

How Britain has
changed into a
multicultural Britain?



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In this essay I am going to discuss whether Colin Holmes was correct to state 'From a study of British history it is possible to question the widespread vision of Britain as a country characterised by a spirit of toleration.

By looking back at British history it is clear to see there were many of prejudice and a lack of toleration for immigrants coming to Britain. The first example of intolerance towards immigrants I am going to look at is when Jewish immigrants came to Britain from 1880 onwards. The Jews, who were moving from Russia in an attempt to have a better quality of life in Britain, did not receive the warm welcome they expected. They faced intolerance from the Anglo-Jewish Community already established in Britain. By 1914, 150 000 immigrants had joined the 60 000 strong Jewish community in Britain. The Anglo-Jews tried to discourage any more migrants by paying for advertisements to say there would be no help in Britain, which was organised by the Jewish Board of Guardians. The chief rabbi also discouraged more Jews by saying to colleagues in Europe to preach that London streets 'were not paved in gold'; basically saying London was not all it was cracked up to be. The concentration of Jews in one area worried the Anglo-Jews for a number of reasons; they thought of them as foreigners as they spoke Yiddish not English and also had different cultures. They were worried that a large concentration of Jews in one area would make them stand out more and break down the good relations they had built up with the rest of the British community. The government responded to these views by passing the 1905 Aliens Act, which made it difficult for Jews to migrate to Britain. The 1919 Aliens Restriction Act also made it harder for immigrants as immigration officers were given the powers to refuse entry and immigrants had to prove

they could support themselves and that they were medically fit. All these reasons support Colin Holmes' statement that Britain was an intolerant country. The Anglo-Jews and the government were both intolerant.

After the Second World War there was a labour shortage in Britain because the country needed rebuilding after the wide destruction of the war and many people chose to move abroad. To attract workers, the government decided to advertise jobs in the British colonies and as a result many migrated to Britain. However, once they moved to Britain they faced intolerance through the 'colour bar'. The 'colour bar' was a form of racism which prevented black and other ethnic groups from entering pubs, clubs, renting houses and getting jobs. One of the first things that an immigrant needed was to find somewhere to live. Those in need of accommodation now needed to be resident for 5 years in order to be eligible for council housing. Immigrants were therefore dependant on private housing and bombing during the war meant there was a housing shortage. Advertisements were put up in vacant rooms saying things like "No coloureds" and "No niggers". This was the first point where immigrants experienced the 'colour bar'. When immigrants came to Britain they needed somewhere to work, 50% of West Indians had lower status jobs with higher qualifications when they moved. Trade unions also insisted that employers limit the number of jobs to 5% of black people and also demanded that black people were made redundant first purely because of their race. All these reasons were results of the 'colour bar'. Another example of the 'colour bar' was in the education system where black children were automatically placed in lower ability

groups and faced racism from peers. This paragraph provides evidence to prove Colin Holmes' statement is accurate.

In 1965, the race relations act was passed, this meant that the government must have realised that there was prejudice towards African-Caribbean immigrants and supports Colin Holmes in his statement that we were an intolerant nation. However, the Race Relations Act had several flaws and weaknesses which included racism in housing and employment, the two areas which caused the most troubles and disadvantages for ethnic minorities like the African-Caribbeans, were ignored. Other weaknesses that came to attention from the act included that no single body of people had powers of enforcement of the act and also nobody was made to feel responsible for making sure the act worked. As a result of these weaknesses, the act was very limited in practice the 'incitement to racial hatred' was used to charge more black people than white. Therefore, the act was not effective, there was no sign of racism decreasing and racists were generally, not punished. In 1976, the government realised that racism was still an issue in society and tried to improve on the 1968 Act. The new Race Relations Act made racial discrimination unlawful in employment, housing and education also the commission for racial equality was set up to make sure that people knew about the act and that it was being enforced. However, once again there were weaknesses in the act. Resources, such as money were needed for victims of racism to take legal action to prosecute offenders. No data had ever been collected for how many blacks and whites applied for jobs, were successful, employed, promoted and well paid. Consequently, it was very hard to prove if racial discrimination still occurred. After the death of

Stephen Lawrence the act was widely criticised for failing to make public bodies, including the police to take positive action against racism. This paragraph gives strong evidence supporting Holmes' statement that Britain was intolerant as the government felt it had to try and prevent intolerance via their acts.

Enoch Powell was the conservative minister of health from 1960-1963. He had encouraged black Caribbean nurses to come to Britain to help solve the labour shortage in the NHS. From mid 1960s however, he had changed his views and made several speeches in an attempt to stop further immigration. In 1968, he made a speech, what became known as 'the river of blood speech'. In this, he suggested that terrible consequences would arise if immigration persisted. Powell's speeches were exaggerated and used in dramatic language to put frightening images of the possible consequences if people continued to migrate here. After his 'river of blood speech', Powell was sacked by the government. However, he continued with his extreme views with crowds of supporters marching to parliament in support of him. In 1969 he became more extreme and demanded to have the whole of the Caribbean migrants re-emigrated. Throughout the 1970s he continued to make his racist speeches and became known as 'Powellism'. After Powell made his speech there was a significant increase in racism and racist attacks on black, African-Caribbean's and Asian people. Powell and his supporters with their extreme racist views and demands like the repatriation policy to send the immigrants home supports the idea from Colin Holmes that Britain was intolerant.

After Powell was sacked The NF (National Front) gained members as some conservative members left in support of Powell and joined the NF. The NF was set up in 1967 when a few small racist groups joined together. The aim of the National Front was to gain political power in order to introduce racist laws and policies. The NF used racist propaganda, intimidation and violence to get its message across. The NF, a racist gang with many supporters backs Colin Holmes' view that Britain was intolerant.

In 1981, there were many violent disturbances in Brixton. This became known as the Brixton riot. In the space of a few days, at least 7000 police officers and 5000 young people, both black and white, clashed in the street. Rioting took place in Brixton for a couple of reasons. The vast majority of police officers were white and were viewed by the black community as racist and hostile. One major source of tension was made by the use of the 'SUS' law. This allowed police officers during the 1950s, 60s and 70s to arrest young black men without any evidence of a crime. This gave two police officers the power to arrest someone purely because they thought they were acting suspiciously. The law was widely abused. Even in the 1970s black people still faced harassment and discrimination from white police officers. The police presence in the Brixton riots was described as being "an army of occupation" by Lambeth council.

In April 1981, police set up a new operation in London. The aim of the operation was to prevent crime by just stopping and searching as many people as possible in a one week period. 112 police officers in 10 squads were involved, four of those squads were sent to Brixton. 943 stops were made and only one person was arrested for robbery. The number of officers

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deliberately targeting black rather than white people caused extra resentment in Brixton. After the Brixton riots, the government appointed Lord Scarman to find out within the police of inner cities. Lord Scarman concluded there were several improvements that needed to be made. He stated that the riot was caused by the behaviour of the police and the police were not on the whole racist, although there was “occasional racial prejudice”. Black people in Brixton suffered from racial discrimination on and from rising unemployment. In his report he said positive action was needed to stop racism. Lord Scarman also suggested police should be more locally based and liaise with locally based community organisations. These recommendations again suggest that the statement that Britain is intolerant is accurate because of the fact that immigrants faced discrimination from the communities and faced discrimination from areas such as employment and housing.

In April 1993, a teenager called Stephen Lawrence was murdered because of the colour of his skin. An inquiry into the murder and the police investigation that followed found racism and incompetence among the metropolitan police had prevented justice and as a result Stephen Lawrence’s killers got away with murder. The inquiry, ‘The Macpherson Report’, concluded the police service was institutionally racist. The report made seventy recommendations; these recommendations were made in order to promote racial equality within the police service and British society. The report recommended the police should give anti-racist training to officers and make more effort for ethnic minorities to join the police service. It also recommended the police service should be inspected in a similar way to how

'OFSTED' inspects schools. This would check the police service was tackling racism in a positive way. As a result of the Macpherson report, the Race Relations Amendment Act 2001 was introduced. This ensured organisations and public bodies, introduced positive anti-racist strategies, organisations and public bodies must consider the effect on racial equality and inspections will check the police are meeting anti-racist targets. The fact the government introduced these amendments proves Colin Holmes' view, Britain was intolerant.

In conclusion, yes Colin Holmes' interpretation that Britain was intolerant could be valid. Holmes was a historian, and it would be his job to research the topic thoroughly and gather evidence to prove his points. For example, he would have lots of sources readily available for him to use such as newspaper articles and reports, police reports like the one I used whilst researching the Brixton riots. Other sources that were available included government reports, witness statements and statistics from other sources. All these primary sources provide proof that Colin Holmes' view that Britain is intolerant could be valid.

There have been many examples of intolerance throughout Britain, therefore proving Colin Holmes' view correct. The prejudice immigrants received from the 'colour bar' restricted them leading normal lives in housing, work and education areas of their lives, when they were promised equality from the British Nationality Act in 1948. Also, Jews faced prejudice from the already established Anglo-Jewish community in Britain when they moved here in search of a better quality of life. They fled in fear of their lives due to violent protests called pogroms going on throughout Russia. Other examples of <https://assignbuster.com/how-britain-has-changed-into-a-multicultural-britain/>

intolerance include the National Front, a racist organisation with the aim to gain political power and introduce racist policies and laws, to end black immigration. The Stephen Lawrence case and the Brixton riots are also examples of intolerance within the police service. All these examples of prejudice prove Colin Holmes was accurate in his statement, that we are intolerant as a nation.

However, on the other hand we cannot be certain that Colin Holmes' statement was accurate. The quote, taken from his book, "From a study of British history it is possible to question the widespread vision of Britain as a country characterised by a spirit of toleration". This quote from Colin Holmes' book does not necessarily represent the full view of the book, it is only one quote and we have not read the whole book, it may therefore, have been taken out of context. Holmes, was a historian from Leeds University and as a result may have just researched the north of England, therefore would not represent the actions and views of the whole country, this could suggest Colin Holmes was biased.

Throughout British history, there has been evidence to suggest Britain has been a tolerant nation for example Simon Cohen an Anglo-Jew who came to Britain from Poland in 1870, set up a hostel to help Jews migrating to Britain from Russia, despite the fact he faced disapproval from the Jewish Board of Guardians. The government introduced laws to try and prevent racism and although they faced wide criticism, the government did realise there was a problem and this provides evidence that we were a tolerant country. The conservative health minister, Enoch Powell, was sacked after making his racist speech, "The River of Blood" speech, in which he demanded the

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deportation of all Caribbean migrants. The fact that he was sacked proves Britain had a tolerant government. Another example of tolerance is that the National Front was never elected which again proves the British public, on the whole were tolerant. These examples of tolerance suggest Holmes' interpretation was not accurate.

Overall I believe that in the past, Britain has been a tolerant nation, there have been examples of intolerance, but in my opinion I believe these examples have involved the minority of people. However, I still think there is a long way before the problem of racism is completely resolved and I think schools and other organisations need to provide more information on multi-cultural society, so everyone can understand the way people live in different cultures and accept them. From my own personal experiences, I have been lucky enough not to encounter any examples of prejudice in my own school, however I realise that my school is not as multi-cultural as many other schools in the area. In a recent survey 50% of newly qualified teachers feel they do not have the confidence and cultural awareness to deal with black students (Guardian-2006). Other statistics from the Home Office also suggest racism is rife with black people being six times more likely to be searched than white people and 61 267 racially aggravated offences reported to police in 2006/2007, a 28% increase over the last 5 years. This proves racial intolerance is on the increase and further action needs to be taken to prevent these problems. Thus, suggests that Colin Holmes' interpretation that Britain was intolerant is correct.