

After The Riots Forum: From Blame to Positive Action

The riots

I've watched this city burn twice
in my lifetime
and the most notable thing
was the arrival of the
politicians in the
aftermath
proclaiming the wrongs of
the system
and demanding new
policies toward and for the
poor.

nothing was corrected last
time.
nothing will be corrected this
time.

the poor will remain poor.
the unemployed will remain
so.
the homeless will remain
homeless
and the politicians,
fat upon the land, will live
very well.-**Charles Bukowski***, 1992

***Charles Bukowski** (August 16, 1920 – March 9, 1994) was an American novelist and poet. He wrote the above regarding the Los Angeles riots

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“The absence of hopes and dreams amongst many we spoke to is a danger for society”

- 5 Days in August: Interim Report, page 15

1. Executive Summary

This report aims to provide an overview of the impact of the riots and present the causes & issues pertaining to them.

It also deals with the following:

- What may have motivated the people to take part in the riots.
- What motivated local people to come together to deal with the riots during and after the unrest.
- Outlines the importance of the link between values and social, economic, and political issues concerning the riots.
- Highlight critical issues concerning the riots and what we can all do, both individually and collectively, to tackle the issues.

2. Background, Causes and Government Response

The worst unrest in Britain in over a decade was witnessed over the summer. It occurred between August 6th and 10th 2011, starting in London and then spreading to other places across the country.

“Between 6 –10 August 2011, an estimated 13,000 to 15,000 people were actively involved in riots in England.

Over 5,000 crimes including:

- Five fatalities;
- 1,860 incidents of arson and criminal damage;
- 1,649 burglaries;
- 141 incidents of disorder;
- 366 incidents of violence against the person”- Riots Panel report, pg 33

On top of this:

- “90 percent of rioters were male
- £300 million estimated damage to property
- £43.5 million cost of cleanup

And possibly most importantly:

- 74 % of rioters under the age of 24”
- Riots Panel report, pg 32

a. Causes

The causes of the riots have been debated and discussed at length. What can be said is that though the causes may be numerous and overlapping, suggested causes include the following¹:

- Poor relations with police
- Social exclusion, social & moral deprivation
- Family breakdown
- Government cuts
 - The spending cuts of the coalition government in the United Kingdom has also been cited as a cause.
 - Scrapping of the Education Maintenance Allowance, removing of funding for
 - Cuts in public services
 - Youth clubs and the like closing.
- Unemployment

- David Lammy MP has said that Tottenham has the highest unemployment rate in London and the eighth highest in the United Kingdom
- Low economic growth and highest unemployment rate in decades
- Gang culture
- Criminal opportunism
- Moral decay at the top
- Failure of the penal system

b. Government Responses

Initially, the responses to the riots from the government were described as ‘knee jerk reactions’, un-thought out, and typical of a government that was ‘failing to provide leadership’ to the nation at a time of great crisis.

After the initial stuttering, Prime Minister, David Cameron tasked Louis Casey to head the government response to be Louise Casey. She will lead a new unit overseeing issues raised by the riots, including problem families, school truancy, anti-social behaviour and gangs

There has also been action to get local authorities involved with the process of moving forward after the riots. A summary of the ‘London Government Information Unit (LGIU) members briefing:

“The initial reaction to the riots was dominated by central government but it is clear that the longer term response has to be in partnership with local government. What happened was different in different places – there cannot be a top down and one size fits all response. There are no instant solutions. Councils, working with local partners, have been dealing for decades with the deep seated problems in their communities that the riots have highlighted”²

-Nick Clegg announced an **Independent “Communities & Victims panel”**- Not a public inquiry, tasked with reporting in 6 to 9 months.

The Home Affairs Select Committee has set up its own inquiry, & is already taking evidence. Main issues of interest will be:

- David Cameron has announced plans to invest 400 million pounds into helping families to end the “responsibility deficit” among 120,000 troubled families.

- As a reaction to the findings of the London School of Economics/Guardian ‘Reading the Riots’ Study, Home Secretary Theresa May, announced that there will be a national review on police stop and search powers.³

c. What they said

There have been many statements and reactions from across the breadth of British society since the riots, the following is a selection:

PM Cameron - Prime Minister David Cameron has focussed on slow motion moral collapse of our society

He has talked about "mending 'the broken society' and the need for cultural and moral change"⁴

Labour Leader Ed Miliband - "Is it culture or is it poverty and lack of opportunity? It is probably both"⁵

Miliband cautioned the Left against focusing on a lack of opportunity for young people when considering the underlying causes, and "shying away" from the importance of values.

Tony Blair - "criminal minority"⁶ (distancing himself from social welfare policies under New Labour)

Kenneth Clark - "broken penal system" blaming the riots on "a feral underclass, cut off from the mainstream in everything but its materialism"⁷

"Close to three quarters of those aged 18 or over charged with riot offences already had a prior conviction. That is the legacy of a broken penal system – one whose record in preventing reoffending has been straightforwardly dreadful"⁸

Lynne Owens- Metropolitan Police - The Met "needs to do things differently"⁹

The Daily Telegraph's editorial: "What we have experienced in London and elsewhere since Saturday night is a wholly new phenomenon: violent disorder whose sole intent is criminal... In such circumstances, there can be only one response if the law-abiding majority is to be protected: the thugs must be taught to respect the law of the land the hard way"¹⁰

The Guardian called on the public to back the police: "... Britain's 2011 riots have become a defining contest between disorder and order. In that contest, important caveats notwithstanding, there is only one right side to be on. The attacks, the destruction, the criminality and the reign of fear must be stopped. The rule of law in the cities of Britain must not only be defended against delinquent destruction. It must also be enforced"¹¹

In its 9 August leading article, **The Independent** said the police's handling of Mark Duggan's death "looks to have been poor", and that there is "context of mistrust of the police here." The paper added that "it is spurious to draw a connection between that disaffection [by the inner-city youth] and specific outbreaks of violence of the sort we have seen in recent days."¹²

Peter Hitchens, writing in the Daily Mail, disputed the idea that the events were riots on the basis that they were fundamentally apolitical. He further stated: "This is an equal-opportunity crime wave. The lawbreakers are not from any distinct ethnic group, and attempts to explain this behaviour on these ground are baseless and poisonous."¹³

Psychiatrist Theodore Dalrymple wrote an opinion piece for the **New York Daily News**, in which he blamed the "sense of entitlement" that he sees as being common among Britain's youth as a cause for the riots, and said that British youth are today among "the most unpleasant and violent in the world"¹⁴ as a result.

Christina Odone, writing in the Daily Telegraph links the riots to a lack of male role models and argues that "Like the overwhelming majority of youth offenders behind bars, these gang members have one thing in common: no father at home." This has been linked further with England's having the "worst record in family breakdown in Europe".¹⁵

Max Hastings has blamed a culture of welfare dependence¹⁶.

In a Newsnight discussion on 12 August, historian **David Starkey** blamed black gangster culture, saying that it had influenced youths of all races¹⁷

The general consensus from **civil society** organisations has been that the government cuts and shutting down of vital community services due to lack of funds, such as youth centres, libraries etc. meant that the lack of alternatives had led to social exclusion and a large number of unemployed, disenfranchised, angry youth, which is not a way to build a strong society.

Chavez Campbell predicted riots in London - six days before they actually occurred. He made his prediction after **Haringey council shut eight of its 13 youth clubs**, leaving young people with nothing to do.¹⁸

Furthermore, youth services are at '**breaking point**'¹⁹

"Rioting is due to the government's defunding of civil-society institutions in order to balance the nation's books"

Some thoughts and interviews with young people:²⁰

"The only thing I feel unsafe from is the police, especially those with dogs!"

"The Government don't give a shit. They only reason they give a shit now is because we are standing up!"

"It's not right to set fire to people's houses and businesses, but I don't care about Government buildings.... They deserve it"

“Every single person has their own motive to riot.”

“If anyone should be targeted by the rioters, it should be the banks, because that’s where all the government money is tied up...”

“I understand what happened in Tottenham but everywhere else is unjustified...”

One participant shared his view that the Police don’t understand what the younger generation needs. They need stability. They need parents. They need education... *“If you flop in your GCSEs you have nothing.”*

“This is evil. The devil is ruling right now... we need to get right with God”.

“The gap between rich and poor is widening.”

“It’s not only young people, adults are also involved, sending their kids out to loot...” But the media has been portraying it as if it is only kids and youth causing the problem”

The government is already doing so much for youth, and people don’t take advantage of these opportunities; *“I want to know... what are people rioting about?”*

“The law was obeying us.”²¹

Young man from Toxteth, Liverpool: *“I went home feeling like a soldier.”²²*

3. Key findings of various research papers and panels

To date, there have been some reports to analyse the causes of the riots. Below is a summary of 2 of these reports that have already published some findings, as well as a Joseph Rowntree Foundation report on their own extensive community work over the years.

a. Joseph Rowntree Foundation- The Riots: What are the lessons from JRF's work in communities?²³

Key Findings and Conclusions

-Community organisations are vital for transforming neighbourhoods

-Must engage with communities. Excluded neighbourhoods have acute tensions and problems, but are NOT broken

-Needs to be an effort to help these communities develop leadership

b. Riots Communities and Victims Panel- 5 days in August interim report findings²⁴

Set up by the office of deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg and have released an interim report, with key findings below.

Key findings and Conclusions

"The August riots would not have spread from the [London](#) to other areas in England had the [police](#) response been "more robust" in the capital, an independent report has found."²⁵

-Riots were triggered by the shooting of Mark Duggan. "We recommend that the IPCC and police urgently review their existing protocols and ensure that they are adhered to in the future. This will help ensure that deliberate false rumours and unintended inaccuracies do not go unchallenged in future"²⁶

"There was no one single motivating factor for the riots. We heard a range of motivations from the need for new trainers to a desire to attack society"²⁷

Final report and recommendations will be published in March 2012

c. Guardian and the LSE joint study: 'Reading the Riots'²⁸

Key Findings and Conclusions:

- "The 'Reading the Riots' team, which was primarily concerned with better understanding why the riots happened, decided it was important to interview large numbers of rioters".²⁹

Report covers a number of issues, including hostility to the police, issues of race and issues of gangs³⁰

Briefing Paper

Main cause was '*dissatisfaction with the police*'-- 85 per cent describing anger at stop and search and other policing practices as a motivation.

This dissatisfaction led to alienation and this in turn meant that many of the people who participated felt that they had nothing to lose.

A lot of respondents claimed 'opportunism' and a way to just get 'free stuff'.

Reaction to this report

"A London School of Economics governor...criticised the university's "naive" report into the summer riots.

"Conservative MP Margot James said she was "particularly disappointed" at a major piece of research which found anti-police feeling was a key factor behind the violence and looting which swept England."³¹

Daily Mail: "apologists for the mob"³².

4. **Positive Actions - Some Examples:**

Despite these consequences, and out of the mess of the riots, there have been a number of positive community stories that emerged. In a truly appalling week for this country, the one redeeming feature has been the readiness of people from all backgrounds to protect and clean up their neighbourhoods – evidence of abiding and much-needed community spirit³³

a. Love Manchester cleanup and campaign

In Manchester, a public campaign dubbed the “I love Manchester” campaign helped clean up the streets after the rioting.

“Jeremy said: “Both Emmeline and I have been absolutely blown away by Manchester people during the past week. They have shown resilience and a determination that only a great city like this can rouse, and we are intensely proud to have been part of the cleanup effort.”³⁴

b. Clapham

-In Clapham Junction, scene of some of the worst rioting damage, residents gathered to help in the clean up.

“In Clapham Junction, **dozens of volunteers carrying brooms** turned out to assist with clean-up efforts. Tens of thousands of users of social networking sites coordinated clean-up operations of their local shopping areas and streets.”³⁵

This example of positive community action was replicated throughout riot hit areas across the country, and produced the now viral ‘brooms in the air’ picture.

c. Nottingham

Maxine Cockett (Holding Hands and Bringing People Together projects):

“The Mayor asked the gathering to join hands in a big circle, then have a period of silence, during which everyone was asked to think how they could reach out to other people – especially those who may come from a different background or generation - thus making St Ann’s a better place to live in unity”³⁶

d. Forgiveness in Birmingham

“The riots that ripped through several cities in England resulted in the deaths of three young South Asian Muslim men in Birmingham on Wednesday. However, the local Muslim community decided to reply with prayer instead of more violence.

The three victims had been standing with other local residents in an effort to protect their property from looters when a car ploughed through the line of defence.

An estimated 300 Muslim and Sikh men gathered near the site of the killings. Some of the men were seeking revenge. As the crowd considered their options, Tariq Jahan, whose son was among those dead, appealed to the crowd not to avenge the crime³⁷

Tariq Jahan – “I don’t see a broken society. I see a minority of people who took advantage of the country when the country was in crisis. They didn’t think of the country and only thought about themselves, their own personal greed and satisfaction.”³⁸

Conservative MEP Daniel Hannan said of him: “Uncomplaining, in control of his emotions, Tariq Jahan reminds us of what it means to be British.”³⁹

“Jahan’s moving call for peace had an impact throughout the country, and was mentioned by several of the rioters we interviewed.

In Birmingham a 22-year-old said that when he heard Jahan's speech, "I did feel a bit scummish, to be fair, because like I was involved. And if I do ever see him I think I am going to call him over, like, say 'I did riot,' and when I [saw his] interview I did stop like, because that did hit me quite hard.”⁴⁰

Responding immediately to the riots, the Birmingham Faith Leaders group immediately mobilised and played a key role in uniting communities for positive action.

e. Collective Community Action

There were many examples of communities coming together to protect their businesses properties, places of worship and each other^{41,42}. Some of the well publicised examples include:

- the Turkish restaurant owners in Dalston running off rioters.
- Sikhs protecting temples in Southall
- Muslims protecting local businesses and the mosque in Whitechapel/Brick Lane
- multiple reports of Sikhs protecting Muslim places of worship and vice versa.

These encouraging stories were repeated across riot hit areas, with communities really coming together, and providing a potential model for collective and collaborative action moving forward in communities.

5. What needs to be done?

Will riots happen again? The answer is quite possibly 'yes' - 5 Days in August: Interim Report, page 7

What action needs to occur to stop this from occurring again? This will be one of the key issues, which will be discussed at the After the Riots: From Blame to Positive Action forum, which will take place on 1 February 2012.

a. What makes this forum different?

The one-day forum, to be held on the 1st of February, is being organised by Initiatives of Change UK, together with The Cordoba Foundation, the Civil Society Forum and Burning2Learn. The forum aims to understand different perspectives on the underlying civic, moral, political and social challenges and explore what we can do individually and collectively in response.

The keynote address will be given by Dr Peter Selby, President of the National Council for Independent Monitoring Boards. He was previously Bishop of Worcester, Bishop to HM Prisons and a Church Commissioner. His book, *Grace and Mortgage*, opens people's eyes to the corrosive effect of debt on the poor and the environment.

So far, most reports and responses have shied away from dealing with the moral and values dimensions of the crisis.

Some point specifically regarding this forum:

- a. It will be a national forum attended by representatives of many parts of the UK and many sectors of society.
- b. Many of the individuals who are attending the forum have hands on experience in actually dealing with and tackling the critical issues, such as family life, youth offenders, and community cohesion.
- c. The Forum aims to focus on the values dimension bringing it into the discourse, and identifying its links to socio-political and economic factors affecting Britain.
- d. The forum will avoid any points scoring.
- e. The Forum will be short on long speeches and long on short interventions and sharing of positive experiences.
- f. It will provide an opportunity and platform to share experiences, particularly of positive action.
- g. It will provide a space for dialogue and discussion and offer an opportunity for attendees to network and discuss possible individual and collaborative action.

6. Values and Morals dimension

Hopes and dreams

“On our visits, we asked what people needed to succeed in life. We were struck by a common theme, best described in one young man’s words: ‘people need hopes and dreams’. This sense of injustice, powerlessness and lack of opportunity weighed heavily in their minds. They did not feel they had a stake in society.

Young people across the country are worried about the prospect of long-term unemployment. While the vast majority of people we spoke to were clear that not having a job was not an excuse to do wrong: ‘How does not having GCSEs give you the right to riot?’, people felt that this was a significant national issue”- 5 Days in August: Interim Report, page 101

The riots panel interim report shows us that many people who took part in the riots were stricken by poverty and also felt that they had little to lose in rioting and looting. The fact that many of these people’s actions were not constrained by moral inclination leads us to believe that the values and moral issues in contemporary British society need to be explored further, and this specifically gives us the remit to take the discussion further at our forum.

Many who blame poverty fail to note that some of the poorest communities in the north suffered no rioting even though the grievances would probably be the same. This may well be down to the fact that the sense of community is far greater in the north than the south. Community solidarity adds great incentives to not cause criminal damage.

In their Christmas day sermons, Church leaders called on Britons to learn lessons from the upheaval and uncertainty of the past year, speaking of "bestly ways" and "broken bonds" and taking aim at bankers and rioters alike.⁴³

The archbishop of Canterbury asked worshippers to develop an understanding of "mutual obligation" following a turbulent 2011.

At Canterbury Cathedral, Dr Rowan Williams said: "The most pressing question we now face, we might well say, is who and where we are as a society. Bonds have been broken, trust abused and lost.

"Whether it is an urban rioter mindlessly burning down a small shop that serves his community, or a speculator turning his back on the question of who bears the ultimate cost for his acquisitive adventures in the virtual reality of today's financial world, the picture is of atoms spinning apart in the dark."

The archbishop of York, Dr John Sentamu, encouraged his congregation to "treat each other with genuine respect of a fellow human being" and to think about "stopping our lives being a constant stream of fast-paced activity which accomplishes little".

Delivering his sermon from the pulpit at York Minster, Bishop Sentamu suggested people "turn away from beastly ways" such as deceit, extortion, greed, inequality and selfishness.

He condemned "perverting justice for a bribe; a right to consume with no regard for social action; unfairness of economic outcome; obsession with wealth and maximising shareholder value; a winner-takes-all attitude that has taken the place of a belief in fairness and personal integrity" ⁴⁴

Rabbi Jonathan Sachs⁴⁵

Some extracts:

"The immediate aftermath of the riots is no time for a spate of finger wagging and the indiscriminate scattering of blame. We all remember Macauley's line that "We know no spectacle so ridiculous as the British public in one of its periodic fits of morality."

But what we have witnessed is a real, deep-seated and frightening failure of morality. These were not rebels with or without a cause. They were mostly bored teenagers, setting fire to cars for fun and looting shops for clothes, shoes, electronic gadgets and flat screen televisions. If that is not an indictment of the consumer society, what is?

Where were the parents while their eleven-year-old children were out creating havoc? Where was the internalised self restraint that says, There are certain things you just don't do, because if you do, we will all suffer? Where was the capacity to defer the gratification of instinct which, according to Freud, is the basis of all civilisation? Where, to put it bluntly, was the sense of right and wrong?

Honesty compels the further question: Who has been setting a counter-example? Bankers? Parliamentarians? The press? The wave after wave of scandal that have washed over Britain have left many people wondering who, today, is genuinely willing to sacrifice an opportunity for self-interest because it would be dishonourable or discreditable to do otherwise. For some time our culture has been sending out a tacit message that morality is passé, conscience is for wimps, and the sole command is, "Thou shall not be found out."

There are moments in the history of any civilisation when it catches a glimpse of the state of its soul. We have just seen ours, and it has not been a pleasant sight. Yes, the rioters were a minority. The majority wanted nothing to do with them. A significant counter-minority intervened to help victims or came out the next day to clear up the mess. Britain remains for the most part a thoroughly decent society. But there can be no doubt that something in our moral ecology has gone astray. And we are all implicated, because we are all responsible,

individually and collectively, for the moral state of society. That is one duty that cannot be delegated away to the government, the police or social services.

Can a society be re-moralised? Is there a historic precedent? There is. In the 1820s rates of crime were high in Britain and the United States.

Beginning in the 1820s, in both countries, there was a massive shift in public opinion that gave rise to a series of movements of social reform, among them the abolition of slavery, temperance movements, the creation of urban police forces, the drive to eliminate corporal and capital punishment, the creation of Sunday schools and YMCA buildings. What they had in common, as Harvard criminologist James Q. Wilson has documented, was the desire to teach principles of right conduct, moral character, will power and self restraint. It worked. Within a single generation, crime rates came down and social order was restored. What was achieved was nothing less than the re-moralisation of society.

It can and must be done again. We need a new culture of responsibility. Societies can be re-moralised. The 1820s showed us how. This week's riots showed us why. We need to challenge young people to exercise moral leadership, and the only way of doing so is by starting with ourselves.

Peter Osborne, writing in the Daily Telegraph, said that the moral decay at the top is as bad as it is at the bottom⁴⁶:

Some extracts:

“David Cameron, Ed Miliband and the entire British political class came together yesterday to denounce the rioters. They were of course right to say that the actions of these looters, arsonists and muggers were abhorrent and criminal, and that the police should be given more support.

But there was also something very phony and hypocritical about all the shock and outrage expressed in parliament. MPs spoke about the week's dreadful events as if they were nothing to do with them.

I cannot accept that this is the case. Indeed, I believe that the criminality in our streets cannot be dissociated from the moral disintegration in the highest ranks of modern British society.

It is not just the feral youth of Tottenham who have forgotten they have duties as well as rights. So have the feral rich of Chelsea and Kensington.

Yet we celebrate people who live empty lives like this. A few weeks ago, I noticed an item in a newspaper saying that the business tycoon Sir Richard Branson was thinking of moving his

headquarters to Switzerland. This move was represented as a potential blow to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, because it meant less tax revenue.

The same is true of the brilliant retailer Sir Philip Green. Sir Philip's businesses could never survive but for Britain's famous social and political stability, our transport system to shift his goods and our schools to educate his workers.

Yet Sir Philip, who a few years ago sent an extraordinary £1 billion dividend offshore, seems to have little intention of paying for much of this. Why does nobody get angry or hold him culpable? I know that he employs expensive tax lawyers and that everything he does is legal, but he surely faces ethical and moral questions just as much as does a young thug who breaks into one of Sir Philip's shops and steals from it?

Our politicians – standing sanctimoniously on their hind legs in the Commons yesterday – are just as bad. They have shown themselves prepared to ignore common decency and, in some cases, to break the law. David Cameron is happy to have some of the worst offenders in his Cabinet. Take the example of Francis Maude, who is charged with tackling public sector waste – which trade unions say is a euphemism for waging war on low-paid workers. Yet Mr Maude made tens of thousands of pounds by breaching the spirit, though not the law, surrounding MPs' allowances.

A great deal has been made over the past few days of the greed of the rioters for consumer goods, not least by Rotherham MP Denis MacShane who accurately remarked, "What the looters wanted was for a few minutes to enter the world of Sloane Street consumption." This from a man who notoriously claimed £5,900 for eight laptops. Of course, as an MP he obtained these laptops legally through his expenses.

Yesterday, the veteran Labour MP Gerald Kaufman asked the Prime Minister to consider how these rioters can be "reclaimed" by society. Yes, this is indeed the same Gerald Kaufman who submitted a claim for three months' expenses totalling £14,301.60, which included £8,865 for a Bang & Olufsen television.

The Prime Minister showed no sign that he understood that something stank about yesterday's Commons debate. He spoke of morality, but only as something which applies to the very poor: "We will restore a stronger sense of morality and responsibility – in every town, in every street and in every estate." He appeared not to grasp that this should apply to the rich and powerful as well.

These double standards from Downing Street are symptomatic of widespread double standards at the very top of our society. It should be stressed that most people (including, I know, Telegraph readers) continue to believe in honesty, decency, hard work, and putting back into society at least as much as they take out.

But there are those who do not. Certainly, the so-called feral youth seem oblivious to decency and morality. But so are the venal rich and powerful – too many of our bankers, footballers, wealthy businessmen and politicians.

Something has gone horribly wrong in Britain. If we are ever to confront the problems which have been exposed in the past week, it is essential to bear in mind that they do not only exist in inner-city housing estates.

The culture of greed and impunity we are witnessing on our TV screens stretches right up into corporate boardrooms and the Cabinet. It embraces the police and large parts of our media. It is not just its damaged youth, but Britain itself that needs a moral reformation.”

Of course, it is important to note here that journalists are not immune to double moral standards, as the Leveson inquiry has revealed.

a. Mohammad Ashraf Haziq

This Malaysian student who had been in Britain for a very short time, was beaten up, then ‘helped up’ by apparent well wishers, before they robbed him. This event for many was a big moral turning point and also of reflection.

“...for millions, the moral lesson of the riots came courtesy of YouTube and the clip of youths "helping" and then robbing the Malaysian student Mohammed Ashraf Haziq”⁴⁷

b. Moral decay and consumerism

(From a city banker): "We conclude that the rioting reflects a deeply flawed economic and social ethos... recklessly borrowed consumption, the breakdown both of top-end accountability and of trust in institutions, and severe failings by governments over more than two decades."⁴⁸

7. Themes to Explore and Discuss

The forum will explore and discuss the following themes and seek ways to take individual and collective action.

a. How do we develop values and address the culture of consumerism? The role of values in regeneration.

Is there been a society wide breakdown in morals and values? Is Britain Broken and do we have a moral decay in our society?

Do we need to “re-moralise” society, as Rabbi Jonathan Sacks has said?

What is the role of faith communities? Have they been effective in dealing with social exclusion? What are their responsibilities?

Rioters: depraved or deprived?

b. What can be done to enable people at the margins to be more included in community and society?

What can we all do avert other riots from taking place?

What can we do to develop better relationships between communities and stakeholders, like the police?

What partnerships can be built and how can collaborative action lead to stronger communities.

Have the budget cuts seriously disrupted community projects and services?

How can we build sustainable communities?

c. How do we develop collective responsibility?

Who is responsible for law and order in our nation? Who is responsible for the behaviour of our young people?

Can we blame the state when parents have been allowed to abdicate responsibility for the behaviour of their children?

How do we develop a sense of community belonging?

Everyone thinks the government should do everything. Has personal responsibility and community responsibility have been replaced by state responsibility?

What can we identify holistic approaches that deal with the underlying factors of these riots, and not just superficial short-term solutions?

Should we all take responsibility for the riots, whether directly or indirectly? We have not taught all our young people that an entitlement culture is morally wrong. Do we need to collectively grow up and take responsibility?

Throughout Britain, there are many positive and effective community projects, dealing with and solving critical urban issues. How can they work together? How can we better support them?

d. Parenting and family-life:

Some educationists point towards "hard questions" and "uncomfortable truths" for parents and families, after youngsters were caught up in an unprecedented night of violence and looting.

Brian Lightman, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, talks about a toxic mixture of dysfunctional parenting and a consumer and celebrity culture which tells youngsters they should have whatever they want.⁴⁹

He warns that too often schools are faced with pupils who have never had any boundaries in their home lives - where there has never been a sense of right and wrong.

"Parents are not willing to say 'no'. That short, simple word is an important part of any child's upbringing."

"It's desperately important that children have a sense of right and wrong. But we often come across children who have never been told that something is wrong."

What can be done improve parenting and bring back values into family life? Lack of male role models a large problem among youth?

e. Education, aspiration and motivation - how can we find the nexus between the three?

Emma Jones, a former teacher and resident of Tottenham, North London, asks: "It took two hours, perhaps four, for the first people to start saying it, blaming "a lack of discipline in schools these days" for the recent riots in London and other cities. Predictable oversimplification."⁵⁰

In classrooms, teachers bear the brunt of social problems. Day in day out, they work with poor families, building relationships with them. Most families aspire for better, but many also lead very challenging lives.

Many young people in such situations grow up with an inherent anger, hatred, resentment and the feeling that the world is against them, coupled with a deep lack of self-esteem. Even nursery-aged children can show the early signs.

If a person suffers from such lack of self respect, why would they have any respect for authority or their community? What can be done to bring back self-respect in the home and classrooms?

We have created urban ghettos and the schools within them. How can we develop truly integrated schools and communities, so people can begin to understand each other?

Some inner-city schools have high educational standards. How can we spread the good practice?

f. Reshaping the criminal justice system.

Criminologist Jon Burnett expressed concern about the long-term impact on policing and criminal justice of the government's response to the riots and its use of 'underclass' theories.⁵¹

“As an increasing number of bodies express concerns about the government's punitive response.

Already, the roots of this restructuring are taking hold, partly through knee-jerk responses to the riots; partly through more carefully thought out interventions which were already mooted prior to this month's violence.

- Witness, for example, the advice for magistrates to disregard existing sentencing guidelines when processing offenders;
- the drive to 'name and shame' rioters despite this being discouraged in existing case law;
- the proposals to evict families in social housing whose children have been involved in the disorder;
- to use anti-social behaviour orders (particularly in Manchester) to prevent rioters from re-entering certain areas;
- to take away offenders' property; to clear the streets and impose collective curfews on young people;
- to withdraw benefits from rioters who avoid custodial sentences; to use water cannons; to free the criminal justice system from the restraints of human rights legislation.”

Are these changes and just and fair?

Have cuts in legal aid affected the quality of justice?

g. Using social media for positive action.

Did the use of social media exacerbate the problem?

Social media such as Blackberry messenger, Facebook and twitter were used widely throughout the riots, by rioters, journalists, police and people just following developments. Some have said that social media was a lead factor in helping to spread the riots and also to increase panic and unfounded rumour, while others have commented on the positive effect social media had in regard to helping to gather and coordinate cleanup activities.

Peter Bright, writes on the two sides of social networking⁵²:

Some extracts:

“Social networking sites have become standard tools in the arsenal of those organizing all kinds of mass action. They offer instant communications and easy ways for groups of like-minded individuals to come together.

Systems such as Twitter's hashtags make it easy for ad hoc networks to form around a common interest, act together, and then disband.

In London, police officers were quick to blame Twitter and social networking sites for the organized criminality that has struck across the capital⁵³. The move was almost reflexive; Twitter's role in such events is now well-known and expected. Twitter was certainly heavily used during the riots, setting a record for UK visits to the site.

However, although rioters *did* tweet, and continue to tweet, about their acts of theft and vandalism, the blame has now shifted from Twitter to BlackBerry Messenger (BBM). Rioters appear to have been setting their BBM statuses to tell their friends that they were out looting, and messaging each other to decide the best places to attack. BBM might at first seem a strange choice; RIM's core audience for the BlackBerry is enterprise users, and the rioters are primarily (though not exclusively) disaffected teenagers and young adults. But BlackBerry Messenger has a very compelling feature: it's cheap.

Though RIM would insist that its BlackBerrys are smartphones, many of them sell at feature phone prices, putting them within reach of many people who can't afford "proper" smartphones. BlackBerrys are also readily available on pay-as-you-go plans, further broadening their availability. BBM can also be cheap to use, with unlimited BlackBerry mail and Messenger.

BlackBerry Messenger has another desirable feature: it's a closed system. Unlike Twitter, where tweets are public broadcasts, or Facebook, where most messages are shared fairly indiscriminately, BBM is private. Most BBM messages are point-to-point, seen only by the sender and the receiver. Group messages are also possible; these too are only visible to those

sending or receiving them. The entire system is also encrypted, offering less scope for surveillance by the police.

For its part, RIM says that in all markets in which its products are available it will "cooperate with local telecommunications operators, law enforcement, and regulatory officials," and that it will assist the authorities "in any way [it] can".

Under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA)⁵⁴, the UK police can demand the phone records, location data, and Internet records about specific individuals. This doesn't allow the police to make blanket requests—such as information about everyone in a particular area at a particular time, or everyone messaging the word "riot"—but it does mean that such evidence can be acquired about individuals identified in other ways (CCTV, for example).

RIM insists that it has no way of monitoring or intercepting e-mails sent through its enterprise mail system, but it has provided governments in some countries the ability to eavesdrop on the more consumer-focused BBM. The governments of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and India have all been given surveillance access to BBM.

Social networks are just a tool. Like any tool, some will use them for ill ends, but many others will put them to positive uses."

On **Facebook**, over 900,000 people joined a group entitled 'Supporting the Met Police against the London rioters'. Social media sites Twitter and Facebook were also used for reporting information on the riots and to co-ordinate a voluntary citizens' operation to clear up riot-hit areas.

How can we use social networking sites for positive action to mobilise people to generate positive action?

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