

1,500 Word Synopsis.

The 1981 Brixton riots were a confessed culmination of profound social and economic problems, centred on the African- Caribbean community of London. Unsatisfactory and limited housing with little or no facilities led to inevitable high levels of crime, unemployment and the sad truth that when 'these predominantly white officers only meet members of the black community in confrontational situations, they tend to stereotype black people in general'¹, and therefore 'racial prejudice does manifest itself occasionally in the behaviour of a few officers on the street'² The two quotations used here are from two different reports, almost two decades apart, however they form a very coherent sentence. This is not because they are taken out of context for convenience; it is to demonstrate that on the surface they are both referring to similar events that occurred within the same country and that address the same issue; racial prejudice, in particular concerning the police force.

The catalyst of the Brixton riots, which started on the 11th of April, was the system that the Metropolitan Police started to adopt. This system involved 120 out of uniform police officers stopping and searching people on the street on the suspicion of wrongdoing. Within six days nearly 1000 people had been stopped and searched, 118 were arrested. The injustice felt among the masses towards the arrests culminated in a riotous explosion of anger in and resistance against the police force in Brixton. The operation, named *Swamp 81*, resulted in riots that included nearly 300 injuries to police officers, over 100 vehicles burned and up to 150 buildings damage; 'It was... a resounding success'³ one local CID incredibly stated. Over 82 arrests were made, and reports assumed that about 5000 people were involved in some way with the riots.

¹ Sir W. Macpherson of Cluny, *The Stephen Lawrence Enquiry: Report of an Inquiry by Sir William Macpherson of Cluny* (London, 1999) C. 6 p.27

² Lord Scarman, *The Scarman Report: The Brixton Disorders 10-12 April, 1981. Report of an Inquiry by the Rt. Hon. The Lord Scarman OBE* (London: Pelican Books, 1981) p. 65

³ P. Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1984) p. 398