

You are looking at 1-6 of 6 items for: **keywords : port riots**

Introduction

in *Black 1919: Riots, Racism and Resistance in Imperial Britain*

Published in print: 2009 Published Online: June 2013
Publisher: Liverpool University Press
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Item type: chapter

This chapter investigates various themes that lay behind the port riots. These are the broader economic and social context of the riots, contested understandings of national identity and 'Britishness', the vagaries of life in Britain's seaports, theories of crowd behaviour, and an evaluation of the effects of racist thought within sections of British society. General demonstrations of post-war resentment across many sections of British society were in the large seaports specifically focused on job and housing shortages. The cultural dimension of shared identities and common experiences among black people in the 'black Atlantic' world contributed to the debate on identity and the inter-connectedness of colonial and metropolitan experience. The riots in 1919 erupted in poverty-stricken port communities and were frequently presented by poorly unionised workers. Finally, an overview of the chapters included in the book is given.

Aftermath: global reverberations, self-help, alien status and further riots

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This chapter addresses the short- and longer-term effects of the port riots, including the situation faced by black British workers and their families in the inter-war period and the government response to continued high unemployment in the ports, which saw many black Britons reclassified as 'aliens' in order to limit their job opportunities. The immediate aftermath of the riots showed many workers from the settlements continue to struggle to find employment. It is shown that

the port riots were globally important in Britain. The central government agencies mostly dismissed the complexity of unemployed black and Arab sailors around the ports in Britain. By the end of the inter-war period, there had been an improvement in the employment situation of black and Arab sailors. In general, the riots of 1919 did not bring an end to the violence targeted at black and Arab sailors around Britain's ports.

Police and court responses

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This chapter investigates the police procedures during the riots in their ports and addresses the court cases that followed. People arrested by the police following the port riots appeared before the courts in a series of trials in the weeks and occasionally months after. Most of white people caught during the rioting were convicted. It is shown that legal discrimination was introduced in some of the London prosecutions; only in the aftermath of the August rioting at Canning Town did it seem to be absent. Frequently, black and Arab people in the rioting were accused with police assault and weapons offences. The cases of self-defence are also reported. In general, Britain's black and Arab populations were victimised by white crowds, targeted by police in arrest procedure and often given harsher sentences by the courts than white people convicted of similar offences.

Repatriation to the colonies: the government solution to the riots and some Caribbean consequences

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This chapter investigates the British government responses to the port riots, specifically the scheme of paid 'repatriation', and describes the government discussions on whether to allow British-born dependants to accompany black male colonial workers. The repercussions of the repatriation of up to 2,000 black workers, particularly to Britain's Caribbean colonies, are then explored. It is shown that the different levels of 'Britishness' persisted when it came to repatriation arrangements, with black and Arab colonial Britons banished far behind white British colonials. In addition to the repatriation drive, the

government employed colonial resettlement schemes to promote the emigration of black people from Britain, which, however, left the problem of long-term unemployment for black and Arab sailors unresolved. At least in the short term, repatriation seemed to be a successful policy in metropolitan Britain.

Conclusion

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During 1919, the ports riot showed the deep sense of disquiet in British society in the immediate post-war period. The weak level of sailors' union organisation played a crucial role in the eruption of the riots, during and after which, black rioters and unemployed black workers defended their rights. The rioting was aimed at those considered as unfair economic competitors, as well as the ship owners. The events of the riots and the motivations of riot participants revealed that the riots in the seaports of Britain were not 'mob' violence. In 1920 and 1921, the recurrence of rioting in the ports served as a reminder that far-flung disorder was not restricted to the year 1919 and its connections with demobilisation and post-war social malaise. Rioting also recurred later in the twentieth century, most notably in 1948, 1958/59, the early 1960s, the late 1970s, and the 1980s.

Black 1919

Jacqueline Jenkinson

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Item type: book

The riots that broke out in various British port cities in 1919 were a dramatic manifestation of a wave of global unrest that affected Britain, parts of its empire, continental Europe and North America during and in the wake of the First World War. During the riots, crowds of white working-class people targeted black workers, their families, and black-owned businesses and property. One of the chief sources of violent confrontation in the run-down port areas was the 'colour' bar implemented by the sailors' trades unions campaigning to keep black, Arab and Asian sailors off British ships in a time of increasing job competition. The book sets out the economic and social causes of the riots and their impact on Britain's relationship with its empire and its

colonial subjects. The riots are also considered within the wider context of rioting elsewhere on the fringes of the Atlantic world as black people came in increased numbers into urban and metropolitan settings where they competed with working-class white people for jobs and housing during and after the First World War. The book details the events of the port riots in Britain, with chapters devoted to assessing the motivations and make-up of the rioting crowds, examining police procedures during the riots, considering the court cases that followed, and looking at the longer-term consequences for black British workers and their families. It examines the violent racist conflict that emerged after the First World War and the shockwaves which reverberated around the Empire.