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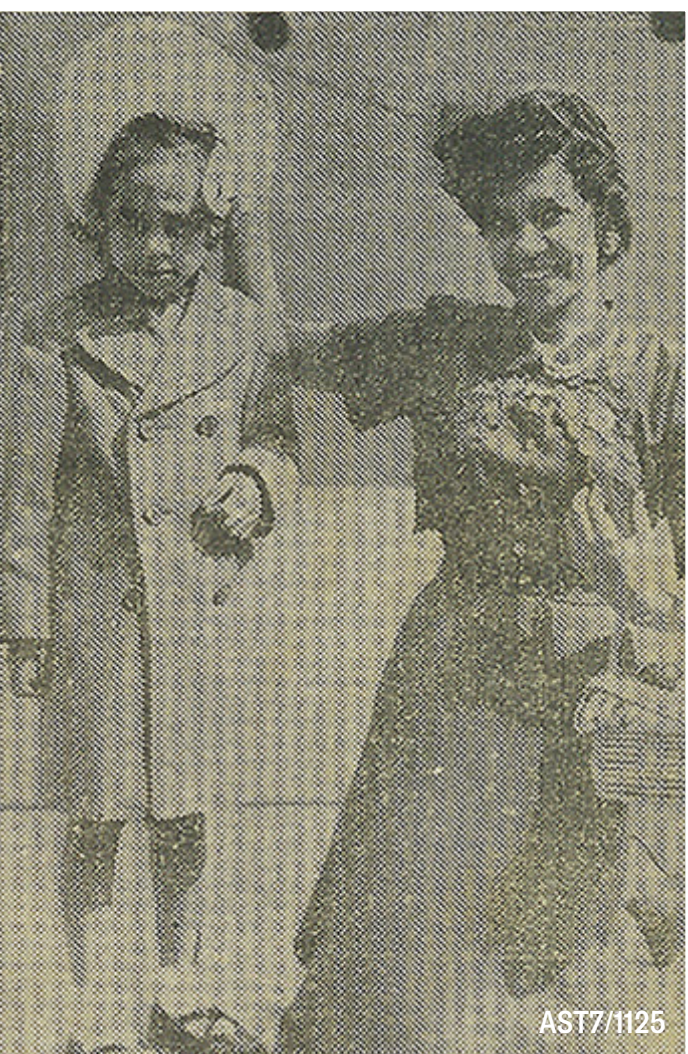
Empire Windrush: Life for Migrants in the 1940s and 50s

What do these documents reveal about life for Caribbean migrants to Britain in the 1940s and 1950s?

Key Stage 2 | Resource Pack

Time periods covered:

- Post-war 1945 - present



AST7/1125

WORK 25/217/116

Teacher's Notes

To encourage pupils to explore original sources to find out how Caribbean migrants were treated after their arrival. Why was it difficult to find decent accommodation and jobs? How were they treated? What were race relations like in the cities in the 1950s?

The sources allow pupils to discuss race relations and inequality in post-war Britain. It is important that teachers ensure that pupils understand these terms: blitz, immigrant, commonwealth, colony, colour prejudice, inequality, discrimination, colour bar, hostel.

These documents cover sensitive subjects and may include language and concepts that are entirely unacceptable and inappropriate today. We suggest that teachers look at the material carefully before introducing to pupils. It would be helpful to discuss the language and ideas contained in a source beforehand and the vocabulary.

All sources could be shown on a whiteboard/or as printed copy. It is suggested that teachers read the text-based sources together with the pupils. They may wish to break the documents into smaller extracts if they appear too long or create additional simplified transcripts. All documents include transcripts with information in square brackets to help. Teachers may also wish to divide their class into small groups/pairs. Print the questions below on separate cards. Ask the pupils to discuss their answers and report back to the class using the whiteboard to display the source.

Finally, teachers can use any of the original sources to create their own resources and activities or adapt the activities provided here for use in their schemes of work.

Suitable for:

KS2

Time period:

- Post-war 1945 - present

Connections to the Curriculum:

Events beyond living memory that are significant nationally or globally.

Teacher's Notes

Part 1 Starter activity:

Pupils engage with a source, an extract from a booklet written to describe life in England for Commonwealth migrants coming to settle in Britain. A second extract is provided to extend discussion and encourage pupils to think of some of the difficulties in finding somewhere to live.

Part 2: Source Exploration

Pupils study a further 4 sources, a series of newspaper extracts and a letter extract, which explore the experience for immigrants in Britain. What were the difficulties and tensions finding somewhere to live and work and acceptance in the community.

Plenary:

Look again at ALL SOURCES [for parts 1 & 2.]

Select TWO sources which you have found the most interesting, shocking, or surprising and compare with a partner/discuss in class.

What do the sources suggest about life for Caribbean immigrants who came to Britain in the 1940s and 1950s? What difficulties did they face? How were they treated?

Part 3: Two suggested creative activities:

1. Using your local archive/library if possible, or the Black Cultural Archives/London Metropolitan Archive/Migration Museum try and research the migration history of your area through historical sources relating to the 1940s and 1950s or more recent times. Create a class exhibition.
2. In pairs, pupils create a booklet/poster/map about your school area today. Paint/draw/ photograph or describe the people, buildings, shops/businesses, markets, green spaces, entertainment, transport.

Introduction

When the Second World War ended, countries needed to recover and rebuild.

By 1948, the Nationality Act was passed which gave people from the Commonwealth the right to live and work in Britain if they wanted. They were citizens of the 'United Kingdom and Colonies'. Many Caribbean men and women had served in the forces during the war, some wanted to re-enlist into the armed forces or find other employment. After the war, Britain needed people to fill jobs in the health service, transport system and postal system.

Britain also used the European Voluntary Workers (E.V.W.) scheme to cope with its shortage of workers. The plan aimed to provide jobs in factories and farming to people from Europe who had been made homeless after the war. At the same time, many people also left their homes in the Caribbean to live and work in Britain. Those on the E.V.W. plan who were classed as 'aliens', however those from the Caribbean were 'Citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies'.

Housing for the new migrants, near to their places of work was often provided by National Service Hostels Corporation. At the Causeway Green Hostel in the West Midlands in August 1949, for example, there were 235 Poles, 18 E.V.Ws, 235 Southern Irish, 50 Northern Irish, 65 Jamaicans, and 100 English, Scottish and Welsh.

Finding accommodation became difficult for many commonwealth immigrants because of growing prejudice and discrimination in the 1940s and 1950s. In 1958 there were riots in the Nottingham and Notting Hill, London. These involved serious fights between 'teddy boys' and new arrivals. The homes of immigrants were also attacked. At this time too, Black people were frequently excluded from skilled employment, pubs, and clubs. Landlords refused to rent to Black families. Other landlords exploited these immigrants by renting them over-priced, overcrowded accommodation. Added to this racial discrimination, the shortage of affordable decent housing and the poor living conditions made matters worse.

The following year, Kelso Cochrane, a carpenter from Antigua was brutally stabbed to death in West London. It was a racist murder and not, as the police later claimed, an attempted robbery. These events would lead to increased calls for immigration control, resulting in the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, many argued that the migrants were being blamed for the prejudice directed towards them.

Following these events there was a strong effort to improve relations in the area from Black activist Claudia Jones and members of the Caribbean community which eventually gave rise to the Notting Hill Carnival and the start of legislation designed to prevent racial discrimination.

Tasks

Part 1

Starter Source 1: Extract from an information booklet written by H.D. Carberry and Dudley Thompson called 'A West Indian in England', Catalogue ref: CO 875/59/1

The booklet aimed to give immigrants information about life in Britain. It was distributed by the Colonial Office to colonies in the Caribbean, 1949-1951. This part describes the approach to London for those arriving in the country for the first time.

Discuss the following questions:

- How do the writers describe first impressions of London for a visitor?
- Why does London seem disappointing?
- What is the difference between England and the Caribbean according to the writers?
- What effects of the 'blitz' were seen in London?
- Why do you think this booklet was made?

Starter Source 2: Extract from an information booklet written by H.D. Carberry and Dudley Thompson called 'A West Indian in England.' Catalogue ref: CO 875/59/1

The booklet aimed to give immigrants information about life in Britain. It was distributed by the Colonial Office to colonies in the Caribbean, 1949-1951. This part describes the difficulties in finding accommodation.

Contains original language used at the time which is not appropriate today.

- How had the 'blitz' made it difficult to find somewhere to live?
- What does the term 'colour prejudice' mean?
- Why have some migrants found it difficult to find somewhere to live?
- What does this source suggest about how white British people treated Caribbean migrants?
- Do you think that the booklet gives a true picture of Britain? Explain your reasons.
- Why do you think this booklet was made?
- Find out about the lives of H.D. Carberry and Dudley Thompson

Part 2

How can we use these 4 documents to find out more about the lives of those who came to Britain in the 1940s and 1950s?

Source 1: Extract taken from a story printed in the 'Birmingham Gazette' by Horace Halliburton, 10th August 1949. Catalogue ref: LAB 26/198

Housing for the new migrants, near to their places of work was often provided by National Service Hostels Corporation (NSHC).

Tasks

There had been reports about some disturbances between the Poles and the Jamaicans living at Causeway Green hostel. On 8th August, a riot with serious fighting occurred. The Causeway Green Riot and events leading up to that night, mainly consisted of Polish men fighting a smaller group of Jamaicans. Those in charge of the hostel decided to evict the Jamaicans, not the Poles or others involved. The Jamaicans refused to leave and therefore the NSHC made a rule to limit the number of 'West Indian' residents 'up to 10% of the total' with 'a ceiling of 30%'.

- What does it tell us about the author's feelings about living and working in Britain?
- What might it have been like to live in a hostel after arriving in Britain?
- What does the writer mean by a 'colour bar'?
- What does the writer say are the real causes of the disturbances at Causeway Green Hostel?
- Does it make a difference that the person who lived at the hostel also wrote this story?

Discuss (if possible) the plan to limit the number of Jamaicans in NHSC hostels after events at the Causeway Green.

- What does this tell us about the treatment of Jamaicans in Britain?

Source 2: Newspaper story from the 'Southern Daily Echo' [Southampton] entitled '700 work- wanting Jamaicans arrive at Southampton', 3 May 1954, Catalogue ref: AST 7/1125

- What was the name of the ship that brought over 700 Jamaicans?
- What type of work do most of the women hope to find?
- How many of the passengers needed to stay in a hostel?
- How many have 'travelled from the 'West Indies' since the Second World War?

The newspaper says that 'only a few have become chargeable to public assistance'. This means few immigrants got money (benefits) from the government.

- Does this comment explain how the writer in the newspaper felt about immigrants coming to Britain? Give your reasons.

Source 3: Newspaper story called 'Little help here for the bewildered West Indian' by John Baker from the 'Express and Star' [Wolverhampton] 9 August 1956
Catalogue ref: AST 7/1125

Contains original language used at the time which is not appropriate today.

Look at the photograph and caption (words below the photograph).

- What does the caption suggest about attitudes to new immigrants in Britain?
- What does it reveal about the difficulties of finding decent housing and jobs for some Jamaicans?
- What does the article reveal about attitudes in British society towards immigration at that time?

Tasks

Source 4: Extract from a letter sent to town halls in Islington, Paddington and Euston asking about their local housing problems, 28 September 1958, Catalogue ref: HLG 117/122

Contains original language used at the time which is not appropriate today.

For several nights at the end of August 1958, young white men known as 'teddy boys' attacked West Indian residents and their homes in Notting Hill, London. These disturbances became known as the Notting Hill riots.

- What type of document is this?
- Why do you think the government wanted a report about housing for immigrants in different areas?
- Apart from overcrowded housing, what other difficulties could immigrants in Notting Hill have faced? [Use what you know from the other documents.]
- Teachers discuss the causes of Notting Hill riots in 1958.

Plenary

Look again at ALL SOURCES [for parts 1 & 2]

- Select TWO sources which you have found the most interesting, shocking, or surprising and compare with a partner/discuss in class.
- What do the sources suggest about life for Caribbean migrants who came to Britain in the 1940s and 1950s? What do we learn about their treatment and attitudes towards them? What other sources could we use to find out more?

Starter Source 1: Extract from 'A West Indian in England'

Catalogue Ref: CO 875/59/1

The Approach to London

After several hours' travelling we got into London. Frankly, this first sight of the world's largest city, especially by rail, was disappointing. About half an hour before reaching the terminus I became aware that we were passing through something; there were rather more houses, and the nearer we got to London the greater their density. To me the buildings looked all the same. Row after row of rather dreary brick houses, all with chimney-pots some six or more to the house and with the washing hanging out in the back garden, which overlooks the railway line. In English towns the houses are usually run together, and bungalows or detached houses such as we have at home, each standing in its own yard, are less common.

As you approach, you will not come suddenly into a world of skyscrapers. No Statue of Liberty will rise from the sea to greet you. Your entry will be casual and undramatic. For all that the place will grow upon you, and you will come to love certain parts of it, such as the view at Westminster, where the Houses of Parliament and Big Ben, with Westminster Abbey in the background, rise quite as dramatically from the river as the Statue of Liberty, and their delicate spires and traceries, black with age, form a pretty picture against the background of clouds, whether the sky is dull or grey, or, as sometimes happens, when a perfectly blue or cloudless day occurs and the wonderful stonework gleams bronze and gold on the blue background. The light in England is never as fierce in intensity and brilliance as it is at home, nor is the range of natural colours as great. Instead there is a soft pastel effect, with light blues and greys, and days of really brilliant sunshine are so rare that when they do come the entire scene is transformed and seems quite strange and foreign. On the whole the softer light is kinder and more suited to the old weathered-stone buildings and the mellow brick to be seen in most quarters of London.

As you get closer into London, you may begin to notice the effect of the blitz. Several houses and warehouses beside the railway lines are mere shells, completely burnt out and gutted,

Transcript: Starter Source 1: 'A West Indian in England'

(a)

The Approach to London

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As you get closer into London, you may begin to notice the effect of the blitz. Several houses and warehouses beside the railway lines are mere shells, completely burnt out and gutted [smashed]...

Starter Source 2: Extract from 'A West Indian in England'

Catalogue Ref: CO 875/59/1

on your own. This is not always easy. It is particularly difficult in London, where the blitz destroyed thousands of houses, and even the English student finds it difficult to get lodgings. You have an additional difficulty, "colour prejudice". You may find that on answering an advertisement for lodgings by telephone or letter and saying you are a student or tourist you will be told by the landlady that the rooms are available, that the rent is so much, and would you like to come and have a look at them? On arrival, the landlady, suppressing a gasp, and puzzling over the fact that a coloured person could have so English a name as Smith or Brown, will politely tell you that she is very sorry, but that she has just let the rooms to someone else who also answered the advertisement. This will hurt, because in most cases you will be sure that it is untrue, but there is little that you or anyone can do about it. The basic cause is the misconception behind the prejudice. Often the landlady might have been prepared "to risk the unknown", but fear of what the neighbours would say has deterred her.

Transcript: Starter Source 2: 'A West Indian in England'

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Starter Source 3: Birmingham Gazette

Catalogue Ref: LAB 26/198

FOR the past eight months — since I arrived in Birmingham in search of a job—I have lived in the Causeway Green Hostel where the recent racial disturbances have occurred.

The problem of Causeway Green is by no means unique in this country. It is an example of Great Britain's colour bar. Similar instances are constantly arising in other parts of the country.

My 60 fellow West Indians in the hostel know only too well that the ill-feeling and fighting of the past week cannot be blamed on individual differences of opinion and local domestic arguments.

The cause of the Polish-Jamaican dispute goes deeper than that. It is a result of cumulative ill-feeling and resentment, which has grown steadily for more than six months.

Fundamentally it boils down to two main factors—accommodation and employment.

Transcript: Source 1: Birmingham Gazette

Transcript

For the past eight months-since I arrived in Birmingham in search of a job- I have lived in the Causeway Green Hostel where the recent racial disturbances have occurred. The problem of Causeway Green is by no means unique in this country. It is an example of Great Britain's colour bar. Similar instances are constantly arising in other parts of the country. My 60 fellow West Indians in the hostel know only too well that the ill-feeling and fighting of the past week cannot be blamed on individual difference of opinion and local domestic arguments. The cause of the Polish-Jamaican dispute goes deeper than that. It is the result of cumulative ill feeling and resentment which has grown steadily for more than six months. Fundamentally it boils down to two main factors-accommodation and employment.

Simplified transcript

I have lived in Birmingham for 8 months at Causeway Green looking for work where the fighting between Poles and Jamaicans took place. Disturbances like this are not unusual. It is an example of Great Britain's colour bar. [Which means landlords and employers can treat people unfairly based on their race, colour, or country of birth.] Events like this are common in other parts of the country. The 60 West Indians in the hostel know well that the bad feeling and fighting last week cannot be blamed on individual difference of opinion and argument in the area. The cause of the Polish-Jamaican dispute goes deeper than that. It is the result of growing bad feeling and rage which has grown steadily for more than six months. Simply it comes down to two main things-accommodation and employment.

Source 2: Southern Daily Echo

Catalogue Ref: AST 7/1125

SOUTHERN DAILY ECHO



Above: The little girl in the white bonnet is Carol Hinds, also of Kingston, and with her is her cousin, Joyce Bonnick, who gives her bonnet a final adjustment before entraining for Waterloo.

Left: Stepping out on a new adventure is little Dawn Levy, of Kingston, Jamaica, as she came ashore with her mother.

—"Echo" photos.

700 work-wanting Jamaicans land at Southampton

NEARLY 700 Jamaicans, the biggest party to come to this country in one ship, sailed into Southampton on Saturday in the Dutch liner *Zuiderkruis*.

All of them are hoping to get work in Britain. The party comprised 439 men, 229 women, four married couples, and 16 children.

Many of the Jamaicans were met at the Docks by relatives or friends who have come to this country since the war, and others were met at Waterloo. Colonial Office officials estimated that only about a dozen would need hostel accommodation in London.

The bright dresses and hats of the women made a gay splash of colour in the dock shed as the Jamaicans came ashore for Customs examination before leaving in two trains.

majority of the women were dress-makers. All said they were very keen to get work.

The fare from Jamaica to New York by air and to Southampton by sea cost each about £90.

Since the war 20,000 people from the West Indies have come to Britain, and only a few have become chargeable to public assistance.

Transcript: Source 2: Southern Daily Echo

Caption: right photograph

Above the little girl in the white bonnet is Carol Hinds, also of Kingston and with her is her cousin, Joyce Bonnick, who gives her bonnet a final adjustment before entraining for Waterloo.

Caption: left photograph

Stepping out on a new adventure is little Dawn Levy, of Kingston, Jamaica, as she came ashore with her mother. "Echo photos".

Main article:

700 work-wanting Jamaicans land at Southampton

Nearly 700 Jamaicans, the biggest party to this country in one ship, sailed into Southampton on Saturday in the Dutch liner *Zuiderkruis*.

All of them hoping to get work in Britain. The party comprised 493 men, 229 women, four married couples, and 16 children.

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The bright dresses and hats of the women made a gay splash of colour in the dock shed as the Jamaicans came ashore for Customs examination before leaving in two trains.

£90 Fare

... [Newspaper damaged]

Majority of the women were dressmakers. All said they were very keen to get work.

The fare from Jamaica to New York by air and to Southampton by sea cost about £90. Since the war, 20,000 people from the West Indies have come to Britain, and only a few have become chargeable to public assistance.

Source 3: Express and Star

Catalogue Ref: AST 7/1125

But until he gets a job, the West Indian can go to public assistance, filling in a form which is signed by a National Assistance Board officer and honoured by payment at the employment exchange.

At this point, it is necessary to correct a fallacy, spread by white people on the "dole." West Indians are not overpaid on public assistance. Skilled N.A.B. officers allow them bare living sums and often inspect lodgings to check up on wealth and income.

The search for a bed is often a living nightmare for the West Indian. If he finds a boarding house with rooms to spare he is often turned away, sometimes apologetically, sometimes rudely, as soon as the landlady sees his skin.

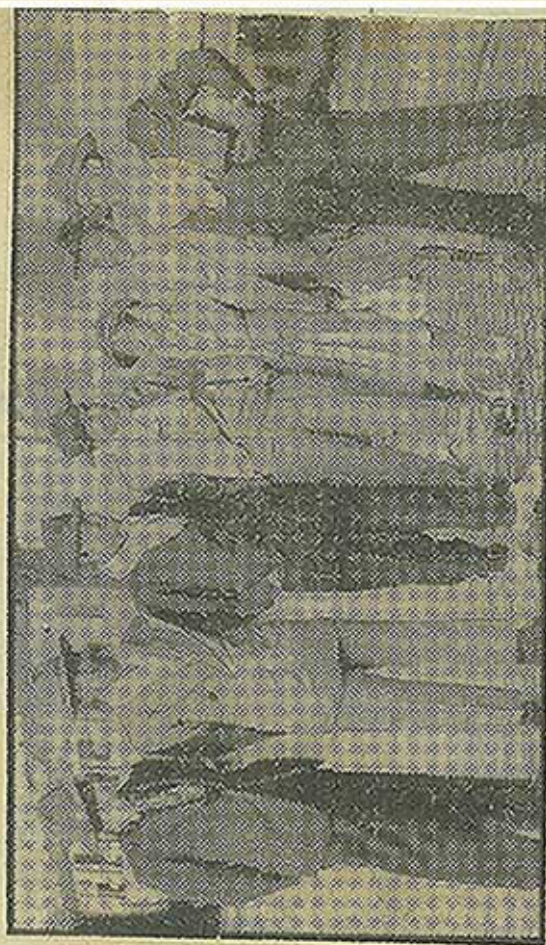
The general housing shortage intensifies the difficulty. Last week I heard a Wolverhampton Citizens Advice Bureau official relate how she had to turn away a West Indian six times in a week, when he asked for accommodation information.

HOUSE FULL

"In desperation," she concluded, "I had to give him the address of a house already brimming with West Indians. After all, he had got to have a bed and shelter!"

On the other hand, some immigrants like to join up with earlier arrivals. Unsophisticated, naturally warm-natured, they are easily depressed by loneliness, seek the company of their own folk—and very often pay for the privilege in the form of a stiff rent for crowded rooms owned by coloured landlords.

But the picture is not always dark. Some West Indians pre-



When this party of West Indians stepped ashore at Plymouth their worries had only just begun. And few people were ready to give them a helping hand.

Transcript: Source 3: Express and Star

Caption for the photo:

When this party of West Indians stepped ashore at Plymouth their worries had only just begun. And few people were ready to give them a helping hand.

Main article:

...

But until he gets a job, the West Indian can go to public assistance [unemployment benefit], filling in a form which is signed by a National Assistance Board officer and honoured by payment at the employment exchange.

At this point, it is necessary to correct a fallacy [mistake], spread by white people on the "dole" [unemployment benefit], West Indians are not overpaid on Public Assistance. Skilled N.A.B officers allow them bare living sums and often inspect lodgings to check up on wealth and income.

The search for a bed is often a living nightmare for the West Indian. If he finds a boarding house with rooms to spare, he is often turned away, sometimes rudely as soon as the landlady sees his skin.

The general housing shortage intensifies [makes it worse] the difficulty. Last week I heard a Wolverhampton Citizen's Advice Bureau official relate how she had to turn away a West Indian six times in a week, when he asked for accommodation.

HOUSE FULL

"In desperation"[as there was nothing], she concluded, "I had to give him the address of a house already brimming with West Indians. After all, he had got to have a bed and shelter!"

On the other hand, some immigrants like to join up with earlier arrivals. Unsophisticated [natural], naturally warm-natured, they are easily depressed by loneliness, seek the company of their own folk-and very often pay for the privilege [put up with cost] in the form of a stiff [high] rent for crowded rooms owned by coloured landlords.

But the picture is not always dark.

...

Source 4: Letter to town halls

Catalogue Ref: HLG 117/122

178 September, 1958.

Dear Mr. Fishwick,

In relation to the disturbances in the Notting Hill district last week, the Minister has asked for a report on the housing and overcrowding problems in connection with coloured immigrants in other districts where they are known to have congregated. We should be very grateful if you could let us have your comments on this problem and in particular on the amount of overcrowding by coloured immigrants of houses let in lodgings or occupied by more than one family (Section 90 of the 1957 Act).

Transcript: Source 4: Letter to town halls

28 September 1958

Dear Mr Fishwick.

In relation to the disturbances [riots] in the Notting Hill district last week, the Minister [government person in charge of housing] has asked for a report on the housing and overcrowding problems in connection with coloured immigrants in other districts where they are known to have congregated [settled]. We should be very grateful if you could let us have your comments on this problem and, in particular on the amount of overcrowding by coloured immigrants of houses let in lodgings [renting rooms] or occupied by more than one family ...



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