

Teaching Britain's 'civil rights' history:

activism and citizenship in context

Hannah Elias and Martin Spafford begin this article by explaining why they believe it is essential for young people to learn about the 'heterogeneous, rich and complex' history of the struggle for civil rights in Britain. Drawing on their diverse experiences of researching, writing and teaching history at school and university level, they put forward a number of key principles that they suggest might underpin the teaching of this history. Their article then provides an overview of the anti-racist struggle across the twentieth century, identifying powerful stories that could serve to illuminate the changing narrative over time, along with guidance and links to important collections of resources related to each of the periods and stories outlined.

UK anti-racism – a human rights story

In December 1955, Claudia Jones, a Trinidad-born feminist, political activist, journalist, Black nationalist and community leader, arrived in Britain seeking political asylum after being harassed, arraigned, briefly imprisoned, and subsequently deported by the United States government. She worked closely with London's African-Caribbean community and was a vociferous advocate for human and civil rights.¹ In March 1958, she founded the *West Indian Gazette*, which argued for equal opportunities for Black people and Commonwealth migrants. She described the newspaper as 'a catalyst, quickening the awareness, socially and politically, of West Indians, Afro-Asians and their friends.'² The *Gazette* did important advocacy work, bearing witness and reporting on the violence experienced by migrant communities, while linking specific neighbourhood concerns in Notting Hill to the wider global world of anti-colonial protest and the Civil Rights movement.³

According to historian Bill Schwarz, Claudia Jones's work 'animate[d] the specifically West Indian culture of the emigrant on the home territory of Britain itself'.⁴ This was an important political project in the face of visceral racial hatred. The same year that Claudia Jones arrived in Britain, Winston Churchill attempted to persuade the Conservative Party to adopt the slogan 'Keep England White'.⁵ White racists instigated riots in Notting Hill and Nottingham in 1958. In Notting Hill, hundreds piled into the streets to take part in the *mêlée*, shouting and damaging property caught in their wake. White children could be heard shouting: 'Come on, let's get the blacks!' Seventeen people were arrested for attacking and petrol bombing Black households.⁶

Claudia Jones responded to the race riots of 1958 by asserting the place of African-Caribbean culture in the imperial metropolis. Four months after the Notting Hill riot, she organised a carnival in St Pancras Town Hall, believing that 'a people's art is the genesis of their freedom'.⁷ This was the first of what became the annual Notting Hill Carnival. The carnival was a showcase of Caribbean artistic and musical talent, which Jones hoped would act as a bridge between cultural differences and promote greater understanding of and respect for the Caribbean presence in Britain.⁸ But more than a bridge between cultural divides, the 'carnival queen contest marked an explicit attempt to instil popular pride in being black'.⁹

The Notting Hill Carnival is one of the most famous in Europe – but how many young people know about its anti-racist origins? Or about its founder's long career of advocacy and her notable contributions to British cultural and intellectual history? Or that the carnival was just one of a series of projects created by Jones to assert that West Indian culture and people belonged in Britain, and that migrants deserved to have their human rights respected?

Hannah Elias and Martin Spafford

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In June 2012, Whitburn and Yemoh wrote in *Teaching History*:

*There is a rich history of grassroots activism... within Britain's Black communities, akin to the history of the African-American civil rights movement, but it is usually the latter which is chosen by history departments for their schemes of work.*¹⁰

Nearly ten years later, how much has changed? According to the 2021 Historical Association survey of history teaching in secondary schools, while the percentage of schools among the respondents that reported teaching migration (72.8%) and the British Empire (82%) was fairly high, only 23% of the 316 respondents reported teaching a series of lessons on Black and Asian British history, with only just under 15% teaching histories of UK civil rights.¹¹

The story of the 'grassroots activism' of the anti-racist struggle in the UK is heterogeneous, rich and complex. It is many-faceted, full of strong narratives and fascinating personalities that will engage students. Its victories and defeats helped to bring about the racial justice and injustices of our time; its history has shaped many aspects of contemporary Britain – politically, culturally and socially. If our students are to understand fundamental issues of citizenship and human rights in the Britain of today and tomorrow, this history is essential. If all they know of this British history is silence, our students remain dangerously ill-informed. As Helen Carr and Susannah Lipscomb write in their prologue to *What is History, Now?*

*The problem of silences in the archives is especially pressing if we recognise that history is not only constructed in the present – our understanding of it also constructs the sort of present we live in.*¹²

At the end of *Young Rebels*, a powerful film made by a younger generation of British Asians about their parents' struggles in the 1970s, two former Southall Youth Movement activists talk of the significance of their actions:¹³

We always said that the past informs the present and the present shapes the future ... You cannot forget the history of your own community ... So for the children in the next generation, we are part of them and they are part of us. They cannot and should not disconnect from our experiences.

Balraj Purewal

The Youth Movement gave us the voice that allows our children to walk free.

Shan Chaudhary

Figure 1: The first ever 'Notting Hill Carnival' organised by Claudia Jones in St Pancras Town Hall

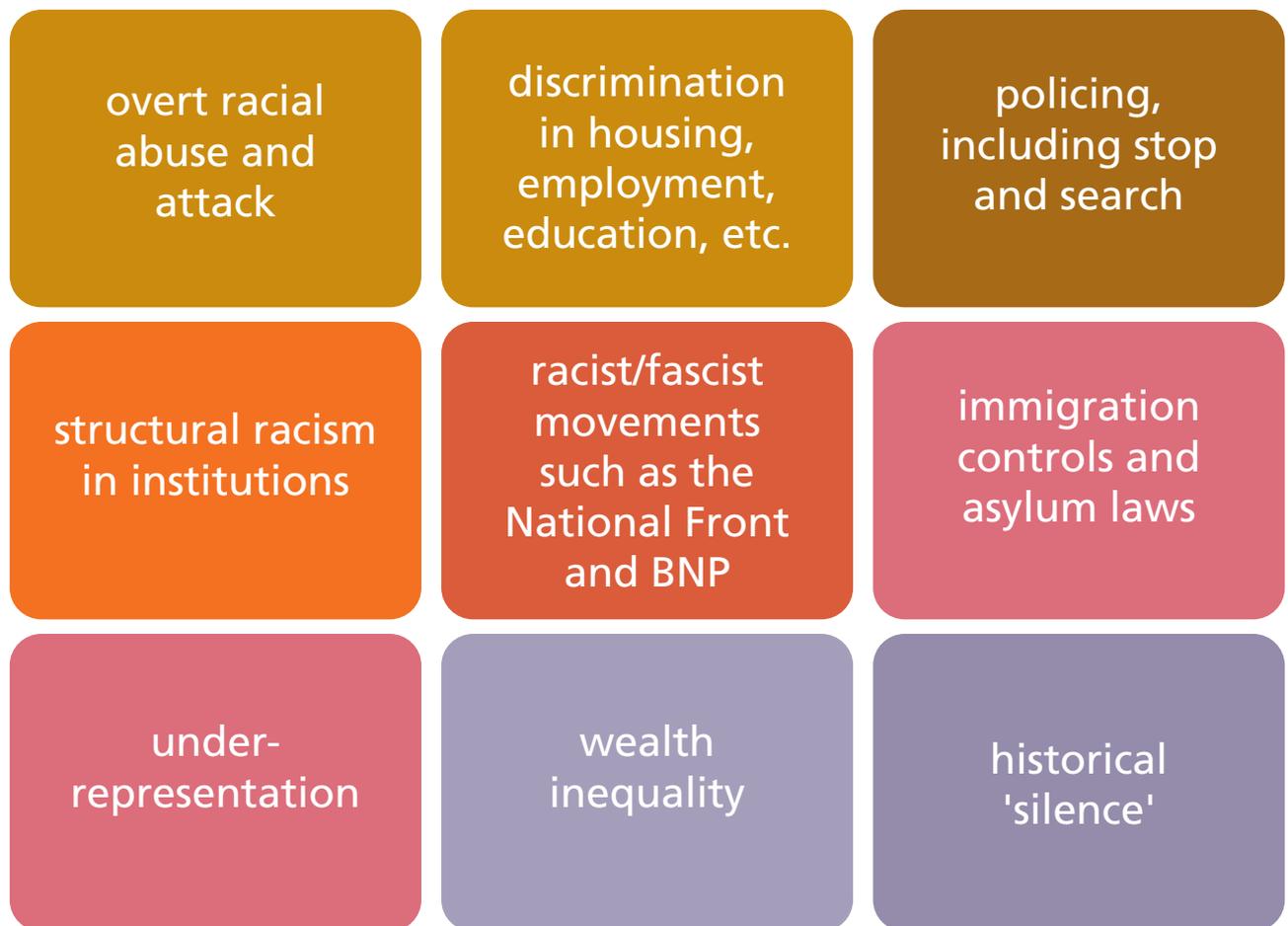


Why, then are personalities such as Claudia Jones or the Southall Youth Movement so absent from our curriculum? Why are Rosa, Martin and Malcolm far more familiar to many students than Paul (Stephenson), Darcus (Howe), Althea (Jones LeCointe), John (La Rose) or Jayaben (Desai)? According to Michel-Rolph Trouillot, who was referenced by Lyndon-Cohen in the Race edition of *Teaching History*,

*The value of a historical product cannot be debated without taking into account both the context of its production and the context of its consumption.*¹⁴

In thinking about these contexts, we recognise that our curriculum choices are in large part determined by the options offered by exam boards and by the content of textbooks, which have been influenced by a relative scarcity of academic works describing these histories. This scarcity has itself, in turn, been affected by the structural exclusion from (or marginalisation within) British universities of the histories of colonised and racialised people. Recent changes offer promise: the Royal Historical Society's *2018 Race, Ethnicity and Equality in UK History* report has challenged university history departments to do better on matters of representation, both in the curriculum and in the ethnic diversity of history teaching staff.¹⁵ Community historians have played an essential role in documenting, recording and preserving the history of Black and Asian experiences in the UK; it is because of their activism and scholarship that we are able learn more about the histories of British anti-racism

Figure 2: Various ways in which racism has manifested itself in Britain



and Black liberation movements today. It is important for students to understand that Black and Asian people have had significant agency in our shared past, and that this has regularly been omitted from dominant historical narratives.

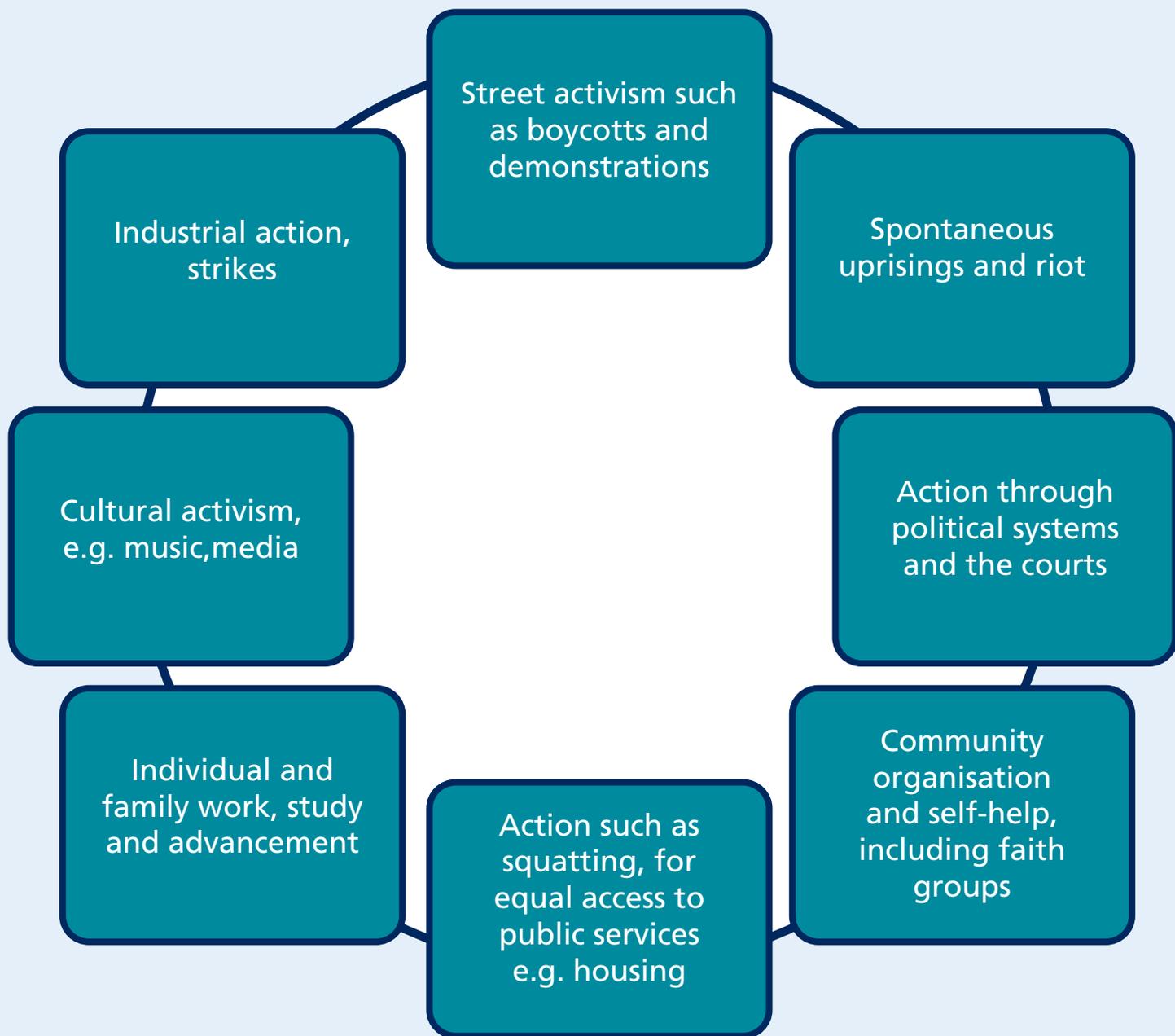
Our combined experience researching, writing and teaching at school and university level has led us to think deeply about why and how schools in the UK need to move the emphasis of civil rights and anti-racist history closer to home. Hannah is a Lecturer in Black British History at Goldsmiths, University of London, part of the team delivering the UK's first taught MA in Black British History. Formerly the head of 'inclusive history' initiatives at the Institute of Historical Research (IHR), she has also worked with Dr Sundeep Lidher and colleagues at the Runnymede Trust to create digital tools to help educators #TeachRaceMigrationEmpire. Martin's active involvement from the mid-1990s in the Black and Asian Studies Association – while a school history teacher – led him to participate in the design of the 2008 National Curriculum for history and, after retirement, to co-create and write for the GCSE unit on migration offered by the OCR examination board, to help with the *Our Migration Story* website and to explore inclusive and silenced histories.¹⁶ As a volunteer for Journey to Justice he has worked to bring to the fore untold personal histories of anti-racist action in the UK. In this article we put forward a number of key principles that we suggest might underpin the teaching of Britain's civil rights history, followed by an overview of the struggle across the twentieth century, identifying powerful stories that could serve to illuminate the changing narrative over time. Finally, we offer guidance and links to important collections of resources related to each of the periods and stories outlined.

Key principles for teaching UK 'civil rights' history

1. Locate the 20th-century struggles for civil rights in the wider context (and consciousness) of the history of empire

Teaching the history of the Black freedom struggle in the United States in the mid-twentieth century cannot begin and end with the life of Martin Luther King; it requires contextualisation from the longer histories of enslavement, segregation and the 'Jim Crow' laws that shaped the USA's past and have tragic legacies in the present. Similarly, when approaching the history of UK anti-racism movements in the 1960s, 70s and 80s, it is necessary to place these movements in the wider context of the history of the British Empire, anti-colonial struggles, processes of decolonisation, and British histories of white supremacy. For much of the past three centuries, 'Britain' stretched far beyond the islands that make up the contemporary United Kingdom: Britain's global colonial system included the Caribbean, Africa, South Asia, regions in the South China Sea, Oceania and North America. In 1948, the British Nationality Act legally recognised all Commonwealth subjects as British citizens and gave them the right to work and settle in the UK. While Britain had long been home to diverse migrant populations, many thousands of Commonwealth citizens moved to settle in England, Scotland and Wales in the mid-twentieth century. Migrants from diverse parts of the British Empire had rights to British citizenship, but they encountered distinct forms of structural racism in the UK, particularly in housing, employment and education. The British anti-racist movement was not singular but consisted of many forms of action responding

Figure 3: Examples of various forms of anti-racist action (since the 1960s)



to specific and often local circumstances. Sometimes groups organised themselves within diasporic communities from the Caribbean, Asia or Africa, and sometimes anti-racist coalitions were formed through disparate groups with shared, or interconnected, histories of colonisation. Many of the Black and Asian activists were steeped in the anti-imperialist writings of Franz Fanon, Walter Rodney, C.L.R. James and Paul Gilroy (as well as Angela Davis and Malcolm X from the USA).

A. Sivanandan said of postcolonial migration, ‘We are here because you were there.’¹⁷ Students will need to know something of the history of the British Empire and the fact that colonised people had been told that they were British citizens, something reinforced by the 1948 Act. The ‘Windrush generation’ arrived with British passports, but they and their descendants had to fight for their Britishness to be accepted. Anti-racist action in the UK by the descendants of colonised, racialised people always took place in the context and consciousness of the legacies of empire, and

still does. Calls in 2020 by Black Lives Matter activists to ensure the teaching of empire in schools, and strikes by Pimlico students objecting to the Union Jack flying at their school, demonstrate the power of that memory.¹⁸ Central to this struggle has been assertion of the right to *belong* as fully equal British citizens.

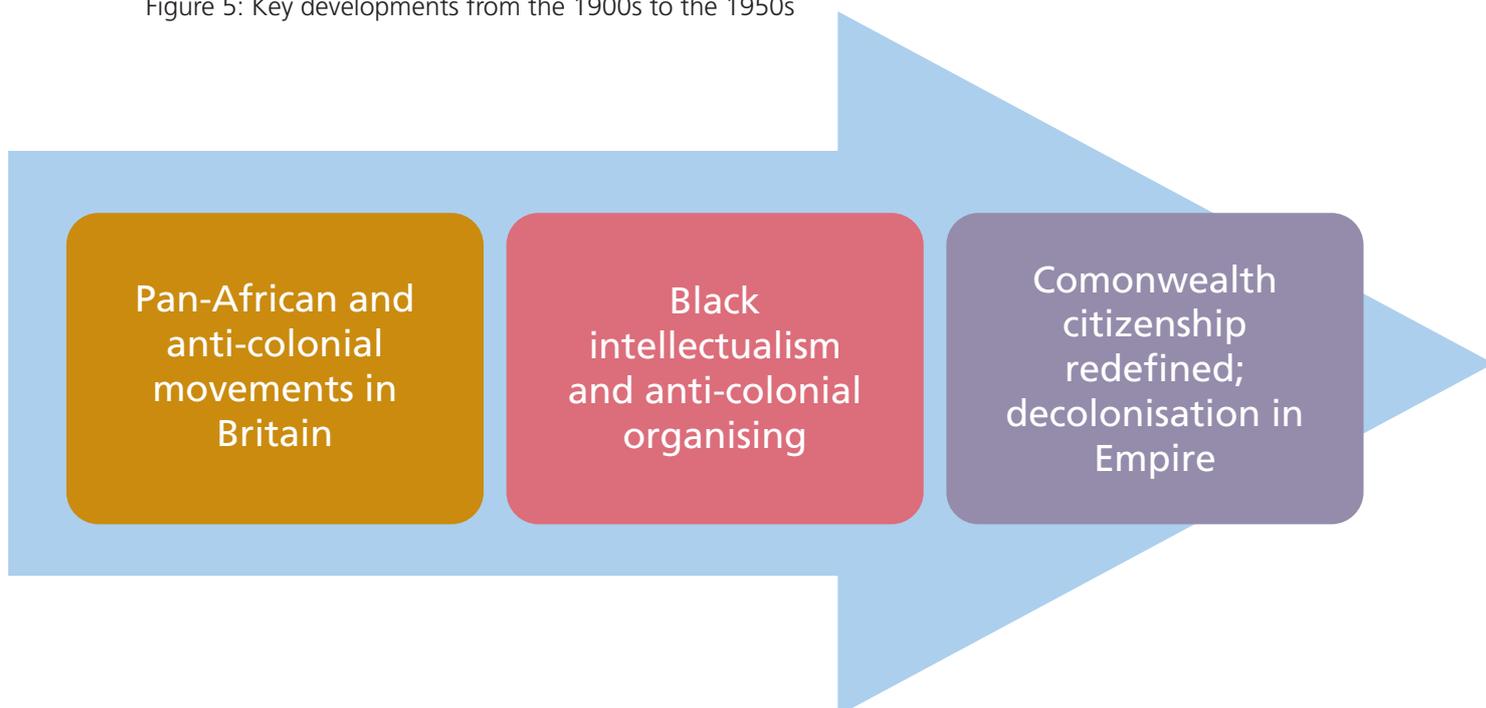
2. Acknowledge the long history of Black British and British Asian activism

Black British and British Asian involvement in political action has a long history. Examples include the nineteenth-century Black ‘radicals’ such as Robert Wedderburn, William Davidson and William Cuffay who saw abolitionism and the rights of the wider working class as inseparable; Lascar merchant seamen in post-war port communities who asserted their right to work; the Pan-African and anti-colonial movements in the early twentieth century; and the inter-war League of Coloured Peoples that was active opposing the ‘colour bar’ around the UK.

Figure 4: Examples of possible enquiries

How important was anti-colonialism to the anti-racist movement in Britain?
Why did Darcus Howe decide to organise the Mangrove march?
What have been the key turning points in the struggle against racism in the UK, and why?
Progress towards racial equality since 1945: real change for the better or hopes destroyed?
Was it a strength or weakness that action against racism took so many different forms?
To what extent were the activists of the 1970s and 1980s 'the voice that allows our children to walk free' (Shan Chaudhary)?

Figure 5: Key developments from the 1900s to the 1950s



3. Highlight the influence of the recent history of fascism

Another history that sets UK anti-racism apart from the US story is the memory of European fascism. Many saw the National Front and the British National Party – both deeply antisemitic as well as anti-immigrant – as descendants of the Blackshirts and the Nazis. The two interpretations – of anti-racism as an anti-colonial struggle on the one hand, and as an anti-fascist struggle on the other, did not always sit comfortably with each other but did energise and bring people together in the struggle against the many forms of racism experienced in Britain (summarised in Figure 3).¹⁹

4. Recognise that the British anti-racist movement took many forms

The struggle for belonging in the UK has never been a single story, nor a single movement. It has responded to varied manifestations of racism by taking varied forms, as illustrated in Figure 2. It has embraced, certainly, the visible, newsworthy stories of street activism, strikes, campaigns and battles through the courts. It has also included supplementary

schools, faith and community groups, writers and artists, parents' pressure for their children's education and the individual hard work and the entrepreneurship, often family based, that has transformed our high streets. Some of these were consciously part of an anti-racist movement while others, without such an explicit objective, still had the effect of challenging racist attitudes and structures.

5. Recognise that it was not a simple story of progress

We may have been tempted in classrooms to portray the struggle for civil rights in the US simplistically as a successful 'march towards freedom' whereas, as the Black Lives Matter movement reminds us, the extent to which there has been progress towards racial equality is unresolved. In the UK, while there have been advances allowing more recent generations to 'walk free' to some extent, the *Windrush* scandal and tightening controls on immigration and asylum demonstrate that the story – especially since 1962 – has often been of rights being stripped away.

Figure 6: Topics and sources for teaching about the period from the 1900s to the 1940s

	Key topics	Useful sources
<p>Pan-Africanism in Britain</p>	<p>1900: First Pan-African Congress held in London. Key participants include Henry Sylvester Williams, W.E.B. Du Bois, Samuel Coleridge Taylor, Anna J. Cooper. Activists from USA, Caribbean, Europe and Africa in attendance.</p> <p>Case study: Amy Ashwood Garvey and the Florence Mills Social Parlour in London as a hub for African and Caribbean liberation movement organisers and intellectuals.</p> <p>1945: Fifth Pan-African Congress held in Manchester, including future leaders of independent African states.</p>	<p>www.ourmigrationstory.org.uk/oms/transcontinental-activism-in-inter-war-britain</p> <p>Adebajo, A. (ed.), (2021) <i>The Pan-African Pantheon: prophets, poets and philosophers</i>, Manchester: Manchester University Press</p> <p>Adi, H. (2019) <i>Pan-Africanism: a history</i> London: Bloomsbury.</p>
<p>Black intellectualism and anti-colonial resistance in Britain</p>	<p>WASU – West African Student Union</p> <p>League of Coloured Peoples: Dr Harold Moody, Una Marson</p> <p>Black intellectuals and literature: Eric Williams, C.L.R. James</p> <p>Anti-colonial organising: George Padmore, Jomo Kenyatta, Kwame Nkrumah</p> <p>Parliamentary politics: Fenner Brockway MP</p>	<p>Marc Matera (2015) <i>Black London: the imperial metropolis and decolonisation in the twentieth century</i> (University of California Press.</p> <p>Gopal, P. (2019) <i>Insurgent Empire: anticolonial resistance and British dissent</i>, London: Verso.</p> <p><i>The Keys</i> primary source www.bl.uk/collection-items/the-keys-january-to-march-1935-issue</p> <p>George Padmore Institute resources: www.georgepadmoreinstitute.org/</p>
<p>Commonwealth citizenship redefined</p>	<p>1947: Partition of India and Pakistan</p> <p>1948: British Nationality Act</p> <p>1948: <i>Windrush</i> arrival</p>	<p>British Library Windrush Collections: www.bl.uk/windrush</p> <p>Lord Kitchener – ‘London is the place for me’: www.youtube.com/watch?v=dGt21q1AjuI</p> <p>Black Cultural Archives resources: https://blackculturalarchives.org/sounds-of-the-rush</p>

Possible approaches and resources for teaching the history of UK anti-racism

In designing a unit of study, a strong enquiry could focus on selected events in the 1950s to 1980s while requiring knowledge of some contextual background from earlier in the century. Figure 4 provides some examples of the kinds of enquiry question that might be used to structure a scheme of work.

To help teachers get to grips with the story we provide, in Part 1 below, a summary of that earlier context. Students will need a clear, if brief, sense that the boycotts, protests,

uprisings and court battles of the 1970s and 80s grew from an earlier history. In Part 2 we then look at many examples of the activism of the post-war period, with links to resources that can help teachers choose which to use in the classroom.

Part 1: Early twentieth-century contexts and interconnections

The first half of the twentieth century can perhaps be summarised in terms of three main developments, set out in Figure 5, and each outlined below. Figure 6 provides examples of specific events and case-studies, along with links to appropriate resources that could support teaching about each of these developments.

Figure 7: Key developments from the 1950s to the 2020s

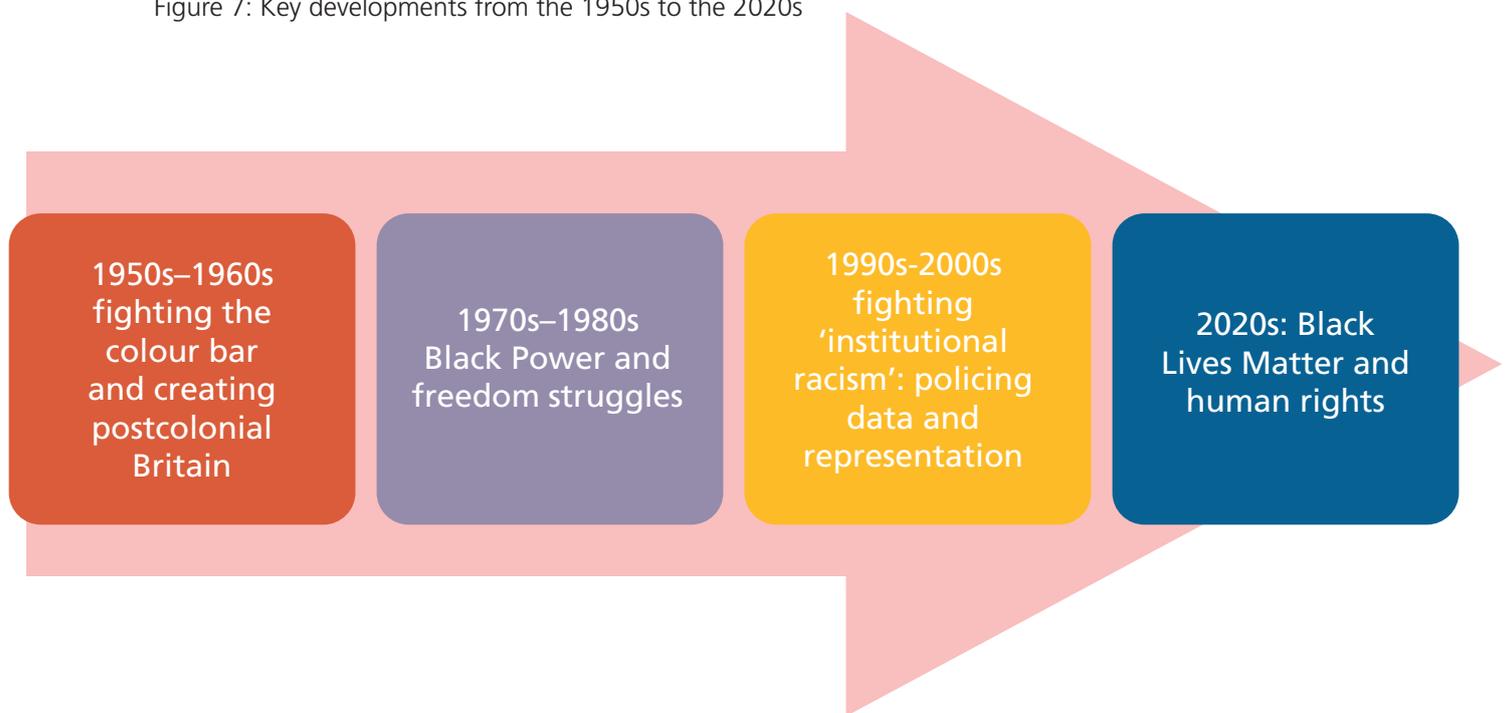


Figure 8: Useful websites for materials related to the 1950s and 1960s

Sources of individual stories related to the struggle against the colour bar in the 1950s	Sources related to the 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Act (the Kenyan Asians Act) which effectively redefined British citizenship
<p>Journey to Justice – Bristol resources (see especially 'Bristol Bus Boycott'): https://jtojhumanrights.org.uk/local-stories/bristol/</p> <p>Black History Month resource – 'Omitted from history: Asquith Xavier': www.blackhistorymonth.org.uk/article/section/bhm-firsts/omitted-from-history-asquith-xavier/</p>	<p>British Pathé – British Asians in Kenya: www.britishpathe.com/video/VLVA67MVDU4880Y22G7D2WHM8K11C-KENYA-UK-ASIANS-FLOCK-TO-UK-FROM-KENYA/query/UK</p> <p>Runnymede Trust – about the Commonwealth Immigration Act 1968, with oral interview: www.runnymedetrust.org/histories/race-equality/38/commonwealth-immigration-act-1968.html</p>

a) Pan-Africanism in Britain

Pan-Africanism is a movement that encouraged solidarity among people of African descent worldwide, and the belief that it is important to celebrate a common history and unity among African peoples, both in Africa and in the global diaspora.²⁰ Pan-Africanism has had a variety of forms, but it is largely concerned with the social, economic, cultural and political emancipation of African peoples. It emerged in the 1770s to challenge transatlantic systems of enslavement and widespread European racism.²¹ In the twentieth century, Pan-African writers, thinkers and activists challenged European colonisation, drew attention to the persistent legacies of slavery, and called for reparations to Africa and African peoples for slavery and colonialism. They also challenged the racist treatment of African-descended peoples in Europe and in white settler colonial nations (including the US, Caribbean, South Africa).

The UK had an important place in the Pan-African movement: the first Pan-African Congress – a gathering

of intellectuals and influential organisers – took place in London in 1900, with further gatherings hosted in the 1920s. Manchester was home to the Pan-African Congress of 1945, a major gathering of future African leaders fighting for independence on the African continent.

At the first Pan-African Congress, scholar-activist W.E.B. Du Bois predicted: 'The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour line.'²²

b) Black intellectualism and anti-colonial resistance in Britain

In the interwar years, London became a hub of resistance to empire. According to historian Marc Matera, 'it served as a meeting point of intellectuals, artists, revolutionaries and movements for colonial freedom.'²³ People from diverse colonial settings exchanged ideas and created plans for a transformed global order, in private settings, clubs, political organisations, universities, and bars.

Figure 9: A summary of forms of action in the 1970s and 1980s energised by various forces coming together



In 1931, the Statute of Westminster codified self-governing independence for white settler colonies in Canada, Newfoundland, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa. The legislation effectively created a colour bar on the right to self-determination, denying colonies in the Caribbean, Africa and South Asia political autonomy. The fight for self-government and self-determination became a major feature of anti-colonial activism before the Second World War.

c) Commonwealth citizenship redefined

The British Nationality Act of 1948 created new categories and definitions of 'citizenship.' Under the act, the nationality of British subjects in the colonies and in Britain was officially recognised under the category 'Citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies.'²⁴ The act created a uniform definition

for British subjecthood that applied across metropolitan Britain, as well as the Empire and Commonwealth. This measure afforded equal access to the rights of citizenship for people of all ethnicities and faiths. After the Second World War, a number of western European countries experienced labour shortages and actively encouraged the migration of workers to meet labour demands and facilitate economic reconstruction.²⁵

Under the terms of the act: all citizens of Empire could apply for and receive a British passport, and were allowed freedom of movement, reinforcing a long-held tradition of entry to the UK for all subjects of the British Empire and citizens of Commonwealth countries.²⁶

Figure 10: Online resources related to key stories from the 1970s and 1980s

Theme	Case studies	Recommended source
Confronting racist attacks and the National Front; anti-fascism	1976–79 Southall and the Asian Youth Movement 1977 Battle of Lewisham 1978 The murder of Altab Ali, and Bangladeshi youth movements 1978 Rock Against Racism 1981 New Cross fire and the National Black People’s Day of Action (see Figure 11)	‘Young Rebels – the story of the Southall Youth Movement’ – https://vimeo.com/95551885 ²⁷ ‘Uprising’ (Steve McQueen) – BBC TV series https://beyondbanglatown.org.uk/globe/politics-racism-resistance/ ‘White Riot – documenting Rock Against Racism’ – www.youtube.com/watch?v=7wOLOlgHj_E ‘Uprising’ (Steve McQueen) – BBC TV series
Policing	1970 Mangrove 9 1980 St Paul’s uprising, Bristol 1981 Uprisings in Brixton, London and Toxteth, Liverpool – the Scarman Report 1981 Bradford 12 1982–83 Newham 8	‘Small Axe’ (Steve McQueen) – BBC TV series. ‘Mangrove 9 Protest’ www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/mangrove-nine-protest/ ‘Uprising’ (Steve McQueen) – BBC TV series ‘Darcus Howe and Britain’s Black Power Movement’ www.ourmigrationstory.org.uk ‘Resisting racism: the Bradford 12 Defence Campaign’ www.ourmigrationstory.org.uk ‘The Newham 8, police racism and community action’ https://jtojhumanrights.org.uk/local-stories/london/newham/ ²⁸
Industrial	1974 Imperial Typewriters, Leicester 1976 Grunwick, West London	‘How a Leicester struggle helped change Britain’ https://strikeatimperial.net/ ‘The Imperial Typewriter Strike’ https://jtojhumanrights.org.uk/local-stories/leicester/ ‘On the picket line: Jayaben Desai from East Africa to Grunwick’ www.ourmigrationstory.org.uk/oms/from-east-africa-to-grunwick-jayaben-desai
Immigration	1981 Anwar Ditta campaign	‘Families divided: the campaign for Anwar Ditta and her children’, www.ourmigrationstory.org.uk
Family	Resisting racist attacks Building family business Supplementary schools	‘Nasreen Saddique – Anne Frank with a telephone’ https://jtojhumanrights.org.uk/local-stories/london/newham/ ²⁹ Corner Shop Stories www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/corner-shop-stories ³⁰ https://beyondbanglatown.org.uk/ ‘Small Axe’ (Steve McQueen) – BBC TV series.

Figure 11: The National Black People's Day of Action in 1981

Thousands marched to Downing Street, to protest against the Metropolitan Police's handling of the investigation of the New Cross Fire in which 13 Black people died.



On 8 June 1948, when 500 Caribbean residents disembarked at the Tilbury Dock in Essex, they came to Britain with full citizenship rights, and the expectation of full participation in British society. Kennetta Hammond Perry has called their arrival, and the arrival of subsequent migrants from the Caribbean and South Asia, a significant act of claim-making to take up the equal rights promised by their citizenship on arrival in the 'Mother Country' of Great Britain.

However, the architects of these changes to citizenship law – both the Labour government and the British state – intended for this legislation to benefit Canadians, Australians and New Zealanders and thereby to continue, rather than dismantle, imperial hierarchies. They saw migrants from Europe and white settler nations as more 'desirable' than migrants from the Caribbean or Asia, and the Colonial Office and Migrant Services Division often tried to suppress increasing migration.³¹

Part 2: Anti-racist dissent in the UK from the 1950s to the present

In focusing on events from the 1950s onwards, we have broken the period into four main phases as summarised in Figure 7. Again we seek to provide an outline of the main developments within each period and examples of resources that could support teachers interested in focusing on them in more detail.

a) 1950s – 1960s: Fighting the colour bar and creating postcolonial Britain

Until the passing of the Race Relations Acts, racial discrimination in areas such as employment, housing and education was still legal. Bristol's Black community, led by activists including Paul Stephenson, Roy Hackett, Guy Bailey and Owen Henry, organised a 1963 boycott of the city's buses that succeeded in forcing the bus company to reverse its decision not to employ Black drivers. In 1966 Asquith Xavier ('an ordinary man who did extraordinary things', in the words of his granddaughter) protested successfully against Euston Station's decision to refuse him a job because of his skin colour.³² Either would form an excellent case study, as would the story of Claudia Jones and the start of the Notting Hill Carnival and the *West Indian Gazette*, summarised at the start of this article. Figure 8 provides a list of websites with materials related to such individual stories.

Between 1948 and 1962, thousands of migrants from the Caribbean, Africa and South Asia moved to the UK, entering the country as British citizens with the right to live and work. Major political parties became increasingly concerned with reducing and discouraging migration. In 1962, a major shift took place: Commonwealth migrants newly arrived in Britain were no longer defined as British citizens. They were now 'immigrants', and new legislation created categories of 'acceptable' and desirable migrants. Migrants from white settler countries were deliberately given more favourable terms of access than countries with non-white majority populations. The 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Act can

Figure 12: Examples of anti-racist action that have focused on migrant communities with origins *outside* the Commonwealth

Anti-deportation campaigns and solidarity with asylum seekers from the Middle East and central Africa.

See the 1996 'Your Shout' video by Year 7 students campaigning to stop the deportation of their Angolan classmate: 'The Friends of Natasha'
<https://jtojhumanrights.org.uk/local-stories/london/newham/>

Unions such as United Voices of the World defending the rights of low paid domestic, catering and care workers from Latin America and East Asia –
www.uvwunion.org.uk/en/

Support for EU migrant workers in the wake of Brexit

be a particularly useful case study: also known as the Kenyan Asians Act, the legislation was passed to close a loophole that allowed Kenyan Asians to migrate to Britain, a racially motivated manoeuvre that caused chaos for thousands of families. The further erosion of citizenship rights in the 1971 and 1981 Acts set the stage for the Windrush scandal.

In 2010, the Home Office deliberately destroyed landing cards that documented when and where Caribbean migrants arrived in the UK.³³ Information about the precise date of arrival was essential for demonstrating whether a person was living in the country legally. The Home Office, under the auspices of its 'hostile environment' policy in 2012, has illegally deported British citizens who have not been able to supply documentation of the precise date of their arrival. Victims of this illegal deportation are still awaiting compensation.³⁴

b) 1970s – 1980s: Black Power and freedom struggles

The story of the 1970s and 1980s is particularly the story of the 'second generation', the children of the 'Windrush Generation', many born in the UK, who faced direct, violent racism in the aftermath of Enoch Powell's 1968 speech and the rise of the National Front as well as racism experienced in institutions and at the hands of the police. People organised, fought back and, in bringing anti-racism onto the streets, challenged the idea of what it meant to be British. It was a period of great social change, not least in attitudes to race and racism, and what it meant to be 'Black'. Figure 9 illustrates how the different forms of anti-racist action in the 1970s and 80s were energised by various forces coming together. Figure 10 presents a selection of the more accessible and engaging resources that are now freely available for many of the stories in this period. We recommend choosing a selection of examples that reflect the diversity of forms of action.

c) 1990s – 2000s Fighting Institutional racism: policing, data and representation

The 1998 report into the policing of the murder of Stephen Lawrence established the concept of institutional or structural racism. The United Families & Friends Campaign addressed deaths in police custody. The police killing of

Mark Duggan led to the 2011 riots, starting in Tottenham as a protest against policing but spreading across the country to become wider expressions of working-class disaffection, white and Black. This was also a period in which there was a focus on the under-representation of people of colour in positions of influence. As Figure 12 illustrates, much anti-racist action has also focused on migrant communities with origins *outside* the Commonwealth.

British anti-racism action has also included the work of organisations like the Runnymede Trust and Institute of Race Relations, which have gathered data and created evidentiary reports to document the extent and nature of systemic racism in British institutions and society.

d) 2020 onwards – Black Lives Matter and human rights in the 2020s and beyond

Like the transatlantic and transnational protest movements for Black liberation in the twentieth century, Black Lives Matter has entwined the global with the local in the fight for race equality. The murder of George Floyd by Minnesota police in 2020 sparked global protests and outcry; but local BLM demonstrations also included specific calls for reform in the UK: to address structural racism in policing, in opposition to expanding surveillance, and to teach Black histories, as well as histories of race, migration and empire, in British schools.

Concluding thoughts and recommendations

The broad narrative and many individual stories of US Civil Rights history are well known, but we hope this article has provided a useful guide and possible starting point for teachers who want to bring the UK's own 'civil rights' history into the classroom. The fight for Black liberation took a different shape in the UK because of Britain's distinct history of colonialism and migration. Activists fighting for race equality in the US, UK, Europe and Africa often collaborated, shared ideas with each other, and supported one another's causes, and so a 'global' or comparative perspective on this important history can be a helpful one. But it is also important to situate and centre the long struggle for racial equality in Britain within this country's national story

for school-aged learners. Black history, after all, is British history; obscuring the histories of race, migration and empire from our teaching gives students an incomplete and partial understanding of the key ideas, movements and forces that have shaped modern Britain. Exploring this history can also touch students' own senses of identity and belonging, and provide essential context to allow critical thinking about what British citizenship means, and has meant over time.

Now that all three examination boards in England offer GCSE units on migration, all the textbooks for those courses contain useful material on the UK anti-racist struggle, and we recommend teachers to have their own copies of them to hand to help with planning. The Black Cultural Archives have an extensive collection of magazines, newspaper, broadsheets, posters and records connected to Black community organising and Black education movements in Britain. Figure 13 provides a list of further reading suggestions, all of which are highly recommended.

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- ¹³ *Young Rebels – the story of the Southall Youth Movement* (2014 video by digital:works and the Asian Health Agency).
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- ¹⁵ <https://royalhistosoc.org/racereport/>
- ¹⁶ Spafford, M., Lyndon, D., Adi, H. and Sherwood, M. (2016) *OCR GCSE History Explaining the Modern World: migration, empire and the historic environment*, London: Hodder. The website *Our Migration Story* presents the 'often untold stories of the generations of migrants who came to and shaped the British Isles'. www.ourmigrationstory.org.uk/
- ¹⁷ For an example of the significance of this aphorism see, for example, Srilangarajah, V. (2018) 'We are here because you were with us: remembering A. Sivanandan (1923–2018)' in *Ceasefire*, 4 February. <https://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/us-remembering-a-sivanandan-1923-2018/>
- ¹⁸ See, for example, the petitions debated in the House of Commons on 28 June 2021, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2021-06-28/debates/21062855000001/BlackHistoryAndCulturalDiversityInTheCurriculum>. For a report on the student protest at Pimlico Academy, see <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-56604467>
- ¹⁹ Finlay, J. (2021) 'Competing modes of anti-racism in Britain since the 1960s', a podcast in the seminar series *Antisemitism and Racism – Comparisons and Context* hosted by the Birkbeck Institute for the Study of Antisemitism, which argued that: 'There have been two distinct modes of anti-racism in Britain since the 1960s ... One, led predominantly by Jewish activists, understood racism primarily as antisemitism, viewed the neo-fascist far right as its main target, and saw the Holocaust as its primary historical locus. The other, led mostly by Black and Asian activists, understood racism as the structural oppression of people of colour by the British state and its agencies, and located the origins of racist ideologies in the histories of slavery and colonialism.' <https://bisa.bbk.ac.uk/event/competing-modes-of-anti-racism-in-britain-since-the-1960s/>
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Figure 13: Recommendations for further reading

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Patel, I.S. (2021) *We're Here Because You Were There: immigration and the end of empire*, London: Verso.

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Digital resources

Our Migration Story (Runnymede Trust):

www.ourmigrationstory.org.uk/oms/by-era/1900–2000

Teaching British Histories of Race, Migration and Empire (Institute of Historical Research) www.history.ac.uk/library/collections/teaching-british-histories-race-migration-and-empire

²² *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²³ Matera, M. (2015) *Black London: the imperial metropolis and decolonization in the twentieth century*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, p. 2.

²⁴ Perry, K.H. (2016), *London is the Place for Me: Black Britons, citizenship and the politics of race*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 54.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

²⁷ A film made by young people in Southall investigating their parents' involvement in the Asian Youth Movement.

²⁸ This includes a powerful interview with Goga Khan, one of the Newham 8.

²⁹ Nasreen, from the age of 12, kept a diary of the nightly racist attacks on her family: here the adult Nasreen is interviewed telling her story.

³⁰ This National Trust/Layers of London project traces and maps the story of the Asian corner shops.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

³² Camealia Xavier-Chihota, speaking at the unveiling of his plaque in Chatham, September 2020. www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-kent-54272188

³³ Gentleman, A. (2018) 'Home Office destroyed Windrush landing cards says ex-staffer' in *The Guardian*, 17 April 2018, www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/apr/17/home-office-destroyed-windrush-landing-cards-says-ex-staffer

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