

Windrush Generation Art & Celebration

By Alex Pascall OBE

Generations, who journeyed to Britain from the Caribbean, arrived by invitation. The majority came on one-way tickets carrying British Passports. "We came to work and study, hoping to return within 5 years" (smile). Few came to stay but did so for uncharted reasons. There were opportunities, but not what were expected. We arrived, subjected to a hostile climate of racial inconsequence and inequality of opportunities. Journeys to Britain started since World War One, with West Indian servicemen and women as Commonwealth Citizens, skilled and semi-skilled, educated and knowledgeable, single, married, religious and innovative, healthy and dedicated, geared to work, with hope to aspire to chosen fields.

Willing to play the game, ready to give and receive. The majority came from the island Jamaica, northern Caribbean, a sizeable distance away from others in the southern and eastern Caribbean countries, an archipelago of tropical countries, homelands in the Caribbean Basin. While the Caribbean Leaders were discussing fiscal arrangements to federate, Britain's economy was shattered needing support to rebuild.

As we come together in celebration of the generations who led laying foundations, let us honour their efforts as their stories unfold. Applaud them for gallantry, self-discipline and resolve, sacrifices made, particularly for the fulfilment of their aspirations. There are still other historical chronicles of life-experiences waiting to be found. Find them and then add to the wealth of stories gathered to enrich this reservoir of amazing accounts. For sure, today's modernized Britain is certainly not the Britain they met, but one that their efforts reconstructed.

To begin, I personally did not want to come to Britain, I always wanted to go to the USA because all my relatives who travelled went there. I arrived in Dover after 12 days of travel, carrying two conga drums and my grip (suitcase) filled with goodies, dressed up in my nylon shirt and bespoke suit, knitted socks and tie - that was October 1959. I was young, handsome, fearless and adventurous. 'The streets are paved with gold', the story told (smile). All that were cobbled stones; Britain (London) was foggy, grey, smelly, damp and dull, colours worn were mostly black, white and what wen off - discoloured. Quite the opposite to the tropical gear from whence we came.

Man, in no time we spiced up the place with tropical delight, our presence chased the fog and warmed the icy climate. Best of all, we created this unique carnival festival bringing together everyone on the narrow street of the Boroughs of Westminster, Kensington & Chelsea to play mas and revel: 'Black, White and Indifferent' joined in to celebrate cultural togetherness. England, how about that for multiculturalism and racial harmony? Forget about your CRC [Civil Rights Commission] and CRE [Commission for Racial Equality], this is We Ting, the spectacle for all races, nothing like Britain's wishful racial equality.

Can you imagine the ways we used to dress up, the way we used to walk, talk and joke, partied, cooked, danced and went to church, the places we worked? Then as the years went into decades, our contributions faded into the clime of the four seasons and rallied to the pace and tempo of Britain's off-the-peg clothing, in tune with Britain's forms of English language. Strange terms like 'bloke', 'ta' for thanks, 'tata' for goodbye, the delicacies of bland England. Time to remind you about we susu/partner, our own innovative way we gathered money to buy houses that needed serious repairs, while we struggled with the authorities to educate generations of our children.

When it comes to sports, check it out. We played the game of cricket, shifting fortunes and glorious uncertainties, English clapping West Indians shouting, cricket was we game, England versus The West Indies was warfare. Slowly but surely we began to beat hell out of dem; blows in their clothes, Roberts, then Michael Holden, Walsh and Curtly Ambrose, fast bowlers with paste, expert batting and fielding, fire in their wire. Viv, Sobers, Kanhi, Kallicharran, Nurse, Marshall, Captains Worrell and Lloyd, dem man striking fours, sixes and centuries. Fast, medium and spin bowlers with speed and grace, like human rockets with rock stones, batsmen blading balls to the boundary, runs like dry peas. The Oval and Lords brought to life; from English clapping and feet stamping, to we sideline commentary and banter, reveling to the music of the calypso, steel band, conch shells and percussion; Jamaican blue beat/ska and reggae music, eating we curry goat, rice and peas, drinking we ginger beer and mauby, making we-self happy.

Art in all, we have all-together created things to be proud of, moments and events to be celebrated for the efforts made and achievements gained. Forget about being referred to as 'illegal immigrants' and 'low hanging fruits'; those are statements representative of the deep-seated prejudices, words voiced by those who would love us to be at the bottom of the Thames, wanting one to believe that we are subordinates, not recognizing their emptiness and ignorance, walk tall.

Defy them and rise, laugh and surprise them. Chart your aspirations beyond their heights, aim for the zenith of all possibilities. Stay on route; take with you model examples from the thousands of historical visionaries. Clock the way we developed, resisting pitfalls and spiked alleyways that lead to nowhere.

Be proud, ambitious, watchful and defiant.
Best of all, aspire to be someone great,
Be the number one to be desired and admired.
Leave traces of your footsteps for those in pursuit to follow.
Now, mek I tell you something for nothing,
Pull up your socks and trousers and wear a smile,
Lift up all you head cut the slack and walk tall,
Cha man! Time for we walk, 'nough' time to reason.
Lace up you boots young man, nough ah dat lip flapping.
Walk tall! Let dem see you walk, straighten up your back.
Yes, show them how we walk and talk, measure time and walk,
Come gal, come dudu darling, leh we walk and talk.
Liven up yourself, buck up and enjoy the experience.
Granny sey, if crab nah walk, crab nah get fat,
Mek time, tek time; after one time is two time,
Shine! Mek time, step in line, to the Windrush Generation walk
Left, right, left, right, now walk and talk, rap and talk,
Ready, steady, rock woman rock, rock your body, now steady;
Do the walk and talk, Windrush Generation walk and talk.
'Walk good'!