

What were the experiences of immigrants arriving and living in Britain?



Create 3 columns in your book with the following headings.

As we go through this lesson you need to add key information to each category



Housing



Jobs



Leisure

Housing



Most Caribbean immigrants had very high expectations of Britain, they were moving to the 'mother country' which they admired and many had been warmly welcomed as GIs fighting in the war. However almost immediately they realised they were not wanted here in peace time as they faced racism and discrimination. There was a feeling of racial superiority and suspicion of foreigners, especially 'coloured' [not a term we use today] foreigners that had existed in the British Empire for centuries.



- A common sign in windows during the 1950s was 'No blacks' or 'No coloureds'. Many landlords claiming they weren't racist but were thinking about the neighbours.
 - Banks refused West Indian immigrants loans or mortgages
 - They could not get a council house as you needed to have lived in Britain for 5 years
 - The immigrants had to take what they could, usually in the worst areas that no one else wanted to be in
- Many landlords squeezed lots of immigrants into small rooms charging much higher rents than they charged white people, in fact, they kicked white people out to get more rents from the immigrants
 - Many immigrants wanted to live near others from their country leading to West Indian communities all over poverty stricken areas of London; Jamaicans in Brixton, Trinidadians in Notting Hill, Guyanese in Tottenham. Similarly these communities grew in Manchester, Birmingham and Leeds

It was shocking, the accommodation... You go along to some parts of Nottingham you would see signs put up, 'Rooms for rent, no n***** need apply', that's not unusual... I described the conditions of the houses... they pack as much people as they can in these houses and charge them, at the time, very, very high rent. It was very, very bad.

Connie Mark, interviewed for the book
Windrush written by Mike Phillips and
Trevor Phillips, 1999



Make sure you have included key information relating to HOUSING



Most migrants found it easy to find a job but once in it, they faced many problems...

- Most immigrants were vastly over qualified for the jobs they ended up doing, but the pay here for lesser work was still more than at home for better jobs
- It became clear that career progression was hard as black workers were discouraged from gaining qualifications eg black nurses in the NHS
- Unions and white workers opposed their new black colleagues, viewing them as a threat. In 1955 transport workers in the West Midlands went on strike to protest the increasing numbers of 'coloured workers', in West Bromwich, this protest was against **ONE** Indian bus conductor! They also wanted a limit of black bus drivers to just 5% of all drivers



Make sure you have included key information relating to JOBS

Leisure



In the early 1950s, two-thirds of Caribbean immigrants were singly young men. They had a great deal of leisure time on their hands. As well as being attracted to Britain for the money, they also came for adventure and excitement. However they found the 'colour bar' affected leisure as well...

- Some pubs banned black drinkers, others made it so unwelcoming that no one would dare enter
- This led to unlicensed drinking clubs (usually in the homes of the immigrants)
- These clubs quickly gained a reputation for loud music, prostitution, gambling and fighting. In reality, they were simply a place for young black men to meet and relax with friends. These clubs would be a trigger to the riots in the following years...

“Biggest shock of all was, one, the cold, and two, having gone to church for the very first time – so delighted that I’m coming from an Anglican church back home, I went to join the worship, and so I did - after the service I was greeted by the vicar, who politely and nicely told me ‘thank you for coming, I would be delighted if didn’t come back’. That was the biggest shock.”

Carmel Jones describes his experiences when he came to Britain in 1955

There were some examples, though rare, of a positive experience...

Father came to Britain in 1948 and then soon after I came with my mother. In London she worked for the first time in her life outside our home, in a sewing workshop with a Jewish refugee from Germany and an Irish woman. The other workers there were among her closest friends all the time she was in England. I used to listen to her talking with a feeling of surprise. Never, in my experience, had she talked so much. She laughed a lot too. I'd probably never seen her so happy as in those times when her life was changing so much.

Source: A West Indian writing in 1999 about his mother's experiences in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s.

I used to feel not only frightened but wondering what is going to happen next. I could get bumped off... People would spit at you, Nobody spat at me personally but I know what happened. But then somebody would look at you, see that you are frightened and say "oh mate, take no notice of them, we're not all the same". That was my experience and it gave me hope and comfort. People were not all the same.

Source: Ivan Weekes, who came to Britain in 1955

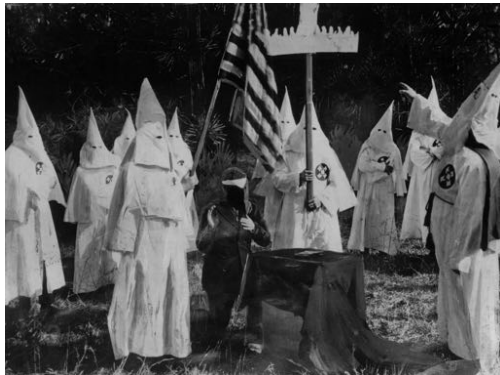
There were some examples, though rare, of a positive experience...

I was in love with Britain and that love only grew when I came here from the Caribbean in the 1950s. I was employed by the NHS as a midwife. I loved the clean hospitals, the efficiency and order. I hated the disorder I had left behind. But my feelings were often beaten down again and again by racism, ignorance and abuse. There was such unfairness to us Christian people who had fought in the war with the best of them.

Source: A West Indian woman being interviewed in the late 1990s

What do we think about the experiences of black people in Britain compared to those in USA at the same time, during the early and mid 20th Century and the Civil Rights Movement?

**FLASH
BACK**



It was a big shock. We were told all lies back home.

We never realised it would be so different.

I was not expecting the hostility. We adored the royalty so much you see.

We thought we'd be treated nice here. I never knew there was so much colour bar.

I thought the people of Britain would be good and affectionate – now most of them are against us.

I did not know I was coloured until the English told me so.

The money's quite good but nothing else!

I expected people to be nice – it's like a slap in the face.

Based on our knowledge so far, you should make up a West Indian immigrant and 'interview them', you will need questions related to Housing, Jobs and Leisure and whatever else you want to ask, but you MUST be able to answer them realistically too, the quotes above might help...

Was the Asian experience of life in Britain any better?

Asian immigrants in the 1960s and 1970s settled in the textile towns of Yorkshire and Lancashire. By 1971, 10% of the population of Bradford was Pakistani. They also settled in the East and West Midlands and some areas of London. One of the largest Asian populations was in Leicester and by 1981 the city was officially the most 'non-white' city in Britain. In many ways the experiences compared to the West Indian (Caribbean) immigrants were similar, but there were some important differences...

- Unlike the Caribbeans, who idolised the mother country and regarded themselves as British, the Asians did not. The Asian immigrants had much lower expectations of Britain, many having been warned it was a wicked place full of drunks and failed marriages. Their lower expectations led to less disappointment.
- Nearly all Caribbeans spoke English, whereas many Asians, especially women, did not or didn't even attempt to learn when they got to Britain.
- There was less effort to assimilate (mix together) in the Asian communities and they refused to give up their links to their home countries and traditions eg arranged marriages.
- Many Asians kept themselves to themselves, exposing them less to the abuse or discrimination. Their lives and entertainment were based around the home, community and their place of worship
- Many Asians went into business, owning their own shop or restaurant. They didn't suffer the discrimination at work like the Caribbeans; although they did from many customers.

You're going to write a letter home to Pakistan after living in Leicester for a year, you should include as much detail as possible about your life what you do for work, entertainment, religion etc.

Your letter **MUST** include the following...

- A comparison to the experiences of your Jamaican neighbour
- A discussion about getting your son home to meet his arranged soon to be wife and the marriage