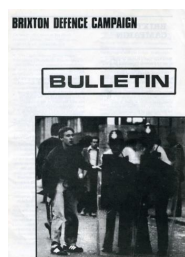


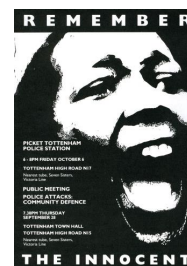
UPRISINGS



Ref. PHOTOS/57



Ref. MCKENLEY/4/1



Ref. EPHEMERA/45

Background

Black Cultural Archives was co-founded in 1981 by educationalists and historians including the well-known Len Garrison, the same year as the 10th-12th April Brixton Uprisings. Since 1981, the BCA has been proactive in archiving communities and national events. Our uprisings' collection primarily draws from the work of the Brixton Defence Campaign (BDC), which was formed by the Brixton Black Women's Group (BBWG) and Black People Against State Harassment (BASH) after the uprisings. The BDC primarily carried out political and legal support work on behalf of young Black people who were harassed, arrested and violently abused by the Metropolitan police force and then imprisoned. Though our collection has grown over the years to explore further facets of the uprisings, we know the collection has gaps and limitations. We hope to fill these gaps with the public's contribution and the declassification of documents by the British Government (held at other national institutions) to nuance further our understanding of the socio-political and economic impacts. If you have any material you would like to donate, please [contact us](#) to add to our growing collection.

This guide covers the uprisings of the 1980s, which were primarily caused by racism and hostility towards the Black and Asian communities. Although there has been a Black presence in Britain since Roman times, [the larger numbers of Black migrants at the end of the Second World War](#) caused an overwhelming reaction of hostility, alienation, and the 'othering' of the Black presence in Britain after the war.

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

Policing

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

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Stop and search powers disproportionately targeted young Black men who were being harassed and victimised by the police. The police used the tactic of high-profile, visible policing in urban areas to try and stem the threat of street crime, such as mugging, which was stereotyped as being perpetrated by young Black men. This tactic most notably deployed in Brixton under 'Operation Swamp'. When arrested under "Sus", many were racially abused, and victims' complaints were often ignored. The targeting and violent abuse of Black people was not new.

Opening in 1968, within two years, the Black-owned Mangrove Restaurant in Notting Hill was raided numerous times, without success on the pretext of search for 'drugs. In 1976 and subsequent years after, the Notting Hill Carnival, was marred by riots and violent clashes between Black youths and the police. At the national level, the 1977 *Shades of Grey Report*, underscored that Birmingham's police force systematically targeted young Black youths and disproportionately verbally and physically abuse them whilst in custody because of their race.

In addition, the police showed little regard for the safety of the Black and Asian communities who were facing daily harassment and abuse at the hands of right-wing extremists and political parties, such as the National Front, contributing to the racial tension between Black and white communities. These tensions were stoked through Enoch Powell's 1968 "Rivers of Blood" and Margaret Thatcher's 1978 televised speech of fears of Britain becoming "swamped by people of a different culture." Four months before the Brixton uprisings, on 18 January 1981, a fire at a birthday party in New Cross southeast London claimed the lives of thirteen Black youths. The Metropolitan police force's mishandling of the investigation and overlooking the cause (a racially motivated arson attack) became another point of contention between the police and Black communities. Frustrated and angered by the Metropolitan police force's mismanagement of the inquiry into the fire, [Darcus Howe](#), [Jessica Huntley](#), [John La Rose](#) and others organised on 2 Mach 1981 the *Black People's Day of Action*, which attracted up to 20,000 demonstrators, to underline the strength of Black communities and institutional racism in Britain. When the Brixton uprisings occurred, the lingering anguish of the New Cross fire inquiry and the loss of young people from the fire was high on people's mind.

Employment and Economic Conditions

From 1974 Britain had been experiencing high inflation rates and recession due to the high price of oil imposed by the OPEC oil embargo in 1973. Manufacturing had also begun to decline as Britain began to be priced out of international and domestic trade markets with the car, shipbuilding, steel and textiles industries being most affected.

Between 1979 and 1981 unemployment had almost doubled, taking the number of unemployed to nearly 3 million. By 1980, the country was well into another recession. In Brixton, at the time of the 1981 uprisings there were over 917,000 registered jobless under the age of 25 of whom 60,000 were under eighteen. Although unemployment affected many, it was the Black community who suffered most. While the 1965, 1968 and 1976 Race Relations Acts were watershed mandates to terminate covert and overt discriminatory practices in public and private spaces years of racism and the 'colour bar' had placed many Black youths at the bottom of the educational attainment and employability.

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

Timeline of the Uprisings: Key Events

1981

BRIXTON: The weekend of the 10th-12th April 1981 saw violent scenes and clashes between the predominantly Black youth of Brixton and the Metropolitan police force. The uprisings were sparked by an incident centred upon a Black youth who after being stabbed in a previous altercation, had been stopped on a few occasions by the police, culminating in a scene where the police had removed the youth from a taxi on his way to hospital. A small group of people surrounded the officers, took the youth from them and sent him to hospital themselves as they felt that the police were doing little to help him. Rumours quickly began to circulate ranging from a belief that the police had prevented the youth from going to hospital in order to question him, to suspicions that they had caused the injury themselves. As the crowd began to grow in number, police officers quickly requested the assistance of further police. When extra police turned up the scene degenerated into violence and disorder. The worst of the rioting and violence happened on Saturday the 11th of April in which *Time* magazine dubbed, "Bloody Saturday" after the police resumed their operations of stop and search and continued into Sunday.

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

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

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

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

There were other similar disturbances which took place in Moss Side, Manchester and Handsworth, Birmingham in 1981. The Scarman report, 1981 which investigated the Brixton uprising, concluded that these later uprisings were copycat disturbances although the areas

in which they occurred also suffered from high unemployment and high levels of police stop and search.

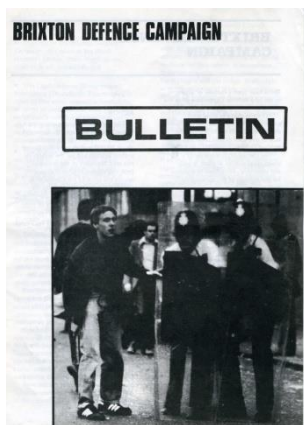
HANDSWORTH: On the weekend of the 9th-11 September 1985 a series of disturbances swept through the Birmingham suburb of Handsworth. The disturbances started when the police stopped and attempted to arrest a young Black man over an illegally parked car, who then fled the scene. The man resisted arrest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

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

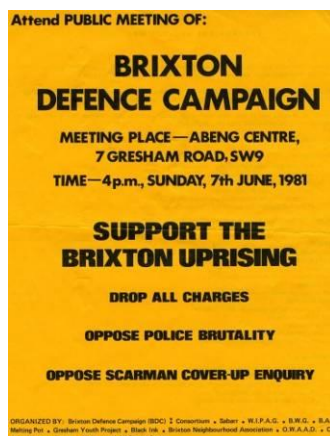
BRIXTON: On 28th September 1985 the Metropolitan police raided the home of Cherry Groce in search of her son Michael Groce. In the process of the raid Mrs Groce was shot by a policeman, which subsequently left her paralyzed. Anger over the shooting led to a protest outside of the police station which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

There is now a memorial to Cherry Groce on Windrush Square, Brixton.

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



Ref. MCKENLEY/3/1



Ref. MCKENLEY/3/1



Ref. EPHEMERA/45

3.1 'UPRISINGS' (Ref. UPRISINGS)

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

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

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

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

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

3.2 The Papers of Cecil Gutzmore (Ref. GUTZMORE)

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

3.3 The Runnymede Collection (Ref. RC/RF)

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

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

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

3.4 PERIODICALS (Ref. PERIODICALS)

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

Periodicals of particular interest from BCA’s collection are:

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

Runnymede (Ref. RC/PERIODICALS)

The Runnymede Periodicals collection holds a wide range of periodicals relating to the issue of race, class and immigration.

Race Today Magazine (Ref. RC/PERIODICALS/331)

The BCA holds most of the *Race Today* magazine collection, 1969-1988. *Race Today* was a Black-British monthly and bi-monthly published magazine on socio-political and economic issues impacting Black people in the UK and globally. It was founded in 1969 by the Institute of Race Relations, and from 1973 it was published by The *Race Today* Collective, which included figures such as Darcus Howe, Farrukh Dhondy, Linton Kwesi Johnson and Leia Howe. On the 1980s uprisings, the collection includes: “From Bobby to Babylon: Blacks and the British Police” Pt 1-3 (May/June 1980-1981) and “Oh Dear!: That ‘Criminal Minority Again’: Handsworth, Brixton, Tottenham” (1986).

The Collection also holds a wide range of journals, from ‘Race and Class’ (RC/PERIODICALS/323) to ‘Britain First’ and ‘Bulldog’, which are newsletters published by the National Front (RC/PERIODICALS/70 and 65) from the 1970s

We Want to Riot, Not to Work: The 1981 Brixton Uprisings (Ref. GUTZMORE/1/6/2)

The “We Want to Riot, Not to Work” leaflet was published in April 1982, one year after the uprisings by the Riot Not to Work Collective, a left-wing group in London. The leaflet uses pictures, Page | 6

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testimonies and newspaper articles to reflect upon the uprisings and the events that preceded it from residents' point of view. The leaflet also highlights the British justice system heavy-handed sentencing of uprising participants; this includes the Magistrates' Courts recommending that the Home Office deport Patricia Giambi, an Italian nationalist who resided in England. Of all the EEC who participated in the uprisings, Giambi was the only one who received a recommendation for deportation in addition to a prison sentence.

A full version of the leaflet is also available online: <https://libcom.org/history/1981-the-brixton-riots>

3.5 The Papers of Jan Mckenley (Ref. MCKENLEY)

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

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

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

3.6 The Papers of Stella Dadzie (Ref. DADZIE)

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

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

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

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

3.7 The Papers of Martha Osamor (Ref. OSAMOR)

Martha Osamor was born in the Delta State, Nigeria. Osamor joined the Black Women's Movement and later founded the United Black Women's Action Group (UBWAG). Osamor began working at Tottenham Law Centre (from '77 till '97, now called Haringey Law Centre) which overlapped with her work with the UBWG. During this time, Martha was part of Broadwater Farm Youth Association Mothers' Project and helped to organise the Black community (**Ref. OSAMOR/1**)

3.8 The Papers of Ansel Wong (Ref. WONG)

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

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3.9 Images (Ref. PHOTOS)

Beyond the published images in the press coverage, visual records such as photography taken during the 1981 uprisings are unsurprisingly limited. BCA does hold a colour contact print with 36 images (Ref: **PHOTOS/57**) that visualises the collateral damage caused by the uprising. Notable images are of the damage to: Woolworths; Dr. M.A Khan's surgery; and burnt out store fronts. We also have a number of digital photographs depicting the uprisings at **Photos/175**.

3.10 HANSIB (Ref. HANSIB)

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

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

3.11 Dick Wilson Press Cuttings Collection (Ref. WILSON)

The collection features a binder of press cuttings relating to the regeneration of Brixton after the 1981 uprising. Most of the press cutting folders relate to race issues and immigration from 1970 onwards.

Uncatalogued Material

This material has not been catalogued and therefore requires advance notice to view.

3.12 Remembering '81 (AC2011/16)

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

3.13 Material from the Scarman Inquiry (AC2016/06)

This collection contains transcripts from the Scarman Inquiry, reports from the Metropolitan police and witness statements presented to Lord Scarman during the inquiry. (*Please note that due to the sensitive nature of the collection and current data protection legislation some of this material is closed to public access*.)

Further Reading

These books relate directly to the uprisings and are part of the BCA's library collection:

- Behind the Frontlines. **Ferdinand Dennis, 1988.**
- Blood on the Streets, **Bethnal Green & Stepney Trade Council, 1978.**
- Broadwater Farm Revisited. **Karia Press, 1989.**

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- Race and Racism in Britain. **John Solomos, 1989.**
- Racism, Resistance and Revolution (Bookmarks). **P. Alexander, 1987.**
- Scarman and After: Essays Reflecting on Scarman, the Riots and their Aftermath. **John Benyon, (Ed.) 1984.**
- Scarman Report: The Brixton Disorders (Penguin). **Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1981.**
- The Broadwater Farm Inquiry. **Lord Gifford, (ed.) 1986.**
- Uprising! (Pan). **M. Kettle & L. Hodges, 1983.**

These books relate to race and racism in Britain and are part of the BCA's collection:

- 'From resistance to rebellion: Asian and Afro-Caribbean struggles in Britain. **A. Sivanandan, 1976.**
- 'There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack'. **Paul Gilroy, 1987.**
- Because they're Black (Penguin). **D. Humprey & G. John, 1972**
- Deportations & Removals. **P. Gordon**
- Familiar Stranger: A Life Between Two Island. **Stuart Hall with Bill Schwarz, 2017.**
- It's the Same Old Story, **Steve Cohen, 1987**
- Police Racism and Union Collusion, **Convention of Black Teachers**
- Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order. **Stuart Hall, et al., 1978.**
- Rasta and Resistance: From Garvey to Walter Rodney. **Horace Campbell, 1987.**
- Staying Power. **Peter Fyrer, 1984.**
- Talking Blues, **P. Bishton & B. Homer, 1982**
- The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain. **Centre for Contemporary Studies, 1982.**
- The State of Black Britain (Hansib). **A. Haynes, 1983**
- Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multicultural Britain. **Mike Phillips and Trevor Phillips, 1998.**

The BCA does not have these selected readings, but they are essential regarding the uprisings:

****Content Warning: Please note there is the use of a racial slur in the title of the following reading****

- "A Nigger in the New England": 'SUS', the Brixton Riot, and Citizenship." **Nicole M. Jackson, 2015.**
- "1981-2011: From Social Democratic to Neoliberal Rioting". **Paul Gilroy, 2015.**
- Afterlife of Empire, **Jordonna Bailkin, 2012.**
- Black Handsworth: Race in 1980s Britain. **Kieran Connell, 2019.**
- Black Star: Britain's Asian Youth Movements. **Anandi Ramamurthy, 2013.**
- Brixton Rock. **Alex Wheatle, 1999.**
- Enoch Powell and The Making of Postcolonial Britain. **Camilla Schofield, 2013.**
- Liverpool '81: Remembering the Toxteth Riots. **Diane Frost and Richard Phillips (eds.), 2011.**
- Moses Ascending. **Sam Selvon, 1975.**
- Race and Riots in Thatcher's Britain, **Simon Peplow, 2019.**
- The Other Special Relationship: Race, Rights and Riots in the Britain and the United States. **Robin DG Kelley and Stephen Tuck (eds.), 2015.**
- Thinking Black: Britain, 1964-1985. **Rob Waters, 2019.**
- Uprising. **Alex Wheatle, 2017.**
- When We Touched the Sky: The Anti-Nazi League, 1977-1981. **Dave Renton, 2006.**

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Other Sources

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

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/1extra/blackhistory/years/1985>

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

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

Bishopsgate Institute : **Bernie Grant Archives**: <http://www.berniegrantarchive.org.uk/>

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

The George Padmore: <https://www.georgepadmoreinstitute.org/>

Linton Kwesi Johnson, "**Di Great Insohreckshan**":

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hpyyYcMe16I>

The Museum of London, "**From Brixton 1981 to BLM 2020: Reflections on Black Uprisings**":<https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/discover/brixton-1981-blm-2020-black-uprisings-londons-history>

The British Library, **The Brixton Tapes**: <https://www.bl.uk/#>

The Battle for Brixton: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YmUNjphPHJ4>

Black Past, **Brixton Riots (April 10-12, 1981)**: <https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/brixton-riots-april-10-12-1981/>

BBC2, **Windrush**: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MbNH4JBQiSY>

Menelik Shabazz's, "**Blood Ah Go Run: The Black People's Day of Action**":
https://vimeo.com/99845352?mc_cid=49639c2562&mc_eid=UNIQID

Insightful Black History, "**Black People's Day of Action**":

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qJnalZFQgBg&t=3s>

These selected films on policing and socio-economic issues young Black and Asian people faced are available on the British Film Institute's website:

Horace Ovés's, *Pressure* (1976); Franco Rosso's *Babylon* (1980); Menelik Shabazz's, *Burning An Illusion* (1981); Stephen Frears', *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985); Isaac Julien's, *Young Soul Rebels* (1991).

Recent films, series and podcasts

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Steve McQueen's, *Small Axe* (2020): https://www.amazon.com/Small-Axe-Alex-Wheatle-Trailer/dp/B08J4HVJ3H/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=small+axe&qid=1616782887&sr=8-1

SPRC in Conversation with Steve McQueen: <https://soundcloud.com/ucl-arts-social-science/sprc-in-conversation-with-steve-mcqueen>

Riots in Brixton, **Riots in Brixton**: <https://www.mixcloud.com/RiotsInBrixton/>