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THEORISING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RACIAL SEGREGATION AND RIOTING

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ABSTRACT

When social and economic pressures are placed on a society it would appear that something almost has to give. Certain factions of society, those that are mostly deeply affected by these social and economic pressures, react to how their everyday lives have been stretched to the limit by rioting. The most recent example of this is the summer riots of 2011.

This link between social and economic pressures and rioting is historic as in 2001 civil unrest erupted in England's northern mill towns. The aim of this paper is to critically explore, from a British context, the theory behind society rioting. Oldham, a northern mill town that experienced rioting in 2001, will be used as a case study example.

KEYWORDS: British Asian, Civil Disturbances; Oldham, Riots, Segregation

INTRODUCTION

Britain has been increasingly described as being a broken society. Leading politicians, academics, religious leaders and respected media commentators are of the opinion that the threads of the fabric that in the past bound Britain together have become so weakened that today's society lacks cohesion and stability. In the policy context central government over the last decade has introduced a number of policy schemes to tackle these problems. The key policy initiative at the moment is how the 'Big Society' will go about and mend 'Broken Britain.'

There are various elements that contribute to a broken society; one of these is the segregation of ethnic minorities. The population of ethnic minorities in Britain has rapidly increased over the last 60 years. The census count indicates that Britain's ethnic population has grown from 3 million in 1991 to 4.6 million in 2001. Issues surrounding ethnic minorities have duly been concerned with education, employment and housing.

Throughout the 1980s, 1990s and to the present day studies have shown that British Asians, particularly those of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origins, are two of the most deprived groups in Britain today. It has been suggested by researchers that British Asian communities are experiencing segregation (Thomas, 2011; Philliphs, 2010; Bolt, 2009; Poulsen and Johnston, 2008). In 2001, civil unrest erupted in England's northern mill towns. The inquiries concluded that white and British Asian communities were living parallel lives.

This was seen to be a failure within the communities and of social policy. Segregation was cited as a contributory factor. Moreover, in 2005, Trevor Phillips, the chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality, warned that Britain was sleepwalking into racial segregation, with white, black and British Asian ghettos dividing cities.

This paper argues that over a period of time social and economic consequences in a deprived area are the key reason why rioting occurs. The unrest within Oldham was cumulative and the subsequent riots, according to interview respondents, were almost inevitable. This paper is comprised of three parts.

Part one addresses the conceptualisation of rioting, from a British context, in terms of theories and past significant events. Part two discusses the methodology used to undertake this research. Part three presents an analysis of the findings of the research into the Oldham riots of 2001.

Conceptualising Rioting
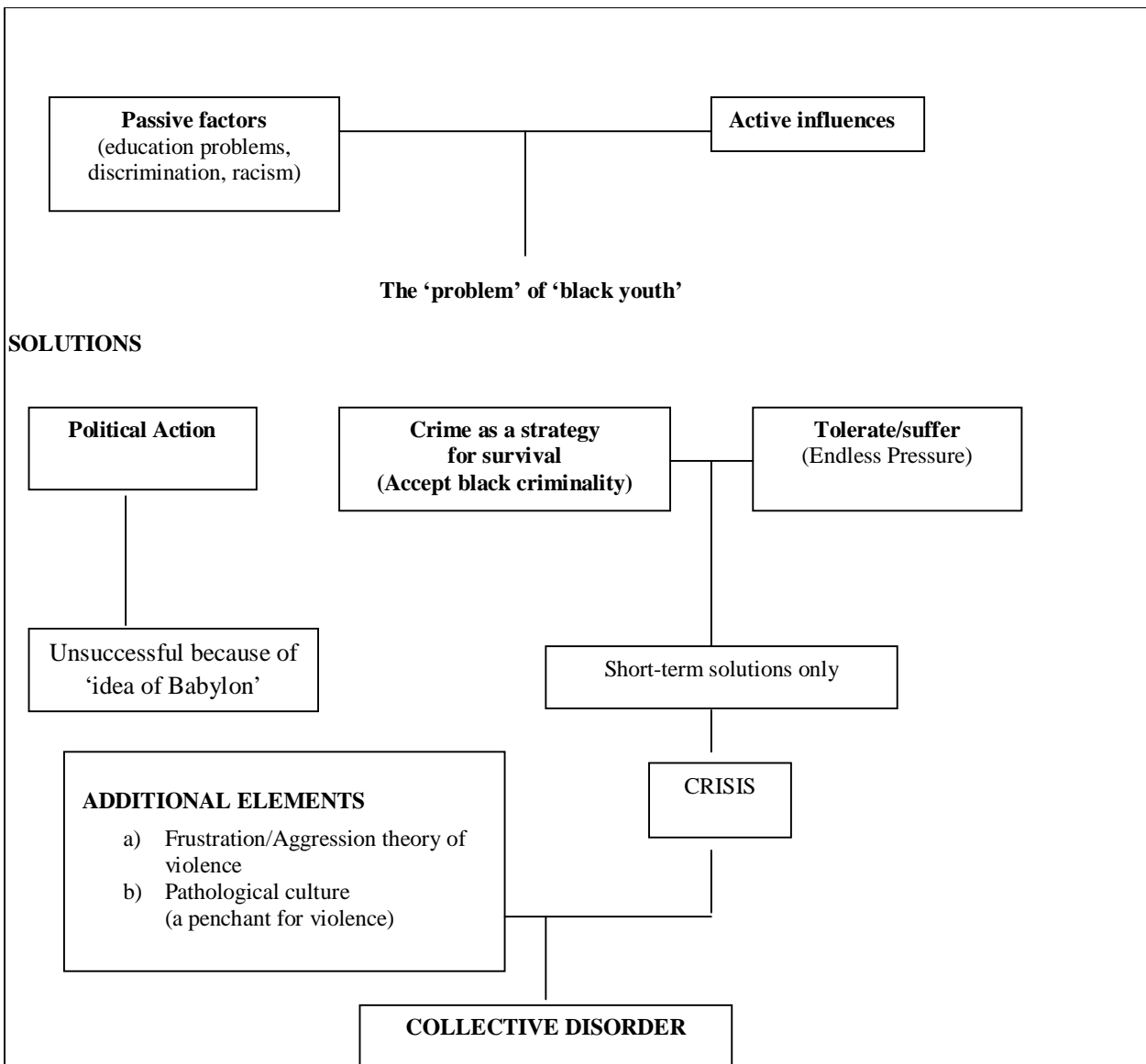
Figure 1: Flow Diagram to Explain the Issues Related to Rioting in the British Context

Source: Keith, 1987, p27

Figure 1 sets out the key issues involved in rioting according to Keith (1987). The most influential factors in his diagram are 'passive factors' and 'political action.' Passive factors are directly related to social deprivation. Over a period of time scholars have recognised that social deprivation can cause communities to become more divided (Kundnani, 2007; Amin, 2002; Ho, 2000). For example Kundnani (2001: 106) has argued that in the last half of the twentieth century places such as Bradford and Burnley were simply 'left on the scrap-heap' and thus became more socially divided. Political action plays a crucial role in the occurrence of riots. In this instance political action can be defined in two areas. Firstly, the political actions of central and local governments, for example, there were major criticisms on the way central government policies were being introduced in the 1970s and 1980s (Rex, 1988). In addition, local councils came under major criticism on the way the authorities were being run. Secondly, the rise of the 'far right' British National Party (BNP), which had been building up political support since the mid 1990s due to the increased intensity of segregation (Copsey, 2004).

Theoretical explanations of riots in Britain generated academic interest in the 1980s (Solomos, 1986; Gaffney, 1987; Keith, 1986; 1987; 1989; 1991). These riots took place in Southall in London (1979), Bristol (1980), Brixton in London (1981), Toxteth in Liverpool (1981), and Handsworth in Birmingham (1985). The riots in the 1980s were the biggest contributing factor to the schools of thought on why riots occur. Lea and Young (1982) suggest that there are two schools of thought, which they label in political terms as 'Conservative' and 'Liberal' theses. These two schools of thought are directly linked to political ideologies. The Conservative thesis is associated with the political ideas of the Conservative Party, whilst the Liberal thesis is focused on the political ideas of the Labour and Liberal Democratic Parties. At the time this ideology was being introduced it was strongly advocated by The Daily Telegraph correspondent Peregrine Worsthorne. Young (2007, p139) has noted that this ideology believed that the current race relation's stance was a failure due to the 'lack of assimilationist' policies. Fundamentally, the elapse in race relation policy had caused successive governments from both Conservative and Labour to allow ethnic minorities to become alien, thus causing ethnic minorities not be identified in the British culture.

The Conservative thesis believes tackling this problem is linked to discipline. As Lea and Young (1982: 5) point out this thesis states that 'we…fundamentally…have allowed into Britain a population whose culture does not possess the commitment and discipline to cope' when times are difficult. Historical events influence the basis of this argument. For example in the 1930s Britain was experiencing economic hardship yet there was no civil unrest with the white working class. But by the 1980s, due to the country's economic collapse, there was widespread rioting with different ethnic minority groups. Another aspect of the Conservative thesis is the ideas around central government intervention. The Conservative thesis believes too much state intervention, with respect to race relation policies, will only develop further segregation and thus bring about a lack of social discipline. The solution for this, the Conservatives assert, is firmer policing (Fyfe, 1995).

The Liberal thesis argues that social deprivation is a key factor that causes riots. This is blamed on the neo-Liberal policies that were introduced by Margaret Thatcher's government. For example, the Liberal explanation is that the 1980s riots were all about 'Thatcherism monetarism, rising unemployment and urban violence' (Lea and Young (1982, p6). The (then) Shadow Home Secretary Roy Hattersley argued that the explanation for the disorders in the 1980s was due to the rise in deprivation (Keith, 1993). The Liberal's solution is to have more policies on integration from central government. Incidentally in Lea and Young's (1982) work they suggest that both theses are correct in some way as they both accept deprivation as the backdrop of discontent but the Conservative thesis blames race as the problem to rioting whilst the Liberal thesis cites the police as the cause of rioting (Bowling, 1996).

Riots in the 1980s

When rioting is debated in an urban context, it has become fashionable to mention the riots that occurred in the 1980s (Clement, 2007; Bagguley and Hussain, 2006; Peter, 2006; Alexandra, 2004). There have been few comparisons made of the riots that occurred in the 1980s and the civil disturbances in 2001. Young (2007) has argued that the riots of the 1980s, in such places as Brixton in London and Toxteth in Liverpool, bore no relation to the riots that occurred in the northern mill towns in 2001. Initially the groups that were involved in the 1980s riots were mainly from the white and the Black African Caribbean population and at the time there was no rioting in places such as Bradford or Leicester, where high levels of Asian people lived. Moreover, the riots of the 1980s were about inclusion and fighting the social exclusion that was being experienced in many inner city areas (Parkinson *et al*, 1988; Hasan 2000). This social exclusion ranged from unemployment, political marginalisation and police racism. As Young (2007: 144) stated, 'They were not propelled by racism but against racism.' The events that took place in 2001 have a more sinister aspect because sections of the

community had become 'pitted against each other, racist stereotypes and ethnic prejudice have been mobilised.' This created separate and divided communities between British Asian and white people. Hence 'the uprisings of the 1980s were never remotely race riots, those of today teeter on the edge of this category' (Young, 2007: 144).

This argument by Young (2007) does have foundation because tracking back to the events that unfolded in the 1980s; it is evident that social deprivation and not racism was at the root of the unrest. There was some confusion on exactly what happened in particular geographical locations. As Peach (1986: 397) notes the interpretations of the urban riots of 1981 varied, to quote:

> "To some they were race riots, to others they were youth riots or anti-police. To some they were the revolt of the underclass and a precursor to the revolution. To some observers they were universal events, to others they were highly differentiated outbursts. To some they were the continuation of the American ghetto revolts of the 1960s; to others they were a response to a uniquely British situation. To some they were the mindless hooliganism of the unemployed, to others they were criminal vandals enjoying themselves."

A theory regarding the cause of the 1980s riots that can be rejected was that they were related to racism. Many academics have fundamentally agreed that the riots were simply to do with social and economic factors at the time. Kundnani (2001, p.105) has argued that the uprising that occurred in the 1980s in places such as Brixton and Tottenham in London, Handsworth in Birmingham and Toxteth in Liverpool were about their communities standing up against the police because in these areas communities were united black and white. The troubles stem from 'youths of communities falling apart from within…It was the violence of communities fragmented by colour lines, class lines and police lines. It was the violence of hopelessness.

It was the violence of the violated.' In conjunction with Kundnani's (2001) argument, Rex (1988) has completed an in-depth analysis of the 1980s urban riots. Rex (1988) felt that the events that had happened in Brixton in London, Toxteth in Liverpool and Moss Side in Manchester were not about race but about social and economic conditions and the treatment of the local residents by the police. As Rex (1988: 109) noted the Toxteth in Liverpool and Moss Side in Manchester riots were about the united black and white youth concerned with the desperate employment situation and they had little hesitation in expressing their feelings to the police by inflicting damage to property. This disorderly behaviour can be interpreted as a direct act of desperation by a generation that felt central government was not listening.

The civil disturbances that occurred in summer of 2001 were a bleak reminder of a society divided by cultural, social, political and economic terms. The riots occurred in classic northern mill towns in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham. Amin (2003: 461) noted that young British Asian men 'went on the rampage to protest against a long history of economic deprivation and hopelessness.'

This was inflamed by a cocktail of white racist threats and violence, police intrusion and incursion, public-sector neglect, and failed ethnic leadership. Throughout all these incidents cars and properties were damaged. Building on from the theoretical discussions on why rioting occurred in the 1980s, the following section will examine the reasons behind the civil disturbances, which occurred in Bradford and Burnley in 2001.

As it will be revealed, the relationship between rioting and segregation, with regard to the focus of the research, can be attributed to social and economic indicators. However, later incidents of rioting in 2001 in Northern Mill towns were compounded by the additional factor of cultural tensions.

Riots in 2001

The rioting in the northern mill towns occurred in three different periods. The Oldham riots occurred in late May 2001 and the Burnley riots happened in late June 2001 The Burnley riots were the second set of disturbances to happen in this period. The rioting that took place in Burnley occurred over three nights (Saturday 23rd; Sunday 24th and Monday 25th June 2001) involving white men and British Asians of predominantly Pakistani and Bangladeshi origins. The disorders took place in three geographical districts in the northern part of the town, Daneshouse, Stoneyholm and Duke Bar. All three districts were different from each other. For example, 60 percent of the Pakistani community lived in the central district of Daneshouse. The Stoneyholm area mainly consisted of the Bangladeshi community and made up approximately one third the size of the Pakistani counterpart. Duke Bar was the most densely populated area where a mixture of British Asians and white people lived together. In some parts of the town there were high levels of deprivation in terms of dilapidated and overcrowded housing, income deprivation, child poverty and poor health. For example, in the Daneshouse area, ethnic minorities made up two thirds of the population and was ranked the top 1 per cent of the most economically deprived wards in Britain. A clear statistical indication of this level of local poverty is that 85.16% of 0 to 16 year olds come from families claiming means-tested benefits (King and Waddington, 2004: 128).

One of the biggest problems Burnley has experienced in the past was high levels of crime in terms of drugs, violent crime and burglaries. The police in the area believe that all the crime problems in the town stem back to drug dealing. A submission by the Lancashire Constabulary in the Clarke Report (2001, appendix 10) said that the town 'has a high level of illegal drugs use which is at the root of much of the town's acquisitive crime and up to 80% of burglaries could be attributed to heroin dependency. The buying and selling of drugs brings with it a lower threshold for violence. Suppliers seek to protect lucrative markets using high levels of violence as a norm and resort to crude methods of debt collection.'

In the Clarke Report (2001), there was a chronological explanation of the cause of the rioting that took place. Before the disturbances started on 23rd June, there was an incident that occurred the night before on 22[nd,] whereby a stabbing took place outside a nightclub. This incident was seen not to be racially motivated because the altercation was between two young British Asian men. According to McGhee (2005, p.44), the disturbance started between young British Asian and white men outside a nightclub in the New Hall Street area of Burnley in the early hours of Saturday 23rd June. During this conflict cars and properties were damaged in the area. By 5am there was another reported incident where a group of white men attacked a male British Asian taxi driver whilst he was going home from work. As it was noted by Clarke (2001: 35), 'The taxi driver suffered serious injuries caused by hammer blows to his head and face.' Clarke (2001) concluded that the disturbances and violent conduct that followed could not have been spontaneous with so many people being involved at that time of the morning. A number of people informed the Task Force that they had heard during the day 'that something was going to happen' (Clarke, 2001: 35).

More violence erupted later on Saturday 23rd June 2001. A group of young British Asian men attacked the Duke of York, a public house, which is mainly visited by white people, because there were rumours going around in the local community that a gang of white men were planning to attack Asian homes and businesses in the Abel Street area (McGhee, 2005). The windows of the public house were smashed before the police could intervene and prevent more serious disorder. The last disturbance took place on Sunday 24th June when a group of white men were abusing passers-by and attacking business premises owned by Asian people. There were also disturbances occurred in other parts of the town, Burnley Wood, where Asian owned premises were deliberately targeted. Finally, the Duke of York public house was petrol bombed by young British Asian men (Clarke, 2001).

After the disturbances that occurred in Burnley an inquiry was undertaken. The review was headed by Lord Tony Clarke and consisted of a wide range of representatives from the statutory and voluntary sectors who understood the problems facing Burnley. Kalra (2002: 21) has noted that this report was the most informative but the review provided little analysis or comment. At the centre of the findings was the disillusionment of the young people who lived in the town and this disillusionment had led to violence and prejudice between certain ethnic groups. The local police were seen to be soft on drug dealers and were unable to deal with other common social problems (Kalra, 2002). Following this discussion on Burnley the next section moves on to examine the events that happened in Bradford in 2001.

As with Burnley and Oldham, Bradford is a typical northern mill town in Britain. Historically Bradford is a working class city and is one of the largest districts where British Asians live. Since the establishment of ethnic minorities living and working in Bradford there have been accusations that the area has become increasingly segregated between British Asians and whites (Cater and Jones, 1979; Byrne 1998; Johnston *et al* 2005; Carling 2008). Bradford had previously experienced rioting; young British Asians broke out on 11-12th June 1995 in the Manningham area of the town. There were small disturbances in Leeds (5th June 2001) and in Stoke-on-Trent (14th/15th July 2001) but these were not deemed as serious as those that happened in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham (Carling *et al* 2004). The disturbances that occurred in Bradford were over two days of the weekend of 7th/8th July 2001. There was a smaller incident that took place the evening of 9th July, which involved 200 white people, and in a separate incident, two takeaways owned by Asian families were attacked. Bagguley and Hussain (2003) have provided an exact picture by using eyewitness accounts on how the tensions flared up. In the Ouseley (2001) Independent Review report there was no explanation offered on what happened on 7th/8th July 2001.

According to Bagguley and Hussain (2003), the civil disturbances started off in the city centre of Bradford on Saturday 7th July after an anti-racist demonstration. The National Front proposed to march through the town but this march was banned by the Home Secretary. Police were controlling the anti-racist demonstration in Centenary Square area. The violence erupted after racist comments were made from a suspected National Front member who attacked a young British Asian man. Incidentally that day Bradford's annual multi-cultural festival was due to reach its finale but the threats of the National Front turning up caused the annual festival to be cancelled. The events that started off in Centenary Square escalated into other areas and fights broke out in the surrounding streets. The fighting between British Asian men and white racists spiralled out of control. Police intervention made things worse because the police pushed large groups of people away from the city centre and towards the Asian area of Manningham. McGhee (2005: 45) noted that the worst of the rioting occurred in Abbey Road, a main access point through Manningham. In total 500 police officers were in full riot gear and were bombarded with stones and petrol bombs. Again, echoing the events that unfolded in Burnley, cars and business premises were damaged. Bagguley and Hussain (2003) have suggested that areas were deliberately targeted by the people who were involved in the riots. This disturbance of 7th July went on for several hours and an extra 425 police officers from Greater Manchester, South Yorkshire, Merseyside, Humberside, Cleveland and Northumbria were drafted in. The rioting continued into the early hours of Sunday 8th July with an isolated incident in which white youths targeted an Asian business premises.

A review was set up to examine the community problems that Bradford faced. The review was headed by Lord Herman Ouseley, the former chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality. This review was commissioned and written before the Bradford civil disturbances and Kalra (2002: 24) has argued that the Ouseley (2001) Report was 'theoretical misguided.' The report identified residential segregation as a particular issue facing Bradford. As Ouseley (2001, pi) pointed out Bradford showed a 'very worrying drift towards self-segregation, the necessity of arresting and reversing this

process, and the role of education in tackling ignorance and bigotry.' In the case of both Bradford and Burnley, specific recommendations were introduced to tackle segregation.

METHODOLOGY

These findings are based on qualitative data drawn from primary research in Oldham including interviews and documentary data sources. A sample selection of interviewees was an essential part of the research in order to gain insights from those that experienced the rioting. This research has drawn on two types of qualitative methods. The first method analysed documentary data sources. Analysing central and local government reports on rioting in Oldham enabled the research findings to be presented in a chronological sequence. The second method used structured open-ended interviews. Two groups were targeted for this research. First, the residents: who live and work in Oldham, and second, the policy makers and politicians who contribute to the cultural, economic, social and political makeup of the area under investigation. For the interview schedules to be successful gatekeepers were established. Coupled with the gatekeeper approach, the snowballing technique was applied. This technique gave access to all strata of society within the selected case study. The data collected was analysed in a structured way. Firstly, the documentary data sources were interpreted. Secondly, interviews were undertaken, transcribed and analysed. Throughout this research, field notebooks have formed a crucial part of data collection and thus the entries documented in these field notebooks have helped to inform the research. After the qualitative data (documentary data and interviews) was collected, the analysis was compiled in three stages. Therefore, the qualitative data analysis has three main components which were: (1) data reduction; (2) data display and (3) drawing and verifying conclusions (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 12).

Oldham's 2001 Riots

"Oldham, England – Bricks and burned-out cars litter the streets of a British town following one of the country's worst outbreaks of racial violence in years." (CNN, 2001)

This quote is from the CNN website. The report was responding to the civil disturbances or 'race riots' that occurred in Oldham. For three days in May 2001 the eyes of the nation and parts of the world were focussed on the events which were unfolding in Oldham. At the time every newspaper bulletin was dominated by events in Oldham. As McGhee (2005) points out, the events that took place were the most serious in Britain since the 1980s when rioting took place in Brixton (London), Moss Side (Manchester), Toxteth (Liverpool) and Handsworth (Birmingham). Oldham was not the only place in 2001 to experience civil unrest. Other northern towns, such as Bradford and Burnley, experienced similar serious disorder. Bradford was the scene of the first disturbance on 15th April 2001. This was followed by similar events in Oldham from 26th – 29th May and later in Burnley from June 24th – 26th. There was another outbreak in Bradford from 7th – 10th July. Leeds also experienced disturbances on the 5th June and Stoke-on-Trent from 14th – 15th July, but these were not as serious as the disturbances and unrest that took place in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham. Denham (2001), who was the Home Office Minister at the time, reported that 395 people were arrested over the disorder in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham.

The Ritchie Report into the civil disturbances that took place in Oldham was damning and extremely critical of Oldham. An explanation as to why rioting took place was provided earlier in this paper. Literature analysed specifically examined the riots that happened in the 1980s in Bristol, Birmingham, Brixton, Liverpool and Southall and the more recent events in Bradford and Burnley. It is noted that there are two schools of thought on the reasons why riots take place: the Conservative thesis and the Liberal thesis. Other factors include social deprivation and governance. In addition, Keith

(1987) puts forward 'Passive Factors' and 'Political Action' to explain the occurrence of riots. As stated previously, 'Passive Factors' are directly related to social deprivation and 'Political Action' is influenced by governance.

Current debate suggests that social deprivation is the main contributory factor to civil disturbances. In this section it is argued that there is no single theoretical explanation on what actually happened in Oldham. Yet, aspects of various schools of thought, Conservative and Liberal theses can be applied in order to address the issues that brought about the riots and lead to an awareness of the needs of the whole community. The root causes in Oldham's case are linked back to Michael Keith's (1987) diagram (figure 1) of 'Passive Factors' and 'Political Action.'

Social deprivation was singled out by many to have been an explanation for the resentment that was to lead to the civil unrest in Oldham. One of the biggest difficulties with social deprivation, within the context of civil disturbances, is that events can quickly be converted into political argument. For example the Labour Party in the 1980s argued the principal cause of the riots in places such as Brixton and Liverpool were mainly linked to the 'changes in levels of deprivation' (Keith, 1993: 72) and blamed the Conservative Government of the time.

During the time of the 2001 disturbances a general election was underway and some politicians used Oldham's situation as a political football. Bartle *et al* (2002, p50) identified this by stating that Simon Hughes, the Liberal Democrat spokesperson for Home Affairs, made the accusation that the Conservative Party 'exacerbated the racial tension with their earlier campaign and speeches.' This accusation was fundamentally rejected by the (then) Home Secretary Jack Straw who said, 'I think it is impossible to argue, incredible to argue, that what happened in Oldham can't be laid at the door of William Hague' (Bartle *et al*, 2002: 50). The above comments demonstrate that the mainstream political parties would not accept that they had used Oldham's plight to their political advantage.

Oldham's Labour Member of Parliament, Michael Meacher, said social deprivation was the main cause of the disturbances. He was reported in a local newspaper to have qualified this by saying that 'There are other deep-seated problems in the background. Poverty and deprivation is rife. Of the 8.400 wards in the UK index of deprivation Oldham has four in the 100 most deprived. Too many young people, particularly Asians, are without work. The unemployment rate is 44 per cent compared to a white unemployed rate of 4 per cent and community integration is poor' (Meacher, 2001: 3). The mood conveyed by the interviewees in this research was one of general acceptance that in some areas of the town, there was and still is a sense of deprivation:

A Respondent Reflecting on the Past

"Oldham was a backward place in 1987. Manchester was way ahead of us. There was no welcoming factor in Oldham." (Interview, Policy Maker)

A Respondent's View on Present-Day Oldham

"There is much difference [in Oldham]. In some areas ethnic minority communities have no concerns in doing well. Whilst others suffer racism, [have no] jobs, poor education and the relationship with the police." (Interview, Policy Maker)

The above interview quotes demonstrate the historical factors of deprivation which were evidenced more than two decades ago (1987).

Furthermore, the comments on present day Oldham portray an image of a town that has a multiplicity of social and economic conditions. Both of these quotes provide no evidence of Oldham's recovery.

Events Leading Up to the Riots

One of the main causal factors of these disturbances was the political activities of the British National Party (BNP). The Party is a far right, white, nationalist political party that undertake political activities in Britain. Britain's main political parties, Conservative, Labour and the Liberal Democrats, portray the BNP as a racist party. This is fundamentally due to the BNP being totally against immigrants living in Britain and 'under its current policy, the party backs an immediate halt to all further non-white immigration and the voluntary resettlement of non-whites to their lands of ethnic origin' (BBC, 2001).

According to Copsey (2004) the millennium year was a significant year for the BNP because it saw the party grow in electoral fortunes. At no other time has it been seen that the BNP has built political momentum. The party had a small success in September 1993 when they took a local council seat in Millwall. But two years later they lost this council seat but it drew high publicity up and down the country.

Since the General Election of 1997 the party has been increasing its share of the vote. For example in 1997 the party fielded 57 candidates and won 35,833 votes. By the 2001 General Election the party had 33 candidates and won 47,225 votes (BBC, 2001). Copsey (2004: 125) has argued that the prominence of the BNP was mainly due to three factors: 'the asylum issue and the mainstream politicisation of 'race,' cultivating the appearance of moderation, and grassroots community politics in isolated pockets.' It is generally accepted that the success of the British National Party is mainly due to the poor, deprived, white neighbourhoods such as Millwall and Stoke. Nick Griffin (the British National Party leader) said in 2001 that:

"The BNP will most certainly make its next breakthrough in a run-down working class area. The people who have been abandoned by Labour and have never been represented by the Tories will, in their desperation, turn to us. We have already been warned that Labour's second term will be 'bloody.'" (Anti-Nazi League, 2001)

These words that the British National Party would have election success in a deprived area proved to be prophetic as in 2008 the BNP had 48 councillors in local government in England and had no elected members in the House of Commons, European Parliament and the Scottish/Welsh Assemblies. However, in the 2009 European and the Local Elections the party experienced its highest ever election success. Firstly, by winning two European Parliamentary seats in the North West, Yorkshire and the Humber and secondly, by winning a County Council seat in Burnley, Lancashire.

Clearly since 2001 the British National Party had sets its sights on targeting deprived areas in the North West such as Burnley and Oldham. In both constituencies within Oldham the BNP managed to poll over 6,000 votes. On the day after the General Election 2001 the national press said the voting in Oldham showed a great division between the white and Asian communities and that the BNP vote was a dangerous sign and the area could turn into a 'war zone' to quote 'You are now entering a war zone.

The 'o' was fashioned into an anarchist's bomb with a lit fuse' (Jenkins, 2001, p.4). In the 2002 local elections the BNP had gained 3 local council seats in Burnley, but failed to gain any seats in Oldham. By 2003 the British National Party in Burnley won 7 seats and was the official opposition party on the council. To present day the BNP have failed to gain any local council seats in Oldham.

The activities of the British National Party stirred up local tensions in Oldham. Coupled with this were the consistently negative comments by Chief Superintendent Eric Hewitt to the media. On a couple of occasions Chief

Superintendent Hewitt was seen to be inflaming the situation. One of these occasions was his viewpoint on the rising number of attacks by British Asian youths on white men in Oldham. Throughout the year of 2000 there were a number of articles in the local paper talking about the rise in local crime. In January 2000 the local paper reported that there was a rise in violent crime. In 1999 Oldham police made 10,000 arrests, a figure which was a record number for a small area such as Oldham. There was a suggestion that there were gangs moving into particular areas and creating 'no-go areas.' For example on June 9th 2000 in the Oldham Evening Chronicle there was an accusation that record levels of racial crime were taking place in areas such as Westwood and Werneth and as Chief Superintendent Hewitt said at the time, 'many of the problems are territorial in districts like Werneth and Westwood….In these areas, there are disproportionately high levels of reports of gangs of youths attacking white pedestrians, who are seen as trespassing into their territory' (Mannion, 2000, p3).

At the start of 2001 there were a series of incidents with race crime a reoccurring factor. Chief Superintendent Hewitt went on the Today Programme suggesting that there was a possibility that Oldham was heading for 'no-go areas' for whites and Asians. The most publicised was the incident of Walter Chamberlain, a white pensioner, who was 'attacked in Westwood by a young Asian man, assisted by two others' (Ritchie, 2001: 69).

There was a general acceptance by people who lived in Oldham that tensions were at boiling point. The people who were interviewed for this research confirm this. As two respondents recollect:

"I was there when the rioting took place. I was on the front line. I saw it all. The riots were bound to happen. For some time the area was boiling up from such a long time. In 2001 we were at boiling point." (Interview, Local Resident)

"The thing I can distinctly remember was the local and national news. I wasn't surprised the riots took place. Over a long period of time you could see things getting separate. Oldham has had a history of racism." (Interview, Local Resident)

The above interviewee comments show that residents expressed an inevitability regarding the riots and that tension had built up over a long period of time. Moreover, it is both insightful and damming that a resident states that 'Oldham has had a history of racism.'

In the interviews undertaken two crucial issues were identified as being the causal factors that brought Oldham to the point of unrest. These two issues were the political activities of the British National Party (BNP) and the attitude of the police. As one eyewitness who was at the epicentre of the troubles pointed out:

"Five weeks before the rioting took place the BNP and the National Front were in the centre of the town. Everyone was saying don't go into the town on Saturday because the racists are there demonstrating…I was shocked on how impotent the police were. They didn't seem to care. All they said was it was freedom of speech for the far right to come into the town centre. By the fifth week the Asian youth could not take it any longer." (Interview, Local Resident)

The above quote suggests that the British National Party had a presence in the town centre and were promoting their political ideologies. Fearful of conflict many residents avoided the area.

Police indifference at the effect that the BNP presence was having on British Asians did nothing to dispel the growing unrest. After many weeks of tension the Asian youth reacted to the taunting of the BNP resulting in the civil disturbances.

Table 1: The Oldham Evening Chronicle's version of the civil disturbances

Timeline of Key Moments in Weekend Mayhem		
Saturday	**Sunday**	**Monday**
8:30pm: Trouble flares in Roundthorn Road, with witnesses reporting a gang of white men attacking Asian homes and business. 9.10pm: A gang of Asian youths burst into the Live and Let Live, Glodwick Road, attacking customers. 11pm: The Live and Let Live is bombarded by bricks, bottles and a petrol bomb. Cars are torched. Street battles rage between rioters and the police. 11:15pm: Bricks crash through the windows at The Owd Kitts, Glodwick Road. A Petrol bomb fails to go off.	1am: Running battles between protesters and police escalate on the streets of Glodwick. 3am: After a series of attacks, a second petrol bomb lands in The Owd Kitts. 4.30am: Police manage to restore calm in Glodwick after seven hours of civil unrest. 4.45pm: Trouble erupts again as bricks and petrol bombs are thrown at the Jolly Carter, Lees Road, Oldham. 9.15pm: Youths said to have petrol bombs on Rochdale Road, Oldham. 11.30pm: Reports of fighting in Lees centre.	12.05am: Vehicle turned over and set alight at junction of Belmont and Henshaw Streets, Oldham. 1.40am: A barricade of furniture and tyres is on fire in Ward Street, Westwood. 2.15am: The Oldham Chronicle offices in Union Street are firebombed. 4am: The streets of Oldham appear quiet and the crowds have dispersed.

Source: Fletcher, 2001: 2

As documented in table 1 the most significant disturbances in Oldham were the riots of 2001, which took place over three days. The worst day of the rioting was Saturday 26th May. A crucial factor of the riots was a volatile cocktail of football hooligans and far right political activists. Copsey (2004) noted that the troubles sparked off with white youths, far right political activists (i.e. the National Front and the British National Party) and football hooligans hanging around in various pubs in Oldham. The people who were interviewed in this research all questioned the way the police controlled everything. As one interviewee said:

"Thinking back the control by the police was questionable. All the tensions were building up, building up. The police were heavy-handed." (Interview, Local Resident)

The above observation by a local resident suggests that police took little or no action in the weeks leading up to the riots where tension and resentment were clearly escalating, yet when violence almost inevitably did erupt the police were autocratic and as a result the British Asian community lost confidence in the police. According to Ritchie (2001: 73) at the time rioting broke out, Saturday 26th May, a number of people started to congregate in various pubs. It was their intention to provoke local Asians living in the area. By early evening 'hundreds of Asian youths took to the streets in Glodwick…and ran riot.' There were 'running battles between the police and Asian youths….Petrol bombs were hurled,

missiles were thrown and vehicles were vandalised and set alight' (Copsey, 2004:128). It was the view of many that the Asian youths wanted to protect their area from racists. As one interviewee pointed out:

> "Riots in our area were in Glodwick. It was obvious the whites wanted to target the area. A pregnant
> Asian woman's house was attacked. They attacked my house. Two white men kicked down my first
> door. My brother and I held on to the second door. They could not get through that one. One of my
> family members was sitting on a chair in the corner frightened to death. They also threw a brick at our
> window." (Interview, Local Resident)

The above quote demonstrates the extent of violence experienced by British Asians in the privacy of their own home. This provides a deep understanding on what went on and moreover the evidence here correlates with Ritchie's findings. There was further disorder on Sunday (27th) but on a lesser scale. As Ritchie (2001: 71) records Asian youths threw petrol bombs in the Westwood area of the town and attacked more pubs. But the most notable incident was the firebombing of the Oldham Evening Chronicle. On Monday (28th) there were further incidents but on a lesser scale than those experienced on Saturday (26th). The local press received a lot of criticism on the way it had, for a number of years, reported news. One interviewee vehemently made the point that:

> "The media have a lot of explaining to do. In some way they caused the riots. The press are culprits.
> They were putting stories out that the white communities were under attack. The riots were semi set up
> by the press." (Interview, Local Resident)

This quote attacking the press provides a further insight into how residents feel and where they lay the blame and responsibility for the riots. Furthermore, the respondent goes on to suggest that the press were instrumental in engineering the disturbances. All the policy makers were in agreement that the events that happened on 26th, 27th and 28th May 2001 were unlucky and the events that happened could have occurred anywhere that had a high proportion of ethnic minority groups and white population and the presence of the far right to quote:

> "It could have happened anywhere. [There is] Nothing unique here. The BNP in 2001 had a strong
> presence here. Thank God they never have had a councillor here." (Interview, Policy Maker)

The quote was proved to be accurate because riots occurred in Bradford and Burnley in similar circumstances, areas with a high proportion of ethnic minority groups. The qualitative evidence presented in this last section shows that there were a number of contributory factors that caused the rioting to occur in Oldham. The first and most notable factor was the media's reporting on the crime statistics in Oldham. The mood of negativity was furthered by the comments of Chief Superintendent Eric Hewitt. As a direct result the British National Party started to agitate an already delicate situation. In the evidence presented above there was a strong indication that conflict was inevitably going to happen and this was substantially linked to the high levels of deprivation in specific geographical areas of Oldham.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has offered theoretical explanations as to why why rioting occurs. What can be concluded from this is that there is no one theoretical school of thought (or 'Conservative' or 'Liberal' based theses) that can explain what actually happened in places of rioting, therefore, aspects of various schools of thought, conservative and liberal theses can be applied. This multi discipline approach enables the issues that brought about the riots to be addressed and leads to an awareness of the needs of the whole community. In many places the root causes where rioting has taken place since the 1980s may be linked back to Michael Keith's diagram of 'Passive' and 'Political' factors. As has been argued places such

as Bradford and Burnley have experienced social deprivation and political problems. When comparing the riots of the 1980s and those of 2001 it was discovered that social and economic indicators were the main cause of these riots. A significant difference however between these two time periods is that the 2001 riots had the further influential factor of cultural tensions.

Oldham as a town has a clear identity and the residents and policy makers of Oldham have strong viewpoints on what has happened in the past and how they perceive the current problems, with regard to segregation. It was discovered that overall the general perception of the term segregation in Oldham is that it is viewed in a negative light. This negativity is largely a result of media manipulation. Certain media organisations have intensified the emotive issues surrounding segregation. The reports by the media are associated with historical events. Public reporting of British Asian segregation has leaned towards two key historical events, which are the civil disturbances of 2001 and September 11th 2001. From this point forward there have been numerous incidents of the media's contribution to the nation's unease with regard to segregation in British society. Since the significant events of 2001 a number of smaller events further contributed to the feelings of negativity with regard to segregation.

It was established that the unrest within Oldham was cumulative and the subsequent riots, according to interview respondents, were almost inevitable. Furthermore, the interviewees expressed the view that the conduct of the media served to incite tensions in the town. The tensions in the town were a direct consequence of the presence of the British National Party over a period of time. The police are accused by participants in this research of a failure to initially control the situation before it got out of control and later, when the civil disturbances broke out, the police are accused of being heavy-handed.

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