

London's Drowning in the Rivers of Babylon: Punk, Reggae and 1970s British Children's Literature

The 1970s was a difficult time for those outside the mainstream in Britain. Youth of all ages experienced hard economic times, but for Black and Asian Britons, and for working-class white Britons, the lack of employment opportunities led to disaffection and rebellion. Youth resistance within all these groups further increased with the rise of right-wing organizations such as the National Front, whose slogan was "Keep Britain White." Initially, Blacks, Asians, and liberal whites protested minority oppression at anti-National Front rallies, or through groups such as the Anti-Nazi League (ANL) and Rock Against Racism. Rock Against Racism brought fans of white punk and Black British reggae together, and for many people, it was the unity of these disparate groups that would lead the charge in ridding Britain of racism. However, while punk and reggae fans committed equally to anti-fascist causes, Black Britons experienced more violence from official, institutional Britain (particularly in the form of police brutality) than whites, straining the alliance between Black and white anti-racist groups. This paper will examine the depiction of music, anti-racism, and police brutality in children's fiction (including British Black Panther Farrukh Dhondy's short stories and novels), poetry (from dub poets such as Linton Kwesi Johnson and from the collections edited by white communist teacher Chris Searle), and nonfiction (including mainstream and independent publishers' depiction of anti-racism, and magazines written by and for young people, such as the *Skat School Kids Against Nazis Newspaper*) by Black, Asian and white British authors during the late 1970s. In particular, the concept of "Babylon" as used in Rastafarian ideology will be contrasted with anti-government ideologies and anarchic ideas in punk and skinhead groups and in their depiction in literature for children, using ideas from cultural theorists such as Stuart Hall, John Clarke, and Dick Hebdige.