

# 5.5 Black British activism in Notting Hill

## Learning outcomes

- To describe how the Notting Hill carnival developed and the reason for its success.
- To explain the growth of activism in the black community, through the work of people like Claudia Jones.
- To evaluate the importance of the Mangrove restaurant and the trial of the Mangrove Nine.

Since before World War Two, black people in Britain had organised groups to help their community and to fight institutional racism in society. The riots of 1958 motivated even more people to join existing equality groups as well as to establish new organisations to fight for human rights.

Many of these groups were self-funded and began by meeting in cafes, churches or someone's front room (due to discrimination it was hard for these groups to rent meeting rooms). These groups demanded the right to be treated as human beings in a racist society.

## Extend your knowledge

### Black self-help groups before 1958

In the 1780s The Sons of Africa, led by the Nigerian Olaudah Equiano, lobbied for equal treatment of black and white people. In 1925 Lapido Solanke established the West African Students Union to campaign against racism. In 1931 Jamaican Dr Harold Moody founded The League of Coloured Peoples. All these groups demanded the right to be treated as equal human beings in a racist society.

## Claudia Jones and the *West Indian Gazette*

Claudia Jones was a Trinidadian woman who spent her life fighting for equality. She was active in the US civil rights movement, organising rent strikes against racist landlords overcharging black people.

## Source A

Claudia Jones at the offices of the *West Indian Gazette* in 1962.



In 1955, because she was an active and successful anti-racism leader and communist, the US government imprisoned and then deported\* her. Claudia moved to Britain and, in 1958, set up a newspaper called the *West Indian Gazette*, which became Britain's first major black newspaper (see Source X page XX).

## Key term

### Deported\*

Forced by the government to leave a country you are visiting or living in where you are not a citizen. (Note: this is different from the Windrush deportation scandal where black people who had been living and paying tax in Britain for decades were suddenly deported due to changes in government policy).

### Key term

#### Circulation\*

The number of people reading a newspaper.

The *West Indian Gazette* gave a voice to the black community in London and it soon gained a circulation\* of over 15,000 people.

- In the 1950s, without the internet or social media, newspapers were how you found out about jobs, accommodation and events as well as the news.
- At the time major newspapers only rarely featured stories about the black community and, if they did, they tended to be negative or sensational.
- The black community had nowhere to get information on issues that were important to them and there was no platform for their voices to be heard.
- Newspapers were also a vital way to help arrange or publicise campaigns for equal treatment.
- The office in Brixton, South London, received huge numbers of racially abusive letters and was attacked by the Klu Klux Klan. Letters sent on KKK-headed notepaper boasted that 'Communism Enslaved, Jewish Usurers Invented It. England Awake, Keep Britain Pure and White. Put the Traitors to the Stake'.

### Source B

*West Indian Gazette*, 18 August 1958, letter from the London Branch of the Ku Klux Klan. It was addressed to 'Mr B. Ape' and sent from 'A. Whiteman'.

Possibly you are wondering why we have so-far failed to pay attention to your audacity in setting up this filthy hack-trash of a paper? Pray good Sir, We, The Aryan Knights miss nothing, close attention has been paid to every issue of this rag, and so I sincerely assure you, the information gleamed has proven of great value to the Klan. May we take this opportunity to wish your n\*\*\*\*r paper every success whilst you are able to continue printing it.

### Source C

Interview with Billy Strachan, former RAF bomber pilot and a member of the Caribbean Labour Congress, in BBC documentary *Eye to Eye*, 1989. Strachan spoke about his work with Claudia Jones.

We were just getting people to get jobs. I remember, we were going to Barclays Bank and trying to get a black girl a job there, and there was no chance, [they] wouldn't even consider it ... Claudia came because of her more advanced experience in the United States and she was now saying - because we now had busmen working on the buses and things like that - and she said what about being made inspectors? Which we had not even *foreseen* because we thought we'd achieved a hell of a lot by just getting a job on London Transport!

Claudia Jones was a natural leader and successfully lobbied for black people to get jobs in senior positions in London Transport and other institutions where there was a colour bar. She also campaigned against racist immigration controls such as the 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act, which restricted migration from black Commonwealth countries like Jamaica but not from white Commonwealth countries such as Canada.

Claudia Jones was so famous for her anti-racist activities that the American civil rights leader Martin Luther King stopped in London to meet her when travelling to collect his Nobel Peace Prize in 1964.

## Source D

From 'The Caribbean Community in Britain' an essay by Claudia Jones published in the African-American journal *Freedomways*, Summer 1964. She writes about the impact of the *West Indian Gazette*.

The newspaper has served as a catalyst [a start of something], quickening the awareness, socially and politically, of West Indians, Afro-Asians and their friends. Its editorial stand is for a united, independent West Indies, full economic, social and political equality and respect for human dignity for West Indians and Afro-Asians in Britain, and for peace and friendship between all Commonwealth and world peoples.

## Extend your knowledge

## Colonial News

A Jamaican RAF veteran, Laurie Philpott, produced a newspaper named the *Colonial News* in 1957. It had national distribution as he used his ex-military contacts to ship and sell it all over the country.

## Activities

- 1 Study Source A (page XX) and sources B and D. Describe the main features (characteristics) of the *West Indian Gazette*.
- 2 What can you learn from the *West Indian Gazette* about the different forms of discrimination experienced by Caribbeans in Notting Hill?
- 3 With a partner, discuss the importance and impact of the *West Indian Gazette* in helping black people fight against discrimination in Britain. What other sources would help?

## Exam-style question, Section A

Describe **two** features of the *West Indian Gazette*.

(4 marks)

## Exam tip

Make sure that you develop each feature you identify with some supporting information. You could first identify one thing the *West Indian Gazette* did and then add information on how it helped black people in the community.

## Claudia Jones and the development of the Notting Hill Carnival

### The Caribbean Carnival 1959

As a direct response to the 1958 riots, Claudia Jones wanted to celebrate African-Caribbean culture and help bring the community together. She said the community 'needed to wash the taste of [the] Notting Hill and Nottingham [riots] out of our mouths'.

## Source E

Programme of the second indoor Caribbean Carnival, 1960, organised by Claudia Jones, which was held in Seymour Hall near Paddington.



The first carnival, sponsored by the *West Indian Gazette*, took place at St Pancras Town Hall, Kings Cross, on 30 January 1959. In Trinidad carnival always takes place in February: the weather is hot there, so it is always outdoors. Obviously in Britain it is very cold in February so it had to be held indoors!

The event was televised on the BBC and leading British black artists, such as Cleo Laine, performed. A beauty show was part of the carnival, to help challenge white beauty standards which defined black women as unattractive. Some of the money raised was used to help pay the bail of young black men unfairly arrested by the police after the riots.

### Source F

Photo published in the *Daily Mirror*, 31 January 1959, showing the first Caribbean Carnival.



Claudia was determined that the carnival would become an annual event. She moved the venue around so that the event would get more exposure and even took it to Manchester. Her carnival ran from 1959 until 1964, when she died.

### From Caribbean Carnival to Notting Hill Carnival

In 1966, Rhaune Leslet, President of the London Free School, planned an outdoor event in August to promote cultural unity. Thanks to Claudia Jones' work, she found there was a network of artists – and an excited audience – from the indoor carnivals to help make this event a success.

### Extend your knowledge

#### Leslie Palmer

One of the people who was part of the 1966 carnival was a Trinidadian migrant called Leslie Palmer. He became the Director of the carnival from 1973–75. He worked to bring representatives from the whole Caribbean community together to be part of the carnival. He installed more sound systems and recruited more steel bands and reggae groups to join the carnival. By 1976, 150,000 people – black and white – were attending the carnival.

In the 21st century Notting Hill Carnival is the biggest street festival in Europe, attracting over a million people and generating millions of pounds. Most of the attendees have no idea about the roots of the carnival.

### Source G

Interview with Victor Crichlow in July 2001. Victor worked with Claudia Jones on the early carnivals and later became Treasurer of the Notting Hill Carnival.

The spirit of carnival is the bringing together of people, all kinds of people, the harmony that it generates, it is something that the whole world would like to have ... I would like to see that same spirit going into everyday life ... Carnival is a teacher, tells us how to live; living means living with people, you can't live on your own that's not living, that's existing.

### Activities

- 1 Why did Claudia Jones decide to introduce the Carnival following the Notting Hill and Nottingham riots?
- 2 Look at Sources E, F and G. How far do these sources show that Carnival has been successful in making Caribbean culture part of mainstream British culture?

## The British Black Panthers (BBP)

With no legislation to prevent racial harassment or discrimination, black people in Britain needed to campaign to protect their rights. After the riots in 1958, several groups were formed to fight for racial equality and civil rights. One of the best known of these was the British Black Panthers, founded in 1968.

The BPP:

- were inspired by the Black Panther Party\* in the USA. The BPP was the first Black Panther organisation outside America
- campaigned against police brutality and in favour of civil rights. They helped black people with legal aid



- worked to educate black people about their history, to build a sense of pride in their community
- campaigned on several social issues, looking to help black people find better jobs, housing and healthcare
- had several leaders, including Darcus Howe, Althea LeCointe-Jones and housing campaigner Olive Morris. Howe and LeCointe-Jones were later part of the Mangrove Nine.

### Source H

Althea LeCointe-Jones spoke to the BBC documentary *Mangrove 9* broadcast in 1973. We've complained to the police about the police and nothings been done. We've complained to magistrates about magistrates and nothings been done. We've complained to judges about judges and nothing has been done. Now it's time to do something ourselves. That represents the essence of black people's experience in Britain. Since we've come here we've suffered a long train of abuses by the police, with the active support of the British state. And those abuses have been able to be carried out under the pretext that black people are criminals ... That is a myth that has been created about us.

### Source I

Darcus Howe spoke to an oral historian in 2001 about his experiences arriving in Britain from Trinidad.

The first thing that struck me like a thunderbolt was that people made decisions about people based on the colour of skin, which was completely outside my world of reason ... that disturbed me greatly and I was determined to fight it and I continued to do so.

### Source J

Photograph by Horace Ove of US civil rights and Black Power activist Stokely Carmichael speaking in London, 1967.



### Extend your knowledge

#### Darcus Howe

Darcus Howe would go on to be one of the organisers for the biggest ever black protest march when approximately 20,000 people took part in the Black People's Day of Action on 2 March 1981. The march was arranged because of the deaths of 13 young black people in a suspected racist arson attack in New Cross in January 1981.

### Activities

- 1 Study Sources H, I and J. Why do you think the Black Panthers emerged in Britain following the 1950s?
- 2 How useful are Sources H and I in helping identify the reasons for the emergence of the Black Panthers?
- 3 Make a list of other sources which would give you useful information about the problems experienced by black people in Britain from the 1950s. Compare your list with a partner. Decide which source would be the most useful.

### Key term

#### Black Panther Party\*

A political party founded in America by black college students Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale in 1966. It focused both on social campaigns to support the community and on protecting the black community from police brutality.

### Exam-style question, Section A

How useful are sources H and I for an enquiry into the reasons for the emergence of the Black Panthers in Britain?

Explain your answer, using Sources H and I and your knowledge of the historical context. **(8 marks)**

### Exam tips

Go through steps when preparing your answer. Always concentrate on the enquiry – in this question, the reasons for the emergence of the Black Panthers – and then identify points from the content.

Think about the provenance (nature, origin and purpose) of both sources. Think about what you know about the context – racial problems in Britain.

Link together the content, provenance and context in your answer and include how the provenance and context affects the usefulness of the content.

### Key term

#### Sus Law\*

Short for Suspicion Law, it gave police officers the power to stop, search and arrest people on the suspicion that they might commit a crime in the future. It was widely abused, with many black people arrested for standing on a corner or walking to the shops. Although the law was repealed in the 1980s, today many black people still complain about being stopped and searched by police without cause.

### Source K

The Mangrove, 10 August 1970.



## Frank Crichlow and the Mangrove restaurant

Frank Crichlow was a Trinidadian who opened the Mangrove restaurant at 8 All Saints Road in Notting Hill. The restaurant served good West Indian food and was popular with black and white celebrities. Muhammad Ali, Bob Marley, Diana Ross, Sammy Davis Junior, Vanessa Redgrave and Marvin Gaye all ate there.

- Like 9 Blenheim Crescent, the Mangrove was a place where people would go to get information, advice and help for their problems. The BBP frequently met there, as did the Notting Hill Carnival organisers.
- Crichlow had a lawyer in the restaurant who would give advice to young black people who had suffered from police brutality or the Sus Law\*.
- Crichlow also sponsored the Mangrove steel band, which gave black youngsters a chance to learn a skill, preserve their culture and entertain the community.

The police were suspicious and regularly raided the venue claiming they were looking for drugs – but they never found any. The restaurant was raided nine times between January 1969 and July 1970.

Furious at this unfair harassment, the BBP helped the community to organise a march on 9 August 1970 to protest the police action. The Action Group for the Defence of the Mangrove sent an open letter to announce the plans for the demonstration to protect the Mangrove to the Home Office, the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and the High Commissioners of Jamaica, Trinidad, Guyana and Barbados.

### Source M

Photograph of the march against police harassment of the Mangrove Restaurant, 9 August 1970. The photo was taken on All Saints Road – the Mangrove restaurant is on the left-hand side of the street behind the crowd.



Over 150 people took part in the march. Special Branch monitored the Mangrove and its customers, as well as the BPP. The police made a number of arrests. Among those arrested were Frank Crichlow, Darcus Howe and Althea Jones-LeCointe. Among the charges was a claim under the Race Relations Act that the marchers had been trying to incite racial violence.

### Activities

- 1 Why do you think the police actions against the Mangrove were seen as racist?
- 2 Read Source L. What does this source tell us about the reasons behind the march?

### Source L

Open letter, sent by Anthony Mohipp, barrister and secretary of the Black Improvement Organisation, 12 August 1970, announcing plans for the march.

We, the Black People of London have called this demonstration in protest against constant police harassment which is being carried out against us, and which is condoned by the legal system.

These deliberate raids, harassments and provocations [of the Mangrove] have been reported to the Home Office on many occasions. So too has the mounting list of grievances such as raids on West Indian parties, Wedding Receptions and other places where Black People lawfully gather.

We feel this protest is necessary as all other methods have failed to bring about any change in the manner the police have chosen to deal with Black People. We shall continue to protest until Black People are treated with justice by the Police and Law Courts.

## The Mangrove Nine

### The defendants

At first magistrates threw the charges out. However, the Director of Public Prosecutions decided to press charges against nine of the marchers. They became known as the Mangrove Nine. They were:

- Frank Crichlow, the owner of the Mangrove
- Althea Jones-LeCointe, Darcus Howe and Barbara Beese, leaders of the BPP
- Rhodan Gordon (who later founded organisations to help the black community with legal advice)
- Rothwell Kentish (who later campaigned for improved housing for the black community and for greater training for the young unemployed)
- Activists Rupert Boyce, Anthony Innis and Godfrey Millett.



They were accused of inciting a riot. If found guilty they would face long prison sentences. The Home Secretary insisted the trial took place at the Old Bailey, the court where only the most serious crimes were heard.

### Source N

A flyer produced during the trial by supporters of the Mangrove Nine.



### Source O

In an interview published in *The Guardian* on 10 November 2020, Barbara Beese talked about the trial.

Such interference from the Director of Public Prosecutions was most unusual and, as far as we were concerned, reflected a determination to paint us as criminals rather than as citizens exercising our legitimate right to demonstrate against the repeated police harassment of the Mangrove.

### The trial

During the trial, the defendants argued that if they were going to be tried 'by their peers' (as British law demands) then the jury should be all black. They managed to get 63 jurors rejected, although the final jury had only two black people on it.

The trial focused on accusations of police brutality and racism. Howe and Jones defended themselves in court and they identified a number of damaging holes in the prosecution case. The police evidence was challenged and shown in some cases to be false or exaggerated. This also helped the jury to see the Mangrove Nine as victims, not the dangerous revolutionaries the prosecution wanted to suggest they were. The trial attracted a huge amount of public interest and coverage in the media.



### Source P

Report of Darcus Howe final speech to the jury, *Post Mercury*, 17 December 1971.

Howe said ... he did not care if he was sent to prison. 'I don't care because history is on my side. If they put me in prison, they do not take away my liberty but reduce what little liberty I have. Every time I stand up to ask a question or cross examine its not because I'm seeking a verdict of not guilty but because I'm speaking for the people I represent.'

Howe told the jury the reaction of black people in North Kensington to the Mangrove Trial placed a tremendous responsibility on them. He defined the 'race riots' in 1958 as 'white people attacking black people because they believe we shouldn't be here' and said that as a result of them the black community of Notting Hill had been born to resist such attacks.

'When [The Mangrove] was attacked, people stopped coming. The restaurant started falling and the community organised itself to subsidise it. The Mangrove is ours not Frank's. Frank has lost it to the community.'

### The verdict

After the trial, all the defendants were acquitted of the most serious charges. Four of the nine were given suspended sentences for minor offences.

In his summing up the Judge ruled that 'What this trial has shown is that there is clearly evidence of racial hatred on both sides.' This admission that there was racism in the police was hugely important as it confirmed what the black community knew had been the case for decades. The Home Secretary asked the judge to take back this statement, but the judge refused.

Fighting institutional racism took a huge toll on all those involved. Normal, everyday people had to take on the entire justice system with money the activists did not have. The fact that they won is remarkable and was a landmark achievement in black British civil rights. The trial was seen as a great victory for the black community and inspired many people to organise against institutional racism.

### Activities

- 1 Look at Sources N, O, P and Q. How useful are these sources in identifying how important the Mangrove Nine were to the black British civil rights movement?
- 2 Read through sources A–R and list the different forms of discrimination faced by the African Caribbean community in the Notting Hill area.
- 3 Look at Sources Q and R. In them Frank Crichlow remembers the trial at two different points in his life. What can these two sources tell us about how people's views of events in their life change over time?

### Source Q

From an interview with Frank Crichlow in the documentary film *Britain's Black Legacy* (1991).

I think I suffered very badly for what has happened in the '70s when we won that trial. I've been arrested nearly every year in the 70s I was on bail, you can easily say I was on bail for ten years, one case after the other. Don't ask me what kept me going. I think that I was standing up for my rights and that is where I got my strength from.

### Source R

From an interview in *The Guardian* 15 September 2018. Frank Crichlow remembers what the trial meant to the black community.

It was a turning point for black people. It put on trial the attitudes of the police, the Home Office, of everyone towards the black community. We took a stand and I am proud of what we achieved – we forced them to sit down and rethink harassment. It was decided there must be more law centres and more places to help people with their problems.

**Exam-style question, Section A**

How could you follow up Source R to find out more about the importance of the Mangrove Nine case to the black community in Britain? In your answer, you must give the question you would ask and the type of source you could use. Copy and complete the table.

Details in Source R I would follow up	
Question I would ask	
What type of sources I could use	
How this might help answer my question	

**(4 marks)****Exam tip**

This question involves a four-stage process. The example shows you what to do at each stage.

**Pick a detail.** For example, 'It was a turning point for black people.'

**Question I would ask.** How far did the Mangrove Nine case help to improve racism and policing for black people in Britain?

**Type of sources I would use.** I would use Records of the Metropolitan Police Department from Notting Hill in 1971.

**How this might help answer my question.** The data would show whether the numbers of arrests of Afro-Caribbeans in the Notting Hill area increased, remained steady or decreased and this would allow me to quantify the words, 'it was a turning point for black people'.

**5.5 Black British activism in Notting Hill: summary**

- Claudia Jones set up the *West Indian Gazette* in 1958 in response to the many challenges faced by the black community in Britain. Her Caribbean carnival later became the Notting Hill carnival.
- In the 1960s, several groups emerged to fight for civil rights, such as the British Black Panthers (BPP). They focused on police brutality, jobs, housing, education, healthcare and legal support.
- The Mangrove restaurant was a cultural and community centre for black people in the west London area of Notting Hill. The police often raided the restaurant.
- After a protest march, nine people were arrested and charged with riot. The defendants used the trial to focus on wider issues of institutional racism in Britain. The trial became a major symbol of success for the black community fighting against institutional racism in Britain.

**Checkpoint****Strengthen**

- S1** Why was the Notting Hill Carnival so successful?
- S2** What were the most important reasons for the growth of black activism in Britain?
- S3** Why was the Mangrove Nine case so significant in the fight for black people's civil rights in Britain?

**Challenge**

- C1** How do the Notting Hill Carnival, the British Black Panthers and the Mangrove Nine case link together in the fight for black people's civil rights in Britain?
- C2** How much progress have we made as a society regarding the civil rights of black people in Britain? Discuss the similarities or differences between the Mangrove march of the 1970s compared to the Black Lives Matter marches of 2020.