalism, paled in comparison to the veteran Hattersley. Rather than confronting the realities of Bradford’s racial segregation, mass unemployment, and white on Asian attacks, the Prime Minister echoed the 80s and 90s “enemy within” ethos of Thatcher, Major, and H.W. Bush. He decried Bradford as a case of “thuggery.” Through his official spokesman, Blair discounted the role of the National Front and other fascist groups proclaiming that while “There may initially have been an element of provocation from the far-right at some point....first evidence suggests that this is simply thuggery.” He further added that this was also

⁹⁰ Jeevan Vasagar, “Poverty and Envy Fuel Racism in Burnley,” Paul Harris, “Race Riots Ignite Bradford,” *Guardian* (London: United Kingdom), June 30, 2001; *The Observer* (London: United Kingdom), July 8, 2001; Yakub Qureshi, “Oldham Riot-10 Years On: Kids’ Fight That Sparked Worst Riots for a Generation,” *Manchester Evening News*, May 23, 2011.

⁹¹ Quoted from “Labour at Odds on Bradford Riots,” *BBC News* (London: United Kingdom), July 9, 2001.

an instance of “local people intent on having a go at the police and in the process of doing that, destroying their own community.”⁹²

Even today, the discussions of racism and classism raised by black working class British revolts and the 1992 Los Angeles Uprising remain unresolved. This disparity was illuminated by the 2011 British “Riots.” From August 6th to 11th, London, Brixton, Merseyside, Birmingham, Bristol, Tottenham (Broadwater Farm), and much of the same cities that burned in 1980s, erupted in social rebellion yet again. Many ethnic minorities and people from economically poor and “fractionalized” neighborhoods took to the streets in protest following the MPS shooting of yet another black man, twenty-nine year old, Mark Duggan.⁹³ Thousands of people were arrested for destruction of property and assault. Former British Black Panther Party member and commentator, Darcus Howe defended those who took to the streets. According to the activist, “I don’t call it rioting, I call it an insurrection of the masses of the people.” Insurrection, he observed, was not just relegated to the United Kingdom, he added, “It is happening in Syria...Clapham...Liverpool...Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, and that is the nature of the historical moment.”⁹⁴ Howe’s observation further illustrates that police violence and the resistance movements were not simply American phenomena.

In many ways dominant British state discourse about race and class have largely remained the same since 1992 and 2001. In the aftermath of the 2011 Insurrection, the highest-ranking state officials were quick to summarize the social movement as gratuitous violence. Statements by UK cabinet members and Prime Minister David Cameron, often mirrored that of Britain’s tumultuous 1980s and President Bush’s condemnation of the 92’ Uprising. As the

⁹² Quoted from: “Blair Condemns Bradford Rioters,” *Guardian* (United Kingdom: London), July 9, 2001.

⁹³ Jutta Kawalerowicz and Michael Biggs, “Anarchy in the UK: Economic Deprivation, Social Disorganization, and Political Grievances in the London Riot of 2011,” *Social Forces* 94, no. 2 (2015), 673-698.

⁹⁴ Quoted in Joshua Hersh, “London Riots: BBC Interview Gets Testy,” *Huffington Post* (New York), October 9, 2011.

Thatcher and Major Tory administrations and Home Secretary Theresa May labeled the riots as a case of “sheer criminality,” further proclaiming there was “no excuse, looters, or thuggery, or violence on the streets.”⁹⁵ Police officials employed a similar framing to May, with many describing protestors as “opportunistic.” In his address from Downing Street, Cameron doubled down on the Home Secretary’s comments. He summed up the social rebellion as “...criminality, pure and simple” and vehemently stated, “...it has to be confronted and defeated.”⁹⁶

The 1992 Los Angeles Uprising experienced a transatlantic afterlife in discussions of 2011 England. In the aftermath, Cameron addressed parliament and lauded the efforts of the LAPD in rebuilding the city after ‘92. He and the media especially showered Chief of Police William Bratton with praise. Many British media sources dubbed him as “Supercop” for his role in LA crime reductions post-1992. His reference to the LAPD, “We should be looking beyond our shores to learn from the lessons from others who have faced similar problems.”⁹⁷ Yet again, Cameron’s words are another example of a British head of state presenting racism and social problems as alien to the U.K. This continues the silencing of social rebellion and the promulgation of the myth of British egalitarianism.

Although the myth of an egalitarian Britain was largely popularized during the late eighteenth century abolitionist movement, *There’s a South Central in Every City* examined its preservation and afterlife. The British mainstream media’s reportage of the 1992 Los Angeles Uprising, showed that the myth endured into the final years of the twentieth century. The ‘92 Rebellion presented a fertile ground for deconstructing this facile idea, not simply just because of

⁹⁵ Quoted in “Theresa May: London Rioters ‘will be brought to justice,’ “ *BBC News*, August 8, 2011.

⁹⁶ Quoted in “London Riots: Prime Minister’s Statement in Full,” *Telegraph* (London), August 9, 2011.

⁹⁷ Tom Geoghegan, “Bill Bratton: How ‘Supercop’ cleaned up US cities,” *BBC News* (Washington DC), August 16, 2011; Palash Ghosh, “London Riot 2011: David Cameron Seeks Advice from Former Los Angeles Police Chief,” *International Business Times* (Manhattan), August 12, 2011.

Britain's long-standing alliance with America. The burning of one of the world's most multicultural cities interrupted the ethos of a post-Civil Rights and classless society, and showed that American racism and classism was far from resolved. As years of conservative Tory rule looked to further bury such discussions in the U.K., the eruption across the Atlantic, amplified conversations in the mainstream media on race, policing, and class. The event forced Britons to confront and ponder these same issues within their own supposed exceptional society. However, though many mainstream publications criticized the state and specifically Tory conservatives, commentaries on racism and classism often also upheld the facile idea of an egalitarian British empire.

One of the main implications of this study is that it destabilizes the idea of the media portrayals and public perceptions of political and egalitarian discourses during racial uprisings. Right wing politicians have often incorporated the discourse of national exceptionalism; from Margaret Thatcher's "Put the Great back in Great Britain," to more recently President Donald Trump's rallying cry of "Make America Great Again," the trope of national exceptionalism continues to be a global trend. However, as my thesis illuminates, left wing media sources and intellectuals have, also largely propagated this idea. This has manifested itself in Britain, through the left's failure to unite racial and class struggles. These narratives are harmful, both to black and working class people fighting for equality, as well as white consumers of these discourses who continue to believe in the egalitarian myth of Britain.

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<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/crime/8691034/London-riots-Prime-Ministers-statement-in-full.html>
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