

National Theatre home

Small Island

Exploring the Play at Home



If you're watching *Small Island* at home and would like to find out more about the production, there are resources that you can explore.

The version of the play that is currently available to watch on YouTube was originally broadcast to cinemas around the world by National Theatre Live.

About the Production

This production of *Small Island* adapted by Helen Edmundson based on the novel by Andrea Levy, was first performed at the National Theatre in May 2019. You can find full details of the cast and production team here:

Cast

Mrs Ryder: Amy Forrest

Hortense: Leah Harvey

Miss Jewel: Sandra James-Young

Little Hortense: Keira Chansa

Mr Philip / GI / Kenneth: Trevor Laird

Miss Ma: Jacqueline Boatswain

Little Michael: Shaquahn Crowe

Michael: CJ Beckford

Policeman / GI: Natey Jones

Woman in Hurricane: Chereen Buckley

Bernard: Andrew Rothney

Queenie: Aisling Loftus

Aunt Dorothy / Woman with Baby: Beatie Edney

Mrs Buxton / Miss Todd /

Woman in Cinema: Stephanie Jacob

Mr Buxton / Ginger / Sergeant Thwaites /

Railway Worker: Adam Ewan

Young Man In Sweet Shop / Kip / GI /

Railway Worker: Cavan Clarke

Arthur: David Fielder

Franny: Phoebe Frances Brown, Rebecca Lee

Gilbert: Gershwyn Eustache Jnr

Recruiting Officer One / Soames / Railway Worker /

Military Policeman: Paul Bentall

Elwood: Johann Myers

Recruiting Officer Two / GI / Foreman: John Hastings

Usherette: CJ Johnson

GI: Daniel Norford

Celia: Shiloh Coke

Production team

Director: Rufus Norris

Set & Costume Designer: Katrina Lindsay

Lighting Designer: Paul Anderson

Sound Designer: Ian Dickinson

Composer and Rehearsal Music Director: Benjamin Kwasi Burrell

Projection Designer: Jon Driscoll

Movement Director: Coral Messam

Fight Director: Kate Waters

Music Consultant: Gary Crosby

Supernumeraries

Jamie Ankrah, Aimee Louise Bevan, Thea Day,
Victoria Denard, Alma Eno, Alvin Ikenwe, Luther King Osei,
Alice Langrish, Roberta Livingston, Fatima Niemogha,
Anselm Onyenani, Mary Tillet, Joseph Vaiana, Tricia Wey,
Christopher Williams, Joylon Young

You might like to use the internet to research some of these artists to find out more about their careers.

If you would like to find out about careers in the theatre, there's lots of useful information on the [Discover Creative Careers website](#).

Exploring the Production in More Depth

You can [read the rehearsal diary](#) written by the staff director of *Small Island*, which gives an insight into the process of creating, rehearsing and staging this play.

You can go behind the scenes with the composer, [Benjamin Kwasi Burrell](#) and discover how the music in the production was created.

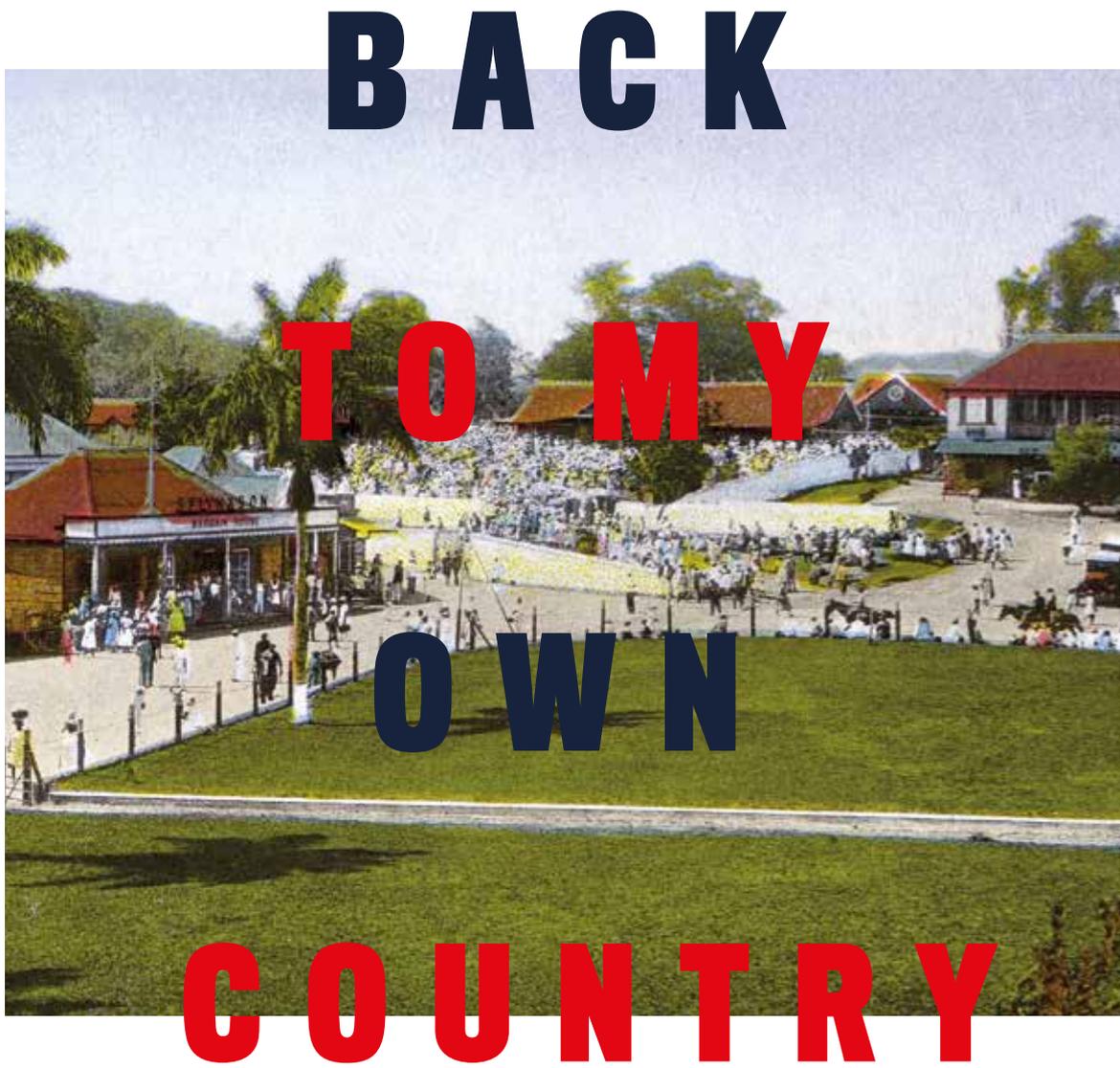
Exploring the Historical Context

Excerpts from the *Small Island* programme:

[Back to My Own Country](#)

[Timeline](#)

[71 Years On](#)



Abridged from Andrea Levy's 2014 essay

I remember a journey I took on a London bus when I was a young girl. It was in the early 1960s. The bus was full of people and one of them was a black man. That was not a common sight in those days. I could tell from his accent that, like my parents, he was from somewhere in the Caribbean. He was talkative, smiling politely at people and trying to engage them in chat. Nobody would be drawn into conversation; they clearly wanted nothing to do with him. But he carried on trying anyway.

I was embarrassed by him, but also overcome with pity for his hopeless attempt to be friendly on a London bus. He somehow became my mum and dad, my sisters, my brother, me. I felt a longing to make some introductions. I could sense the misunderstandings that were taking place, but I didn't know why, or what I could do. The man was different. He looked different and he sounded different. But how come people in England did not know him? Why was he, and all the black people from Britain's old empire, so completely alien to them?

The same thing would not happen today in quite that way. Everyone is used to a mix of cultures and London buses are full of Londoners from all over the world. But still there are silences and gaps in our knowledge and understanding. What are the links that made Britain a natural destination for that Caribbean man on the bus, 50 years ago? How and why did Britain forge those links in the first place? These are questions that have come to fascinate me, because they reveal what amounts to a lost history for many of us. It was certainly lost to me for much of my early life, and it was a loss that caused me some problems.

At the time of my bus ride I lived on a council estate in north London. I went to a local school. Spoke like a good cockney. I played out with all the white kids who lived around my way – rounders, skipping and hide and seek.

Postcard of Mandeville, Jamaica.
Image: Chronicle / Alamy Stock Photo

'MY PARENTS BELIEVED THAT IN ORDER TO GET ON IN THIS COUNTRY THEY SHOULD LIVE QUIETLY AND NOT MAKE A FUSS.'

I ate a lot of sweets. Watched a lot of television: *Coronation Street*, *Emergency Ward 10*. Loved the Arsenal. Hated Tottenham Hotspur. I lived the life of an ordinary London working-class girl.

But my parents had come to this country from Jamaica. We were immigrants. Outsiders. My dad had been a passenger on the *Empire Windrush* ship when it famously sailed into Tilbury in June 1948 and, according to many, changed the face of Britain for ever. My mum came to England on a Jamaica Producer's banana boat. It sailed into West India dock on Guy Fawkes Night in the same year, under a shower of fireworks that my mum believed were to welcome her.

My dad was an accounting clerk in Jamaica for, among other companies, Tate & Lyle. My mum was a teacher. They were middle class. They grew up in large houses. They even had servants. They came to Britain on British Empire passports in order to find more opportunities for work and advancement. But once here they struggled to find good housing. They had to live in one room for many years. They had a period of being homeless and of living in half-way housing where my dad was not allowed to stay with his wife and his three children. Eventually they were housed in a council flat in Highbury where I was born, and where I grew up.

My dad did not have trouble finding work. He was employed by the Post Office. But my mum

was not allowed to use her Jamaican teaching qualification to teach in England. She needed to re-train. So she took in sewing throughout my childhood. But she still nursed her dream of becoming a teacher again.

In England, the fabled Mother Country that they had learned so much about at school in Jamaica, my parents were poor and working class.

They believed that in order to get on in this country they should live quietly and not make a fuss. They should assimilate and be as respectable as they possibly could. Clean the front step every week. Go to church on Sundays. Keep their children well dressed and scrubbed behind the ears.

My parents believed that with no real entitlement to anything, they must accept what this country was willing to give. My mum was desperate for my dad to lose his accent and stop saying 'nah man' and 'cha' in every sentence. They never discussed Jamaica with anyone. My mum would get embarrassed if she saw a black person drawing attention to themselves. It drew attention to her as well, and she hated that.

My family is fair-skinned. In Jamaica, this had a big effect on my parents' upbringing because the class system, inherited from British colonial times, people took the colour of your skin very seriously. My parents grew up to believe themselves to be of a higher class than any darker-skinned person. This isolated them from other black Caribbeans who came to live here – they wanted nothing to do with them.

My mum once told me how, back in Jamaica, her father would not let her play with children who were darker than her. She said wistfully, 'But I had to, or I would have had no one to play with'. So when she came to England she was pleased to be bringing her children up amongst white children. We would always have lighter-skinned children to play with. I was expected to isolate myself from darker-skinned people too, and it seemed perfectly normal to

me that the colour of your skin was one of the most important things about you. White people of course never had to think about it. But if you were not white, well then, how black were you?

Light-skinned or not, still we were asked, 'When are you going back to your own country?', 'Why are you here?', 'Why is your food so funny?', 'Why does your hair stick up?', 'Why do you smell?' When a member of the far-right group, the National Front, waved one of their leaflets in my face and started laughing, I felt I owed them some sort of apology. I wanted them to like me. It would be years before I realised I could be angry with them.

At art college, I encountered middle class people for the first time. Keeping those origins of mine a secret became paramount. Few people at my college knew I lived on a council estate. Once, when given a lift home, I got my friends to drop me at the gate of a proper house. I walked up the path waving them off. Then as soon as they were out of view I walked back to my flat.

I got a degree in textile design and worked as a designer for about ten minutes before I realised it was not for me. After that I worked for a brief while as a shop assistant, a dresser at the BBC and the Royal Opera House, and a receptionist at a family-planning clinic.

Then something happened. I was working part-time for a sex-education project for young people in Islington. One day the staff had to take part in a racism awareness course. We were asked to split into two groups, black and white. I walked over to the white side of the room. It was, ironically, where I felt most at home – all my friends, my boyfriend, my flatmates, were white. But my fellow workers had other ideas and I found myself being beckoned over by people on the black side. With some hesitation, I crossed the floor. It was a rude awakening. It sent me to bed for a week.

By this time, I was scared to call myself a black person. I didn't feel I had the right qualifications. Didn't you have to have grown



British map of Jamaica from surveys by Mr Sheffield, drawn by Patrick Browne, 1755. Image: Granger Historical Picture Archive / Alamy Stock Photo

up in a 'black community'? Didn't you need to go to the Caribbean a lot? Didn't your parents need to be proud of being black? My upbringing was so far removed from all of that, I felt sure I would be found out as an imposter. I was not part of the black experience, surely?

It was a life-changing moment.

Fortunately, I had recently enrolled on an afternoon-a-week writing course at the City Lit, just as a hobby. The course had an emphasis on writing about what you know. So, nervously I began to explore what I knew – my family upbringing and background, and my complicated relationship with colour. I soon came to realise that my experience of growing up in this country was part of what it meant to be black. All those agonies over skin shade. Those silences about where we had come from. The shame. The denial. In fact, I came to see that every black person's life, no matter what it is, is part of the black experience. Because being black in a majority white country comes with a myriad of complications

and contradictions. It was writing that helped me to understand that.

A few months into the course I had the urge to visit Jamaica for the very first time and stay with the family I had never met. I went for Christmas. It was an amazing experience. I realised that I meant something to people who lived on the other side of the world. I met my aunt and cousins and saw where my mum grew up. I realised for the first time that I had a background and an ancestry that was fascinating and worth exploring. Not only that, but I now had the means to do it – through writing.

I am now happy to be called a black British writer, and the fiction I have written has all been about my Caribbean heritage in some way or another. It is a very rich seam for a writer and it is, quite simply, the reason that I write.

The more I began to delve into my Caribbean heritage the more interesting Britain's Caribbean story became for me. The story of the Caribbean is a white story too and one that goes back a long way. The region was right at

'I REALISED FOR THE FIRST TIME THAT I HAD A BACKGROUND AND AN ANCESTRY THAT WAS FASCINATING AND WORTH EXPLORING.'

the very heart of Europe's early experiments in colonising the world. In the 1500s, it was the Spanish who first exploited those newly found islands, displacing the indigenous people. The Dutch, the French and the British came soon after. The island claimed earliest for Britain was Barbados, in 1625. But soon Britain was a major coloniser in the region. A whole string of islands became 'British'. Islands that for a long time were seen as our most lucrative overseas possessions. Sugar was the main crop, as important to Britain as oil is today. It was planted, harvested and processed by the slave labour of black Africans. That slave trade from West Africa to the Caribbean and the Americas was the largest forced migration in human history. Those islands soon became brutal island-factories helping to fuel and to fund the industrial revolution in Britain. Huge family fortunes were made. Major cities like Bristol, Liverpool and London grew wealthy on the proceeds. The money that slavery in the Caribbean generated was reinvested in Britain's industry and infrastructure. Britain's empire grew as a result.

When British slavery finally ended in 1833, compensation was paid by the British Government. It amounted to 20 million pounds (many billions in today's money). It was paid to the slave owners for the loss of their property. They were seen as the injured party.

But there is more to those Caribbean islands than just the history of slavery. Many white people went, if not in chains, then under duress: indentured servants and poor people from all corners of Britain who were trying to escape hardship at home or to build a new life. Many were pressganged sailors, or convict labour. There were Sephardic Jews from Iberia, merchants from the Middle East, and, later, indentured labourers from India and China. A social mix was created like in no other place on earth. Creole cultures developed with a wide range of skin colours that were elaborately classified (mulatto, quadroon, octoroon and so on) as a divide-and-rule tactic by the British plantocracy. Racial difference and racial value developed into a 'science'. After the end of slavery in the Caribbean the British continued to rule their islands through a policy of racial apartheid right up until they finally left in the 1960s.

But all this happened 3,000 miles away from Britain, and as a result it has been possible for it all to quietly disappear from British mainstream history. This is the absence, the amnesia of the British that made the black man on the bus such an alien. It is unthinkable that a book on American history could leave out plantation slavery in the southern states. But in British history books the equivalent is the case, or at least the importance of those centuries of British slavery in the Caribbean is underplayed. That British plantation slavery has no lasting legacy for this country is absurd, but it is a claim that is made implicitly by this silence. It was so very long ago, it seems to say, we don't need to dredge it up.

And what of the period after slavery? What about the century of 'racial apartheid' that grew up in the colonial era, the time when my mum and dad learned to know their racial place and to keep themselves separate?

Apart from the islands being an exotic holiday destination they have now become an irrelevance here. They are no longer wealthy. They are not rich with natural resources. They no longer have the power they enjoyed

when some of the most famous families in Britain were there. It is too easy to forget what happened and how it has affected our lives today. But it is as much a part of British history as the Norman Conquest, or the Tudors.

What this all means of course is that I, and my family, are a product of Britain just as much as the white kids I grew up with in Highbury. Given Britain's history in the Caribbean it was almost inevitable that people like my dad and his fellow passengers on the *Windrush* would end up here. They belonged, whether Britain realised it or not. One of the consequences of having an empire, of being a cultural hub, is that the world ultimately comes to you. That's how hubs work.

We are now three or four generations on from the man on the London bus. Immigration to Britain since the end of the Second World War has been a final, unexpected gift to Britain from its old empire. The benefits that the labour and the enterprise of immigrants, like those from the Caribbean, have brought to Britain are incalculable. Their ideas, their creativity and their ways of life have helped turn this country into a sophisticated multi-culture.

But there are still countless young Britons today of Afro-Caribbean descent who have as little understanding of their ancestry and have as little evidence of their worth as I did when I was growing up. And there are countless white Britons who are unaware of the histories that bind us all together. My heritage is Britain's story too. It is time to put the Caribbean back where it belongs – in the main narrative of British history.

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Extract from 'Back to My Own Country', from *Six Stories and an Essay* by Andrea Levy, originally published in 2014 by Headline Publishing Group.

Photograph of Andrea Levy © Laurie Fletcher, courtesy of Headline.



ANDREA LEVY

Andrea Levy was born in London in 1956 to Jamaican parents who came to Britain in 1948; her father sailed from Jamaica to England on the *Empire Windrush* ship and her mother joined him soon after.

After attending writing workshops in her mid-30s, Andrea Levy began to write the novels that she, as a young woman, had always wanted to read; novels that reflect the experiences of black Britons, which look at Britain and its changing populations and at the intimacies that bind British history with that of the Caribbean.

Andrea Levy wrote five novels and was a recipient of an Arts Council Award. Her second novel, *Never Far from Nowhere*, was long listed for the Orange Prize while *Small Island* was the winner of the Orange Prize for Fiction, the Whitbread Novel Award, the Whitbread Book of the Year Award, the Orange Best of the Best, and the Commonwealth Writer's Prize. Her last novel, *The Long Song*, was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, and won the Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction. Besides novels, Andrea Levy wrote short stories that have been read on radio, published in newspapers and anthologised.

BRITAIN AND JAMAICA



1494 Christopher Columbus arrives in Jamaica.

1509 Spain claims Jamaica and begins to transport enslaved African peoples to work on sugar plantations. Many of Jamaica's indigenous Arawak and Taíno peoples die from disease.

1534 Spanish Town is established as the capital of Jamaica.



Jubilee market, Kingston, Jamaica.
Image: Chronicle / Alamy Stock Photo

○— 1400 — 1500 — 1600 —



1586 The first mass plantation is established in Munster, as part of the colonisation of Ireland.

1607 England establishes first American settlement in Jamestown, Virginia. It is managed by the Virginia Company.

1609 Bermuda is settled and claimed by England.

1620-1636 Britain settles colonies in Plymouth, Maryland, Rhode Island, Connecticut and Carolina.

1624-1628 Britain establishes settlements in St Kitts, Barbados and Nevis.

1655 Britain captures Jamaica from Spain. Olivier Cromwell sends Irish political prisoners to Jamaica.

1662 A royal proclamation gives Jamaica's non-enslaved populace the rights of English citizens.

1670 The Treaty of Madrid formally hands Jamaica to the British. Jamaica goes on to become the world leader in exporting sugar, but the industry is propped up by enslaved Africans.

1700 There are more than five enslaved people for every British settler in Jamaica.

MAY-JULY 1760 Tacky, an overseer on the Frontier plantation in Saint Mary Parish, leads a group of enslaved people in taking over the plantation.

1778 The black enslaved population in Jamaica is in excess of 200,000.

1600

1700

1642-1651 English Civil War.

1651 Parliament decrees that only English ships can trade in English colonies, keeping profits from sugar plantations in English hands.

1661 The British establish a fort on James Island (now Kunta Kinteh Island), West Africa, to facilitate its slave trade.

1666 Britain colonises the Bahamas.

1670 Bunce Island, off the coast of Sierra Leone, is settled and fortified to be used as a slave trading post.

1672 The Royal African Company is founded, and King Charles II grants it a monopoly over the trade and supply of enslaved people to British Caribbean colonies. Britain seizes control of Havana, Florida, Grenada, Dominica and Saint Vincent.

1756-1763 The Seven Years War, European conflict over control of multiple colonies and territories around the globe, many of which change hands.

1776 The United States declares independence from Britain. Caribbean islands captured by the French during the American Revolution are returned to Britain after the war.

1778 The first convicts are transported to Australia.

1786 The British East India Company, having joined forces with the Royal Navy, acquires Penang Island.

>>

1807 International slave trade is abolished but indentured servants are still 'imported' to work on plantations.

1814 Jamaican sugar production peaks at £34 million.

1831 'The Baptist War', an 11-day uprising, starts on 25 December 1831. Around 60,000 enslaved people take part. The uprising is met with harsh reprisals by plantation owners and the British.

1833 Parliament passes the 'Slavery Abolition Act', which comes into effect from 1834. The Act grants a four-year transition period (or 'apprenticeship') after which, enslaved people would be fully emancipated.

1838 Slavery is formally abolished.

1846 The Sugar Duties Act takes away British colonies' preferential tariff protection. Jamaica's sugar industry falls into decline.

11 OCTOBER 1865 Morant Bay rebellion – freed people, protesting against injustice and widespread poverty, rise up against the British. The protest lasts for two days. It is estimated that 439 black Jamaicans are killed and 345 more arrested and later executed without trial.

1865 Jamaica becomes a crown colony.

1870 The sugar cane industry goes into decline and Jamaica replaces sugar plantations with banana plantations.

1872 Kingston replaces Spanish Town as the capital of Jamaica.

1802 The end of the French Revolutionary War results in the Treaty of Amiens, and Spain cedes Trinidad to Britain.

1807 Parliament enacts the Slave Trade Act, which abolishes slavery in the British Empire, with the exception of territories in the possession of the East India Trading Company.

1811 The British East India Company captures Java from the Netherlands and continues to expand though Asia, acquiring control of Singapore (1819), Malacca (1824) and Burma (1826).

1839-1842 The First Opium War, during which Britain seizes Hong Kong island from China.

1858 The Government of India Act gives control of India to the East India Company and Queen Victoria is crowned Empress of India.



Loading bananas in Montego Bay, Jamaica, early 20th century. Image: World Archive / Alamy Stock Photo

1915 Volunteer troops from the Caribbean form the British West Indies Regiment, which serves in Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

1929 The Great Depression leads to increased unemployment and to social unrest.

1938 Unemployment and resentment towards Britain's racial policies result in uprisings. A Royal Commission is set up to report on living conditions in the British Caribbean.

1938 People's National Party is founded.

1940 Colonial Development and Welfare Act allocates funds for the long-term reconstruction of the British Caribbean colonies.

1943 Alexander Bustamante founds the Jamaica Labour Party. He becomes Jamaica's first prime minister in 1962.

1944 Universal suffrage is introduced in Jamaica. A new constitution establishes an elected House of Representatives.

1945 The Moyne Report (The Report of West India Royal Commission) is published which exposes poor living conditions in Caribbean colonies.

21 JUNE 1948 HMT *Empire Windrush* docks in Tilbury, Essex. It is thought that 492 of 1,027 passengers are migrants from the Caribbean.

1958 Jamaica becomes a member of the Federation of the West Indies but withdraws from it in 1961.

1962 Jamaica becomes independent.

1900

2000

1914-1918 First World War.

1919 Ireland declares independence from Britain.

1921 The Anglo-Irish treaty creates the Irish Free State, which remains a British dominion.

1922 Egypt, which has been a British protectorate since the outbreak of the First World War, is granted formal independence.

1926 The Balfour Declaration states that Britain and its dominions are 'equal in status' and the term 'British Commonwealth of Nations' is adopted to describe the community.

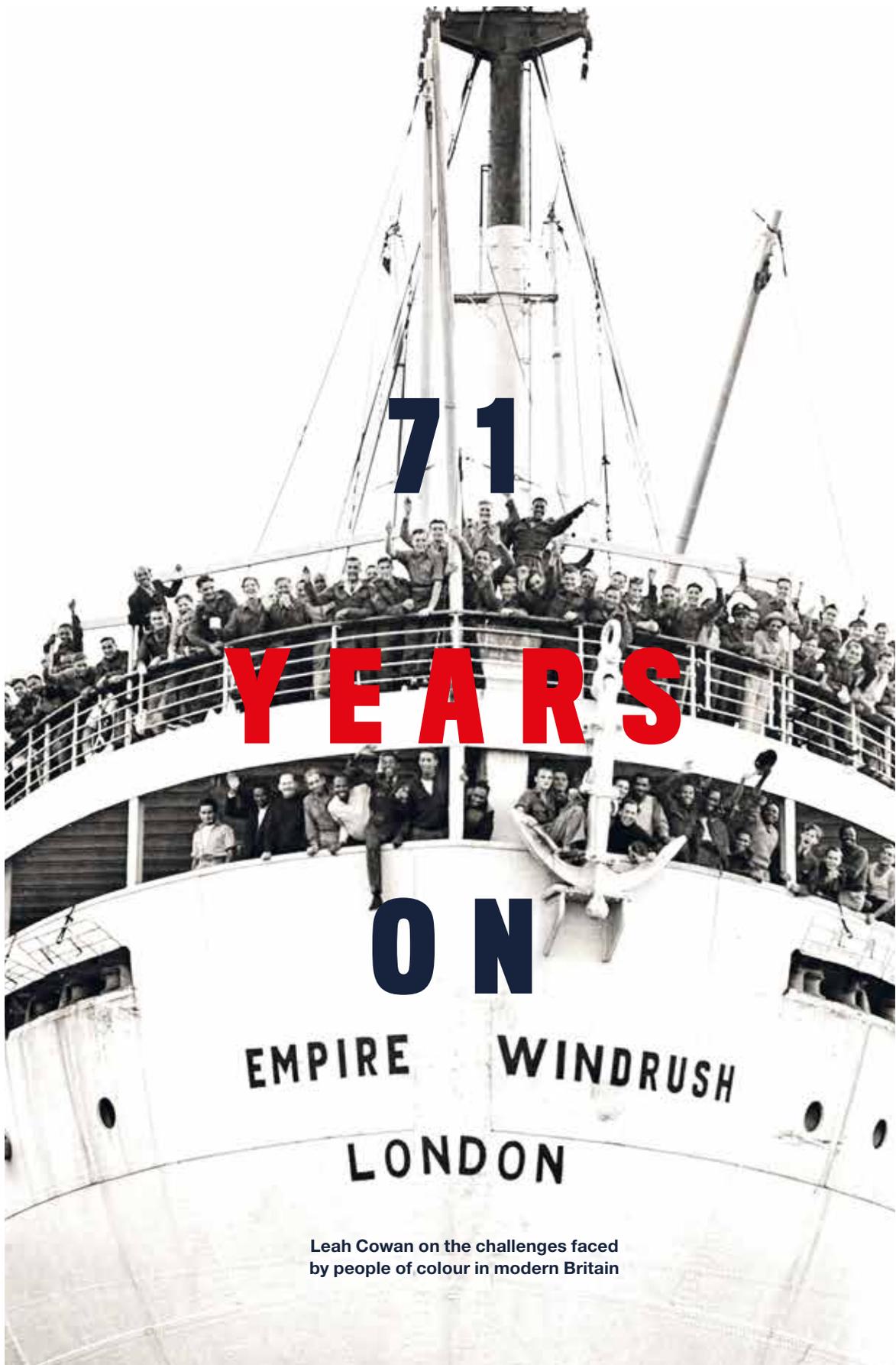
1939-1945 Second World War. Over 10,000 people from the Caribbean enlist to fight for Britain.

1947 Lord Mountbatten oversees the partition of India. Millions of people are displaced and mass violence costs tens of thousands of lives.

1949 The word 'British' is dropped from the Commonwealth of Nations. Ireland formally becomes a republic and leaves the Commonwealth.

1950 India becomes a republic but remains in the Commonwealth.

2018 Prince Charles succeeds Queen Elizabeth II as head of the Commonwealth. Anguilla, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Montserrat and Turks & Caicos remain British Overseas Territories.



71

YEARS

ON

EMPIRE WINDRUSH
LONDON

Leah Cowan on the challenges faced
by people of colour in modern Britain

Being a young person of colour in Britain is not a monolithic experience. When I consider my friends and relatives and their different experiences and perspectives, it's clear a myriad of variables shape our relationship to these islands.

A common thread is that for many people who migrate to Britain, they only become 'people of colour' when they arrive in the UK. As the African-American writer Zora Neale-Hurston wrote: 'I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background'. Similarly, for young people of colour like me who grew up in very white towns, and attended schools with largely white student populations, the overwhelming context of whiteness coalesced to point us out as different and 'other'. As I grew up, the nature of this 'othering' took on different forms. A little white girl at primary school told me I couldn't join in a skipping rope game because my skin wasn't the right 'peachy' colour; in secondary school children pelted me with chocolate cake and shouted 'brownie' at me in the lunch hall, and well into university people asked me if my Dad was Bob Marley and if he ate fried chicken and smoked weed. These are the more banal and everyday recollections; as a light-skinned person of colour I stood out enough to warrant endless uninspired 'jokes' and derogatory remarks.

As people of colour we often walk a tightrope of having our viewpoints ignored, whilst our presence is hyper-visible in the screaming headlines of mainstream media, and the sanctimonious clauses of state legislation. We are the targets of Britain's 'hostile environment': a web of government policies which seek to make life in the UK untenable for migrant communities. These policies provide the context for the 'Windrush scandal'. In 2017, it came to light that British elders from the Caribbean were being targeted for deportation as part of the Home Office's efforts to meet net immigration targets. The

Empire Windrush docks at Tilbury on 22 June 1948.
Image: Contraband Collection / Alamy Stock Photo

'WE ARE HERE BECAUSE YOU WERE THERE'

media's framing of this as a 'scandal' centres the viewpoint of citizens who have never felt the watchful eye and iron fist of immigration controls. The Windrush scandal is in reality the continuation of discriminatory policies which have undermined people from the Caribbean's right to reside in the UK ever since the HMT *Empire Windrush* docked at Tilbury. Contempt for Black Britons is not a new phenomenon; historian David Olusoga reminds us that even as the *Empire Windrush* sailed away from Kingston in Jamaica, Britain's prime minister Clement Attlee was feverishly scheming to turn the ship back or divert it to East Africa.

The very idea of a 'Windrush immigrant' is deliberately inaccurate. People who, like my grandparents – and *Small Island*'s Gilbert and Hortense – arrived in Britain from the late 1940s onwards, were already UK citizens before they set foot on these shores. For many Jamaicans who came to Britain, the experience was one of homecoming to the 'mother country'. Britain's connection to the Caribbean is indelible; up and down the country, regency townhouses, banks, city halls, roads, arts venues, and stately homes were built with coins minted in the blood and sweat of my ancestors. Destroying archival material documenting Caribbean communities' migration histories to the UK cannot uncouple our deep colonial connection to this country; as the late A Sivanandan, Director of the Institute of Race Relations explained: 'We are here because you were there'.

Racism is soaked into the social attitudes and institutions which prop up inequality in Britain today; young people of colour feel this viscerally when we are surveilled, policed, and continually asked 'where are you really from?'. In practice, this inequality means that black people are nine times more likely to be



Activists protest deportations, 4 February 2019.
Image: Mark Kerrison / Alamy Live News

stopped and searched by police, and more than half of young people in prison are people of colour. These disparities are prevalent in every aspect of private and public life. In 2019, many people continue to struggle to rent a room, access health and maternity care, or even open a bank account. Research by the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI) revealed that a quarter of UK landlords now won't rent to someone with an accent or a 'foreign-sounding name'. In *Small Island*, Gilbert and Hortense's living conditions may have been less than desirable, but in modern-day London, landlords like Queenie would have the UK's 'Right to Rent' policy enshrined in the Immigration Act 2014 at the forefront of their mind when selecting tenants.

This inequality also thrives in our education systems: young people of colour are less likely to have their A Level grades accurately predicted by teachers and so are less likely to receive appropriate offers from universities. If we do embark on a degree, we are unlikely to see ourselves represented in the faculty: in 2016–17, only 0.1 per cent of professors in UK institutions were black women. Young people of colour are less likely to be employed if and when we graduate, and when we do get a job, we can expect to earn a lower salary than

our white peers. We also experience negative outcomes in social care and healthcare: the limited data on young people of colours' experiences of mental health reveals that we are less likely to access early intervention or primary care services, and are at a higher risk of depression, self-harm and suicide than our white peers.

This is an uncomfortable backdrop to exist against. Learning about black British history through falling head-first into late-night Wikipedia clickholes has enabled me to nurture a connection to my heritage. In school we learn a few scant details about slavery in North America and the civil rights movement. It is empowering, therefore, to read about slave rebellions, and to know that enslaved people rose up against British oppressors and seized liberation with their own hands. The fact that we aren't taught about Britain's leading role in the transatlantic slave trade in school in the UK feels like a deliberate omission. History collectives like Black History Walks, institutions like the Black Cultural Archives and research projects like UCL's Legacies of British Slave-Ownership do incredible work to join the

dots between dusty archival material and our modern-day lives. Our collective histories are not crystallised in the past; they travel forwards through the centuries and sculpt our lives in the present.

While we cannot disregard the weight of this context, we can celebrate the positive shifts that we are making. Young people are building on and reimagining the work of our elders and community leaders who led resistance movements in the face of violent racism in the 1970s. We are organising in collectives such as Lesbians and Gays Support the Migrants, End Deportations, Docs not Cops, Sisters Uncut, and the London Campaign Against Police and State Violence to resist racism and the anti-migrant state. We are also reclaiming spaces online and offline across disciplines such as art, media, literature, fashion, nightlife, technology, and music. Predictably, businesses have been quick to realise the marketing potential of our activism, our faces, our skin, and our hair, without being truly invested in our freedom and liberation. 'Diversity' schemes enable companies to perform the illusion of inclusion, but genuine structural change requires self-reflection, giving up power and stepping aside.

Industrial Britain has always been defined by the Caribbean: it was built by our labour. Our presence is complicated and precarious, but our migration histories have also been creative and transformative. I have endless admiration for my grandparents, who made the long journey to this cold island; so bleak in winter that my grandma was concerned that all the leafless trees were dead. I am strengthened by the love which drove them to seek a comfortable life for our family. Their hard work is inspiring to me. As migrant communities and families, our 'contributions' to the economy, however, do not make us any more or less entitled to live in this country which we have made our home. Migration exposes the fragility of borders, drawn out by dead white men on maps that now crumble in ancient libraries.

'IN 2016-17, ONLY 0.1% OF PROFESSORS IN UK INSTITUTIONS WERE BLACK WOMEN'

In spite of, or perhaps because of the proud British tradition of racism, as young people of colour we learn, we re-invent, and we build community and connection where we can. Moving to London has been a process of healing for me: I can wander down Dalston's Ridley Road market and buy ackee and callaloo, and my younger sister, who has not yet stepped foot in Jamaica, cooks the best rice and peas in our family. I have also found solace in communities of resistance; I have worked in solidarity with women locked up in detention centres such as Yarl's Wood who are tirelessly fighting deportations which threaten to tear them away from their families and loved ones. I have joined marches streaming down Hackney's Kingsland Road, shouting the names of young people of colour like Rashan Charles and Sarah Reed who have died at the hands of Britain's criminal 'justice' system. We must say their names, otherwise their blood runs into the dust and is forgotten. Stories like *Small Island* remind us of what our communities have journeyed through, and how we can continue to sustain each other in difficult times.

Leah Cowan is the Politics Editor at *gal-dem* and has written for *Vice UK*, *Media Diversified*, *openDemocracy*, and *Guardian*. She also works at Imkaan, a Black feminist organisation dedicated to addressing violence against Black and minoritised women and girls. Her TEDxTalk in October 2018 was an intersectional analysis of emotional labour, and she has spoken on the intersection of race, gender, migration, violence and media, for UN Women, in the House of Commons, at the Trades Union Congress, at the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE), and at Queen Mary University of London.

Reviewing the Production

You might like to write a theatre review when you have watched the production. All students studying drama and theatre for GCSE and A-level will have to do this for productions that they see as part of their course.

If you choose to write a review, you might like to consider some of the following:

- The form and style of the production
- The artistic choices which have been made, remembering to include sound, lighting, set and costume design choices
- Your own critical appreciation of design elements and performance skills
- What you think the creative and production team's intentions were in staging the production
- Significant moments in the production where you notice a particular performance skill being used or think a particular directorial decision has been made
- Your own response to the overall effectiveness of the piece as an audience member
- You could sketch the set and/or some costumes from the production as you watch.

National Theatre Collection

The National Theatre Collection makes the best of British Theatre available worldwide to libraries, schools, universities and the wider education sector.

In light of the Coronavirus pandemic, the National Theatre Collection is currently available for students in UK state-funded schools to access at home. Find out more at nationaltheatre.org.uk/ntcollection
