

The Black London eMonograph series

# *The Shaping of Black London*



**EB** Editions  
**EB** Blair

**The Black London eMonograph series** is the first-ever continuous study of African and Caribbean peoples in the nation's capital.

Having published five eBooks, Prof Thomas L Blair is now at work delivering his research writings on Black people in London. He says: "Titles range from The Shaping of Black London to the first Black settlers in the 18th century to today's denizens of the metropolis".

### **Also available**

Decades of research on race, city planning and policy provide a solid background for understanding issues in the public realm. Available from <http://www.thomblair.org> Thomas L Blair Collected Works/MONO (or search), they include:

**1968 [The Tiers Monde in the City](#): A study of the effects of Housing and Environment on Immigrant Workers and their Families in Stockwell, London, Department of Tropical Studies, the Architectural Association, School of Architecture, Bedford Square, London.**

**1972. <http://www.thomblair.org.uk/>The City Poverty Committee. To Make A Common Future. Notting Hill, London. Circa 1972**

**1978 [PCL – Habitat Forum, Condition of England question](#). Papers and Proceedings. Edited by Dr Thomas L Blair, Professor of Social and Environmental Planning, Polytechnic of Central London, 1st volume in series 1978**

**1989. [Information Base Report on Ethnic Minorities in London Docklands](#). Full Employ/LDDC Project.**

**1996. [Area-based projects in districts of high immigrant concentration](#). By Thomas L Blair and Edward D Hulsbergen, Consultants. Community Relations, Directorate of Social and Economic Affairs, Council of Europe 1996. ISBN 92-871-3179-1. French edition: [Projets de quartier dans les zones à forte concentration d'immigrés](#). ISBN 92-871-3178-3**

**1997. [The Unquiet Zone: Planning Innovative Renewal in Post-war Social Housing Areas of Black and Ethnic Minority Concentration in Inner London](#). Submitted and accepted as a Master of Arts in Urban Studies degree. Goldsmiths College. University of London. 1997.**

### **How to sharpen your focus**

Compiled from more than five decades of academic research, the Black London eMonograph Series is a boon to educators, policy makers and problem-solvers.

## **Notes on the Author, Editor and Publisher**

Thomas L Blair, PhD, FRSA, a sociologist, writes on the creative renewal of Black people in urban society. Essays for some of the Black London eMonographs were written for an MA thesis and Urban Studies Fellowship at Goldsmiths College, University of London, in the 1990s. He has held professorships at UK and American universities, is well-known as a cyber-scholar, publisher of Editions Blair series [editionsblair.eu](http://editionsblair.eu), and edits the pioneering Black Experience web sites founded in 1997 <http://www.chronicleworld.org/> and <http://chronicleworld.wordpress.com>

COVER Photograph by TLB, "New day at Brixton London Underground Station"

**The Black London eMonograph Series**

**THE SHAPING OF BLACK LONDON  
TO THE 21ST CENTURY**

Thomas L Blair



## **Publishing information**

The Shaping of Black London to the 21<sup>st</sup> century  
Thomas L Blair

The Black London eMonograph Series.

Publisher: Editions Blair  
October 2013  
ISBN 978-1-908480-16-3

©Thomas L Blair All rights reserved. ©2013

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise), without the written permission of the author and copyright holder.

The greatest care has been taken to produce this publication; however, the author will endeavour to acknowledge any errors or omissions. Please e-mail comments and enquiries to Thomas L Blair [tb@thechronicle.demon.co.uk](mailto:tb@thechronicle.demon.co.uk)

# The Shaping of Black London To the 21st century

Thomas L Blair © October 2013

This timeline chart encourages awareness of a crucial fact: Black Africans and Caribbean people have lived in Britain's capital for centuries.

So long, that generations have shared the bed and board, the life styles, cultural tastes, accents and food habits – “Fancy a pie and mash, mate?) -- and, indeed, “africanised” the DNA coils of their white neighbours.

Significantly, The Shaping of Black London adds an urban focus to the history of one of Britain's minorities. It highlights their immigration, settlement, assimilation and mobility -- the essential indicators of their progress and prospects for the future.

## AD 50 Roman London

Earliest Londoners come from all over Europe and Africa

Africans served in Roman army. "Negro head" carved wooden spoon found at Southwark bridge is earliest African connection in Southeast London.

## 16th century

Catherine of Aragon lands at Deptford in 1501 with her African attendants.

Black trumpeter at court 1507; and "John Blanke" served Henry VII at Greenwich and later Henry VIII.

**1555**

"Certain Black slaves" arrive from Africa with John Lok; and marks beginning of continuous Black presence in London.

Late 16th century, opening up of West African trade. Africans became part of London's population in seafaring centres like Deptford.

**1593**

First record of a Black person, "Cornelius", in parish register 1593.

**1596-1601**

Fear of increased Black population in London and other towns leads to Royal proclamation by Queen Elizabeth I to arrest and expel all "Negroes and Blackamores" from her kingdom.

## Mid-17th to late 18th century

First era of large-scale settlement of Blacks in Britain. Spans period of Britain's involvement in the tri-continental slave trade.

Significantly, slavery was domesticated in the wealthiest classes. They were symbols of wealth and power -- see the portrait of Mary Butterworth and her blackamoor – and the trailing “Black boys” showed the status of slave merchants and sea captains swaggering through the streets.

1674 Blacks appear as criminals or victims in the earliest Old Bailey court records in London.

### 1700s

Significant presence of Black people brought as slave-servants of returning ex-colonial officials, traders, plantation owners, and military personnel.

Growing evidence of Black settlements in London's northern, eastern and southern areas. This included free slaves and seamen from West Africa and South Asia.

In Tottenham, All Hallows Church baptismal register records "John Cyras, Captain Madden's Black" in March 1718, and at St Mary's Church, Hornsey "John Moore, a Black from Captain Boulton's" 8th October 1725 and "Captain Lissles Black from Highgate" in 1733.

1731 London Mayor bans Blacks from job training fearing panic over competition and the growing non-white population.

Many reduced to beggary through lack of jobs and racial discrimination.

### 1750s

Blacks sought refuge in the city's poorer quarters traditionally housing working class whites and multi-racial, -cultural groups, Chinese, Asians and Jews, Irish, Germans, and Huguenots.

### 1756

Mounting Black response to slavery through covert means, resistance and flight, leads to population increase.

Oluadah Equiano, Ignatius Sancho and Ottobah Cugoano are notable Black anti-slavery activists. They denounced slavery as inimical to God, “natural rights” and British law

Their narratives of enslavement, resistance and fight for freedom from slavery gained public support.

Supporters include city's workers and urban poor who themselves suffered under the ruling classes of the day.

## 1760s

First estimates of Black London communities. They number 10,000-15,000 of the nation's 20,000 Black people – of an estimated London population of three-quarters of a million.

The status of Black people in society becomes part of public debate.

Widespread view that Blacks were less than human expressed in slave sales and advertisements.

## Mid-18th century

London Blacks vociferously contested slavery and the slave sales widespread in Britain.

The legal status of these practices was never clearly defined. But there was evidence of race-based inequalities. Slavery of whites was forbidden. Free Blacks could not be enslaved. However, those brought as slaves to Britain were considered bound to their owners.

## 1772

Lord Justice Mansfield ruled that a slave who has deserted his master could not be taken by force to be sold abroad.

Verdict triggers Black flight from their owners, and the decline of slavery in England. Subsequently, clandestine Black quarters develop.

## 1775-83

The capital prospered from this period of international, even global, migration of labour, industry and wealth. But Black Londoners faced hard times in the poorest districts.

Following the hostilities of the American revolution in 1783, hundreds of "Black loyalists" arrived in London. They were the African-American slave-soldiers who fought on the side of the British.

Deprived of pensions, many of them were popular characters who sang and danced for pennies; others were indigent street beggars.

## 1786

London's Blacks and Asians (Lascars) lived among whites in such areas as Mile End, Stepney, Paddington, and St. Giles. Some were free-men, householders or tenants.

Many became the Black Poor: ex-low wage soldiers, seafarers, dockhands and plantation workers, but with few desirable skills in an evolving urban capitalist economy.

	<p>1788 Black Londoners actively create their own domestic, social and political life.</p> <p>Yet, they often shared the same cramped dwellings, taverns and dancehalls as whites. Observers report they drank, gambled and whored like others of their class. Inter-mixing fed the growing panic that "London abounds with Black men and an increasing number of mulattos by white women".</p>
<b>1789</b>	<p>Blacks and southeast Asian Lascars did not fit easily into the Poor Law welfare strategies created for indigent whites.</p> <p>A special Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor laid plans for the Settlement of Blacks in Sierra Leone, West Africa.</p>
<b>1789</b>	<p>Publication of the memoirs of Equiano, the outstanding Black personality, titled <i>The Interesting Narratives of the Life of Olaudah Equiano</i>.</p>
<b>1792-1815</b>	<p>Further groups of Black soldiers and seamen settle in London after services in the Napoleonic wars.</p>

### Late 18th century

The slave trade declines greatly in economic importance to Britain with the evolution of industrial capitalism. Unsubstantiated prejudice and "scientific racism" buttressed widespread racial intolerance.

As the capital's population mounts to 1 million, estimates suggest a drop in London Black population. This may due to decline in immigration, some out-migration to and settlement in North America, Africa and the Caribbean, and to the gradual absorption of Blacks and their descendants into the white population, within and outside marriage.

This effectively ends the first period of large-scale Black immigration to London and Britain.

There followed a profound change in Black Londoners' life and living. They shared the housing and life styles of traditional working class districts; and Black male-white female liaisons became common.

### 19th century

<b>1807</b>	The British slave trade is abolished
<b>1834</b>	<p>Parliament abolishes slavery throughout the British Empire.</p> <p>Steady decline in numbers and presence of London's Black population. Fewer were brought in by West Indian planters and there were restrictions on immigrants from</p>

	Africa.
<b>1880s</b>	<p>By now, a generation of Blacks are Londoners by birth as well as immigration. Thus, they are the first Black urbanites in the expanding 3 million people in the largest city in the world.</p> <p>New build up of small Black dockside communities in London's Canning Town, and in Liverpool and Cardiff, as new shipping links developed with the Caribbean and West Africa.</p>

**20th century**

London-born Black people begin to make a mark in the city's political and cultural life.

Continuous influx of African students, sportsmen, students, and business persons. Some stay and gain positions as doctors, politicians and community activists.

**World War I**

Black communities grow with fresh arrival of Black merchant seamen and soldiers.

They revive settled Black communities in dockside areas of London as well as Liverpool and Cardiff; some take refuge with whites.

Continuous presence of small groups of students, professionals, workers from Africa and the Caribbean.

**World War II**

Caribbean and West Africans arrive in small numbers as wartime workers, merchant seamen and service personnel in the army, navy and air forces.

Black Londoners gain from challenge to hotel discrimination. Learie Constantine, welfare officer in the RAF, refused service in a London Hotel, wins damages.

**Post-war period**

<b>1948</b>	<p>Black London greets Britain's first post-war Caribbean people arriving on the SS Empire Windrush.</p> <p>Contracted labourers among the 492 passengers were housed by the authorities in Brixton, south London, which became a prominent Black, mainly Jamaican, district.</p>
<b>1950s to 1960s</b>	Mass in-migration from all over the English-speaking

	<p>Caribbean, particularly Jamaica and Trinidad, marks the arrival of the next Black settlers. Many are "invited" to fill labour requirements in hospitals, transport and railways and contribute to rebuilding the post-war urban economy.</p> <p>Causes of migration vary, but there is little doubt that the entry of families, relatives, spouses and children created households. This gave Black London the shape and character a UK low-income working class community, more than simply a transplanted bit of the empire.</p> <p>Black London is born as one of the city's diverse and often deprived working class, including English and white ethnic groups.</p> <p>Trinidad-born Samuel Selvon's <i>Lonely Londoners</i> (1956) learn new city tricks in the fleshpots of Soho and Piccadilly. Their favourite pastime is "liming" or hanging out in taverns and street corners in Bayswater and Notting Hill – anywhere away from the boredom of low wage work and dreary crowded, unsanitary dwellings.</p> <p>George Lamming takes up the narrative of urban exploration in <i>The Emigrants</i> (1956); followed by Colin MacInnes in <i>City of Spades</i> (1957).</p>
<p><b>1962</b></p>	<p>Commonwealth Immigrants Act (1962) and a succession of laws severely restrict Black entry to Britain. It ends this Black settlement period. However, it marks the struggle against race prejudice and intolerance.</p> <p>They rallied for relief from an invidious pattern of housing discrimination. "No coloureds, here" was a familiar message in many lodging house windows.</p> <p>Recruited Black workers organised against racism in the labour market, most virulent when whites feared job competition.</p> <p>They marched for social justice in a hostile urban environment.</p> <p>Hence, their lives were shaped as much for comfort and safety in group solidarity as by accent and colour.</p>
<p><b>1975</b></p>	<p>David Pitt, Grenada-born Black London medic and civil rights leader, brings a new popular Caribbean voice to the House of Lords.</p> <p>1981, In April, Brixton, now London's premier African Caribbean district, erupts as smouldering tension reveals</p>

	<p>youths' joblessness and police harassments.</p> <p>Disturbances follow in large cities, Liverpool and Manchester. Later, Lord Scarman's Report highlights unsocial policing tactics and need to combat racism. He targets the "serious social and economic problems affecting Britain's inner cities", where 50% unemployment is common among young Black men</p> <p>Significantly, in the 1980s, Black Londoners and youth gained from Labour-controlled Greater London Council's initiatives. Councillors promoted equal opportunity and repeal of "repressive and racially discriminatory immigration and nationality laws and practices in the United Kingdom".</p> <p>1985 Broadwater Farm Estate rioters expose unrest among African and Caribbean residents in Tottenham, north London. Local politician Bernie Grant became Black champion nationally for condemning police actions. He gains loyal following among the unemployed, the Black community and the left.</p>
<p><b>1987</b></p>	<p>Black voters, workers, and community activists contribute to the election of three Black Londoners, Bernie Grant, Diane Abbott and Paul Boateng as Members of Parliament.</p>
<p><b>1991-97</b></p>	<p>Black Londoners numbered half a million people in the 1991 census, in a city of 7 million. Many now, were London- or British born. New categories included Black-white mixed race persons, and in-migration of overseas people from Africa and Latin America.</p> <p>1993 Decline of state-aided development funds puts Black Londoners' projects in jeopardy. Unheralded voluntary groups launch report titled Funded to fail: nuff pain no gain: the under-resourcing of the African Caribbean voluntary sector in London.</p> <p>1993 London murder of teenager Stephen Lawrence sparks campaign against race-hate crimes by his parents, Doreen and Neville.</p> <p>Despite modest gains in jobs and wages, and individual celebrity and wealth, discrimination remained a problem.</p> <p>1995 Brixton erupts again as death of a Black man in police custody triggers protests and riots.</p> <p>1996 London hosts formation of Operation Black Vote to promote voting and civic participation.</p>

## Into the millennium

Black and minority ethnic parliamentarians increase to six in 1992 and nine in 1997 elections.

1998 Black London celebrates the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of West Indians arrival on the SS Windrush. Brixtonians promote public square as landmark.

1999 Black Londoners welcome Lord Justice Macpherson's damning assessment of police "institutional racism" in the Stephen Lawrence race-hate murder case.

There is growing realisation of a small foreign-born Black population: Muslims from different countries; refugees from conflict-ridden Congo and Somalia; college students from Nigeria, Ghana, Zimbabwe and Uganda; health professionals from South Africa, and labourers from East Africa.

2000 Death of the Hon. Bernie Grant, MP for Tottenham, one of many inner city districts plagued by low-incomes, high unemployment and cycles of despair.

Twenty-first century Black Londoners will inherit his explosive question: "How can we change a society that is so obviously discriminatory against Blacks?"

## Capsule history by Thomas L. Blair (c) 2013

### Sources

Black London is, of course, a vital strand of Black History in the British Isles, from Roman times to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. One notable academic source is The Oxford Companion to Black British History, edited by David Dabydeen, John Gilmore and Cecily Jones, London, 2007

Moreover, London Metropolitan Archives continues to unearth evidence of the presence, study and representation of Black people in London's history.

The texts of Black intellectuals, political and community movements must be added to this treasure trove, lest the Black experience remains invisible in the national heritage – see Decolonising Knowledge: Expanding the Black Experience in Britain's Heritage, by Thomas L Blair, An e-book from Editions Blair [editionsblair.eu](http://editionsblair.eu)

### **Studies relevant to Shaping Black London include:**

Banton, Michael (1955), *The Coloured Quarter*. Jonathan Cape. London.

Braidwood, Stephen J. Black poor and white philanthropists: London's Blacks and the foundation of the Sierra Leone Settlement 1786-1791. Liverpool University Press, 1994.

Carretta, Vincent (editor) *Unchained voices: an anthology of Black authors in the English speaking world of the eighteenth century/* edited by Vincent Carretta. USA: University Press of Kentucky, 1996.

Collicott, Sylvia L. (1986), *Connections. Haringey. Local-National-World Links*. Haringey Community Information Service, London.

File, Nigel and Chris Power (1981), *Black Settlers in Britain 1555-1958*. Heinemann Educational.

Gundara, Jagdish S. and Ian Duffield, eds. (1992), *Essays on the History of Blacks in Britain*. Avebury, Aldershot.

Merriman, Nick ed. (1993), *The Peopling of London: Fifteen Thousand Years of Settlement from Overseas*. Museum of London, London.

Scobie, Edward (1972) *Black Britannia: A History of Blacks in Britain*. Johnson Publishing. Chicago.

Shyllon, F.Q. (1977), *Black People in Britain 1555-1833*. Oxford University Press.

Shyllon, Folarin, "The Black Presence and Experience in Britain: An Analytical Overview," in Gundara and Duffield eds. (1992), *Essays on the History of Blacks in Britain*. Avebury, Aldershot.

Walvin, James (1971), *The Black Presence: A Documentary History of the Negro in England, 1555-1860*. Orbach and Chambers.

Walvin, James (1973), *Black and White: The Negro and English Society 1555-1945*. Penguin, London.

### **Useful Internet links on race and public issues include:**

<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/>

<http://www.blink.org.uk/>

<http://www.chronicleworld.org/>

<http://chronicleworld.wordpress.com/>

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130128103514/http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk>

<http://www.irr.org.uk/>

<http://www.obv.org.uk/>

<http://www.runnymedetrust.org/>

Comments, corrections and additions will be gratefully received.