

UNIT 3 : Changes in Patterns of Migration c.1500 to the present day

What were the experiences of and responses to the various groups of immigrants?

THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD : c.1500-1700s

The experiences of immigrants to the UK have varied over time. Factors such as religion, the state of the economy, the degree of competition for work and their willingness to integrate have all played a part in whether immigrants were welcome or not. There have also been variations in government attitudes to immigrants and the reception given by the UK population. In general, the initial response to most immigrant groups has been one of suspicion or hostility, followed by acceptance and a recognition of the contribution made.

The early modern period

In the early modern age the degree of welcome varied.

The **Huguenots** were made welcome. **Public collections** were organised throughout the country for their benefit and raised large sums of money. The **government welcomed them**, partly because they were Protestant but also because they **brought skills** that Britain needed e.g. silk weaving, watch-making and printing. Their faith and the fact that they did not compete for work also meant that **ordinary citizens did not see them as a threat**, even though they came in large numbers. German Hansa traders, Italian merchants and German engineers e.g. miners were also useful in bringing the products and skills that were needed.

African and Asian migrants arrived in Britain as servants and sailors. With the exception of a few individuals e.g. John Blane, trumpeter to Henry VII and VIII, relatively little is known about them. They seem to have integrated into the populations of ports like London. However, there does seem to have **some antipathy** towards them. We do know Elizabeth I was asked to have them removed from the country. However, these petitions were not acted upon and the number of black Britons continued to rise steadily into the 17th century.

WELSH EXAMPLES : *The earliest migrants who came to Wales seem to have been generally welcome. They brought with them the skills to develop industry and would have helped create work for the local population.*

INDUSTRIAL PERIOD : c.1800s

During the industrial period, the experiences of immigrants again varied. Britain had no immigration laws, and the **governments operated an "open door" policy**. Some politicians saw the many migrants arriving in Britain as evidence of Britain's superiority as a nation. Passports would not become necessary until World War I.

However, the government's attitude was not always shared by **the public who often complained about migrants working for lower wages and taking their jobs**. Immigrants usually settled in the slums of larger cities e.g. the East End and were therefore often blamed **for causing crime and spreading disease** etc.

- The **Irish** in the 1840s and 50s faced a **lot of hostility**. They were poor, Catholic, and in competition for the lowest paid jobs. When cholera broke out in 1848 the Irish, who lived in the poorest most disease-ridden slums, were blamed for spreading the disease. However, they were willing to work hard so they did find it easy to get work at a time when there was a great demand for labour. By the end of the century they had become more integrated into society.
- Later in the century the same dislike was directed at **East European Jews** escaping persecution. Like the Irish, they arrived in huge numbers over relatively short periods. Though some people sympathised with their plight, there was **often hostility in the poorer areas in which they settled**. Both were accused of working for lower wages and taking jobs from the native inhabitants. They were also not Protestant, and this also marked them out as different and, to some people, suspect.
- The **Italians** who arrived in the late 19th and early 20th centuries had generally **good relations** with the native population. There were fewer of them and their cafes and restaurants were not in competition with local people. Their cafes and ice cream parlours were a welcome addition to the high street and became centres of social life in many parts of the country.

WELSH EXAMPLE : *There were at least 20 incidences of anti-Irish riots in Wales in the 19th century e.g. in Cardiff in 1848. They tended to coincide with economic downturns, when Irish workers were accused of working for lower wages.*

By comparison, Jewish and Italian migrants in general had better relations with the local Welsh inhabitants. There were relatively few of them and they did not compete for jobs. Italian cafes, in particular, became a valued part of every Welsh town and provided places for people to socialise – particularly for those who did not drink alcohol. Italian cafes were often referred to as "Temperance Bars" which meant they had the blessing of the non-conformist chapels.

MODERN PERIOD : c.1900s-present day

The years before World War I saw a **change in government attitude** towards immigration, partly in response to the British Brothers' League, which demanded tighter controls on immigration - particularly on East European Jews. **The Aliens Act 1905** stated that **immigration was no longer a right**.

The inter-war years

The level of immigration fell in the inter-war years. However, those who did arrive were generally made welcome e.g. Belgian refugees in 1914, as well as the Basque and Jewish children in the 1930s. People were also **sympathetic to Jews escaping Nazi Germany**, especially as many of them set up businesses and created jobs, though this time the government set limits on the numbers allowed in.

The post-war period

The period **since 1945** has seen a new era in immigration and a **mixed reception** for the groups of immigrants who came.

Commonwealth immigrants

After the war, the **government encouraged immigration** to help rebuild Britain. The Nationality Act 1948 gave Commonwealth subjects the right to work in Britain and employers like the NHS, transport companies and textile mills needed labour. However, in many areas **the concentration of immigrants caused tension**. In 1958 there were **race riots** in Nottingham and London. Immigrants also experienced **discrimination** in jobs and housing etc. Though laws against racial discrimination were passed in the 1960s, governments also restricted further Commonwealth immigration. The arrival of Kenyan Asians in the late 1960s caused further tension and was the background to Enoch Powell's "rivers of blood" speech in 1968.

EU immigration

The early 21st century saw a huge new wave of immigration from the EU, particularly from eastern Europe. Many came to fill labour shortages e.g. in construction, the NHS, food production etc. and were **welcomed by employers**. However, the **large numbers** of immigrants in certain areas **caused resentment** among the local population, with accusations of them working for lower wages and taking jobs from locals. Immigration played a key role in the result of EU referendum in 2016.

WELSH EXAMPLE : *There were race riots in Cardiff, Newport and Barry in 1919 as soldiers returning from war found themselves out of work and blamed the local black populations. However, in general, life in the port communities of Wales has been more harmonious during the 20th century.*