

The Windrush Generation

A Read the following text

On 22 June 1948 a passenger ship arrived at Tilbury Docks in Essex, England. In and of itself, this was not an unusual event. However, the origin of the 492 passengers and the purpose of their passage made the ship, the MV Empire Windrush, remarkable. The journey of the Windrush had been planned to supply workers from the Caribbean to rebuild Britain in the aftermath of World War II. The passengers had been recruited in Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and other Caribbean islands that were under British rule then. Some of the passengers had even served in the British armed forces, but others aboard the ship were just children. This was the first large group of immigrants to enter the UK from the Caribbean; hundreds of thousands from all over the Commonwealth were to follow. They, their descendants, and other immigrants who arrived from 1948 until the early 1970s have become known as the 'Windrush Generation'.



These migrants were invited by the British government. The British Nationality Act of 1948 provided citizenship to people born in the UK or any of its colonies. So one may believe that the Windrush Generation lived happily ever after. But the recent Immigration Act of 2014 introduced requirements on landlords, employers, banks and the National Health Service (NHS) to check residents' immigration status. This was designed to restrict illegal immigrants' access to work and public services such as healthcare, benefits and housing. These requirements were made even more stringent in 2016.

In 2017, however, the Windrush Scandal broke. Because immigrants who arrived between 1948 and 1973 often lacked documentation that proved they had the right to stay in the UK, they were often targeted under the government's new policies for undocumented migrants. In extreme cases, they were deported.

In most cases, however, the immigrants were not to blame for their missing documentation. When they arrived from Commonwealth countries, documentation was not required, nor were records kept by the Home Office. Some arrived as children travelling on their parents' passports. In other cases the Home Office destroyed paperwork, including landing cards of Windrush migrants. The burden of proof, however, was put on the migrants and their descendants. They are among more than 500,000 UK residents who were born in a Commonwealth country and arrived before 1971.

The influx ended in 1973 when the Immigration Act of 1971 went into effect, guaranteeing Commonwealth citizens already living in the UK permission to remain indefinitely. After this, a British passport holder born overseas could only settle in the UK with both a work permit and proof of a parent or grandparent having been born in the UK. Groundwork for this law was laid by Conservative politicians such as Enoch Powell, who was among the first to speak out against the UK's immigration policies, using inflammatory and divisive language. He predicted in 1968, for example, that in just one or two decades "the black man will have the whip hand over the white man", and he compared immigration to "a nation busily engaged in heaping up its own funeral pyre".

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According to the new laws, this proof was required for a citizen to receive medical care or to apply for housing. To gain this official recognition, people also had to apply for an official stamp known as No Time Limit (NTL), which cost them £229. In 2017, a number of these cases came to light and the government under then-Prime Minister Theresa May was forced to react. She issued an apology in 2018 and that same year the first ever Windrush Day took place, which is funded annually by the government and includes community events, exhibitions and publications. The government's official statement describes it as a day to "pay tribute to the outstanding and ongoing contribution of the Windrush Generation and their descendants". In 2019, a compensation program was set up for immigrants who had been wrongfully detained or deported. And so, all's well that ends well. Or is it?

B Fill in the historical blanks

What happened in Britain regarding immigration and race relations between the arrival of the Windrush and the first Windrush Day? Divide these topics among your class members or in groups. Research and report back. The goal of this task is to retrace the steps Britain has taken in its struggle with policies regarding immigration and ethnic diversity.

1824 Vagrancy Act (and present-day sus laws)	1965 Race Relations Act
1958 Notting Hill race riots	1968 Enoch Powell's "Rivers of Blood" speech
1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act	1970 Trial of the Mangrove 9
1963 Bristol bus boycott	1997 Macpherson Report
1964 Peter Griffith's campaign slogan	

C The long and Windrushed road

1. Have things improved since Windrush Day in 2018? Find real-life stories about both racial discrimination and successful racial integration in Britain.
2. Film fans may want to watch Steve McQueen's film series "Small Axe", which gives viewers insights into the lives led by Caribbean immigrants in London from the 1960s to the 1980s. Some of the historical events mentioned above feed the plots of the films.
3. Find out about British participation in the Black Lives Matter movement.
4. The US press recently reported about a controversial 19th-century British law called 'joint enterprise' because, although in 2016 the British Supreme Court ruled that these cases were unfair and racially biased, the cases keep appearing. The only thing that really changed was the name – from 'joint enterprise' to 'secondary liability'.

This law is used by prosecutors to charge more than one person with the same crime if it can be proven that other people were somehow involved in the crime, even if they played different roles. Legal experts say just being present at the scene will not get you convicted, but others beg to differ. Advocates of the law argue that the law deters young people from becoming involved in gang violence. Data from the Crown Prosecution Service show that there is racial disparity in how the law is applied.

After doing some research on your own, prepare a debate on whether the law of joint enterprise/secondary liability should be changed.

C Fill in the historical blanks

- 1824 Vagrancy Act made it possible for anyone in public to be arrested if the police thought they might intend to commit a crime. The sus laws – ‘sus’ stands for “suspected person” – have been increasingly used since the 1960s to stop and search anyone looking suspicious.
- 1958 Notting Hill race riots – set off after a Swedish woman who was married to a Jamaican man was verbally attacked by a group of white teenagers, resulting in the organisation of the Notting Hill Carnival
- 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act – restricted the immigration rights of Commonwealth citizens
- 1963 Bristol bus boycott – to protest racial discrimination in the bus company’s hiring practices; it resulted in the company overturning their unofficial colour ban and Parliament eventually passing a Race Relations Act
- 1964 Peter Griffith’s campaign slogan – “If you want a nigger for a neighbour, vote Labour”
- 1965 Race Relations Act – made discrimination in public places based on “colour, race, or ethnic or national origins” illegal
- 1968 Enoch Powell’s “Rivers of Blood” speech – inflammatory rhetoric by an influential Conservative politician against immigration
- 1970 Trial of the Mangrove 9 – on trial after being charged with incitement to riot after protesting racial discrimination by the police, all were acquitted, and the judge acknowledged mistakes made by police
- 1997 Macpherson Report – published after the murder of a black teenager, it concluded that the case had been “marred by... institutional racism” and included 70 recommendations for achieving zero tolerance for racism