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Semestres 1-3-5**

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**Sujet**

Cf ; pages 2 et 3

## LEA1 – Semester 1 – Méthodologie de la Civilisation US et GB – Mme LEROY

- ⇒ **Using your knowledge of the period and the document, write a short essay to comment on the document.**
- ⇒ **Don't forget the steps: introduction, body of the essay (at least 2 ideas) et a conclusion.**

### **Brixton was where the spark was lit': how the riots changed black politics in UK**

For Labour politicians including Diane Abbott and Paul Boateng, the unrest meant black Britain could no longer be ignored

by [Alex Mistlin](#) – The Guardian - Sun 11 Apr 2021

01           “Without the uprising in Brixton you wouldn't have had black people  
05           elected to parliament in 1987,” says the Labour MP Diane Abbott. “Those  
          uprisings made politics pay attention to black representation, particularly on  
          the left where people tended to focus on class and thought talking about race  
          was a distraction.”

          After the 1981 Brixton uprising, which caused 279 injuries to police and  
          £7.5m-worth of damage in the form of burned vehicles and buildings, the voice  
          of black Britain could no longer be ignored.

10           Alongside her black and Asian colleagues Bernie Grant, Paul Boateng and  
          Keith Vaz, Abbott's election marked a significant moment in black British  
          history. But Abbott knew she was entering a hostile environment, not least  
          because her own party saw the bold young candidates as “an embarrassment”.

15           “If you tried to talk about racial justice in the early 80s you were just  
          dismissed by those on the right of politics, even on the right of  
          the Labour party, as someone with a chip on their shoulder,” she says.

20           Boateng, now a Labour peer, echoes this sentiment, noting how the  
          party's antipathy was emblematic of British attitudes at the time. “Britain had  
          not come to terms with the fact that it was a multiracial society. There were  
          many in Britain who somehow believed it was all a nightmare and one day  
          they would wake up and we would be gone.”

25           Before 1981, politics largely dealt with the growing number of ethnic  
          minorities as part of a “migrant problem” that could only be solved by keeping  
          numbers to an absolute minimum. In 1978, the then Conservative leader,  
          Margaret Thatcher, claimed in an interview for ITV's World in Action that British  
          people feared being “swamped” by immigrants from Pakistan and the rest of  
          the “new Commonwealth”.

30           Before entering parliament, Lord Boateng was a lawyer and activist in  
          nearby Loughborough Junction who cut his teeth as a legal adviser to the  
          “Scrap Sus” campaign in the late 1970s.

          Police relied heavily on the “sus law” – which allowed them to stop,  
          search and potentially arrest people purely on suspicion of breaking the law –  
          during Operation Swamp 81. Within five days, 943 people had been stopped  
          and searched, with 82 arrested.

35           “The campaign was symptomatic of a sense of deep and abiding injustice  
          that was felt, not just among black youth, but right across the inner cities. But  
          Brixton was the historic centre of the black population and that's where the  
          spark was lit,” says Boateng. He recalls watching the uprising unfold. “You

could smell the smoke [coming from Brixton] and you just knew things weren't ever going to be the same again."

40 For all the progress of the last 40 years – Abbott and Boateng are both clear about how much has changed for the better – there is still significant scepticism towards the government's commitment to tackling racial disparities.

45 "The fact that this government went to such trouble to construct a commission on racial disparities, which was really about pushing back on the notion of institutional racism, shows they still don't take it particularly seriously," says Abbott. "Tony Sewell's commission wants to take the race debate back to where it was in the early 80s."

50 Indeed, Britain's race debate bears a similarity with 1981. The government's Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities was set up after a summer of protest in the wake of George Floyd's death. After Brixton came the Scarman report, the first in Britain to acknowledge "racial disadvantage", although it too denied that "institutional racism" was widespread in British society.

55 "The political system did what it always does in those circumstances: it appointed an inquiry. That's what you do when there's no other option," says Boateng.

60 In February this year, the Stuart Hall Foundation published its own race report that revealed 589 different recommendations were made by 13 previous race reports and commissions between 1981 and 2017 – the vast majority of which have not been implemented.

65 Last year, David Lammy, Grant's successor in the Tottenham constituency in north London and as a campaigner for racial equality in parliament, captured the frustration of many critics, angrily telling the government to stop prevaricating and implement existing recommendations with the words: "Get on with the action. Legislate. Move. You're in government – do something."

70 Boateng laments the UK political system's failure to adequately address issues of race and structural disadvantage. "There's still a strong element of denial and avoidance, and we see that in the most recent contortions of the current government," he says.

75 "I want to build on the gains that have been made over these past 40 years, not see them disparaged and dissipated. In 1981 circumstances demanded change and to a certain extent things did, but not enough, and the struggle continues."