

ADI, Hakim (2022). *African and Caribbean People in Britain: A History*. London: Allen Lane, 688 pp., ISBN: 978-0-241-58382-1.

African and Caribbean People in Britain: A History is the newest volume by the well-known historian Hakim Adi, author of several books and the first person of African heritage to have held a full professorship of history in the United Kingdom. Founder of a unique research master's degree (MRes) in the History of Africa and the African Diaspora, Adi recently received considerable media coverage in the United Kingdom owing to the University of Chichester's decision to curtail its humanities provision, leading to the closure of some of the institution's history degree programmes¹.

At 688 pages, the book is divided into a Preface and 11 chapters, together with bibliographical references, acknowledgements, and an index. In the work's Preface, Adi summarises existing scholarship on the topic and underlines his decision to opt for the designation of "African and Caribbean People". Structured in chronological order, the book's focus is squarely on the timeframe ranging from the early modern era up until the present day, and thus the two opening chapters are both relatively compact. Chapter 1 gives an overview spanning from Roman times through the *Domesday Abbreviato* and the Black Death into the end of the mediaeval era. Chapter 2 centres principally on the developments during the Tudor and Stuart dynasties of the 16th and 17th centuries. During this complex era, Adi elucidates how people of African origin came to be present in England and Scotland, some of whom were forcibly trafficked via Spain and Portugal and others who came to the British Isles by different means. Among others, Adi profiles Africans who worked at the English royal court, such as the trumpeter John Blanke, the situation of Africans in Scotland, as well as ordinary African students and workers, situating them within broader questions relating to the status and names used to describe Africans living in Britain at that time.

The book's third chapter is more expansive than the previous two and focuses on the development of the triangular trade and its repercussions in Britain. Noting that "the slave system therefore cannot be separated from every aspect of Britain's economy and society in the eighteenth century" (p. 32), Adi develops points raised in the previous chapter about the status of Africans in the British Isles from the late 1600s onwards. As such, he outlines several legal cases regarding slavery and freedom, provides profiles of Africans in England and Scotland and their social gatherings, as well as the beginnings of a community of African people. This is complemented by profiles of specific personages – for example, the celebrated

¹ For more information, please see e.g. <<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2023/jul/23/outrage-over-chichester-university-plan-to-cut-african-history-course-and-its-professor>>.

cases of the authors Phillis Wheatly and Ignatius Sancho, before moving on a presentation and analysis of contemporary moves towards the abolition of the slave trade, noting the contribution of those Africans and their supporters residing in Britain who sought for the trade to be abolished (for example, the “Sons of Africa” movement and the London Corresponding Society).

Chapter 4 develops these discussions of abolitionist movements, focusing on the impact of the 1807 Abolition Act, which abolished the slave trade but “made no immediate impact on the institution of slavery in the colonies, or even in Britain” (p. 102) as well as uprisings in Barbados and Jamaica. This historical analysis is supplemented by overviews of people of African and Caribbean origin active in the British Isles. These range from general summaries (for example, of convicts, military men, and boxers) to more detailed portraits (for example, of the famous doctress Mary Seacole).

Building on themes first introduced in the third chapter, Chapter 5 revolves around the intersection of African and Caribbean people in Britain with growing general awareness of social movements in nineteenth-century British society, with Adi stating that “The many struggles facing Africans and the working class in Britain, a consequence of their common oppression, led to a strong tradition linking the demand for abolition, and for the rights of Africans, with radical politics and the struggle for the rights of all working people” (p. 145). These important societal developments are framed by contemporaneous studies of other domains, such as the theatre, clergy, and university education, where people of African and Caribbean origin were also active.

Amid the backdrop of growing racial tension which would erupt in race riots in several British cities in 1919, Chapter 6 centres primarily on the creation of relevant political and student-based associations, such as the African Association, as well as the inaugural Pan-African Conference of 1900 which was attended by luminaries such as the politician John Archer and the composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor. With the outbreak of World War I, the military-related activities and contribution of African and Caribbean people in Britain to the war efforts are highlighted, ranging from officers and prisoners-of-war to munitions workers and conscientious objectors.

Chapter 7 continues the political focus by examining and profiling the development of activist and political organisations during the years between the wars, and discusses issues relating to increasing racism, the colour bar, and moves towards pan-Africanism during this period. These aspects gain further relevancy and scrutiny in the context of World War II, where in Chapter 8 Adi outlines the notable contributions made by people of African and Caribbean heritage in the Royal Air Force, the Merchant Navy, as well as on the Home Front, contrasting these with the many cases of racism encountered during that period.

The changing composition of postwar Britain is the central point of Chap-

ter 9, which is highlighted in the popular mindset by the arrival of the Empire Windrush in 1948. With a growing number of African and Caribbean people coming to live in the country after World War II, Adi discusses these social and demographic changes through the prism of various factors. The reality at that time included everyday discrimination and outbreaks of racial tension and violence, but also included the creation of the famed Notting Hill Carnival, as well as community-based publications, associations, and activism. This is developed further in Chapter 10, which profiles several of the activist movements and organisations that emerged from the late 1960s onwards, such as Black Power, the Black Panthers, and others. This analysis is framed by a discussion of broader political aspects, such as domestic moves to promote African liberation (including stopping apartheid in South Africa), as well as cultural aspects such as the popularity of reggae music. The final chapter (Chapter 11) moves into the twenty-first century. It notes the creation of a 'Black British' identity in modern society, highlights the ramifications of the Windrush scandal, before going right up to date with accounts of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020.

As the United Kingdom, like several other European countries, grapples with its role with a colonial power and the enduring impact of colonialisation on other nations across the world, this is a valuable book for many reasons. With regard to African and Caribbean people in the British Isles, the volume enhances awareness of the complex intersection between institutions and individuals in the colonial and post-colonial sphere. Through detailed general and specific profiles from across the historical spectrum, it provides new and different perspectives, thereby allowing for informed discussions and debates on weighty topics. In addition, the book's chronological structure means that readers can access different sections to view relevant information on a topic of specific interest (e.g., nineteenth century African and Caribbean musicians, or "Black Edwardians"), whilst also having the necessary context to understand these aspects within the wider historical and sociocultural dynamics. In short, as illustrated by its shortlisting for the prestigious 2023 Wolfson History Prize, Hakim Adi's *African and Caribbean People in Britain: A History* is an important addition to the scholarly literature which will remain a seminal reference work for many years to come.

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