

BLACK BRITISH HISTORY TIMELINE

UK Black history goes back nearly two thousand years with evidence of African people living in Roman Britain. In fact, archival research suggests Black communities have been living in the UK since the 1500s.

00 - 300 AD

Skeletons found in a Roman burial site in Leicester between 2010 and 2015 were found to have African cranial features - two of which, including a child, appeared to have been born in the Roman province of Britannia.

300 AD

A fort on Hadrian's wall at Burgh-by-Sands was home to a unit of African Roman soldiers. Artefacts suggest they settled in the area and assimilated into the local community.

350 - 400 AD

In 1901 in York, a skeleton, who would later be called the "[Ivory Bangle Lady](#)", was discovered and subsequently dated to the second half of the 4th century AD. Buried in a stone coffin her remains were found with ivory bracelets, earrings, pendants and other expensive possessions indicating that she held a high ranking position within Roman York. Isotope analysis showed she had spent her early years in a warmer climate whilst her skull shape suggested she had some North African ancestry.

1000 AD

Two female skeletons identified as originating from Sub-Saharan African and identified as dating back to around the tenth century are found in England, one found in North Elmham, Norfolk, in 2013 and the other in Fairford, Gloucestershire, between 1967-1972.

1241

The earliest image of a Black Briton was discovered in an abbreviated version of the Domesday Book used to collect taxes.

1225 - 1285

Skeletal remains discovered in 1911, in what once was the cemetery of Grey Friars monastery in Ipswich are identified as African in origin dating back to the late 12th century. He is believed to have come from modern day North African and may have been connected to the [Crusades](#).

1259

An African described as an 'Ethiopian' (a term used in ancient times to describe anyone with black skin) is mentioned in the Pipe Roll (21 June 1259). The document says that he was brought to England by 'Roger de Lyntin.' It also gives 'a mandate to arrest'

Bartholomew, for 'running away from his said lord Roger de Lyntin.' Bartholomew may have been on his way to the city of Nottingham to escape his lord's authority. Again, this is likely to be connected to the [Crusades](#) as records indicate that the Lord was a Knight.

1441-1888

The Atlantic Slave Trade was the transportation and global trade of 10-12 million enslaved Africans to the Americas. It was started by Portuguese & Spanish merchants and West African traders but within 150 years it was dominated by Dutch, English and French merchants. They transformed it into a multibillion-pound industry that help fund the industrial revolution in the West and birthed the ideology of racism that still continues to this day.

1507

[John Blanke](#) was a royal trumpeter in the court of Henry VII. It is thought that he came to England as part of Catherine of Aragon's royal court when she came to marry Prince Arthur (brother of Henry VIII). He first appears in UK royal court records in 1501. He married in 1512 and was given a wedding present by Henry VIII.

1558

Details of African baptisms and burials are found in Tudor parish records in London, Plymouth, Southampton, Barnstaple, Bristol, Leicester, Northampton and other places across the UK from 1558 (when most official records begun). They include 'Christopher Cappervert, a blackamoore who was 28 years old when he died and is buried in St Botolph without Aldgate in London on 22 October 1586.

1562

This is the year, the United Kingdom entered the slave trade and the beginning of a change in the relationship between White and Black Britons. John Hawkins is recorded as the first English slave trader. His first slave-trading voyage was in 1562-63, on behalf of a syndicate of London merchants, was so profitable that a more prestigious group, including Queen Elizabeth 1, provided money for a second expedition in 1564-65.

1593

A man named Cornelius is recorded as the first Black resident of London.

1652

Cattelena of Almondsbury was one of a several free Africans recorded living in rural locations. Cattelena lived in the small Gloucestershire village of Almondsbury, not far from Bristol, until her death in 1625.

1752

Francis Barber was the Jamaican manservant of Samuel Johnson in London from 1752 until Johnson's death in 1784. He was the main beneficiary of Johnson's estate and used his generous legacy to open a draper's shop in Litchfield in Staffordshire. He married an English woman and his descendants assimilated into the wider community. He still has living relatives in Staffordshire.

1761

Dido Elizabeth Belle, a British heiress and member of the Lindsay family of Evelix was born. Her life was dramatized in the 2015 British period movie Belle.

1770s-1780s

Enslaved African American soldiers who fought on the side of the British in the American Revolutionary War start arriving in London. Deprived of war pensions, they're forced to work as servants to wealthy whites or were reduced to begging on the streets. Black abolitionist Olaudah Equiano took up their cause and became the unofficial spokesman for Britain's Black community.

1772

In the Somerset vs Stewart case of 1772, William Murray, Lord Chief Justice Mansfield, ruled that it was unlawful for Charles Stewart, of Boston, Massachusetts in the British American colony, to forcibly return James Somerset to the West Indies to be resold. But it did not end the holding of slaves within England or end the Atlantic Slave Trade in the UK or any of its colonies.

1773

According to his autobiography, Olaudah Equiano became the first Black person to explore the Arctic when he sailed, on the same ship as Horatio Nelson, on Lord Mulgrave's famous expedition to find a passage to India.

1773

Writer and Abolitionist Mary Prince published her autobiography 'The History of Mary Prince' exposing the life of enslaved females in the colonies.

1774

[Ignatius Sancho](#) renowned abolitionist and writer is the first person of African origin to vote in Britain. He voted in 1774 and again in 1780.

1777

Bill Richmond was a former enslaved African American from British America who became a leading boxer in the UK. He travelled to England in 1777 and worked as a cabinetmaker in York. In 1804 he began boxing and went on to become the world's first Black sporting superstar.

1781-3

The Zong massacre was a mass killing of more than 130 enslaved Africans by the crew of the British slave ship Zong on and in the days following 29 November 1781. The massacre was initially tried as an insurance litigation case when the insurers refused to compensate the Liverpool trade-slaving syndicate owners of Zong. Leading English Abolitionist, Granville Sharpe, was persuaded to take on the case by African Abolitionist, Olaudah Equiano, and one newspaper reported on the case. It raised the profile of the abolitionists case against slavery and public awareness of the brutality and inhumanity of the slave trade . It also led to the founding of the Abolition of Slave Trade group in 1787.

1785

Under the initial leadership of Olaudah Equiano, a group of Black Abolitionists living in London, formed the **Sons of Africa** abolition group and worked alongside other abolitionists group such as the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade to emancipate slaves in the British colonies.

1786

Writer and Abolitionist Olaudah Equiano was the first Black person to be employed by the British government and three years later in 1789 he published his biography 'The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano' which depicted the horrors of the slave trade and helped influence the passing of the British Slave Trade Act 1807.

1787

Hundreds of Black Britons were transported from London for resettlement in a colony in Sierra Leone with help from the Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor.

1787

Ottobah Cugoano was a formerly enslaved person who published his biography in 1787 detailing the hardships and suffering of plantation slave labour. He was the first African to publicly demand the end of slavery and to challenge the perceived justification for enslaving Africans. He also attacked the trade and the countries who benefited from it. It was a very bold act as no Black person had ever publicly announced that enslavement should be abolished out of fear of retaliation and the lack of faith that their voice would be heard.

1788

In 1788, Olaudah Equiano lobbied the House of Commons in support William Dolben's bill to improve the slave ship conditions by creating a limit for the number of enslaved Africans could be transported on a ship, related to tonnage. The Slave Act 1788 was the first British legislation passed to regulate slave shipping.

1792 - 1815

Individual [Black soldiers are known to have taken part in many of the Napoleonic war campaigns for England and France.](#) After the war, Black soldiers and seamen settled in London after fighting in the [Napoleonic Wars.](#)

1807

Black and White abolitionists successfully lobbied parliament to pass the Slave Trade Act on 25th March 1807 which prohibited the slave trade in the British Empire. However, many slave traders found ways to bypass the law and slavery remain legal in the British Empire until the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833.

1810

Pablo Fanque was a Black British equestrian performer and circus proprietor who was born on 30 March 1810 in Norwich, England. He is the first recorded non-white British circus owner in Britain and ran one of the most successful circus business for 30 years in Victorian Britain. He is also best known for being mentioned in The Beatles song 'Being for the Benefit of Mr Kite!'

1820

The British Caribbean political radical, [William Davidson](#), is executed for his role in the Cato Street Conspiracy against Lord Liverpool's government in 1820.

1832

John Stewart became the first person of mixed African heritage to become a member of parliament. Stewart took his seat as Tory MP for Lymington 125 years after the British Parliament was officially established. However, he remains a controversial figure in Black history as he was a slave plantation owner and received compensation when the enslaved people he held in Guyana were freed.

1834

Although the Slavery Abolition Act was passed in 1833 it wasn't until the 1st August 1834, that the more than 800,000 enslaved peoples throughout the British Empire were 'freed'. But they were required to serve an 'apprenticeship' of up to six years on low or no pay. Enslaved Africans finally achieved their freedom in 1838 when the system was scrapped.

1837

On the 23 December 1837 the Slave Compensation Act was signed into law. The British government borrowed £20m to compensate slave owners to buy the freedom of the slaves. It was the equivalent to 40% of the Treasury's annual income at the time and wasn't paid off until 2015.

1850

[Sarah Forbes Bonetta](#) was a West African princess who was orphaned by war, sold into slavery and, in a remarkable twist of events, was liberated from enslavement and in 1850 became the goddaughter to Queen Victoria. In 1862, she was invited and attended the wedding of Queen Victoria's daughter Princess Alice. She married Captain James Pinson Labulo Davies, a wealthy Victorian Lagos philanthropist, and they moved to Madeira to start a family.

1862

During the Cotton Famine, [Rochdale mill workers sided with the Union in its fight against slavery despite the many hardships they experienced](#). The Union strategy of blocking all the Confederate ports in the United States exacerbated a shortage of cotton supplies in Europe, resulting in the cotton famine.

1879

Prince Alamayou, the young Ethiopian prince died after contracting pleurisy in Far Headingley in Leeds on the 14 November 1879. The young prince was taken under the care of the British after both his parents died. Queen Victoria arranged for him to be buried in Windsor Caster and a brass plaque was placed in St George's chapel to commemorate his life.

1889

Conrad Reeves becomes the first Black man to be knighted by a British sovereign.

1895

Emma Clarke becomes Britain's first Black female footballer debuting for the British Ladies team in Crouch End in London.

1900

The First Pan African conference was held in London. It was set up to end colonial rule and racial discrimination and demand human rights and equality of economic opportunity for Africans across the globe.

1914-18

Almost 3 million soldiers and labourers from across the British Empire served alongside the British Army in the First World War. Walter Tull was the first person of African-Caribbean heritage to become an officer in the British Army despite a ban on Black officers and dies in action in 1918.

1919

After World War 1 there was a jobs boom in the UK and Empire soldiers and seamen began settling in UK port cities such as Liverpool, Glasgow and Cardiff. The competition for jobs led to trade unions setting up a 'colour bar' to prevent the employment of BAME workers. This was a key contributor to the 1919 Race Riots which led to the death of Caribbean seaman Charles Wotton and the forced deportation of Empire citizens back to their homelands.

Aug 1925

Lapido Solanke and Herbert Bankole-Bright founded the West African Student's Union (WASU) in London, England. It became a key political, social, and cultural organisation for West Africans in Britain and the main African organisation in the UK for over thirty years.

1927

Grenada-born singer and musician, Leslie Arthur Hutchinson aka 'Hutch', arrived in London and became one of the biggest cabaret stars in the world during the 1920s and 1930s.

Mar 1933

West African Student's Union (WASU) opens its first hostel on Camden Road to provide accommodation to students and visitors of African descent.

1935-1941

The Ethiopian Royal family take exile in the United Kingdom after Ethiopia (one of only two independent countries in Africa) is invaded by Italy in 1935.

Aug 1936

Ethiopian Princess Tsehai begins training as a nurse at London's Great Ormond Street Hospital for Sick Children.

1939-45

The second World War brought thousands of American GI soldiers to the UK. The troops were racial segregated and American servicemen tried to implement their Jim Crow laws in the UK. But the majority of the British population didn't share the US Army's segregation attitudes and Black servicemen were welcomed into British homes, pubs and clubs. There were frequent clashes between Black and White servicemen which cumulated in the Park Street Riots of 1944.

1940

The 'colour bar' on British army officers was lifted in 1940 following lobbying by Harold Moody of the League of Coloured Peoples, the International African Service Bureau and the West African Students Union (WASU).

1941

Ivor Cummings was the first Black person to obtain a position in the Colonial Office in 1941.

1942

Nigerian Princess Ademola who was training as a nurse at Guy's Hospital was featured in a BBC pamphlet and a British propaganda film to promote Britain's wartime efforts to its colonial empire.

1945

Black Trinidadian cricketer, Lee Constantine OBE, sued the Imperial Hotel in London after it refused to fulfil his hotel reservation. The hotel cancelled his reservation after receiving a complaint from American servicemen about his presence in the hotel. Constantine won the landmark case and was awarded damages, but the ruling didn't end the colour bar in some British hotels and other establishments.

1945

'Miss Lou' Bennett-Coverley's becomes the first Black student to study at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts in 1945.

1946

Kofoworola Abeni Pratt becomes the first Black student at the Nightingale School at St Thomas' Hospital in London and later became the first Nigerian-born Chief Nursing Officer in Nigeria.

1948

The Empire Windrush arrives in Tilbury Docks, Essex on 21 June 1948 carrying hundreds of passengers from the Caribbean and Latin America who wished to start a new life in the UK.

1954

Learie Constantine releases his book 'Colour Bar' in which he talked about the racial inequality in the UK and also criticised British colonialism and empire.

1958

Human Rights activist and journalist Claudia Jones founded Britain's first major Black newspaper, West Indian Gazette. Just over twenty years later, The Voice newspaper is

launched in 1988 and a decade later the New Nation newspaper joins it on the newsstands.

1959

Claudia Jones creates the 'Caribbean Carnival' to 'wash the taste of Notting Hill and Nottingham (race riots) out of our mouths'. She went on to organise five more indoor carnivals which are thought to be a precursor to the Notting Hill Carnival.

1962

The Commonwealth Immigrants Act is passed and ends the automatic right of people of the British Commonwealth and Colonies to settle in the UK.

1963

John La Rose and Sarah White founded New Beacon Books - the UK's first Black bookshop and publishing house.

1963

Roy Hackett, Paul Stephenson, Audley Evans and Guy Bailey joined together to organise a boycott to force the Bristol Omnibus Company to change its racist policies that stopped Black and Asian people from working on the buses. The protest attracted national attention and ultimately led to the passing of the Race Relations Act in 1965 that banned all discrimination in the workplace.

Nov 1965

Malcom X visits Birmingham in the UK.

Sep 1966

The Notting Hill Festival is started and later evolves into Europe's largest street party – the Notting Hill Carnival.

Dec 1966

The influential Caribbean Arts Movement was founded. It was a diverse collection of writers, critics and artists who were interested in developing a modern Caribbean – an aesthetic that explored colonial histories as well as defining a newly formed Black British identity.

1967

Margaret Busby became Britain's youngest and first Black female book publisher, when she co-founded the publishing company Allison & Busby.

1968

Sislen Faye Allen becomes the UK's first Black female police officer.

Jan 1969

Yvonne Conolly becomes the UK's first Black female headteacher.

1969

Learie Constantine became the UK's first Black peer taking the title 'Baron Constantine, of Maraval in Trinidad and of Nelson in the County Palatine of Lancaster'.

1970

The Mangrove Nine, a group of British Black activists including members of the British Black Panthers were tried for inciting a riot at a protest, in 1970, against the police targeting of the Mangrove restaurant in Notting Hill. After 55 days in the dock, they were all acquitted of the most serious charges and the trial became the first judicial acknowledgement of racial prejudice and wrongdoing in the Metropolitan Police's operations.

1974-76

Black Britons create a new musical genre called 'Lovers Rock' and one of its rising stars, Janet Kay, hits the top ten of the UK charts with her single 'Silly Games'. Two years later, they create 'Brit Funk' and it goes mainstream when Brit Funk band Hi Tension scored a top ten hit single.

April 1975

The Black Parents Movement (BPM) was set up to campaign against racism in society and maltreatment by police, contested suspensions and expulsions in schools, provided legal defence, especially for juveniles, challenged deportation orders and helped resolve problems with housing and unemployment.

Nov 1976

The Race Relations Act is passed, and the Commission for Racial Equality is formed to enforce it. The law banned racial discrimination in public places and made the promotion of hatred on the grounds of 'colour, race, or ethnic or national origins' an offence.

1976

First black TV show 'The Fosters' is broadcast on London Weekend Television (LWT), now part of ITV London. The show was a remake of the hit American sitcom 'Good Times' and starred a young Lenny Henry.

Mar 1981

The New Cross Fire kills thirteen young Black people aged between 14 and 22 years. Protests follow after perceived indifference of the police investigating the cause of the blaze cumulating in the Black People's Day of Action march on 2nd March 1981.

Apr 1981

The April 1981 Brixton uprisings or riots were a series of violent clashes between mainly Black youths and the Metropolitan Police in Brixton, London. It resulted from racist discrimination against the Black community by the mainly white police, especially the police's increased use of stop-and-search in the area, and ongoing tensions resulting from the deaths of 13 black teenagers and young adults in the suspicious New Cross house fire that January. Rioting spread to other English cities and towns including Southall, Liverpool and Birmingham.

Aug 1981

A group of Lewisham mums headed up by Mavis Best, campaign to stop SUS laws in the UK with the support of MP Paul Boateng. The law was abolished on 27 August 1981 but three years later the government introduce the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 which reintroduces stop and search.

Aug 1981

Justin Fashanu is signed by Nottingham Forest football club, becoming Britain's first £1 million Black footballer.

1981

Len Garrison and others founded the Black Cultural Archives to record, preserve and celebrate the history of people of African descent in Britain. In June 2013, it moved to its now permanent address in Windrush Square, Brixton to become the UK's first national Black heritage centre.

Jun 1987

MPs Bernie Grant, Diane Abbott, Paul Boateng and Keith Vaz are elected to parliament.

Oct 1987

Black History Month UK is started by Akyaaba Addai-Sebo, Linda Bellos and Ansel Wong.

1988

Naomi Campbell becomes the first Black British female model to grace the cover of Vogue.

1980s-90s

This period is marked by the re-emergence of the British Soul scene with artists Soul II Soul, Loose Ends and Sade breaking the American music market.

1990

Choice FM is launched and becomes the first ever licensed Black radio station in the UK.

Oct 1991

Ben Okri becomes the youngest ever winner of the Booker Prize with his novel The Famished Road.

1991

The Black female lifestyle magazine 'Pride' is launched.

1992

Bill Morris becomes General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union - the first Black leader of a trade union in the UK.

1992

Victor Headley's book 'Yardie' becomes the first Black British best-seller and in 2018 was adapted as a feature film of the same name by Idris Elba.

1992

Black Britons create another musical genre – Jungle music which later morphs into Drum and Bass.

1993

British teenager, Stephen Lawrence, was stabbed to death by a group of white, racist youths as he waited at a bus stop with a friend in Eltham on the 22nd April 1993. His killing and the subsequent failure of the London Metropolitan Police Service to properly investigate the crime sparked a national outcry. It culminated in a landmark official inquiry that concluded the force was institutionally racist. It took nearly 20 years for two of the 18-year-old's killers to be brought to justice, with three named suspects never prosecuted.

1994

Rinse FM starts as a pirate radio station and is a key player in the promotion of the new Black music genres of Jungle, Drum and Bass, UK garage and Grime.

Jul 1996

Operation Black Vote (OBV) is created to encourage Black British and other ethnic minority groups to register to vote and use their voting power to tackle racial equality in the UK.

Nov 1996

Kanya King CBE founded the MOBO awards to honour achievements in 'music of Black origin'.

1997

Mathematician Kate Okikiolu wins the Sloan Research Fellowship award.

Aug 2000

Craig David released UK garage album 'Born to Do IT' and took UK garage to the mainstream. The album debuted at number 1 on the UK Album Charts and sold 7.5 million copies worldwide.

Nov 2002

Damilola Taylor was murdered. This incident raised questions about gang culture and urban poverty amongst sections of the poor Black community.

Jan 2002

Rapper/Producer Wiley MBE created 'Eskibeat' which later became known as 'Grime' and a new UK musical genre was born. Fellow grime pioneer Dizzee Rascal won the prestigious Mercury Award for his album 'Boy in da Corner' the next year.

Feb 2003

Channel U television channel launched and became the first music channel dedicated to promoting Grime music.

Oct 2003

Patrick Vernon OBE launched the 100 Great Black Britons poll to celebrate the greatest Black Britons of all time. Mary Seacole tops the poll.

2005

John Sentamu becomes the first Black Archbishop of York.

2007

Michael Eboda, then editor of the New Nation newspaper, launched the Powerlist to help celebrate influential Black Britons and inspire the next generation.

2009

Prudential became the first FTSE 100 company to appoint a Black chief executive, Tidjane Thiam.

2011

On 4 August 2011, [Mark Duggan was shot and killed by police](#) in Tottenham, north London, sparking the [largest civil unrest the UK has seen for a generation](#). The disturbance quickly spread and for five nights, London, Birmingham, and other major cities in England were engulfed by fire and violence.

2013

Malorie Blackman, author of Noughts and Crosses, became the UK's children's laureate.

Feb 2014

Dr Maggie Aderin-Pocock co-presents Sky at Night on television and became the first Black presenter of the show.

Mar 2014

Artist and filmmaker Steve McQueen is nominated for Best Film Director and won the Best Picture for 12 Years a Slave. He is also an award-winning artist who won the Turner prize in 1999.

Oct 2014

Black Business Awards were founded by Melanie Eusebe and Sophie Chandauka to celebrate and promote the significant contributions by Black professionals in Britain.

Apr 2017

Edward Enninful becomes editor-in-chief of British Vogue magazine. His multi-ethnic first edition features Mixed heritage model Adwoa Aboah on the cover. Vanessa Kingori becomes the magazine's publishing director.

Sep 2017

Birmingham City University introduced a Black Studies undergraduate degree programme.

2018

The Windrush scandal began to surface in 2017 after it emerged that hundreds of Commonwealth citizens, many of whom were from the 'Windrush' generation, had been wrongly detained, deported and denied legal rights.

May 2018

Hollywood actress Meghan Markle married Prince Harry in a lavish event at Windsor castle.

Jun 2018

Patrick Vernon OBE successfully campaigned for Windrush Day to recognise all migrant contributions in helping shape British society. It was introduced on the 70th anniversary of the Windrush migration and is an observed day in the United Kingdom.

Jun 2019

Black British Theatre Awards are launched, and the first-year winners include Sharon D Clarke, Beverley Knight and the musical Hamilton.

Oct 2019

UK rapper Stormzy set up the Merky Foundation with the purpose of donating £10m over a decade to help organisations that are dedicated to fighting racial equality in the UK. The following year, he donates £500,000 to the Black Heart Foundation to help young people from underprivileged backgrounds through college or university.

Dec 2019

65 ethnic MPs were elected to Parliament of which 21 were of Black or Mixed-Race heritage. One in five Labour MPs are now from an ethnic minority compared to 6% of Conservatives.

Mar 2020

World Health Organisation (WHO) declared Covid-19 as a pandemic and most of the world went into lockdown to contain the virus. The Black British population was particularly hard-hit by the virus with studies finding that they're at greater risk of

catching and dying from the infection. Numerous reports suggest that the high prevalence is due to racial inequality in employment and housing.

May-Jun 2020

Following the brutal killing of George Floyd by policemen in America, Black Lives Matter protests sweep the world. There are demonstrations in the UK about racism and questions are raised about Britain's colonial past and its role within the slave industry. The statue of slaveholder Colson is torn down in Bristol.

Jun 2020

Diana Abbott becomes the longest serving black MP. Her long-running parliamentary career includes joining the shadow cabinet under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn during 2016-20.

Jul-Sep 2021

Kemi Badenoch enters the Conservative party leadership race.

Sep 2021

Michaela Coel becomes the first Black woman to win the Emmy award for a limited or anthology series.