According to a current YouGov tracker, 23% of people in the UK regard immigration and asylum as one of the top three issues "most important facing the country". That's more than twice as many who put education in their top three, five times as many who put family life and childcare as a key issue and immigration asylum comes only three points behind the economy and four points behind the environment. And that figure of 23% has to be understood within the context of another metric in the same survey which was that Britain leaving the EU is another of the three most important issues for 66% of people asked.

Although there are multiple reasons why the vote in 2016 went the way it did, it's hardly surprising that immigration was a factor, given that the leave campaign regularly put forward the argument that leaving the EU is the only way Britain could take back control of her borders.

Our national debates around immigration have become more acute and more pointed since the referendum but in many ways, this is entirely in keeping; the trends within them and the patterns within them existed within British political history since 1945. Immigration and immigration controls were a factor in other political crossroads between then and now.

It was a key issue in the election of 1970 and also a key issue in the election of 1974. The election of 1979 came after Margaret Thatcher had given an interview to Granada Television's 'World in Action' programme in which she claimed ‘people are rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people of a different culture. The British character has done so much for democracy, for law, done so much throughout the world that if there is any fear that it might be swamped people are going to react and be rather hostile to those coming in’. That was 1978.

In a newspaper article in 1979, the year of the election itself, she was if anything clearer, she argued "Some people have felt swamped by immigrants, they've seen the whole character of their neighbourhoods change"

Britain's long-running immigration debate has often been focused on race, in one way or another. Arguably one of the oddities of the current situation is that the racial dimensions of the immigration debate are less central then they often have been as the focus of some of it to what the opposition to immigration has been directed at white EU nationals.

What I want to discuss tonight is how over recent years the immigration debate has become detached from the broader history of movement and migration, in all its forms, in the years since 1945. We have an immigration debate, not a debate about migration or movement and how we got to now. And within this narrow debate the work of academic historians, in particular the brilliant ‘Coal Face’ documentary focus work done in the archives that is informed so much of the best writing on this subject has gained little attention despite the centrality of immigration in our political discourse. Where a disconnect exists between academic work and popular understanding, it is the role of public history to attempt to bridge that gap.

There's one aspect of this history that is widely remembered and firmly fixed within our consciousness and that's due in large part to the efforts over the past half-century of British people of West Indian descent. That community
has told the story of the wind rush and the struggles endured by the people who came ashore from that ship and from the ships and the aircraft that followed. That history is now part of the public history of the UK. The determination of that community to have their history and their contribution to the past 70 years of the British story imprinted into the national story led to an emergence of new forms of black British history. It spawned new books, it led to the inauguration this year of a new Windrush Day. It was one of the reasons why we have Black History Month, an American import. The apotheosis of that process by which the Windrush story was brought into the mainstream of British history, perhaps came in 2012 when a mock-up of the Windrush was included in the opening ceremony of the London Olympic Games.

Black British history in its many forms has documented hostility and the discrimination the black migrants encountered when they came to Britain. It has shown the many and multiple ways in which that community also brought their culture as well as their labour to the UK and helped create the globalized, hybridized forms of Britishness that so many of us, particularly the young and particularly the people of this city, are familiar with and comfortable with.

But what has often been less well incorporated into this narrative are the attitudes that prevailed within post-war governments and the legislative strategies employed by the state towards coloured migration after the Second World War. Here public history and academic history have failed to properly connect. Research by historians like Clive Harris, Wendy Webster, and above all Kathleen Paul has demonstrated that the story of migration after 1945 is like every Imperial phenomenon, a story of contradictions, sometimes of doublethink and always of two-way traffic of emigration as well as immigration.

To understand who came to Britain and who left in the decades after 1945 and why they did so and how the state regarded their movement we have to remind ourselves a little of what that other Britain of 70 years ago was like. In June 1946 the British Cabinet Manpower Working Committee calculated that in order to meet her post-war targets, Britain would need 940,000 additional workers. By the end of the year, they raised their estimates to 1.3 million. Despite rapid demobilization between the middle of 1945 and the end of 1946, the working population fell by 1.38 million. Large numbers of women who had been drafted into the war economy returned to the home, not all of them willingly or enthusiastically. And large numbers of elderly people who had not been permitted to retire during the wartime emergency, now finally were able to leave the workforce. So many policemen for example had been compelled to work on beyond retirement as the younger men who might otherwise have replaced them were diverted into the Armed Forces. The joke circulated during the war of thieves getting away with their crimes by simply outrunning elderly officers. There was not just a dad's army, there was a dad's police force in the Second World War and the shrinkage of the labour force caused by retirees leaving the labour market was accentuated in 1947 when the school-leaving age was increased, delaying the arrival of teenagers into the workforce.

Post-war Britain was battered, it was war-torn, its industries and its infrastructure were in need of a vast programme of improvements, modernisations and repairs. One in seven homes, according to one estimate, had suffered some degree of war damage. Plants, factories and hold industries that had been brilliantly retooled for wartime production now had to be returned to their pre-war functions or found a new economic niche. There was a colossal, unprecedented task of rebuilding facing the nation and not enough workers to do it. Part of the answer to the labour crisis in England, Scotland and Wales was to look to the land from which thousands of workers had come during the war: Ireland, both Northern Ireland and the Republic, which until 1949 was a member of the Commonwealth. Between 1946 and 1959, 350,000 people from Ireland came to work in Britain. Their experiences are deserving of a whole lecture but restraints on time mean I can only mention them here.

Another smaller part of the solution to the labour crisis was again to repeat what had been done so effectively during the war, which is to look to the people of the West Indies where high levels of unemployment meant there were workers in need of jobs. One of the places where the parallel histories of Irish and West Indian migrants who arrived in post-war Britain overlapped is in the famous ‘no colored, no Irish’ signs, that genuinely did appear
in advertisements for private rental accommodation and in some variations, again famously, dogs were added to
the list of the unwanted.

In 1947 the Ministry of Labour carried out an evaluation exercise to determine what use, what it described as, the
surplus male West Indian population might be made use of. The report however concluded the West Indians were
unsuitable for outdoor work in winter owing to their susceptibility to cold and more serious chest and lung
ailments. Similarly, West Indian women were elsewhere deemed to be unsuitable to fill the tens of thousands of
vacancies in the cotton mills as it was concluded that they were unable to withstand the cold temperatures of
Lancashire. The same report concluded that West Indians were also unsuited to work in the mines as the
conditions underground were too hot. The temperature range in which West Indians were deemed able to operate
in by the Ministry of Labour were extraordinarily narrow. But more disturbingly the same report put forward the
view that West Indians were unreliable and lazy, thereby deploying perfunctory stereotypes about the temperament
of black people that contained echoes of Victorian racial anthropology. The Ministry of Labour’s report was
carried out by officials who were confident that their assessment and their conclusions would be key determinants
as to whether West Indians were to be brought into the UK labour force.

What they did not predict was that the people of those islands would assess themselves, that they would audit
their own skills, that they would come to their own determination as to their own suitability for work in the UK,
and in the spring of 1948 that is exactly what happened. On the 11th of May that year an urgent telegram was sent
by the British governor in Jamaica to Arthur Creech Jones, the Colonial Secretary in London. It read "I regret to
inform you that more than 350 troop deck passengers by Empire Windrush have been booked by men who hoped
to find employment in the United Kingdom. Most have no particular skill and few will have more than a few
pounds on their arrival. I regret". Two weeks later on Thursday the 24th of May, the day the Empire Windrush
set sail from Kingston Harbour, Prime Minister Clement Attlee in a memo enquired as to whether there was
anywhere the passengers on board could be diverted and instead of being landed at Tilbury that they could be
sent to East Africa, and there offered agricultural work in the fields of Kenya and Tanzania in the infamously
disastrous grander scheme, which at that stage had not yet been fully exposed as the enormous white elephant of
economic imperial planning that it was.

When it was accepted by Attlee and his government that there was no legal possibility of diverting the ship,
recriminations commenced. The Secretary of State for the colonies, Arthur Creech Jones, was condemned for
having failed to have "kept a lid on things". In telling language, he was blamed for "this invasion". Atlee deployed
similar terms when he asked in a memo who would organize this incursion, other documents talked of influxes.

Three weeks before the Windrush arrived in June 1948, Minister of Labour George Isaacs sought to calm
governmental nerves. He reminded his colleagues that the men and women on the Windrush had not been
officially invited to Britain. He was firm in his insistence that no encouragement will be given to others to follow
their example, and he warned government colleagues that the arrival of these substantial numbers of men (about
500) "under no organised arrangement is bound to result in considerable difficulty and disappointment". Even
before the Windrush had set sail there had been attempts to discourage black people from the Caribbean from
exercising their rights to come to Britain. In early 1947, the Colonial Office had dispatched an official to the West
Indies to dispel rumours that there were thousands of job vacancies in Britain, which of course there were. Local
people were informed that these were not real openings, but what was called paper vacancies.

However, the newsagents on the Caribbean islands stocked copies of the British newspapers, and so West Indians
were able to see for themselves page after page of classified advertisements offering positions in British firms. In
1950 a report by the welfare department of the Colonial Office warned that if Britain wanted to avoid having an
"openly avowed policy of restricted immigration", then the government would have to fall back on what it called
"rather devious little devices" - British officials in the Caribbean islands had previously been instructed to make
sure migrant workers were moved to the back of shipping queues and to quote "delay the issue of passports to
migrants". In Nigeria and Ghana officials refused thousands of people their inter-colony travel permits that enable
them to travel between the British and the French colonies along that coastline. This was because the same
document confirmed their holders to be British subjects. By the 1950s, as one Colonial official explained, people in the region had "come to realise that a British travel certificate is the minimum document on which they can expect to be landed in this country", by which he meant the United Kingdom. In 1951 all mention of British citizenship was removed from these certificates, this made it possible for customs officials to refuse entry to British subjects from West Africa to the UK.

It's sometimes forgotten that around a third of the Windrush pioneers had served in the Royal Air Force, others had served in other branches of the forces or worked at sea or worked in the wartime factories. They were not coming to Britain; they were coming back to Britain and like the ship they sailed on they were veterans. The Windrush was a former Nazi cruise ship known as the Monte Rosa. By making the journey they had made in wartime now in peace, they were merely exercising the rights that they shared with all other citizens of the Empire and the 49 million inhabitants of the United Kingdom. Yet the wording of the various papers reports and memos from the Ministry of Labour and other departments of state from the late 1940s, through the 1950s and into the early 1960s, suggests that civil servants and ministers who drafted those papers regarded the Britishness of West Indian migrants and migrants from other non-white parts of the Empire to be a legal reality but a practical inconvenience.

It was not the case that they were not recognised as British subjects but as historians have demonstrated that there were two notions of Britishness in operation: one was a matter of legal citizenship and subjecthood, the other was conceived around ideas of race and whiteness. These two definitions of Britishness meant the West Indians could be subject to the Empire, they could hold British passports and travel certificates, they could fight for Britain in war but they could never be part of the racial community of Britishness.

The idea of a legal Britishness of passports and imperial universality and another of race and skin colour was present from the very beginning. Both the 1945 and 51 Labour government of command Attlee and the 1951 and 1955 Conservative administration of Winston Churchill were unshakeable in their view that people from the West Indies were not the right people to help rebuild post-war Britain. So the question is who was? I stated earlier Irish workers were regarded as key to solving the labor crisis, but another source of labour was to be people from Eastern Europe, who were encouraged to migrate to Britain in schemes run by the government. From 1946 onwards, 600,000 migrant workers were brought to Britain from Europe; some were recruited under the European Volunteer Workers Scheme. Many but not all of these were displaced persons who were then living in the vast camps of Europe. Others were poles and other nationalities who'd served alongside British forces during the war.

In 1947, the Polish resettlement act set out to formalise their status, as returning home was impossible because Poland was then behind what Churchill had called that year 'The Iron Curtain'. The Labour government was well aware of the time that giving preference to East Europeans over non-white British subjects risked provoking a profound sense of injustice in the West Indies and elsewhere, especially among the many thousands of men and women who had served in the armed forces during the war. In 1947 the Colonial Secretary warned "West Indians are well aware of the labour shortage in Great Britain and it is known to them that it is proposed to employ thousands of European displaced persons. In these circumstances there has been a natural and immediate demand for the employment of British West Indians who are British subjects and many of whom have experience of work in Britain during the war years to relieve the labour shortage."

Migrants in Eastern Europe, even poles who had fought alongside British forces in the war were a time subject to a degree of hostility in the years after 1945 but this opposition tended to come from the bottom up: complaints from neighbours, there were some unpleasant articles in some of the newspapers, but it was not officially sanctioned and indeed there were official efforts made to assist Europeans to settle and to explain their presence in the UK to potentially hostile communities.

The position of successive governments was that the Europeans were ideally suited to helping mitigate the labour crisis. In a 1947 parliamentary debate they were described as "first-class people who if led into this country would be of great benefit to our stock and as a people full of the spirit and the stuff of which we can make Britons".
Remember that just a couple of years earlier? Black people from the West Indies had been defined by the Ministry of Labour as “Surplus”, “unreliable”, and “lazy”.

One of the reasons the European voluntary workers were seen as ideal was because, as aliens, if they refused work in a particular industry or location, they could be removed from the country. The terms of their recruitment meant they often had to remain in a job allotted to them by the ministry for a specified period, usually a couple of years.

There is another story to tell of the racial thinking and of times anti-semitic thinking that contaminated some of the selection processes by which migrants were selected for inclusion within the EVW scheme. On occasions people from the Baltic States were regarded as preferable to Slavic peoples and to European Jews. A draft report on the recruitment of Baltic displaced persons, written in 1946, suggested that people from the Baltics were "more easily assimilated" and using almost eugenic language, concluded that Balkan women are "an exceedingly good type of woman: clean, exceptionally healthy and fit". The work of Clare Willis and others is important here, but beyond the scope of this lecture.

So successful were the various schemes to recruit European workers, that by 1961, on the eve of the Commonwealth immigrants act of 1962 - the law that would severely curtail the migration of non-white people into the UK from the West Indies Africa and the Indian subcontinent - there were more European aliens "resident in Britain than migrants from the coloured Empire" (this is 13 years after the Windrush). Yet this whole episode is hardly remembered today. There were 60 Polish migrants on the Windrush in 1948, their presence is for the most part glossed over or left unexplained in the popular memory of the Windrush phenomenon. Why were the West Indians treated so differently? One group sought out and recruited, the other officially discouraged. There are many striking differences in their treatment but perhaps the most striking are attitudes towards the possibility that volunteer workers would intermarry and settle in Britain. This eventuality was at times regarded as a positive, even an ancillary benefit of the European Volunteer Workers Scheme.

One of the first schemes, which was codenamed ‘Baltic Signet’, focused on single younger women from the Baltics and 1,500 of them were brought to the UK. The same draft report written by the Foreign Labour Committee after visiting a camp in Germany, from which many women were recruited, was again highly positive about Baltic women, many of whom came from middle class families and that was also a factor that played a part in how they were assessed. The report said "the women are of good appearance, are scrupulously clean in their personal habits", "there is little doubt that the specially selected women who come into this country will be an exceptionally healthy and fit body and would constitute a good and desirable element in our population". This emphasis on fitness and cleanliness was overtly linked to the idea of women from the Baltics intermarrying. In 1947, in a parliamentary debate the potential of European men settling down and marrying British women was also described in similarly positive terms and even as part of the solution to demographic imbalances that existed within the United Kingdom. The report said "we are suffering from the falling birth-rate of the 20s and the 30s and have no fewer than 200,000 numerically surplus women. I believe that it is an unfortunate sociological factor, on the assumption that we should take many single men there is the strongest possible reason for having an infusion of vigorous young blood from overseas at the present time."

Contrast these positive assessments and positive projections of the idea of intermarriage with the view contained within a letter sent by Sir Harold Wiles, the Deputy Permanent Undersecretary of the Ministry of Labour, to M A Bevan, the senior civil servant. The letter was sent in 1948 and in it Wiles makes clear that there is an essential difference between making British citizens of Ukrainians and people from the Baltics and bringing black migrants to Britain. Despite the latter being British subjects, the distinction lay within what Wiles called “absorption”. He wrote "The EVWs who are being brought in are coming definitely for permanent settlement here with a view to their intermarrying and complete absorption into our working population, whatever may be the policy about British citizenship I do not think any scheme for the importation of coloured Colonials for permanent settlement here should be embarked upon without full understanding that this means that a coloured element will be brought in for permanent absorption into our own population".

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To Wiles, black people could never be part of our working population as their permanent absorption would represent a crossing of boundaries between the two forms of Britishness: one about what he called the policy of our British citizenship, the other a sacred biological racial community that was vulnerable to pollution and the introduction of impurities.

Phrases, like "our people", "our own men" and the most biological of all "our stock" pepper documents relating to non-white immigration from the 1940s and 1950s. Tellingly, migrants from the West Indies were routinely racialized in government discussions. Whereas those recruited under the evw scheme were described as Europeans and they were often described under their individual nationalities, men and women from the West Indies were described very often as ‘coloured colonials’: their skin colour was the material issue here, not their citizenship status.

The Windrush and the waves of movement that followed risked a breach in the barrier between black and white, between colonizer and colonized, between two forms of Britishness: an imagined community of race ‘our people’ on the one hand and the colored Colonials on the other. This racialized definition of Britishness was able to absorb the European voluntary workers who despite in most cases having no cultural historic or linguistic connections to the United Kingdom were white, which in the end was all that really mattered.

What Wiles called the ‘Policy About British Citizenship’ was shown to me a mere contrivance. While it functioned on the colonial frontier as its inventors had intended, when coloured citizens of the Empire came to Britain they brought the frontier with them and threatened the real community of Britishness which was interchangeable in the minds of men like Wiles with the idea of whiteness.

At that moment the language of miscegenation, purity and pollution appeared in official documents and also in the press: in 1958 an article in The Daily Telegraph confidently stated, “what most of us instinctively recall from is miscegenation”. The same year a poll conducted by Gallup found that 71% of those surveyed were opposed to mixed marriages.

There were other reasons while the two groups of post-war migrants, the EVWs and black people from the West Indies and elsewhere, were treated differently. The Working Party set up by the Labour government in 48 to examine the issue of surplus colonial manpower determined that no recruitment project similar to the EVW scheme should be extended to the West Indies. But there were other justifications given in the archive of governmental documents for the undesirability of coloured migration, one practical reason (practical at least from the point of view of the government) was that as British citizens West Indians could not be directed in the way EVW’s could be. They could not be bound to one employer or sent back if they disobeyed the rules. It was their potential autonomy as well as their blackness that bothered officials and in this their status as British subjects with full rights made them less attractive as a source of labour. The Working Party of 1947 concluded that if West Indians came to the UK in great numbers their rights to work and settle where they liked meant that they would automatically "gravitate to coloured ghettos in Britain's Seaport towns". This was a misreading of black British history. It was an overlaying of past demographic patterns onto a very different future. It was an imagining of a very different historic community being the same as the one that was then being formed. The Working Party also warned that the trade unions would oppose coloured members and that the introduction of “other races into the British workplace and into the British city” would have "social implications". Another problem the working party identified was that the minister of Labour would not allow West Indians to use the government hostels that have been used to house EVW's and Irish immigrants. And this was following an old pattern: the black people were defined as problematic, even when the problems at hand arose from their treatment by others.

The general election of 1951 returned a Conservative government that was every bit as uncomfortable with West Indian migration as the Labour government of Clement Attlee that it replaced. the Marquess of Salisbury, formerly Viscount Cranbourne, a member of Churchill's new cabinet warned of the risks of the arrival of large numbers of black people, which he said posed a threat to the racial character of the English people. In 1954 during a lunch at Chequers with the Governor of Jamaica, Sir Hugh Foote, Churchill expressed his own concern that if West Indian migration continued we would have a magpie Society. In the early 1950s Churchill asked government officials in
various departments to look into devising mechanisms by which West Indians could be kept out of the country contrary to their rights of entry and residence.

The challenge was to draft legislation that specifically targeted non-white immigrants while not appearing to be motivated by racial considerations and this task was a delicate one: any new law that overtly targeted people on the basis of race risked a backlash from sections of the press and the public and it would damage Britain’s standing in the world. Most importantly such legislation would also cause deep resentment among the nations of the multiracial and then still fledgling British Commonwealth. When he was interviewed in 1954 Sir David Hunt, Winston Churchill's private secretary, he paraphrased the dilemma: "the minute", he said "we've got to keep these black chaps out, the whole Commonwealth lark would have blown up".

In 1955 Churchill's government considered introducing a five-year limit on the right of settlement of non-white immigrants from the Commonwealth but thought better of it at the last minute. The legally simpler option of a blanket withdrawal of rights of entry and residents bequeathed to all Commonwealth citizens under the 1948 British Nationality Act would have antagonized the governments of the Old Dominions at the very moment Britain wanted to draw those nations closer, not push them away.

But another obstacle that stood in the way of the government's ambition to pass immigration controls to the “problem” of coloured migration was that it was not a big enough problem outside of Whitehall to justify a push for legislation. Minutes from meetings of Churchill's cabinet from the mid 50's reveal that on more than one occasion ministers discussed the issue of black migration, positioning it within their discussions as problematic, but noting repeatedly that the public were nowhere near as concerned about the issue as the politicians. In a meeting of the cabinet on 24th November 1954 the then Home Secretary, David Maxwell Fyfe, proposed that “a departmental committee should be appointed to consider what changes should be made in the law relating to the admission of any class of British subject to this country” and he noted that such a committee would focus public opinion on this question and would help gain public support for the legislation to deal with it.

In another meeting of 14 June 1955 the cabinet debated “Proposals for the appointment of an independent committee of inquiry into coloured migration” and it was noted at this meeting that "the first purpose of an inquiry should be to ensure that the public throughout the country were made aware of the nature and the extent of the problem". Until this was more widely appreciated the need for restrictive legislation would not be recognized. The minutes of a further cabinet meeting, 3rd November 1955, reveal that the cabinet had concluded that “the problem of colonial immigration has not yet aroused general public anxiety”. Although there was some concern mainly due to housing difficulties in a few localities where most of the recent migrants were concentrated. Although they repeatedly discussed the lack of public concern and the need to focus public opinion on the issue of coloured migration, Churchill's government nevertheless committed itself in 1954 to drafting legislation to restrict coloured immigration.

Post-war governments were also wary of introducing racially targeted immigration controls as they feared a backlash from sections of the British public. Caribbean migrants often talk of the British public being divided into three equal thirds: one-third of people who were committed to racial thinking, a third you could go either way, and one-third who were often forgotten in this history who were anti-racist.

It was not until after the Notting Hill and Nottingham riots of 1958 called race riots, although they’re better understood as occasions on which white mobs attacked black communities. It was only then that the public mood for immigration controls was deemed high enough for legislation to be brought forward. Yet by then the even mechanism by which normal migration was restricted was covert.

The name of the game was to draft a racial immigration law that did not appear to be racial. One that severely curtailed emigration of British citizens from the Caribbean and other parts of the New Commonwealth without disrupting the flow of white people from the old Commonwealth Cabinet papers from the spring of 1961 in which the final touches were being put to what would become the 1962 Immigration Act, show Harold Macmillan's government had concluded that “employment control” was “the only workable method of controlling
immigration from the Commonwealth without either bringing such immigration to a virtual standstill or ostensibly discriminating against immigrants on the basis of colour” and the key word there of course is “ostensibly”.

The story of how post-war immigration laws were deftly calibrated to target non-white migrants without interfering with the movement of white people has been the subject of study by academic historians for decades. Yet it remains largely unknown. And yet every October in Black History Month we discussed other aspects of this history. However, the aspect of the great flows of human traffic surged around the Empire Commonwealth in the postwar decades, that has perhaps been most lost to popular memory, is that this traffic moved in all directions. The history of post-war immigration can only be understood alongside the history of emigration and key to this is the bill that was being debated in the summer of 1948 as the Windrush was crossing the Atlantic. The British Nationality Act received Royal Assent on the 31st of July, five weeks after the Windrush had arrived at Tilbury. The new act was in part a response to Canada’s introduction of Canadian Citizenship and it gave the people of the Empire who had formerly held the status of British subjects the new status ‘Commonwealth citizens’ creating the new designation ‘citizen of the United Kingdom and colonies’. It reaffirmed the right of all to enter and settle in Britain, which was seen as a necessary continuation of a long British tradition of open borders deemed fitting for a nation at the center of a vast empire and an empire that the immediate post-war governments did certainly not believe was about to see the sun finally set upon it.

It was hoped that this new overarching status of ‘citizen of the United Kingdom and colonies’ as opposed to citizenships of each colony would help dampen nationalist independent movements. However, it was introduced to maintain and enhance the bonds between Britain and what were then called the old dominions (sometimes called the white dominions): Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa. MPs imagined in 1948 that the Act would simply continue the two-way flow of traffic between Britain and those dominions. What they did not expect was unplanned spontaneous migrations like the wind rush and the waves of migration that followed.

But the 1948 act was part of a wider Imperial strategy adopted by post-war Labour government of Attlee. Attlee and his cabinet firmly believed even after 1947 that only by maintaining as much of the Empire as possible could Britain remain a world power in the age of superpowers. Maintaining and strengthening the bonds that held the imperial structure together, while combating the centrifugal forces who were pulling it apart, was critical and like many other policy decisions and economic decisions in the post-war period immigration policy was shaped by this underlying objective. Even before the war Lord Salisbury, then Lord Cranborne, wrote in May 1944 that the interchange of blood between one part of the Commonwealth and another must tend to strengthen the whole and multiply the links that hold it together. The same ideas were evident for even 14 years later even after the loss of India and the disaster of Suez. In 1958 Howard McMillan, while visiting Australia, reaffirmed the importance that Australia must “remain British in blood and tradition”. Post-war migration from the UK was of course a continuation of a phenomena that had long been a feature of the Empire and part of the family histories of millions of British people.

While the significant proportion of 19th century migrants headed to the United States the majority by the 1880s and 1890s went to the white settler colonies and the majority were absorbed by Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa. It was government policy after 1945 not merely to allow for the continued flow of skilled people from Britain but to assist and facilitate. It the Empire Settlement Act of 1922 that had enabled over 400,000 people to emigrate from the United Kingdom to the dominions between 1922 and 1933 was renewed three times after the war 1950 to 1957 and 1962. And In 1946 and 47 free and assisted passengers passages schemes were established to help bring migrants from the UK between 1945 and 1960, 1 and a half million Britons emigrated - 80% went to the white settler colonies. When the Australian assisted passenger scheme was announced there was an immediate rush: 240,000 people applied for places lodging 96,000 applications between them within two weeks of the scheme being started.

So, in the midst of a labour shortage of historic proportions and an ongoing demographic panic about falling birth rates and an aging population, Britain’s post-war governments subsidized and facilitated the migration of hundreds of thousands of young and healthy people. The economic costs of the loss of their labour came in addition to the
upfront costs of these subsidies yet there was never any question that the economic winner in this human traffic was the receiving nation and therefore the economic loser, the UK.

These migration schemes were put in place and supported by politicians who believed immigration was the key mechanism for maintaining the British character of the dominions. People of British stock leaving the UK for new lives and the dominions would carry Britishness with them rather than becoming Australians, Canadians, or New Zealanders in any proper cultural sense. Politicians confidently believed they would instead retain the British character of the dominions they went to. As this was one of the functions of the scheme, non-white subjects of the Empire were excluded - the Dominion governments were equally keen to control the race of the migrants.

The government of New Zealand had to be persuaded by the British government not to issue forms that openly stated that applicants had to be wholly of European race. In a series of agreements between Britain and dominion governments concluded to ensure that black and Asian subjects of the Empire were excluded, soldiers also were deemed to be not the right type. And mirroring attitudes to immigration in the UK, in fact, an agreement was reached with the government of Australia the Polish ex-servicemen who had fought under British command in the war would be eligible for emigration while West Indian veterans would not. While the “10 pound poms” and the White Australia Policy are reasonably well known, the racial and discriminating nature of the scheme is not nor is the role of the British government. The argument therefore developed that while Eastern Europeans were people full of spirit and the stuff out of which we can make Britons, those same people if they migrated to Australia or Canada, it was said would there dilute the British character of those nations. The British governments permitted emigration on this scale because they feared that if not the dominion governments would look to the same pools of labour from which it was fishing and they would themselves bring in East Europeans from the displaced labour camps. The logic of this human traffic thus required that Britons leave their homes to settle in the dominions and that Eastern Europeans recruited to take their place in the UK labour force, and there in Britain they would be made into new Britons. While at the same time people from the West Indies, who were already in so many ways culturally British and in every way legally British, were to be reduced and ideally curtailed in their immigration, as their skin colour meant they could never really be British in the sense that really mattered.

British immigration and emigration policies in the seven decades 1945 have not only been racial, they've at times been muddled and even delusional. Today despite immigration remaining among the most important political issues in repeated attitudinal studies, the history of immigration and immigration is poorly understood. That lack of popular understanding accentuated the sense of shock and outrage that gripped the nation when anomalies and the status of tens of thousands of people who had come to Britain as children from the Caribbean, the children of the original Windrush era migrants, exploded into a scandal last year. Those anomalies in status stemmed from a clause of the 1971 Immigration Act but it has remained dormant until the passage of the 2014 Immigration Act. The detonation of this unexploded legislative munition, a relic of a forgotten act that was itself part of a forgotten history, led to the resignation of a Home Secretary and caused a deep sense of righteous anger within a community who felt their place within and contribution to modern Britain was again being called into question. The history that explains the origins of the Windrush scandal and that sets our current debates over immigration, has been the focus of brilliant academic work and at this poetic moment in our nation's story this is a history that needs to be accessible to a wide public. This Colin Matthew might have said. Thank you very much.

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