

1981 continued – Most white Britons had ignored attacks against blacks by fascist groups and the police. Historian Peter Fryer states that 31 blacks had been murdered (by stabbing, beating and immolation) by racists between 1976 and 1981, and scores of black churches, homes, and businesses had become targets for vandals. Police held firmly to their beliefs, denying that racism could ever be at the heart of white gang attacks against blacks, even to the point of arresting the victims while letting the attackers go free. Police (and white Britons, in general) persisted in first seeing blacks as immigrants, and then as illegal immigrants. Increasingly, blacks had to provide proof of citizenship to receive health and welfare service benefits, or to have access to housing, education, and employment. Future Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher explained away British racism as a necessary measure: *“People are really rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture.”* By invoking *“culture”* instead of *“colour,”* Thatcher attempted to mask or code British racism.

Thirteen blacks were burned to death in a fire that the black community believed was racially motivated in Deptford London in January, 1981. The black community centre and other black homes had already been burned. As always, while the black community believed the deaths resulted from racial motivations, the police denied this.

In April, 1981, over 15,000 blacks marched from Deptford to London to protest against widespread injustices against blacks. As what was perceived as the retaliatory answer to the Deptford march, police unleashed *“swamp 81”* against blacks in Brixton. In six days, 943 blacks were stopped and detained on the street, and 118 were arrested. On April 11, Brixton erupted in a rebellion, with violence spreading to Southall to Toxteth in Liverpool. Groups of black and white youth fought against police in Liverpool, burning 150 buildings, putting *“781 policemen out of action, and holding the area until police returned with CS gas.”* As Margaret Thatcher decried the *“appalling violence we have seen,”* the rioting spread throughout Birmingham, Leeds, Bristol, Nottingham, Coventry, and many other cities.