



Caribbean immigrants arriving in London 22 June, 1948 on the *Empire Windrush*.

PUSH AND PULL FACTORS

Push: Few opportunities, unemployment, natural disasters, poverty, lack of safety, food shortage, war.

Pull: Better future, employment, education, better accommodation, more wealth, stability.

POST-WAR IMMIGRATION

But let us turn our attention to history and the period immediately after World War II and find out how Britain turned into a multicultural society. It is also important to look at why so many people came to Britain and what motivations they had for coming. Push and pull factors have always been dominant in debates about immigration, and they are clearly important in this period too.

During World War II, Britain was heavily bombed by the German Air Force during the *Blitz*. After the war, Britain needed both economic assistance and labour to rebuild society. Money they got from America, but manual labour they had to actively invite themselves. They turned to their colonies, and especially the Caribbean Islands. 1948 is therefore an important year in the history of British immigration. That was when 492 Jamaicans arrived on the ship *Empire Windrush* carrying British passports they had received through the 1948 British Nationality Act. The act gave UK citizenship to people from the colonies, and it meant that people from British colonies and Commonwealth countries could come to Britain. This is called the 'Open Door Policy' where Britain literally opened its borders. The first arrival of people from the Caribbean is symbolic as it is

Fra: Being British, Jan Erik Mostad et al,
Gyldeendal, 2014

THE BRITISH NATIONALITY ACT OF 1948 – THE OPEN DOOR POLICY

The British Nationality Act of 1948 was an Act of Parliament that literally opened the borders for people living in British colonies or Commonwealth countries. The act is often referred to as 'The Open Door Policy'. This was a win-win situation as Britain needed labour and people in the relevant countries needed work. By 1956, there were over 40,000 Caribbean immigrants, and doctors and nurses from the Indian subcontinent came in large numbers. By 1961, over 100,000 Pakistani and Indian nationals had taken up residence in Britain.

often seen as the beginning of Black Britain and the start of mass immigration to Britain. Many of these newcomers had fought for Britain in the war, and they felt British. But as we shall see later, it took a long time for these groups to feel accepted and assimilated into society.

Britain needed both unskilled and skilled labour after the war. Skilled labour was needed particularly in connection with the newly established welfare state – a system that would provide free healthcare for the population. The National Health Service (NHS) needed doctors and nurses, and they were actively recruited from countries on the Indian subcontinent and the Caribbean. This pull factor of work and better economic prospects was the motivation for trained medical staff to move to Britain in the 1950s and 60s. The majority of unskilled labour settled in the cities where there was work to be found and to where they had been invited to come. London Transport

An Indian bus driver in London.



recruited many immigrants, particularly from the Caribbean. Many Asians went to industrial towns in the Midlands and the old mill towns in Yorkshire and Lancashire in the north and north-west of England. Mill towns like Bradford, Manchester and Leeds had been cornerstones in the Industrial Revolution which occurred in the final decades of the 18th century and the first decades of the 19th. Many Asians had been involved in the textile industry in their homelands making them suitable to work in these industries. Due to the distribution of the National Health Service (NHS), skilled immigrants were needed across the country, and many of them ended up in remote rural areas in addition to the urban centres. Many immigrants moved in with people of their own culture. London's East End, for example, which had always been a place for immigrants like French Huguenots, the Irish and the Jews, saw large groups of Asians moving there at this time. The street Brick Lane became in many ways synonymous with multicultural Britain.

The Open Door Policy lasted until 1962. By that time a great number of immigrants had settled in Britain and changed society, especially in certain parts of the country. The number of people who had arrived made the British authorities restrict the flow of immigrants, and the first restrictive immigration act came in 1962. There was a belief in the late 1940s that labour – skilled and unskilled – would attract male immigrants working for a short period of time before returning to their home countries. Reality showed that whole, and often extended, families arrived to settle and remain in Britain. The 1960s therefore became a decade when Britain had to try and cope with all the newcomers. The focus changed from 'open access' to stricter immigration control, and the authorities paid more attention to race relations and how the immigrants were managing in the new country.

The year 1962 is also an important landmark in the history of immigration to Britain. Throughout the 60s and 70s, primary immigration (free admission) was replaced by secondary immigration, which meant that immigrants had to have family members living in Britain or have a job to go to in order to enter the country.

It became more important to look after the

File

im
a c
ser
cie
im
rel:
In
as
the
ter-
anc
in I
the
pri
rela
nic

MC
ML

Can
the
If ot
tucu
isok
see a
cult



Fierce discussions in London between whites and immigrants in 1958.

immigrants who had already arrived than to have a continuous flow of new ones. Focus was on observing how the ethnic minorities adapted to society in their new communities. Many unskilled immigrants settled in industrial areas and had relatively low-paid jobs in the clothing industry. In turn, this led to poor conditions in many areas as well as tensions between ethnic minorities and the white British population. There have been inter-racial riots and confrontations between whites and non-whites since the 1958 Notting Hill riots in London through to the present day. Therefore, there was a great need to change the focus from primary to secondary immigration and look at relations between the races and between the ethnic minorities and the white British population.

MORE INTERCULTURALISM THAN MULTICULTURALISM?

Cameron's speech in 2011 was a turning point in the political approach towards multiculturalism. If other politicians agree that the politics of multiculturalism has failed and led to segregation and isolation of ethnic minorities, we will probably see a more active political engagement in multicultural Britain in the future. Britain is a liberal

country, and the politicians have always believed that immigrants should have citizenship, freedom and the right to choose rather than have the state putting too much pressure on them to integrate and take part in society. The official British view was always the hope that the immigrants would slowly integrate and choose the British way of life. And this has certainly been the case for many, while some have chosen not to become part of British life at all.

Interculturalism may be the way forward for Britain in trying to break down the barriers and focus more on what unites than what divides. Hopefully, this approach will help to build a more dynamic society where everybody at least has the opportunity to find out that they have something in common with each other. But this choice is of course up to each and every person from the ethnic minorities and from the white majority. Playing a larger part in society is based on an active decision that people need to make. For many this is a difficult decision. According to the politicians though, it is not a choice between either/or. Choosing integration would not mean giving up your own cultural background.

Looking back, there seems to have been some individuals and groups that never integrated into British society in the way the authorities had



Two young British girls promoting what it means to be British in the 21st century.

hoped. Some of these have isolated themselves from mainstream society. Developments in recent years have therefore focused more on interculturalism. Whereas multiculturalism is more about cultural diversity and pluralism and may lead to little integration and too much co-existence, interculturalism is a way of promoting more interaction and dialogue between ethnic groups. In this way, people of non-British origin may feel more inclined to take part in society and share the values, norms and characteristics of contemporary Britain.

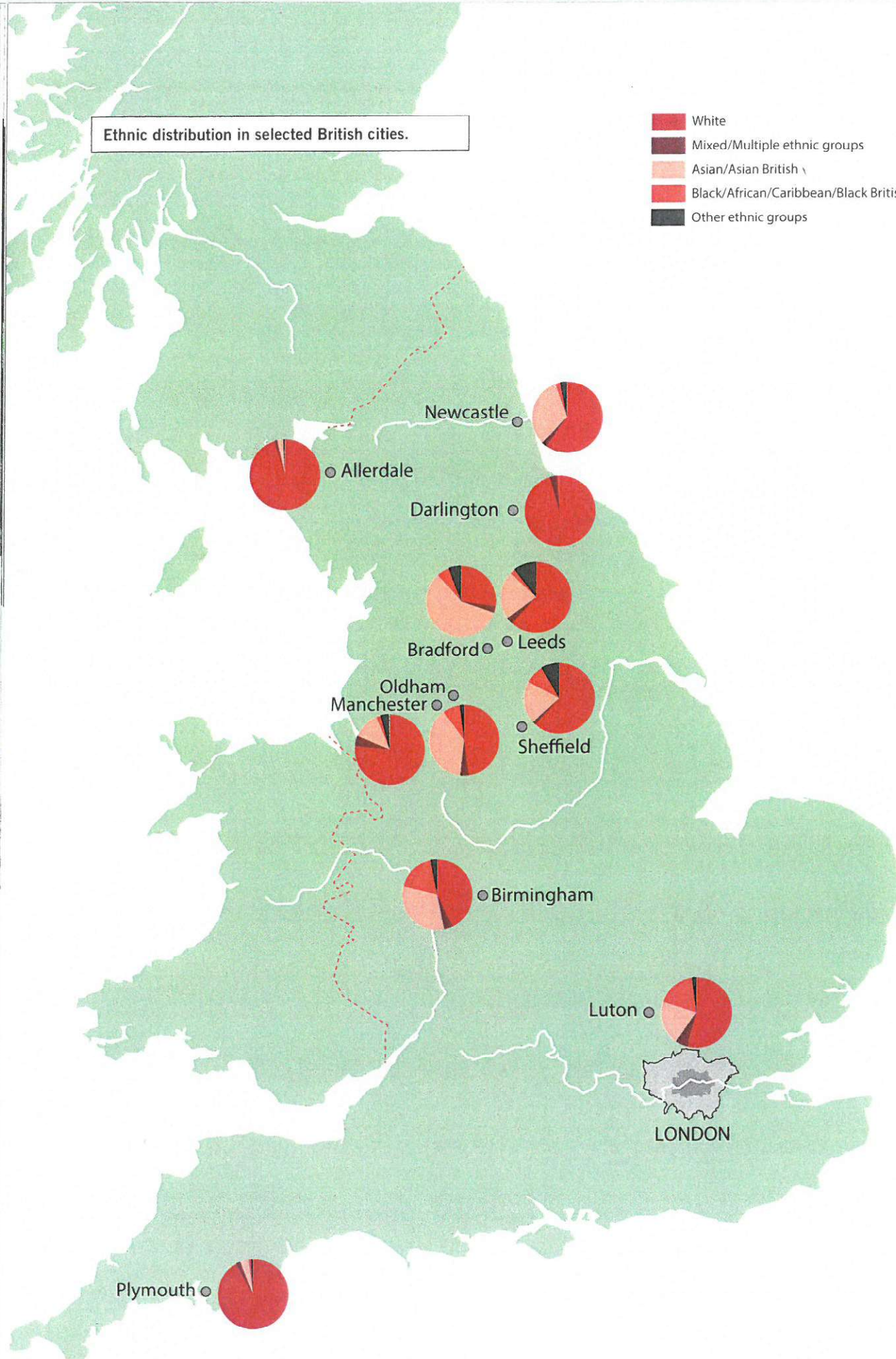
SO, BEING BRITISH ...

What it means to be British today is obviously very different from the decades immediately after World War II. There is no doubt that the British

national identity has changed with the coming of multiculturalism and that Britishness today contains elements – norms and values – that have been brought in by the ethnic minorities. Amidst the debate about the future of the Union, multicultural Britain may play a more decisive role than it has so far. Many members of ethnic minorities feel more British than they feel English, Scottish, Welsh or Northern Irish and consequently may promote unity rather than separation in the identity question.

Perhaps an important way forward would be to focus on the elements that people living in Britain today have in common rather than focusing on all the differences. And that interaction and dialogue may lead to more shared perceptions of what being British means in the 21st century.

Ethnic distribution in selected British cities.



Post-War Immigration to Britain - questions.

1. Why did the British invite people from the former colonies to come to Britain after 1945, especially people from the Caribbean?
2. Why is the year 1948 an important year in the history of immigration?
3. What was the British Nationality Act of 1948, and what is the B. N. Act also known as?
4. What type of labour was needed?
5. Where did the immigrants settle?
6. What street in London has become synonymous with multicultural Britain?
7. How long did the Open Door Policy last?
8. How did the belief about immigration in the late 1940's differ from reality?
9. How did the new laws of 1962 restrict the former 'open access' policy?
10. Why was there a need to change the focus from primary to secondary immigration?
11. What is the difference between multiculturalism and interculturalism?