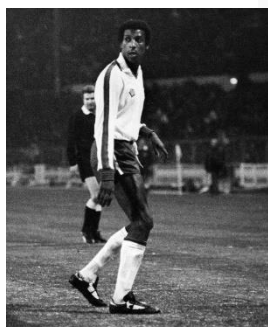


Canonbury Home Learning

Big Question: What was the Windrush migration and how has it influenced British life today?

LO: To develop knowledge and understanding of a significant time in British history



In **1948**, Britain was just starting to recover from **World War II**. Thousands of buildings had been bombed, loads of houses were destroyed and it all needed to be rebuilt.

In the Caribbean, lots of young men and women had **served in the British armed forces** because at the time, many Caribbean countries were still under British rule and not yet independent. After the war, some of these **people answered an advert** to come to Britain where there were lots of different jobs opportunities to help support Britain's recovery. When people move from one place to another place to live, this is called **migration**.

Other people just wanted to see Britain, a country which they had heard so much about. They got on a ship - **the Empire Windrush** - which left the Caribbean to travel thousands of miles across the Atlantic.

It was **22nd June 1948** when the **Empire Windrush arrived at Tilbury Docks in Essex**, 72 years ago. This was the first time so many Caribbean people had come to live in Britain. Many more arrived in the following years - approximately 500,000 between the 1950s-60s.

Here's a link to some informative videos sharing more information about the Windrush migration: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/43793769>

This video shows the **poet John Agard** reading his brilliant poem **Windrush Child** <https://vimeo.com/34658318>

Britain in 1948

Commonwealth citizens were vitally important to the prosperity of the British Empire. Many of them had also fought for Britain during the war, including a large number who lost their lives.

In 1948, the British Nationality Act gave 800 million people in the Commonwealth the right to claim British citizenship.

Britain needed workers since many men had died in World War II.

The NHS was launched in 1948 and needed labour and constantly advertised in Commonwealth countries to attract new workers.

Britain in 1948

Just after World War II ended in 1945, the first groups of post-war immigrants from the Caribbean began to settle in Britain.

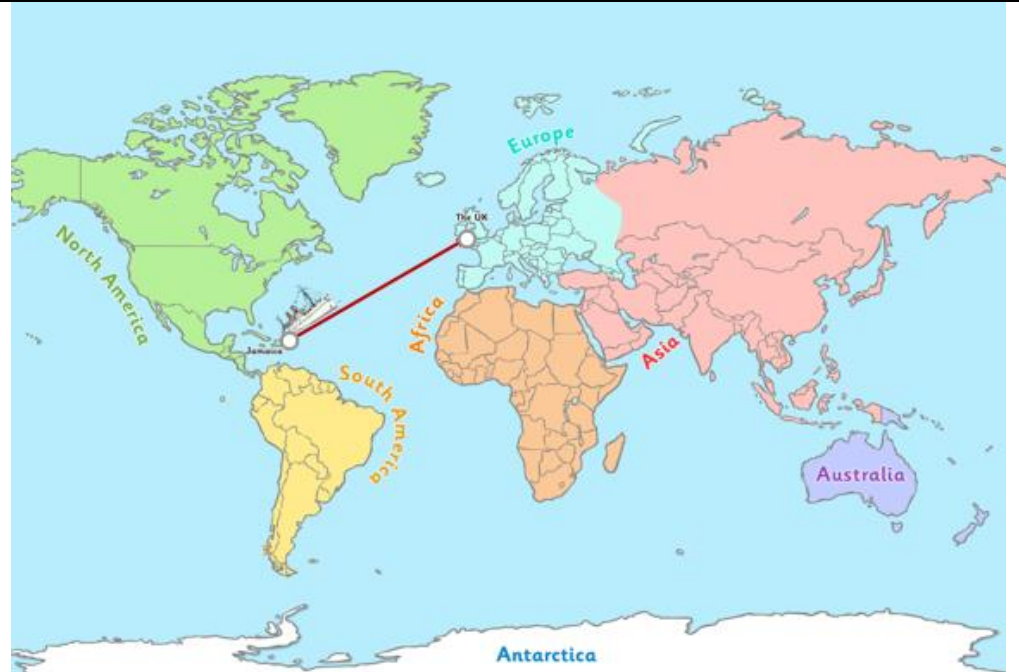
From the 1950s into the 1960s, there was a mass migration of workers from many English-speaking countries in the Caribbean, particularly Jamaica, who settled in Britain.

These immigrants were invited to fill labour requirements in London's hospitals, railways and other areas of work. They are widely viewed as having been a major contributing factor to the rebuilding of the post-war London economy.

Britain in 1948

The passengers had a wide variety of skills to offer. There were nurses, cleaners, mechanics, carpenters, former RAF airmen, and lots of other jobs that were needed in Britain.

Many of these passengers settled in the area of Brixton, in London, which led to the development of large Caribbean communities who have contributed to life in Britain ever since.



Was the Windrush the only ship that brought Caribbean migrants to Britain?

The arrival of the Windrush was the start of a period of migration from the Caribbean to Britain that did not slow down until 1962.

By 1955, 18,000 Jamaicans had moved to Britain.

This outward flow of people to settle in Britain was an important event in the history of both the West Indies and Britain.

Caribbean migrants have become a vital part of British society and, in the process, transformed important aspects of British life.

What Was it Like to be a Windrush Passenger?

Passengers on the Windrush were told that they would all be welcome in Britain, the 'mother country'.

Was this their experience after arriving?

Vince Reid

"My parents brought me on the Windrush - I had no choice in the matter. They didn't have to - they came in search of a better life, better opportunities. It was quite a devastating experience. I was thirteen when I arrived so I wasn't a man, I was a boy. Most of the people on the Windrush were men. I had never been out of Kingston so it was quite an experience. I went to school in Kings Cross. I had never associated with white people and then at school I came across real hostility. I mean to say I had no friends for several years, that wouldn't be far from the truth."

At 13 years old, Vince Reid was one of the youngest passengers on The Empire Windrush. It is Vince Reid who inspired John Agard's poem Windrush Child (link above).

What Was it Like to be a Windrush Passenger?

John Richards

"I knew a lot about Britain from school days but it was a different picture from that one, when you came face to face with the facts. It was two different things. They tell you it is the 'mother country', you're all welcome, you all British. When you come here you realise you're a foreigner and that's all there is to it. The average person knows you as a colonial and that's all. You cut cane or carry bananas and that's it. Anybody wants to diddle you they say I just come off the banana boat and things like that."

Mr. Oswald 'Columbus' Denniston

"It was common knowledge that there was work in Britain, just after the war. I had no ties. I wasn't married or anything like that. I come from Montego Bay, Jamaica. I knew no one in England, I had travelled before to America and Panama. I had no idea what I was coming to. I can remember some of the people I travelled with, if I see them, but I don't know where they are now. All in all it was a good journey to Britain for me, yeah it was."

Life for Caribbean Immigrants Today

Today, the descendants of Caribbean immigrants, and new immigrants to the country, still suffer the effects of discrimination and racism, some of which may not always be obvious. For example, they may often find it more difficult to get jobs, or receive the same standards of justice as white British people.



