JOURNEYS
The Story of Migration to Britain

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Why have people migrated to Britain?

In 1066, a very important event in British history took place – the Battle of Hastings. This battle started the Norman invasion of Britain, which brought many migrants into Britain from France. Over time, people have migrated to Britain for many reasons. Some groups, like the Huguenots and the Jews of Eastern Europe, came here to escape the poor treatment they received in their home countries.

Others came to trade and set up businesses, such as merchants from northern Europe, or bankers from Italy who arrived during the Middle Ages.

Some people were invited to Britain because they could help to make a difference, including the Caribbean and South Asian migrants who came to Britain in the 1950s and 1960s to work in the National Health Service, in public transport or in textile factories. You will discover these stories and more as you read through this book.

In 2018 the football World Cup took place in Russia. Crowds of England supporters cheered when the England team got to the semi-finals – it was a fantastic achievement. Have a look at the photo of some of the team.

Just under half of the England squad have families that originally came from other countries: Dele Alli’s dad is from Nigeria, Harry Kane’s grandfather was Irish, and Raheem Sterling was born in Jamaica but has lived in England since the age of five. They’re not unusual – many British people come from families that originally lived elsewhere.

Since the beginning of time, people have moved around to live in new places. Migration didn’t begin in 1066 with William the Conqueror, but in this book we will look at the history of migration in Britain from around this time.
For many years, people from all around the world have been coming to live in Britain. This timeline shows the key events in this aspect of Britain’s history.

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How did the First World War increase tension for migrants?

Germans in Britain

During the First World War, there was an increase in anti-German feeling in Britain. There were attacks on German shops in the north-east of England, and in London, over 2,000 German properties were damaged. Germans living in England were made to register with the police to make sure they weren’t spies, and all German men between the ages of 17 and 55 were forced to live away from their families in camps set up across the country.

Post-war tension

After the First World War ended in November 1918, thousands of soldiers and sailors returned home to Britain. Many of them were looking for work, but unemployment levels were high. Some were frustrated because they thought that Black and Asian workers had taken their jobs. In 1919, violence broke out in the streets of towns and cities such as Liverpool and Cardiff.

In Cardiff, the violence started when a group of black men were seen riding around the city on a bus with their white girlfriends. Some of the people in Cardiff believed that this should not be happening because the different races should be kept separate. Shortly afterwards, thousands of people started attacking the homes of black families. Shots were fired and soldiers had to be called in to help out the police.

The communities where the worst violence broke out were places where migrants had been living for many years. Most of the time there were good relations between the different communities; however, at times of stress, the relationships could break down.

In the period between the First and Second World Wars, antisemitism was increasing across Europe, especially in Germany under the Nazis. It was happening in Britain too. Organisations such as the British Union of Fascists (BUF) openly called for Jews to be removed from Britain.
The Battle of Cable Street

It was Sunday 4th October, 1936. The British Union of Fascists (BUF) were planning on marching through the East End of London to terrorise the Jewish community that had been living there for over 50 years.

Sally* was ready. She had her notebook in her hand. At either side of her stood two enormous men. At the first sight of any trouble, they would protect her. Her heart raced as she listened to the speeches. She was disgusted by what she heard, but carefully made her notes.

Sally was a young Jewish woman who had been spying on the BUF for months, and her inside information had been invaluable. The Jews of the East End were prepared.

Sam* was ready. His fist was tightly wrapped around a dozen coloured marbles. Behind him, gently swaying in the morning breeze, was a huge banner stretching across Cable Street with the freshly painted words “They shall not pass”. In front of him, he could see his neighbours building a barricade of chairs, tables, barrels, bits of wood and metal – anything that they could get their hands on to block the streets.

A shout went up: “The fascists are coming!” Sam tensed. The streets came alive with people rushing forward. And then he saw them: hundreds of police, some on foot, some on horseback, all there to protect the BUF demonstrators. Sam dashed his marbles and saw the police horse slip, stagger and then smash on to the ground. Sam craned his neck to see as far as he could above the chaos, but there was no sign of the BUF. The fascists had been defeated, their march diverted away from the East End. They shall not pass!

* Although this is a piece of fiction, parts of the story are true. Sally was the author’s grandmother, who did spy on the BUF. Sam was the author’s grandfather, who fought in the Battle of Cable Street.
The Second World War

When the Second World War broke out, Britain was again able to call on help from the other countries in the British Empire. Soldiers, sailors and pilots from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean fought against the Nazis and their allies. Countries in the British Empire contributed £45 million to the war effort. In Britain, Black and Asian people worked in factories, hospitals, air raid patrol units and as firefighters. Britain also welcomed thousands of refugees from war-torn Europe.

 Refugees from Nazi Germany

My grandmother, Lilo, was 18 when she came to England in 1938. She was from a Jewish family in Germany, and had suffered for many years under the Nazis. She was forced to wear a yellow star on her clothes, so that everyone knew that she was Jewish. People would often spit at her and call her names. Like other Jewish children, Lilo was not allowed to go to school, and her father had lost his job because he was Jewish.

In London she met my German grandfather, Henry, who was not Jewish. He had to escape from Germany because he was fighting against the Nazis and had been arrested several times. Henry escaped to Poland. However, Poland was invaded by the German army and Henry managed to get on a boat to England. On arrival, he was sent to Canada in case he was a spy, and was allowed to return to London six months later after proving that he was not. During the war, he made propaganda films for the British government to help them in the fight against the Nazis.

Both Lilo and Henry were lucky to survive. Most of my grandmother’s family were killed in the Holocaust, where six million Jews were murdered by the Nazis and their supporters.
The Windrush generation

On 21st July 1948, the Empire Windrush docked in Tilbury, close to London. The following day, over 800 passengers from the Caribbean stepped on to English soil. Some of them had been to England before because they had been in the Royal Air Force during the Second World War. They all came for a brighter future, in the hope of getting better jobs and earning more money. One passenger, the Calypso singer Lord Kitchener, sang “London is the place for me” for the television cameras. However, the reality of life in Britain after the war was somewhat different for this group of migrants, who were known as the Windrush generation.

Most of the ship’s passengers headed for London, although some went to Birmingham, Liverpool or Manchester. Those who couldn’t find somewhere to stay ended up in the Clapham Deep Shelter, a former air-raid shelter underneath a Tube station in south London. Many were trained engineers, mechanics and carpenters, and hoped to find work quickly. They went to the local job centre, and those who were successful were able to settle in the local community.

Making a new life

Sadly, many of the Caribbean migrants faced discrimination when they tried to find somewhere to live. It was quite common to see signs in the windows of houses to rent that said: “No Blacks, No dogs, No Irish”. To solve this problem, the Caribbean community often saved their money together to help each other buy homes to live in. Finding work was also challenging. Although many of the Caribbean migrants were skilled, they were often forced to take work that was poorly paid and did not offer them many opportunities. However, thriving communities emerged in places such as Chapeltown in Leeds and Brixton in London.

The children of the Windrush generation worked hard to become successful lawyers, politicians, sport stars, musicians, chefs and writers. Many of them are now household names like Naomi Campbell (model) and Rio Ferdinand (footballer).
Claudia Jones, ‘The Mother of Carnival’

Following the arrival of the *Empire Windrush*, thousands more migrants arrived in Britain from the Caribbean. One of the most colourful ways in which this group have had an influence on Britain is through the Notting Hill Carnival in London. Every August, millions of people enjoy the music, food and traditions of the Caribbean.

The time machine has now arrived in 1960 so that you can talk to Claudia Jones, a key figure in the history of the Notting Hill Carnival.

You: Claudia, you have lived in London for several years, but where were you born?

Claudia Jones: I was born in Trinidad in 1915 but when I was nine, my family moved to America and I grew up in New York City.

You: How did you end up in England?

CJ: After leaving school I wanted to be a journalist, so I started writing for a communist newspaper called the *Daily Worker*. The paper was very unpopular with the American government though, so I ended up in prison and was eventually told that I had to leave the USA. I couldn’t go back to Trinidad, because I was seen as a bad influence, so that’s how I arrived in England in 1955.

You: Did you continue writing?

CJ: Yes! In fact, I set up the *West Indian Gazette*, the first newspaper in England for the Caribbean community.

You: How did you get involved in setting up a carnival?

CJ: Unfortunately, 1958 was a difficult year for the Caribbean community, as Caribbean people had been attacked in Nottingham and Notting Hill. So we decided that it would be a really good idea to have something positive to focus on. We decided to host a Caribbean carnival in Kings Cross, London, where there would be music and dancing!

You: That sounds amazing!

CJ: It was fantastic, and the BBC even made a TV programme about it. We decided to have five more indoor carnivals to celebrate Caribbean culture.

You: Thanks Claudia, it’s no wonder that you are known as the ‘Mother of Carnival’!
Migration from South Asia in the 1960s and 1970s

In the 1930s, there were about 7,000 Indian people living in England. By 1961, that had grown to 100,000. Many came to work in the clothing factories because they already had the relevant skills from work in the textiles industry in India and Pakistan. Others set up Indian restaurants and takeaways. They were soon joined by Asian families that had lived for many years in East Africa, but were being forced to leave. The leaders of two East African countries, Kenya and Uganda, claimed that the Asian communities in their countries were not loyal to them or were not integrating with the African communities properly.

A lot of families moved to Birmingham and opened many Indian restaurants and Asian fashion shops.

Similar to the Caribbean communities that had settled in Britain in the 1950s, the Asian community also faced racism and discrimination. Many had arrived with good qualifications and experience of working in business, schools and the army, but were only able to get low paid work in factories. However, others decided to set up their own restaurants and shops, which became very successful. It is hard to imagine any part of Britain today that does not have an Indian restaurant on the high street!

CASE STUDY

Jayaben Desai

Jayaben Desai was born in India, but married an Indian man who was living in East Africa and so she moved there to be with him. When the Asian population was forced out of Africa, Jayaben came to London in 1967. She found a job working in a factory, but the work was very poorly paid and the workers were treated very badly. Jayaben decided to organise the female workers, most of whom were Asian, to go on strike to improve their working conditions. The strike lasted two years and, although it was not successful, in the long term it made a big improvement to the way in which workers were treated.

A lot of families moved to Birmingham and opened many Indian restaurants and Asian fashion shops.
Refugees in Britain after the Second World War

Britain has always been a home for refugees escaping war, unfair treatment or disaster. For example, the Huguenots in the 1570s and the Jews of Eastern Europe in the 1880s were refugees. In 1951, Britain signed the United Nations Refugee Convention. This meant that the government would accept anyone who was being mistreated in their own country. Over the last 50 years, refugees have come to Britain from all around the world, but particularly recently after the wars in Afghanistan and Syria.

Afghanistan

There has been fighting in Afghanistan since the late 1970s, however the largest number of Afghan refugees arrived in Britain after the American invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. By 2015, there were over 75,000 Afghans in Britain. Most live in London, but there are also large communities in Birmingham, Manchester and Leicester.

Syria

The war in Syria began in 2011 when a peaceful protest against the government turned into a full-scale civil war. The UK pledged to resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees by 2020. Many of them are children, who now have places in schools across the country. Others have been able to get places to study at university or have managed to find jobs. Fifty refugee musicians from the Syrian National Orchestra performed at the Glastonbury music festival in 2016.

Farkhunda

Farkhunda studied medicine in Afghanistan, but when an organisation called the Taliban (who wanted women to return to a more traditional role in the home) took over, she was forced to stop. Farkhunda eventually came to Britain in 2002, and tried to resume her training. It took her many years to qualify as a doctor, but with great support from the Refugee Council, and after 13 years of hard work, Farkhunda is now fulfilling her dream.
How has migration changed Britain?

It is impossible to imagine what Britain would be like if there had been no migration into this small island country. Britain has been changed in so many ways.

Our story started with the Norman invasion of 1066, which introduced important changes to the land, church, language and laws in England. However, in many ways, those changes were forced onto the people living here already. Other changes came about in more subtle ways, through the skills and ideas that migrants such as the Flemish and Huguenots were able to bring to the country.

Some changes took place quite slowly – the idea that people from different backgrounds, religions and ethnic groups should be treated as equals has been fought over for hundreds of years. Today, laws are in place to make sure that everyone receives the same, fair treatment.

Other changes have been more rapid, for example, at the time of writing this book, the largest group of migrants living in Britain were from Poland. In 2001 there were 66,000 Poles in Britain; in 2016 there were 911,000!

There have also been changes to our everyday lives that have come about because of the migrants who moved here. Many migrants have brought favourite foods from their own countries to Britain. Today it is easy to taste delicious food from India, Asia and the Caribbean, as well as many other places, in towns and cities around the UK.

Migration has had a very significant influence on British social experiences. Caribbean music has made a huge contribution to hip hop, jungle, garage and grime music. The proportion of British Premier League players from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds has doubled since the league began in 1992, in 2017–2018, the proportion was 33%. Sir Mo Farah (born in Somalia), Jessica Ennis-Hill (Jamaican father) and Anthony Joshua (Nigerian father) all won gold medals in the London Olympics in 2012.

Nicola Adams, whose family are from the Caribbean, was the first British woman to win an Olympic gold for boxing.

Chicken Tikka Masala is Britain’s favourite takeaway food!
It can be quite a challenge to understand how an enormous issue like migration has changed Britain. Sometimes it’s easier to think about things on a smaller, personal level. I’d like to end this book by sharing my own personal experience of migration, and how it has changed my life in so many ways.

I was born into a Jewish family that can trace its roots through many of the most well-known migration histories of the Jewish community in Britain. On my father’s side, my great-grandparents came from Poland and Russia, and settled in the East End of London. The other side of my father’s family are from Holland. I like to think that they were part of the Jewish community that came back to England in 1656. On my mother’s side, my grandparents were German. You have read about my grandmother who had to escape from the Nazis, and my grandfather who fought against them.

I have been a history teacher for 25 years, and have always taught in schools in London. In the school I teach in at the moment, there are children from all around the world. Seventy-five per cent of my students speak another language at home. They have all taught me so much about their lives.

I am married to a migrant. My wife comes from New York City and has been living in England for nearly 10 years. She works for the National Health Service. My two children are dual citizens, which means that they have both British and American passports. My brother is married to a British Asian woman, whose family came from the Punjab in India.

Migration has a long history in this country, and maybe your family is part of that history too.
Glossary

abolition  to get rid of something
alien  someone from a foreign country
antisemitic  hostility towards or hatred of Jewish people
British Empire  when Britain ruled over many other countries around the world such as India, Nigeria and Jamaica
Briton  a person of British descent
communist  someone who believes that property and wealth should be shared, and that each person contributes and receives according to their ability and needs
discrimination  being treated unfairly because of your age, religion, race, sex or nationality
emigration  leaving your home and moving to another place
evicted  being forced out from your home
export  sell something to another country
Huguenots  French Protestants who were treated very unfairly in the 16th and 17th centuries.
Jew/Jewish  a person who follows the Jewish religion
merchand  someone who buys and sells goods
Middle Ages  a period in European history that lasted approximately from 1000 AD to 1500 AD
migration  moving from one place to another, this could involve movement between countries, or just between towns and villages; a person who has done this is called a migrant
mutiny  a refusal to obey the orders of a person in a position of authority
Nazis  a German political party, led by Adolf Hitler, that held strong antisemitic beliefs
prejudice  judging someone unfairly, often not based on personal experience
propaganda  attempts to persuade people to believe in or support particular ideas or points of view
racism  treating someone unfairly because of their race
refugee  someone who has left their country because of a war, disaster or unfair treatment
Russian Empire  an empire that spread across much of Europe and Asia until 1917
strike  when a person or group of people refuse to work
sweatshop  a factory or workshop, especially in the clothing industry, where workers are paid very low wages and work for very long hours in poor conditions

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Now answer the questions ...

1. Read pages 2 and 3. What are some of the reasons why people have migrated to Britain?

2. What does ‘deteriorated’ mean on page 7?

3. Read pages 14–17. How was the experience of the Huguenots and Palatines different, and why?

4. ‘Sometimes, when the families reached England, the Ayahs would be abandoned because they were no longer needed.’ Think of another word or phrase that could be used instead of ‘abandoned’ in this sentence.

5. Read pages 20–21. What are the main points the author makes on these pages?

6. Read pages 26 and 27, and Molly’s story on pages 28 and 29. Molly’s family decided to move from Ireland to England. If you were in their position, what decision do you think you would make, and why?

7. Read pages 38 and 39. Sally was ‘disgusted by what she heard’. Why?

8. Read this quote from page 42 and reread the text: ‘However, the reality of life in Britain after the war was somewhat different for this group of migrants ...’. How was life different from what they had hoped?

9. Why might the author have included the imaginary interviews in this book?

10. Who do you think is the most inspiring person or group of people you have read about in this book? Why?