AMAZON ORIGINAL SERIES

SMALL AXE

An Anthology Zine

Featuring

Q&A with the Director
Steve McQueen

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John Boyega as Leroy Logan in Red, White And Blue. Photo Credit: Will Robson Scott / Amazon Prime Video.



Letitia Wright as Altheia Jones – LeCointe in Mangrove. Photo Credit: Des Willie / Amazon Prime Video.



Kenyah Sandy as Kingsley Smith in Education. Photo Credit: Will Robson Scott / Amazon Prime Video.



Micheal Ward as Franklyn in Lovers Rock. Photo Credit: Parisa Taghizedeh / Amazon Prime Video.



Sheryi Cole as Alex Wheatle (left) and Khali Best as Badger (right) in Alex Wheatle. Photo Credit: Will Robson Scott / Amazon Prime Video.

Q&A with Steve McQueen



Steve McQueen with John Boyega on set of Red, White And Blue.
Photo Credit: Will Robson-Scott / Amazon Prime Video.

What inspired you to develop this as an anthology series?
These are true stories that needed to be told. Stories that shaped the landscape of Britain. Stories that had been ignored for generations and even unknown to many Black Brits. At first, I conceived ***Small Axe*** as a TV series, but as time went on things evolved. As I, my co-writers Courttia Newland and Alastair Siddons, along with researcher Helen Bart, dug deeper into the research and personal stories behind these pivotal moments in British history, it became clear that each one deserved and needed to be a standalone film. Standalone, but at the same time part of a collective.

These are the stories that have made my life as an artist today possible. A Black British artist. We have to look back not only to judge how far we have come, but most importantly, look forward to see how far we need to go. We barely see such stories in the canon of British television and film, which means there are generations who are unaware of the sacrifices, determination and the people who reshaped the landscape of Britain and paved the way for the multicultural London we know today.

Where does the title *Small Axe* come from?
"Small Axe" refers to an African proverb that means together we are strong and was later popularized in the 1973 Bob Marley and The Wailers' track ("So if you are the big tree / We are the small axe / Ready to cut you down"). All five films comment on radical Black British life between the late '60s and mid '80s. Sometimes the radicalism is overtly political, but it's also small acts of bravery and defiance against inherently racist systems and institutions. It's not just the big things, it's the small ones too. Everyone coming together makes things happen. These are stories anchored in the West Indian experience of London and ultimately a celebration of all that community has succeeded in achieving against the odds. To me, this collection of films is a love letter to Black resilience, triumph, hope, music, joy and love as well as to friendship and family... and let's not forget food!

What does this collection of films mean to you personally?
Each and every one of them is personal to me. ***Mangrove***, the first film of the series, marks the first time that the British judicial system recognized racial discrimination. It's personal because my father was a close friend with one of the Mangrove 9, Rhodan Gordon. Even though I grew up with Rhodan visiting my home, it wasn't until years later I learned about this landmark court case. What I love about *Mangrove* is that it's the story of a community who came together to thrive, to support each other, enjoy good West Indian food, music, company and conversation at Frank Crichlow's cafe, The Mangrove, only to be subjected to relentless police raids. But in the end, their tremendous resilience triumphed in court.

As for ***Lovers Rock***, this is my musical! I made it for my aunt. I remember the stories she would tell. How my grandmother didn't allow her to go to blues parties but my uncle would leave the backdoor open for her so she could sneak away to the Blues. They lived in Shepherd's Bush which is just next door to Ladbroke Grove where some of the dances were. She would leave and then come back in the morning in time to go to church. It was like Cinderella. *Lovers Rock* is about that sort of liberation, freedom and spiritual nakedness. You don't see that very much in cinema – Black people having that total, absolute lack of inhibition. It was very liberating and so much fun to make. It was great working with costume designer Jacqueline Duran. I remember my mother had a Singer sewing machine as everyone would get patterns to make their dresses and blouses. That was all part of it. Everyone wanted to be unique. The guys wore their double-breasted blazers and such. A lot of the dresses you see in *Lovers Rock* are handmade just like the dresses women wore to these parties. You had to come sharp to the dance!

Red, White And Blue is the true story of Leroy Logan, a brilliant forensic scientist and athlete who makes the very hard choice to try and change racism from within by joining the British Metropolitan Police Force. It was a particularly hard decision for Leroy in the early '80s because his father had been brutally beaten by two policemen in an unprovoked attack. At its heart, *Red, White And Blue* is a story about the bond and love between Leroy and his father and the stunting of a career that was destined to be a great one within the British Metropolitan Police. Leroy ended up staying in the force for thirty years, rising to the ranks of superintendent, but not without persistent racism right through to the end. Leroy now works with Black children in the community, through his charity *Voyage Youth*, to help them aspire to reach their goals.

It was interesting how ***Alex Wheatle*** came about. Alex is an award-winning author who was initially a part of our writer's room. He's a very generous person. The day he shared his life story, about growing up in care and the very brutal Social Services file from his childhood, I was heartbroken. I knew immediately that we had to tell his story from childhood through to how he ended up living and finding his identity through music in Brixton and participating in the Brixton Uprising of 1981 following the New Cross Fire.

Education is the coming of age story of 12-year-old Kingsley, a kid with a fascination for astronauts and rockets, yet somehow is sent to a school for those with "special needs." The situation for many Black parents who were working two jobs and were unaware of the unofficial segregation policy at play, preventing many Black children from having the education they deserved and being sent to (the official term) 'educationally subnormal' schools. A group of West Indian women take matters into their own hands by taking children into their homes on Saturdays, thus establishing 'Saturday School' for the Black children who the system was failing. Education is vitally important for our younger generations to get ahead.

What purpose do you think these films serve during the current global political and social climate?
When I was shooting last year, I certainly didn't foresee what the situation would be in 2020. Although all five films take place between the late '60s and mid '80s, they are just as much a comment on the present moment as they were then. They may be about the past, but they are very much concerned with the present. A commentary on where we were, where we are and where we want to go.

A Bond Stronger Than the System Trying to Break Us

By Dr. Samantha Rennalls



Micheal Ward as Franklyn (left) and Amarah-Jae St. Aubyn as Martha (right) in Lovers Rock. Photo Credit: Parisa Taghizedeh / Amazon Prime Video.

Embracing the power in Black unity to resist and heal from racism.

In London, the Black Lives Matter movement has died down almost as swiftly as it lit up the city.

For many, life has continued somewhat similarly to how it was before. While there may be a progressive shift in the degree to which it is socially acceptable to call out racism, in many ways, society is not much further along in our journey to eradicating it. Black people are still being policed at a significantly higher rate than people from other racial groups, remain at greater risk of death at the hands of the authorities, and are being profiled disproportionately.

The robust and heavily racialised social hierarchy that we are conditioned to accept as the norm has yet again withstood another uprising, in which Black people are positioned at the bottom— still defending, still resisting, and still healing. And when you consider the nuance of identities that intersect with race including gender, sexuality, and ability amongst others, it is clear that the extent to which experiences of oppression remain ignored, misunderstood, and unaddressed is stark. This, like racism and race itself, is by design; a design that intends to maintain power differentials with little regard for the impact that the oppressive system has on the wellbeing of Black people.

As a community, this is something that we cannot physically, mentally or even economically afford to ignore. It has been documented that experiencing racism has deleterious effects on the body and mind; experts describe that experiencing racism has a 'biological weathering' effect with consequences that can be acute or more long-term (Geronimus, 1992; Williams & Mohammed, 2009). It's not just our physical health that takes a toll, but also our mental health, with acts of racism having the potential to insidiously chip away at our sense of self, such that we can internalize racism and look to ourselves to blame rather than the powerful system that is at play.

During the loudening national conversation about race, I have heard many of my friends and colleagues finding solace and healing not only in the public recognition of the pain that we endure but also in the validation that comes with acknowledging the universality of our experiences as a Black community. There have been more spaces created by and for Black people to share and be with one another. As a psychologist, I adopt a position of curiosity about my own and others' experiences, and I have found myself wondering 'how come?' What is it that happens when we come together and this healing effect is created? I'm not so sure there are words to explain it; it is in itself a lived experience, a felt sense of existing as a united and compassionate yet formidable community. A feeling of being home.

This connection that we have with each other is something that spans geographical and language barriers to bond Black people to one another. It's what brings that sigh of relief when you walk into a white-majority space and see another Black person in that space with you. It is what causes two Black strangers to pass by each other in the street and nod in each other's direction as though they've known each other for years— as though to say, "I choose to see you, I'm pleased to see you, and I appreciate being seen by you too." It's what allows the terms of "sis," "bro," "aunty," "uncle" to be preferred means of referring to one another regardless of a lack of familial relationship. It's the force that can't be taken away from our community; it can't be denied, it can't be erased, it can't be replicated and it most certainly cannot be killed.

Within all the individual and large-scale attacks present in the various forms of racism that we face, that intimate connection is a driving force in our survival and progression as one of the most resilient groups in history.

Yet this isn't the story that is most widely told about what it means to be a Black person today. Narrow, negative, discriminatory narratives about Blackness remain dominant throughout our society. To be darker, in its literal or metaphorical form, is to be framed as more evil, more impure, more unattractive, "bad." To be a Black person is to be associated with violence and criminality, as though these are biologically-inherent traits and therefore uncontrollable and irreparable. These dominant narratives are related to the pseudo-scientific theories on which the construct of 'race' and racism was established. And the upholding of these narratives without critique, development, and adaptation can be damaging to ourselves and our community, yet they continue because they maintain the racialised social hierarchy.

Fortunately for us, we know the truth. And connecting with the parts of us and our community that empower us can help manage the harm caused by the oppression we face. Holding on to what it truly means to be Black can keep us moving towards a more promising future, so much so that there are psychological therapies dedicated to re-authoring our own stories and utilizing our own strengths and resources as an act of power, with liberation as the end goal.

The attacks on our lives and wellbeing persist, yet we resist by simply celebrating and continuing to be here together. Fighting for our existence drains our energy, but choosing to connect with each other is in itself re-energizing. What a beautiful thing it is to be so self-sustaining; a community that, at its core, replenishes itself.

And when all the negative messages that our society feeds us make it harder to connect with our truthful existence at a cognitive level, we have plenty of other ways. We have our food, music, art, and dance; we have our loudness, our energy, and our magnetic presence.

We have each other.

What a beautiful thing it is to be so self-sustaining; a community that, at its core, replenishes itself.

Lovers Rock: The Respite and Romance for Young Black Brits

By Shenequa A. Golding



Micheal Ward as Franklyn (left) and Amarah-Jae St. Aubyn as Martha (right) in Lovers Rock. Photo Credit: Parisa Taghizedeh / Amazon Prime Video.



Alexander James-Blake as Parker B (left) and Kadeem Ramsay as Samson (right) in Lovers Rock. Photo Credit: Parisa Taghizedeh / Amazon Prime Video.

Lovers rock doesn't ask for your permission. When the music saunters through the speakers, your shoulders give way to an easy sway before the rest of your body notices. The groove then takes hold and, just like that, you're caught. It isn't a deceitful or manipulative capture; the music has always been direct about its pull and purpose and rarely does it ever miss the intended target: you.

Often cited as the U.K.'s Motown, lovers rock gave people the feels and proved to be one of the most immaculate genres of its time.

"It was a balance of rhythm and melody," producer Salaam Remi tells us. "The aspect of lovers rock was the vocals, the harmonies, and the instrumentation. Whether the piano or guitars had something sweet about it, the groove of it was steady. [Lovers rock] was the combination of a pretty face and a good shape. The pretty face was the music. The warmth of the body was what the drums and bass were doing."

Or, as singer-songwriter Jacob Banks tells us, "It's something to hold a whine to."

Lovers rock made its home in South London, but unlike its mother sound, reggae, it was easier to the ear and lighter to the heart, divorced from the political subject matter, more attached to the sweetness of Chicago and Philadelphia soul and R&B— its other origin genres. Beginning with Louisa Mark's 1975 hit "Caught You In A Lie," the genre — which received its name from Dip Records owner Dennis Harris — offered anyone looking to fall in love, stay in love, or manage the bumps of a first love, the soundscape to do it. And for young Black Brits of the 1970s and '80s trying to carve out their identities were also still figuring out how to navigate romance, the genre was a map.

"They were just teenagers finding their way," Remi said. "This was a thing with 'Silly Games' by Janet Kay or 'Caught You In A Lie' by Louisa Mark. They meant a lot to the youth because of the perspective. The perspective pushed it to another place."

The Grammy-nominated producer remembers his first encounter with lovers rock — Gregory Isaacs' 1982 "Night Nurse." Although no older than 12 years old at the time, Remi noticed no matter where he was whenever the song came on, "the man of the house was looking for the woman of the house so he could get his dance on."

The lyrics especially fascinate Banks who admits to using the music as a compass for his songwriting. As a man who admittedly views love in practical terms, the Nigerian-born, Birmingham, U.K.-raised artist notes that the genre helps him to reach beyond himself.

"Whenever I hear a bunch of old-school lovers rock, the lyrics are like, 'I'll bring the sun to you.' No, you won't, but it's important that we know that's how far you're willing to go," he explains. "I enjoy using lovers rock as my lyrical extreme."

Some might dismiss the music as a fad or a relic of yesteryear that has no place in today's musical landscape, but much is owed to the genre.

"I think popular music doesn't realize that it's influenced by lovers rock," Remi says, "It's the balance of groove and bass. Lovers rock prides itself on soul music, going back to Jamaica and capturing a different groove... The same way that hip-hop comes from dancehall toasting in a certain way, there's a surge of R&B based hip-hop that is also based on lovers rock... As Jamaican toasting, DJ music dancehall is the father to hip-hop, lovers rock is the father to that R&B and hip-hop blend."

In Steve McQueen's *Lovers Rock*, viewers are introduced to Martha (Amarah-Jae St. Aubyn) and Franklyn (Micheal Ward), two young people who meet in one of London's underground '80s blues parties brought together by the seduction of the music.

"Remember, singing about love and sex for a teenager is also rebellious," Remi said.
It was more than music for admirers and dalliances; lovers rock became a respite from the war going on outside. Whether the racist and discriminatory aggressions were micro or macro, Black Brits, largely from West Africa and the West Indies, were relegated to second-class citizenship from police, business owners, and anyone else who believed they were inferior. Parties gave young people space to gather, be intimate and put the world's troubles in the back of their minds for a moment. The music created an escape while defining the disruptive nature of youth.

In Menelik Shabazz's 2011 documentary *The Story of Lovers Rock*, the intimate dance known as scrubbin is described. A potential couple who may have been eyeing one another all night would start scrubbin' by slowly intertwining their bodies and then dip to the floor, and back up again. Her arms around his shoulder. His hands gripping her waist. Her cheek caressing his face, and maybe his lips grazing her neck. This connection, whether it lasted the whole night or just one song, kicked the troubles of the day to the curb.

It's hard to imagine that with the protests and uprisings of the time, slow dancing became the release young people needed. But when you're being hated for the color of your skin, a loving and safe embrace from those that look like you might have made all the difference.

Lovers rock not only put young Black people in the mood, but gave them the fuel to fight another day.

...when you're being hated for the color of your skin, a loving and safe embrace from those that look like you might have made all the difference.

Stew Chicken



by Mary McQueen

Use chicken pieces of your choice (on the bone is preferable). Wash the chicken with lemon and then season with Dunn's River Jerk Seasoning for two hours.

In a deep frying pan or pot, sear the chicken in hot oil. Remove the chicken from the pan. Use the same oil add cumin seed, one onion finely chopped, garlic, ginger and Chief Curry Powder. Stir into the pot or frying pan half a cup of water, then add the chicken pieces back in. Add 5 garlic cloves, thyme, chopped seasoning pepper, spring onions, black pepper, and half a tin of chopped tomatoes (or fresh if you prefer). Cover and simmer for half an hour on a low fire. Now it's ready to eat.

You can serve with rice and peas, plain rice, potatoes, or vegetables. Enjoy.

Chef JJ Johnson (@chefjj)

JJ Johnson is an award-winning chef, author, and founder of the fast-casual restaurant chain, FIELDTRIP. He has been nominated for the 2019 James Beard Foundation Best Chef Award and was named an honoree on Forbes 30 Under 30.

Jerk Meatballs

6 TO 8 SERVINGS

PREP TIME
2 hours

COOKING TIME
20 minutes

TOTAL TIME
2 hours and 20 minutes

INGREDIENTS
- 1/2 cup Soy sauce
- 1/4 cup Worcestershire
- 3 sprigs Bunch thyme
- 1 Bunch scallions
- 5 cloves Garlic
- 2 Scotch bonnet peppers/habanero
- 1pc Fresh ginger chopped
- 1/2 cup Whole allspice
- 1/4 cup Black pepper (whole)
- 1/4 cup Salt
- 1/2 tbsp Brown sugar
- 1 lb of Ground turkey

PREPARATION

Blend all ingredients separately. Combine all dry and wet ingredients together, and blend again until mixture is no longer coarse (should have a smooth but thick consistency). Afterwards, let sit for 1-2 hours to let flavors come together. Then, marinade with 1 pound of ground turkey. Use an ice cream scoop or small spoon to make the meatball. Place meatballs in a sheet pan with a little water at the bottom. Cook for 20 minutes covered and 5 minutes uncovered. Enjoy!

Chef Nyesha Arrington (@nyeshajoyce)

Nyesha Arrington is a Los Angeles-based multidisciplinary chef who integrates worldwide flavors and techniques to create "food that hugs your soul." She has been featured on Top Chef, Knife Fight, and Chef Hunter.

Red Snapper en Banana Leaf

4 SERVINGS

PREP TIME
20 minutes

COOKING TIME
20 minutes

TOTAL TIME
40 minutes

INGREDIENTS
- Whole red snapper
- 1 ea Scotch bonnet pepper (stems removed)
- 2 ea Garlic (cloves)
- 1/4 Green onion (roughly chopped)
- 1 tsp California chili powder
- 1/8 tsp Cinnamon powder
- 1/8 tsp Nutmeg powder
- 1/8 tsp Clove powder, or 2 cloves
- 1/4 tsp Allspice powder
- 1/4 tsp Red chili flakes
- 1/2 tsp Brown sugar
- 1/2 tsp Thyme, leaves
- 1/2 tsp Parsley, leaves
- 2 tsp + 1 tsp Himalayan salt (divided)
- 1 tsp Toasted black pepper
- 3 tbsp Coconut oil (divided)
- 1 ea Lime juice

PREPARATION

MARINADE In a food processor, pulse together the scotch bonnet pepper, garlic, California chili powder, cinnamon powder, nutmeg powder, clove, Allspice powder, red chili flakes, brown sugar, thyme, parsley, 2 tsp salt, 1 tsp black pepper, and 3 tbsp coconut oil. Place the paste into a small bowl and set aside, preferably overnight.

STEAMED FISH Cut banana leaf into rectangular shape about 12 x 8 inches. Rub fish with 1 tsp of salt and lime juice and let stand for 15 minutes. To make the banana leaf more pliable, lightly toast over a low open flame for a few seconds. Brush oil on the lighter side of each leaf. Rub fish with jerk marinade and place fish onto the leaf. Wrap the fish in the banana leaf. Set aside.To cook the fish, heat a large sauté pan over medium heat, and add a splash of coconut oil into the pan (about 2 tsp). Cook the fish covered on medium heat for 12 minutes on each side. Serve it hot with lime slices.

Coconut Cauliflower Rice and Chickpeas (Side Dish)

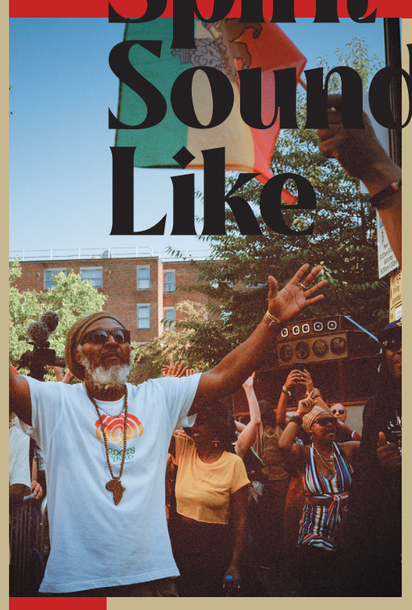
INGREDIENTS
- 3 cups Cauliflower (riced)
- 1 cup Lentils du puy (cooked)
- 1ea Red bell pepper (small, diced)
- 1ea Celery (stalked, small diced)
- 1 tbsp Ginger (finely chopped)
- 2 ea Cloves of garlic (minced)
- 1 tsp Turmeric (finely chopped)
- 1/2 tsp Red pepper flakes
- 1/2 cup Organic coconut milk
- 1 tsp + 1tsp Himalayan salt (divided)
- 2 tsp Grapeseed oil
- 2 tbsp Lime juice and zest
- Fresh herbs (chopped): mint, parsley, cilantro, basil

PREPARATION

In a nonstick pan, heat grapeseed oil over med-high heat. Place the red bell pepper, celery, ginger, garlic and turmeric into the sauté pan and season with 1/2 tsp Himalayan salt. Turn heat to med-low and cook aromatics until fragrant (about 3 mins). Push sauteed aromatics to one side of the pan, add red pepper flakes and turn up the heat to med-high. Add "riced" cauliflower into the pan, mixing thoroughly and season with remaining salt. Add coconut milk and cook over medium heat until coconut milk is absorbed. Fold in cooked lentils and chopped fresh herbs. Finish with a squeeze of lime juice.

Black Power Through Music: What Spirit Sounds Like

by Ivie Ani



Channel One Sound System. Notting Hill Carnival 2019 ©eddie OTCHERE

Music has served as a backdrop to movements — from the Civil Rights era to the current Black Lives Matter period — soundtracking pivotal personal, political, and cultural shifts throughout history. The soundscapes of the soul and the spirit of periods and places defined and defied by Black people help translate what is often left unspoken.

The *Small Axe* anthology series chronicles London's West Indian community in London between the late 1960s and mid '80s. The films are anchored by the songs that soundtracked an era of resistance, resilience, and coming of age. In this reflection, *Small Axe* director Steve McQueen, writer Courttia Newland, and author and activist Alex Wheatle share the music and memories that defined movements, moments, and their lives, and reflect on the making of the movies and the power of the invisible yet ubiquitous force that is music. The music in the series captures the spirit of a movement.

"Music is the food of these films," McQueen says. "Music is as important as the food they eat, the clothes they wear, the weed they smoke, and the air that they breathe. It's all about the senses. It's all-encompassing."

"Music was a discovery— within your sexuality, within how you dressed, how you spoke, and how you thought," McQueen says, of history and of himself. "Discovering Prince and 'Dirty Mind' when I was 13 and then *Sign O' The Times* was mind-blowing. To have a Black artist who is undeniably a genius, a curator, was hugely influential." That coming-of-age musical inspiration helped spawn the realization that became the bedrock of his pursuits and purpose in storytelling.

For *Small Axe* writer, Courttia Newland, that early inspiration of self stemmed from the genre lovers rock. "I was born into the lovers rock era," he says. "Outside of our very Caribbean world, there was British culture. The Caribbean stuff, I took for granted. We came out English, and [our parents] were like, 'You have to know your history.' The night I went to my first rave, I was 16 years old. My friend said, 'We're going to go see *Do the Right Thing* in Leicester Square.' Blew our minds. Those two things happened in the same night, and they became, I suppose, an articulation of what we're like in Britain; that we can hold space for the two things. We can hold the Americanness of hip-hop but also have our own thing at the same time."

Nostalgia is rarefied in the form of music. *Small Axe* signals to the historical inflection points of a generation. Alex Wheatle is of that generation whose lived experiences are represented in the films. Born in South London, the novelist understands firsthand the significance of each song. "For people like me who lived through those times, it's a reference point," he explains. "Music catches a moment in time. When I hear a certain track, a certain melody, it just takes me right back."

Wheatle was among the thousands who participated in the 1981 Brixton uprising that resulted in hundreds of injuries to police and members of the public and dozens of arrests. He went on to serve a sentence in prison for his involvement. Conflict had been brewing for some time. The 1981 economic recession in the U.K. combined with racism-rooted disenfranchisement that local African-Caribbean communities bore the brunt of in the form of poverty, unemployment, crime, and tension with the police made for an implosion of civil unrest. "One of the tracks in *Mangrove* is 'Pressure Drop'," Wheatle says, "There was a certain pressure that we lived under," he says. "From any pressure, you need a release. The music and the parties gave us that release."

Music was also Wheatle's guide in navigating his individual life while actualizing his place in a broader struggle. "Music was always my savior," he says. "My childhood was incredibly bad and traumatic, but music offered me a space. Music is part of my healing— part of my nourishment. And so I needed that to feel good about myself and find my identity."

For Black British youth at the time, identity was a battleground marred by the disillusions of racism, retained by community, and fortified by traditional and burgeoning cultural productions. An array of Black immigrant groups in England found solace in self-identifying with the countries they had left. "In the late '70s, early '80s, most of the music at that point was always about going back to Africa. That was the message and it was very powerful," Wheatle remembers. "Those of us who were born in the U.K. adopted Jamaican style. I've got Jamaican parents, but I do not speak like them. Everyone wanted to dress like a Jamaican and everyone wanted to speak like a Jamaican. We all tried to imitate that because we saw ourselves as more Jamaican than British. We felt that the British did not accept us. My parents' generation, when they came over in the late '40s and '50s, were not accepted. They were not allowed into the clubs in central London, so they had parties."

Those parties encapsulated the same essence of Jamaica. But in this new land, they were an escape into a world within a world— a world of their own. Around the globe, Black sounds, stories, and struggles were bubbling through music. "Reggae was at the forefront, then later on, bits of early hip-hop," Newland says. "At the time, I didn't know Kool Herc was Jamaican, but I felt it. I wanted to be a toaster; I wanted to be on the mic. When I heard hip-hop, I could hear this was a different way of doing the same thing, and I started emceeing. Later on, I found out the Caribbean origins and how we participated in hip-hop culture. That's why it caught on in such a big way in the U.K." It was an intrinsic cultural connection.

"I remember first hearing Public Enemy," Newland says. "'Rebel Without a Pause' came out, and England just went crazy. Everyone was wearing the African pendants. That was a big shift." It was a shift that Wheatle also remembers vividly. "The first time I listened to Bob Marley's 'Exodus', I thought, 'Wow. He's singing about me, my friends, and my situation'," he recalls. "When I arrived in Brixton in the 1970s, reggae music was quite militant. The record shops were full of albums about the struggles in Africa. The Back to Africa [movement], was a real thing for me and my friends because we couldn't tolerate living in the U.K. anymore. The racism was so deep and so entrenched and the police, that we called Babylon, were always in our face."

"It was an incredible time for music, especially lovers rock," Wheatle reminisced. "Lovers rock calmed us down a notch. We could be militant, but also we wanted to love. It offered that balance. You can't be angry 24/7. It was important for us to have that space with lovers rock where we could just take a deep breath, be with somebody we like, and relax. It gave us that moment to be ourselves."

Courttia and Alex created the following bespoke and irresistible selection of choice blues dance classics, guaranteed to conjure up the lovers rock vibe. Enjoy!

MUSIC PLAYLIST

PARTY TIME
by The HEPTONES (Lee Scratch Perry's production)

HOW LONG
by Pat Kelly

HOW CAN I LEAVE
by Delroy Wilson

SIMPLY IN LOVE
by Carrol Thompson

HIS MAJESTY IS COMING
by The In Crowd

BLACK PRIDE
by Brown Sugar

JAH JAH ME NO BORN YAH
by Cornell Campbell

ROOTS TRAIN NO.1
by Junior Murvin

DIM THE LIGHTS
by Winston Reedy

WHISPER TO ME
by Cecile Campbell

HAVE YOU EVER
by Dennis Brown

LOVING YOU
by Junior English

NATTY DREAD AH WEH SHE WANT
by Horace Andy & Tapper Zukie

CAUGHT YOU IN A LIE
by Louisa Mark

SOON FORWARD
by Gregory Isaacs

HOPELESSLY IN LOVE
by Carol Thompson

DON'T LOOK ANY FURTHER
by Dennis Edwards

I'LL TAKE YOU THERE
by Staple Singers

MY BABY JUST CARES FOR ME
by Nina Simone

Carrying Caribbean Culture and Community Through Food

by Stephanie Smith-Strickland

In 2018, McDonald's briefly introduced a new menu item at select locations: the jerk burger. Seeing one of Jamaica's most globally beloved culinary exports hawked via one of the largest fast food chains in the world may certainly have seemed odd to some. But to others, it was indicative of the evolution of West Indian food in mainstream cultural consciousness, and its role as a quiet tool of assimilation for often marginalized immigrant communities.

In fact, since the early 2000s, curious chefs (many of them white and with no ties to the cultures from which these foods originated), from Jamie Oliver to Gordon Ramsay, have attempted to put their own spin on the quintessential dishes ranging from jerk chicken, to rice and peas, and Trinidad's famous roti. And while Great Britain has always been known for its love of Indian curries (a by-product of its long-time colonial interference in India), over time the Windrush Generation — West Indian immigrants who came to the U.K. en masse between the 1940s and '70s in search of work post World War II — and their forebearers also came to greatly influence the country's diverse cuisine.

Yet, where the cuisine of other immigrant groups, like Chinese and Indian communities, for instance, was much quicker to hit the mainstream, West Indian food remained far more insular, and was thereby much slower to catch on outside of areas with a high concentration of immigrants. This was due to several factors including a more readily pronounced and traceable line of anti-Black racism and xenophobia, much of which exploded post World War II and through what most Americans would recognize as the height of the Civil Rights era. Additionally, unlike other immigrant groups who faced less barriers around brick-and-mortar ownership, and thus intentionally opened restaurants that swiftly adapted the flavors and base ingredients of their homeland dishes to better suit the tastes of white Brits, West Indian gourmands were much more reluctant to take this route, instead fighting to preserve the authenticity of their comfort foods.

These foods became a staple of community gatherings prior to the establishment of physical restaurant locations. "Cooked Caribbean food was often in high demand late at night, as people departed some of the emerging nightclubs of the time. While opening a brick-and-mortar cafe or shop was difficult, due to financial restrictions from prejudiced loaners and uncooperative landlords, many saw this concentration of Afro-Caribbean people late at night as a business opportunity and served home-cooked food out of the back of cars, or formed deals with the clubs to cook on the premises," said food and culture writer Riaz Phillips to Vice of the slow proliferation of the cuisine.

In *Belly Full*, Phillips' seminal exploration of the United Kingdom's West Indian food scene, he estimates that some of the first food and drink establishments date back to well before the arrival of the Windrush Generation. "I was going to every library I could, looking for social history books, scouring for any mention of food and social events," says Phillips. "The legacy of having a sit down Caribbean meal in the U.K. stretches back almost a century, with references to individuals eating rice 'n' peas in central London as far back as the 1920s. After the world wars, when the Caribbean population began to develop in the U.K., the basements of houses in areas like Brixton and Notting Hill provided the locale for meals and parties known as 'shebeens.' For years, Caribbean bakeries and takeaways dominated the restaurant enterprise in London, and it's only in the last decade or so that places for a sit-down Caribbean dining experience have come to the fore," he further shared with *Eater London*.

Phillips' difficulty in finding physical records of the presence and impact of these once niche cuisines speaks to the attempted historical erasure of many of these resilient communities. This reality is precisely why sit-down restaurants such as the Mangrove in Notting Hill came to represent so much more than mere eateries; they were bastions of cultural identity that survived through a complicated history marred by prejudice and discrimination.

"The first notable wave of eat-in Afro-Caribbean establishments emerged in the late 1960s, as youth of the Windrush Generation started to come of age. These included Trinidadian-born political activist Frank Crichlow's Mangrove Restaurant in Notting Hill, which opened in 1968, and Dougie's Hideaway club and West Indian restaurant in Archway. "More than just restaurants and bars, these eateries were places of cultural importance that built strong bonds of friendship between customers," notes Phillips.

These physical spaces become doubly important with the difficulty many Black immigrants faced in acquiring ownership (whether through leasing or outright buying) of brick-and-mortar storefronts to house their establishments. "Caribbean cafes, bars, and social clubs stepped in to offer people a taste of home as early as the late 1920s, notably the Caribbean Cafe in Cardiff and Florence Mills Social Parlour, which was opened in 1929 on Carnaby Street by a team that included Amy Ashwood— political activist and first wife of Marcus Garvey," historian Colin Grant writes in Negro with a Hat of the smaller establishments that paved the way for the arrival of true sit-in restaurants in the '60s. As more sit-down restaurants opened against the backdrop of anti-immigrant sentiments and general racial unrest, many of them became centers for resistance and areas of safety and community. And, in the case of the Mangrove, they were at times also converted into after-hours spots where sound system culture and late night bashments took root, particularly in a time where the country's nightlife scene was often divided along racial lines.

To many white Brits, West Indian immigrants were perceived merely as Black with no care to the nuance of their varied cultural identities. Places like the Mangrove — whose Trinidadian owner Frank Crichlow went on to become a lauded anti-racism activist and community figure — took care to specialize in specific delicacies that tipped a hat to the owners' countries of origin. "A lot of people still see Caribbean food as this one entity, but we have so many different islands, and so many different foods. When you look at the distance between some of the islands, the distance between some of them is greater than the distance between England and some other European countries. While they have some similarities, there are little bits that are really specific to each place," Philips shared of today's still-shifting perception of Caribbean cuisine.

The arrival of food hawkers, and eventually, sit-down restaurants also played a role in creating a demand for the food products and produce needed to make the meals that reminded immigrants of home. Though the Windrush Generation is often most readily recognized as the largest influx of West Indian immigrants, many had come to the U.K. prior and were invaluable to helping build its infrastructure. Upon arrival, many found it near impossible to access the food staples they relied on to make the affordable yet filling meals they'd survived on in their home countries. Starchy, energizing imports like yam, cassava, plantain, and green bananas were virtually impossible to find due to high import costs and the tendency for food to go bad over the long journey. The presence of eateries specializing in food stuff sourced from more tropical locales created a viable demand, and with it, an industry around import that eventually allowed for greater visibility of West Indian food as a whole. In tandem, it helped empower generational immigrant businesses by giving them a baseline to grow from. As Phillips notes in his book, enduring neighborhood spots like Sunrise Bakery, Old Trafford Bakery and Horizon foods date back to the 1940s and 50s and began as post-war family businesses that helped supplement incomes. Many have since grown into massive businesses with attached factories, illustrating just how far West Indian cuisine has come globally.

The legacy of having a sit down Caribbean meal in the U.K. stretches back almost a century, with references to individuals eating rice 'n' peas in central London as far back as the 1920s.

Beyond that, the palates of the denizens of the U.K. have shifted as access to West Indian food became more common. There is also something to be said for the greater interest in veganism and plant-based eating, which uniquely positions traditional Caribbean Ital diets, for example, as new and "trendy", particularly to those unfamiliar with the tenants of the Rastafarian religion, which embraced this form of eating as early as the 1930s.

The current mainstream popularity of the cuisine is a result of a combination of elements. A primary factor has been a renewed desire from the children and grandchildren of the Windrush Generation to reconnect with the parts of their culture that have been subdued and changed by the need to assimilate. These young chefs are tapping back into traditional recipes and offering modern takes that incorporate current food and wellness trends.

As more people discover the varied influences and flavors of West Indian food, it will become increasingly important for a new generation of legacy-keepers to continue to share its historical importance as a signifier of community and a symbolic bridge between cultures.



Credit: (c) Adrian Boot / Urbanimage.tv. Young Dread at Notting Hill Carnival 1979

My Not So Literal Education

by Alex Wheatle

In the fall of 1980, there was a young Black boy living on my road. I guessed he was about 12 or 13 years old. The son of Rastafarian parents, he wore infant dreadlocks.

His name was Asher.

On this autumn day, he looked troubled and upset. I asked him what was the matter as he passed my home. He explained that his history teacher had insisted that Christopher Columbus had discovered Jamaica in the late fifteenth century. Asher had raised his hand to challenge his tutor. He argued that Christopher Columbus could not have 'found' Jamaica because the Arawak people and others were already there. He had heard the reggae singer, Burning Spear, singing about it on his latest album.

An argument ensued which resulted in Asher being given detention and a warning to behave in the future. As Asher marched home, he paused to glance over his shoulder at me and said, 'Aren't the Arawaks considered important too?' My exchange with Asher made me consider my own education.

As far back as I can remember, I could read well. I recall picking up discarded comics, magazines and football annuals from the floor of my children's home dormitory. More often than not, they had the pictures cut out of them. On many occasions, I had to sellotape or glue the pages together. I read those publications religiously whenever I could. It was my escape from a brutal regime.

At school, I had difficulties with grammar, but I could read almost every word put in front of me. Whatever class I was placed in, I was always among the top two or three spellers. I enjoyed creating my own comic strips and short stories, just for my own amusement. I imagined a world where I could play on the same team as Pele, spar with Muhammad Ali and dance with the Jackson Five.

I loved drama class. One school report stated: *Alex always brings fresh, innovative ideas to class*. Despite the plaudits I gained for my English and drama, I was continually advised to *work extra hard* in woodwork and metalwork. *Learn a trade!* It became a mantra from my form tutors and career advisors. One of my own ambitions was to produce a new comic and call it *Alex in Boots*.

They were blind to my potential as a creative and in their eyes, to pursue a career as a writer *was something that Black lads like you did not do*.

In all the set texts I had read during my education, I can only remember engaging and relating to one Black character: Jim, the escaped slave in Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*. I so wanted to kick Huckleberry Finn off that raft navigating the Mississippi and use it to save more slaves! Libraries were no better. I simply could not find any narratives where a Black character was a hero. There were no Black personalities in my sports comics either, but at least I liked to play soccer.

I attended school in the U.K. in the 1970s. For a Black child living in an oppressive children's home, I never saw positive images of people who looked like me. They were not to be found in popular culture.

Tarzan never lost a fight in the jungle when he was confronted by a Black man (I always wondered why *Tarzan* had the ability to communicate with animals, while Black people, who had lived in Africa for countless centuries, could not).

Michael Caine and his British army repelled the 4000 Zulu warriors in *Zulu* and the only Black character in the *Italian Job* somehow managed to steer the getaway coach halfway across a cliff. He was the only one of the gang who did not fulfill his task. I was mortified.

Hope rose in my heart when I watched Woody Strode's Black character in *Spartacus* refusing to kill the title character in the gladiator ring. He aimed his spear at the Romans who were enjoying the life-or-death spectacle. Alas, Woody Strode was quickly slain and did not get to lead the hordes of rebels and freedom fighters. Television was no better.

Racist terms were normalized and written for laughs in comedies like *Love Thy Neighbour*. Quiz show presenters openly asked Black contestants if they swung to work. I cannot remember if there ever was a Black contestant on *Mastermind*. As a young actor, Brinsley Forde, who later formed the reggae band, Aswad, appeared in a children's television series, *The Double Deckers*. To watch someone who looked like me appear on a popular TV show, offered me brief hope. *Someone like me can excel in drama*, I used to say for myself. It was only when I moved to Brixton in the late 1970s that I began to see positive images of Black people that did not include music and sport stars. I discovered Marcus Garvey and his back-to-Africa campaign. I was shown black and white photographs of Garvey's grand parades in New York City. Reggae artists of that period praised his name. Brixton friends of mine had posters of Bob Marley, Martin Luther King and Huey Newton on their bedroom walls.

Through the lyrics of reggae music, I learned about the independence struggles in Angola, Mozambique, South Africa, Zimbabwe, and other African nations. I realized there were Black heroes out there, fighting for freedom and putting up resistance. I felt better about myself. One of that era's most popular reggae instrumental tracks was *MPLA* by Tapper Zukie. I had no idea who the MPLA were, so I did my homework in Brixton Tate library about the MPLA and other resistance groups in Africa.

By 1981, I was ripe and ready for someone to school me in Black history. I wanted to reclaim my identity.

In the summer of that year, I was serving time for the part I had played in the Brixton uprising. My fellow cellmate was a Rastafarian called Symeon. He was a well-read man. He gave me a copy of CLR James's *The Black Jacobins*, a classic study of the only successful slave revolt in Caribbean history. I was mesmerized by it. At last, in Toussaint L'Ouverture, I had found my Spartacus, my Tarzan, my Admiral Lord Nelson.

It propelled me to write again. I wanted to be that young kid again who had dreamed of being a creative before his teachers, career advisors and the cruelty of life knocked that possibility on the head. *Yes*, I said to myself. *If Toussaint L'Ouverture could accomplish what he did. Then I must try and write my stories too*.

I wanted to talk about the experiences that my friends and I had and challenge power just like Asher did in his South London school over 40 years ago. Yes, indeed, as Burning Spear sang, *Christopher Columbus is a damn blasted liar*.

They were blind to my potential as a creative and in their eyes, to pursue a career as a writer was something that Black lads like you did not do.



Rochenda Sandall as Barbara Beese in Mangrove. Photo Credit: Des Willie / Amazon Prime Video.

Celebrating The Women of the Mangrove Nine

by Evette Dionne

Jim Crow suffocated Black life in the American South.

Recy Taylor was born into the Jim Crow era, a period defined by decades of entrenched legal segregation in every facet of life— from schools, restaurants and churches, to the criminal justice system. In September 1944, the 24-year-old sharecropper and mother was walking home after attending a church service in Abbeville, Alabama, when six white men abducted her at gunpoint and gangraped her. Then, as now, Black women survivors weren't believed when they reported their assaults through official channels. So, the NAACP sent one of its most dogged investigators — a Black woman named Rosa Parks — to Abbeville to aid in Taylor's quest for justice. Though Parks and the NAACP thoroughly investigated the crime and ensured that Black newspapers covered the case, Taylor's rapists were never indicted.

Parks' involvement in that case — and dozens of similar cases across the south in the 1940s and 50s — was the foundation for what would become known as the Civil Rights Movement. To ensure justice for Black women, segregation would need to be upended entirely. It was this broader mission that eventually led Parks to strategically refuse to relinquish her seat on a segregated bus in Montgomery, Alabama. Parks' anti-sexual assault activism remains one of the cornerstones of the fight for Black liberation, and yet public memory paints her as a feeble, old woman too tired to stand, who accidentally turned the tide for racial segregation across the south. But Parks' legacy falls in line with the many Black women of the past and present who are revolutionaries, leading from the frontlines and behind the margins of recognition, ushering in social movements that have changed the course of world history.

Overseas, British activist Barbara Beese was leading another fight. In the 1960s, Beese began frequenting the Mangrove, an all-night restaurant in London's Notting Hill neighborhood. Beese told the BBC that the Mangrove "was the 'go-to' place for Black people in the area"; it served the best Caribbean food, "wicked" pineapple punch, and became a space where people united — whether to dance or to protest injustice. Beese, who was a member of the British Black Panthers at the time, would bump into everyone from community activists to U.S. and British celebrities in the dimly lit restaurant. But she'd also witness police officers repeatedly raiding the establishment because its owner Frank Crichlow, a Trinidad-born community activist, was involved in Britain's ongoing fight for racial equality.

Between January 1969 and July 1970, police raided the Mangrove 12 times. They claimed it was a drug den masquerading as a restaurant, but Beese and her Black Panther affiliates encouraged Crichlow to fight back. In addition to formally accusing the police of discrimination, Crichlow joined forces with the British Black Panthers — headed at the time by then-student Altheia Jones-LeCointe — to stage a protest that called attention to the raids. A letter to Prime Minister Edward Heath, the Action Committee for the Defense of the Mangrove read, "This protest is necessary as all other methods have failed to bring about any change in the manner the police have chosen to deal with Black people."

Beese and Jones-LeCointe, now a physician and scientist, were heavily involved in organizing the demonstration. On August 9, 1970, when more than 150 protesters peacefully gathered with signs that read "slavery is still alive" and "hands off us pigs," they were front and center. When more than 200 police officers initiated violence against the protesters, Beese, Jones-LeCointe, Crichlow, and seven others were arrested and charged with 39 counts that ranged from assault to inciting a riot. Beese and LeCointe didn't leave their brothers and sisters in arms to face unjust systems alone; instead, they joined them in the fight. Though the charges were initially dropped because the judge found that "police statements were thought to be contradictory," the Director of Public Prosecutions re-indicted the defendants, rearrested them, and proceeded with a trial that lasted for 55 days. It was an arduous battle, but they stood the course.

Beese, who was only 20 years old at the time of the trial, told the BBC that the courtroom was "male, pale and stale" and that being tried in a courtroom reserved for the community's most violent offenders "was like being told we were up there with murderers and rapists." Not only were all nine defendants ultimately acquitted of all incitement to riot charges, but Beese, Jones-LeCointe, and their comrades employed a legal strategy that exposed the police force's racial bias. Jones-LeCointe and defendant Darcus Howe represented themselves, demanding to be judged by a "jury of peers"— all Black jurors. Only two Black jurors were selected. They called more than 100 witnesses who spoke candidly about being terrorized by the police, cross-examined police officers, and asked their witnesses about their definition of "Black power."

The judge's closing statement put the nail in the police department's case, saying, in part, "What this trial has shown is that there is clearly evidence of racial hatred on both sides." Though, of course, the British Black Panthers in actuality could not be deemed racist, the statement was the first acknowledgment that Britain's police officers targeted Black citizens. It was undoubtedly a victory for the Mangrove Nine, spearheaded in part by two young Black women fighting for freedom.

If a Black woman assumed a role of leadership, she was said to be eroding Black manhood, to be hindering the progress of the Black race. She was an enemy of Black people.

In many ways, their trial echoed one taking place across the pond. In 1970, activist and professor Angela Davis was incarcerated for 18 months and then tried for allegedly orchestrating an unsuccessful escape plan for one of the Soledad brothers, a trio of men incarcerated in California, charged with the murder of a white prison guard, that resulted in multiple deaths. Davis was placed on the FBI's Most Wanted list and captured in October 1970. In 1972, she was acquitted on all charges— and has continued writing pivotal works that examine oppression and liberation, educating, lecturing, and actively protesting.

The list of leaders doesn't stop at Davis. There's Olive Morris, a Jamaican-born, British-raised activist who helped establish the Brixton Black Women's Group and protested racial injustice until her untimely death at the age of 27; Daisy Bates, the former president of the Arkansas chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, who was a trusted confidante of the Little Rock Nine, a band of students who desegregated Little Rock's Central High School in 1957; and Ella Baker, the mother of the Civil Rights Movement, who was integral to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the activist home of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

Elaine Brown, who became the first chairperson of the U.S. Black Panther Party in 1977 when former chairman, Huey Newton, fled to Cuba to escape a murder indictment, wasn't initially respected as the Party's leader. She had to fight for it, demand it, and fend off sexism in the process. "A woman in the Black Power movement was considered, at best, irrelevant," Brown wrote in her 1992 memoir, *A Taste of Power*. "A woman asserting herself was a pariah. A woman attempting the role of leadership was, to my proud Black Brothers, making an alliance with the 'counter-revolutionary, man-hating, lesbian, feminist white bitches.' It was a violation of some Black Power principle that was left undefined. If a Black woman assumed a role of leadership, she was said to be eroding Black manhood, to be hindering the progress of the Black race. She was an enemy of Black people." Still, Brown took the mantle of the Party for three years, and eventually left as the sexism became too much to bear.

Despite their records, these women, and all Black women activists, faced an uphill battle to not only be taken seriously as activists but to be given their due credit.

All of these women understood that a fight for liberation remains bigger than the individual; the fight for freedom is a collective effort. And Black women have been, and continue to be, integral in imagining a world where liberation isn't the goal; it's the default.

The fight for freedom is a collective effort, and Black women have been and continue to be integral in imagining a world where liberation isn't the goal; it's the default.

Trial and Error: What We Learned from The Mangrove Nine Trial

by Julian Mitchell

What began as a passionate protest against police brutality in West London became a revelatory masterclass in deconstructing the mechanics of systematic racism.

In 1970, activist Frank Crichlow witnessed his beloved restaurant become the centerpiece of a vicious attack against the advancement of Black immigrants across the diaspora by police and government officials. He witnessed their attempt to stifle arguably the most prominent and progressive Black power movement in Britain's history.

The Mangrove connected natives of Africa, the Caribbean, and South Asia, symbolizing unity and the fight for freedom, and standing as a thriving cultural landmark in West London. The location served as a popular gathering spot for community leaders and notable public figures alike to organize, strategize, and socialize. It was a safe space. As the establishment garnered greater attention and Crichlow developed a stronger reputation as a community organizer, London police joined forces with the British Home Office to cite the Mangrove as a hub for criminal activity, repeatedly raiding and ravaging the restaurant without ever successfully discovering any alleged drugs or witnessing any illegal activity. Seeing this unlawful investigation as an evident abuse of power anchored in racial hatred and subjugation, Crichlow sought the support of the British Black Panthers to help organize a demonstration against the unlawful investigation. As a result, 150 passionate protesters showed up to local police stations demanding accountability be taken for their actions.

A group of 200 officers engaged in a violent confrontation with protesters resulting in the re-arrest and subsequent trial of nine activists — Althea Jones-LeCointe, head of the British Black Panthers, and several other distinguished members — charged with inciting a riot. The case was initially dismissed following a court ruling that the impact statements of 12 officers were inadmissible after making the claim that Black radicalism carries criminal intent. Shortly after the charges were dropped and all of the accused were released, the Director of Public Prosecutions reinstated the charges, consequently leading to the re-arrest of all nine members.

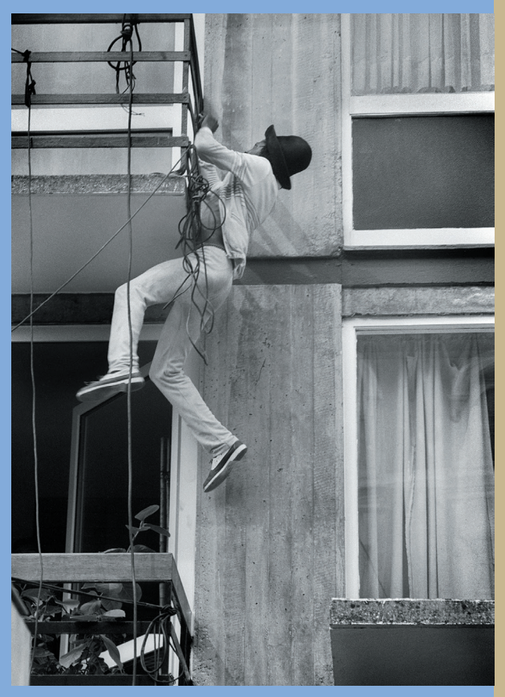
Lasting 55 days, with LeCointe and Darcus Howe masterfully defending themselves and one fearless attorney representing others, the Mangrove Nine verdict marked a definitive turning point in London's history and shifted the trajectory of race relations forever. Every member accused was acquitted on all charges, and this unprecedented moment became the first instance in which racial discrimination was acknowledged and punished by a court judge in Britain. The targeted attack against influential Black leaders in West London sparked a historic uprising fueled by years of deep-rooted pain and anguish. Facing public persecution and police brutality, this collective of protesters stood in solidarity to boldly confront the sobering realities of racism, discrimination, and systemic inequality.

While we can search for more progressive ways to address the politics of race and systematic oppression, nothing changes without the acceptance of simple truths. Race is a social construct. While racial superiority is, in essence, a myth, this practiced ideology serves as the foundation from which the pillars of society were established— from economics, education, politics, to the criminal justice system. As a result, what we see too often are sensible solutions and definitive demands for change dismissed due to conditioning on all fronts and adherence to the maintenance of an unfair system.

The projection of white supremacy dictates that white people operate under a collective belief that other races are inferior— in talent, intellect, physical ability, and all else. White superiority suggests that Black people are incapable of being equal. But even in the face of blatant hate, discrimination, and systematic oppression, Black people have diligently persevered and excelled— having risen from the lowest points to become groundbreaking pioneers, fearless revolutionaries, and transformative leaders. Despite every attempt to reduce their worth and deny their power, Black people have prevailed to develop a shared identity, generating immeasurable social, cultural, political, and economic value, and designing cultures that carry unparalleled influence on a global scale.

Suppressing the value and power of Black lives not only stifles the growth of a country, but it also stifles the progress of communities across the world. New ideologies and systems and socioeconomic frameworks are achievable. In order to rewrite history for generations to come, it's time we focus on the root of these issues in a way that will bring us closer to truth and, in turn, closer to each other.

Suppressing the value and power of Black lives not only stifles the growth of a country, but it also stifles the progress of communities across the world.



Credit: (c) Adrian Boot / Urbanimage.tv. Dread Broadcasting Corporation DJ, London 1981

The Joyful Blues

by Stephanie Smith-Strickland

Imagine this: you were once the half-formed idea of a person growing inside a body, cradled below a thunderously beating heart and held securely between the gurgles of digestion and the other inner-workings of the body. You stretched your mother's belly, the skin tighter than that of a talking drum, and more firm than a steel pan dimpled from the measured hammer falls of a blacksmith. Even then, there was music. The thump-thump of the heart, the shh-shh of rushing blood; a lullaby, preparation for a world full of noise.

Now, imagine you know the world — you've seen it through fresh eyes wizened by years and pain, but also by joy and dreams. You were born in a place of green where life is verdant and explosive, a place where it pours from the cracks and crevices of stone monuments built by imperial powers. Gone but not forgotten. They have named the streets and ports and counties, things like Surrey and Kingston or Saint Andrew; people and things that lay claim to places long-inhabited before their presence. These are the rewriters of history, the insidious architects of self-doubt that forces those who have always existed to question if they were real before — before the sugar, the plantations, and the spices. A place where red-dirt roads are speckled with banana trees and palm branches, where guinep and mango grow, and with it, the warmth of banjar and drums floats through the ether, seasoning the sweetness of fruit with a nameless, potent new flavor.

Imagine this is a birthright — a blood-deep song calcified into the very marrow of your bones. Take it everywhere; it is a North Star to always guide you home. Now imagine this place of green, (the one you've always known), imagine you must leave it, probably forever. Maybe because, for all its riotous life, none of the green is the kind you can buy things with. Maybe you have other reasons. But now you're in a new place. A foreign place. A place where, suddenly, even your sharpest indignation sounds musical to new, very pale, ears. You've got an accent now, a funny one to some. And maybe your accent is amusing (though no one can tell you why), but amusement can be dangerous here in this new, cold, place where ghostly faces stare suspiciously at every turn. Amusement here is inexorably tied to violence. Maybe there's no such thing as a "sundown town," but nigger-hunting is still an amusement to aimless crews of Teddy Boys mired in post-war gloom and looking for someone, anyone, to blame— to rage against. For whiteness, the decimation of all that is not white is amusement, you discover. Or maybe you've always known.

It is in these corners, these pockets of communities displaced and welcomed — not with grace and hospitality, but with naked hostility and open suspicion — that the music you've carried in your blood and bone starts to fashion itself into something new. Something that can even feel like armor. In clandestine basements and cluttered living rooms, in the cellar or the seating areas of restaurants like our own Mangrove, we come alive after hours. Still bone-weary, still tired, still trying to find space in a place that never intended to accommodate faces darker than a perfectly-fried fish fillet dashed with malted vinegar.

Therein lies the irony: To be unwanted in one's physical body but loved for the expressions of one's soul.

When Lord Kitchener stepped from the deck of the *Empire Windrush* onto the Tilbury Docks and the blustery cool of London, he did it with a song that captured the hope of a generation. "I have been traveling to countries years ago / But this is the place I wanted to know / London is the place for me." For this generation who would come to be known as the Windrush Generation, England did indeed become a new home, particularly for those looking for a better quality of life post World War II. And, in the same way, their new surroundings changed them. They, too, left an indelible impact on the music and culture of Great Britain, one that would go on to shape contemporary music for decades to come.

"You had a lot of musicians who could play jazz, blues, gospel music and Latin music coming into a London scene that at that time was primarily swing-based and dance bands," British-Trinidadian novelist, poet, and academic Anthony Joseph shared with BBC. "So not just African and Caribbean music, but the tins of Spanish music and Spanish and Cuban rhythms, all of that just really enriched the musical palette of London."

Many of these musicians — who had few options outside of working the railway lines, a job the British government had announced awaited West Indian immigrants post-war — happened to find work in local clubs and bars. Here is where they melded the sounds of swing and big band that audiences already enjoyed with elements of mento and calypso, and later, reggae, and what would become ska. Calypso in particular enjoyed growing popularity between the 1930s and '50s, in the process, creating the cornerstone from which much of Black British music culture evolved. The genre, which developed almost 300 years earlier in Trinidad & Tobago, caught on so voraciously partly because of the presence of British soldiers stationed in the Caribbean during World War I and World War II, and the presence of West Indian immigrants in the U.K. prior to the Windrush Generation. Plus, the easy-listening nature and call and repeat stylings, which originally evolved as a covert, tongue-in-cheek way to verbally flay slave masters, made for inherently catchy and singable lyrics. At the same time, Black American musicians were also bringing blues, jazz, and soul to London club scenes, resulting in a fusion of sounds that created a direct lineage to the evolution of sound system culture in the 1950s and beyond.

"It set the template for the Black music styles that were to follow," writer Lloyd Bradley explained in a piece for the British Library. "Start with a specific style (Trinidadian calypso); adapt it to the new environment (London's ballrooms, pubs and broadcasters) with different audience/management expectations; acknowledge popularity of existing Black musical forms (jazz and swing); and absorb the not-necessarily Trinidadian influences of the pool of players (West Africa, Guyana, Jamaica, the USA). The same intrinsic process created lovers rock reggae and jungle, and provides a vivid line from 1940s London calypso superstars such as Sam Manning, Rudolph Dunbar and Freddie Grant through Eddy Grant, Carroll Thompson, Light Of The World, and Soul II Soul to Ray BLK. Indeed, put Lord Kitchener next to Skepta and, really, the only thing separating them is the cut of their trousers."

The prominence of sound systems, which by the 1950s, were often more popular than live music and traditional club settings, also helped bring genres like lovers rock, Brit funk, and ska (which caught on as record labels took interest in Jamaica's thriving music scene) to the mainstream during a time where segregation and racial bias often saw West Indian communities marginalized. Music also became a powerful tool of resistance, and a vehicle for communicating the injustices of living in a new, unwelcoming land. Lord Kitchener's buoyantly hopeful ditty about life in London was replaced by offerings from artists like Lord Invader, who in 1959 recorded and released "Teddy Boy Calypso (Bring Back the Cat O' Nine)," the song takes direct aim at the reign of terror Teddy Boys caused in West Indian communities, through which groups would roam carrying out racially-motivated attacks. Even Lord Kitchener would go on to pass commentary on the inherently racist nature of many white English people's views on nationality and race with songs like "If You're Not White You're Black," exploring the lack of nuance through which West Indian communities were often viewed.

Since then, more than 70 years have passed but ironically, the genres that have since evolved often tackle the same themes and concerns as the generations before them. And while resistance to immigrants and deeply coded racism has been renewed — from the 2016 U.S. presidential election to the 2018 Windrush scandal — a new generation of immigrants (and the children and grandchildren of the Windrush Generation) are answering in kind.

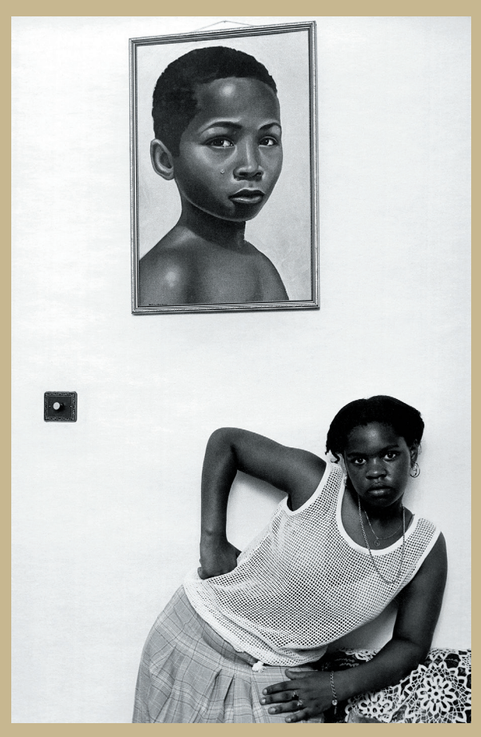
What remains is the powerfully intoxicating influence of Black immigrant communities on all aspects of popular culture, but most especially music.



Credit: (c) Richard Saunders / Urbanimage.tv. Carrying a speaker cabinet up a staircase, Sound System London 1983

Maryland Vice-Principal Discusses the Intelligence and Challenges of Teaching

By Shenequa A. Golding



Credit: (c) Richard Saunders / Urbanimage.tv. Woman beneath portrait of boy crying, London 1983

Anitra Washington stumbled into a career as an educator. As a biology undergrad major, Washington believed she'd pursue an occupation within the medical field, dismissing the fulfillment she'd felt when working with teenagers during after school programs.

"I've always loved science. In my mind I thought OBGYN work would give me a chance to do something that made me happy," Washington said during a Zoom conference. "Who doesn't want to help women in medicine? Who doesn't want to deliver babies? The answer is: I didn't want to."

During her junior year at Drexel University Washington landed a volunteer opportunity at the University of Pennsylvania hospital in their labor and delivery ward. She quickly realized the lab environment wasn't for her; she needed to forge a new career path.

"Science teachers are hard to find, and particularly Black women teaching science," she said, "so I found a school in Newark, New Jersey, moved from Philly and started there about two weeks after graduating from college."

The Baltimore, Maryland native went from college lectures to teaching young men at St. Benedict's Preparatory School within what felt like moments. When she looks back at her early years as an educator, she says they flew by faster than expected.

"The teaching wasn't super difficult. It was trying to figure out other pieces of the profession. Time management, understanding a little bit more about curriculum, being able to get kids to really buy into what's happening in the classroom. Those were things that I had to learn that was more than just stand and deliver. Luckily in science, you don't have to depend on standing and deliver… You can do stuff and kids expect that in science. That part of it was manageable, but really learning how to look at the job as a profession is where I grew the most as a young teacher."

Washington finishes her thought and quickly begins typing on her laptop; she admits to squeezing the interview in between a forthcoming meeting with parents about the upcoming school year. Washington's skin is a rich, clear mahogany. She has thick, curly, shoulder-length black hair, wears clear square frames, and speaks definitively. Her smile is genuine and bright except when she scowls at the sound of her barking dog.

"Sorry," she says.

Now, as the new vice principal of 1,200 girls at her alma mater, she is both protective and no-nonsense, calling out her students when they get out of line, and adults who do the same. Despite the challenges that often come when engaging and educating teens, Washington can't help but boast over them.

"I love the fact that very few people appreciate teenagers," Washington said. "I think a lot of people have a tendency to think [teenagers] don't know anything, or they think their voice is always going to be kind of immature. I love them. I think they're brilliant. At that age, they still have a very critical eye of the world around them and they're pretty good at articulating what they think and what they feel. They have real feelings and they have real thoughts and helping them put those things in the context of the bigger world is really what I like to do."

It's this innate desire to help guide her students that sits at the center of Steve McQueen's film, ***Education***. The BAFTA winner's latest project, a five-part anthology series entitled *Small Axe*, takes a look at the Black experience within London between the 1960s and '80s. In *Education*, community members and parents push back against a racist system that thwarts their children's education.

"Some people are just annoyed with them. 'Oh, they want to ask questions. They always have something to say,'" Washington explains. "'They're too smart. They're too grown.' Too grown is something adults put on them. I think when you look at the characteristics of what 'too grown' is that's really more of a reflection of the grown-up than it is of the kid. Being able to have their back in that way is also something I know they need and appreciate."

Along with educating her students, Washington also views her line of work as a service. She takes responsibility for helping shape their critical thinking abilities.

"A lot of people look at teaching as just teaching. You go in. You do this thing. The students learn some stuff. You give them some tests and you move on," she says. "We're in a customer service industry… our students are our customers. We are responsible to them. We owe them a lot and not just in 'Oh here, read this book and you have this test.' That's not educating; that's schooling. I think American schooling has issues of its own, but if you look at your job as trying to give them the information they can use then you really begin to shift things."

For Washington, changing the way some view helping students can have an even greater effect.

"We often try to save kids from the life that they have, as opposed to helping them navigate that life, and seeing that there is a way to get to the things they want. For example, a kid is in a drug-addicted home, things aren't great. The thought is, 'I'm going to move them in with me.' That can't happen for everybody. We can't do that for every kid, but … we can get you a little bit of support — whether it be a counselor or a therapist. I can help you set up a timeline for you to do your homework and care for your sibling. I can assist you in those hard moments where you look at your parents and you hate them. I can help you see them as much of an adult as you see me. Those pieces of the job are the things they've taught me the most."

And while Washington's students are mostly Black and Brown, she's noticed the effect they've had on white teachers and faculty who now have a fuller, more nuanced understanding of marginalized women and girls.

The trope that's often bestowed on young Black and Brown women — too sassy, grown, attitudinal — robs them of the grace and sensitivity, which is given, normally without hesitation, to white teenage girls. The benefit of the doubt or the basic understanding of the bumpiness that comes during these four years drastically affects how they're engaged with. Washington says that for her white faculty to be with them every day for four years has made a lasting impression.

"I think the students have shown them that the stereotypes are wrong … being in an environment with young Black women as students and adult Black women as colleagues helps people to see who they are now and who they can become — good and bad. It's a very good lesson for some white teachers, who have a tendency to come into a classroom with that 'I'm going to save the Brown children' mode," she adds.

"We don't need saving. We need educating."

The trope that's often bestowed on young Black and Brown women — too sassy, grown, attitudinal — robs them of the grace and sensitivity, which is given, normally without hesitation, to white teenage girls.

The Fight for Black Joy is a Battle for Black Liberation

By Julian Mitchell



Malachi Kirby as Darcus Howe (front row left of center, blue shirt), Letitia wright as Altheia Jones-LeCointe (front row center, orange shirt), Shaun Parkes as Frank Crichlow (front row center, black suit jacket) in Mangrove. Photo Credit: Des Willie / Amazon Prime Video.

At the core of every vibrant cultural movement is the spirit of defiance anchored in an ongoing pursuit of freedom and equality.

How do we embrace the essential fight to discover and experience joy without first defining it, and re-defining it for ourselves?

The pursuit of freedom is an enduring mission, one that embodies the collective struggle of Black people around the world. Treading against centuries of compounded racism and systematic oppression, Black people remain in a perpetual fight — for justice, equality, and basic human rights. As a marginalized people, being Black is being in a constant fight for significance.

These battles symbolize the shared effort to win a war, pressing forward to frame a future in which Black people can exist in the fullness of our identity without facing subjugation or persecution, free to enjoy the liberties and protections perceivably afforded to all people.

As we continue fighting racial inequity and the common enemies that have plagued our past, achieving true freedom is impossible without first winning the individual war within ourselves. Amidst our fight for freedom and equity, we must also fight for joy for the sake of our well-being during and after the long war toward liberation.

The first step to finding solace within ourselves is making peace with unresolved pain, anger, and turmoil. When blindly ignored, these variables can converge to become a destructive force that disrupts every aspect of our lives. Failing to confront the conflict that exists beneath the surface restricts our ability to see the full scope of our power, self-worth, and potential. It mirrors an undetectable disease that can spread to erode our physical, mental, and spiritual well-being.

In his seminal 1993 book *Race Matters*, Dr. Cornel West elaborates on the spiritual warfare that festers beneath racism. The renowned critical theorist asserts that the silent mass murderer of the Black community is grounded by nihilism — the state of rejecting all moral and spiritual principles, living without a sense of hope, love, or meaning. West writes, "Nihilism is a natural consequence of a culture or civilization ruled and regulated by categories that mask manipulation, mastery and domination of people and nature." This psychological affliction perpetuated through poverty, oppression, and violence poses a threat to Black people everywhere, carrying side effects that include depression and a numbing apathy powerful enough to push Black people into a process of self-destruction. Being born Black is to be involuntarily thrust into adverse social conditions that naturally breed higher levels of pain, anger, and insecurity. From the moment we enter the world, we are forced to form an impenetrable outer layer for survival. As a people constantly under attack, we are charged with the task of tirelessly validating the value of our lives, while working diligently to protect and preserve our bodies, minds, and spirits.

The institutions designed to uplift and equip us have historically stripped and reduced us, while the systems intended to protect and serve us have inversely dehumanized and defiled us. Lacking sufficient access and opportunity, we are disproportionately impacted by the constricting effects of poverty, mass incarceration, unemployment, and discrimination. The byproduct is a staggering percentage of Black youth growing up in fractured families, accustomed to adversity, limited opportunities, and confined to underserved communities ravaged by crime and violence. Carrying the weight of these conditions, Black people are further taught that in order to dispel perception and transcend stereotypes, we must uphold an unrealistic standard of perfection. This places an insurmountable pressure to not only appear pristine and unshakable but to also reject the complex and nuanced characteristics that make the Black experience invaluably unique.

As a result, our fight for freedom often comes at the expense of our happiness, inadvertently sacrificing our mental health and inner sanctity for the collective cause. However, maintaining a focused effort toward achieving freedom for all must also recognize the essential fight to discover and experience joy.

To cope with the intensity of our experiences, we become accustomed to suppressing our emotions as a defense mechanism. While this tactic may prove effective in prolonging our ability to absorb pain, it subsequently numbs our ability to feel. Becoming insensitive to our emotions not only stifles our ability to openly communicate and establish relationships, but it also shuts off our ability to give and receive love— to one another and to ourselves. This is what makes self-love a revolutionary act for Black people, taking ownership of the challenges and complexities of our identity to reach a defiant level of comfort and acceptance within our own skin.

James Baldwin, one of the most prolific Black writers and intellectuals in history, suggested a specific process for escaping the confines of hatred and oppression. Derived from the philosophy of existential alienation, Baldwin's practice of Black Existentialism prescribed that Black people must displace themselves from their native environment, dwelling within uncomfortable solitude to forcefully strip themselves of their learned identity and develop a true definition of who they are.

This process reshapes individual perspective in a way that allows Black people across the diaspora to return to their native environment with a clear vision for how they can empower themselves, as well as the collective. Existential alienation is a philosophy emphasizing that an individual is responsible for their own actions and possesses the freedom to choose both their development and destiny. It is the process of claiming control over your life, thus detaching from our predetermined identity, provoking the transformative questions required to achieve enlightenment and discover our greater purpose.

By experiencing extreme vulnerability, we must inescapably confront the inner turmoil that fuels self-destruction. As a result, we can run nowhere but within, incapable of solely blaming the known dynamics of race, nor leveraging the realities of history as an excuse to settle in conformity. The singular point Baldwin sought to make is that for Black people to truly experience joy in society, we must first be removed from that society to liberate ourselves.

As a revolutionary period fueled by Black music, art, and culture — the Harlem Renaissance produced iconic pioneers who provided an insurgence of soul, style, and skill. Genres like Blues, Jazz, Swing and Beat music presented a soothing soundtrack for stories of intense struggle to navigate and defeat oppression while creating a sense of solidarity that transformed the social climate of America. Out of anguish, poetry arose as a thriving art form used to gracefully express the complexity, confusion, and combativeness of the times. In a period engulfed by racism, the people of Harlem did not relinquish their joy. Rather, they took pride in creating an entirely new culture of their own. It is that spirit of creativity, community, and resilience, intertwined with the desire for progress and prosperity that still underlines the beauty of the Black experience today.

But how do we embrace the essential fight to discover and experience joy without first defining it, and re-defining it for ourselves?

Even though we are engaged in a seemingly endless fight — to matter, to be counted, and to forge a reality that doesn't require suffering without reason — we must still continue to live. Finding joy demands doing the internal work to develop an unconditional love of self, dispelling every vicious lie, and claiming every empowering truth about who you are. It requires changing the narrative in your mind about what we deserve, what we're worth, and what we have the potential to become.

Mental illness has been widely stigmatized within the Black community, appearing as a sign of weakness and inadequacy, although there are higher cases of mental illness amongst Black people than any other race. We grapple with disproportionate levels of stress, anxiety, and generational trauma. Mental health refers to the health of our mind, measured by the wellness, stability, and quality of our thoughts. This includes the way we view ourselves, other people, and the world around us.

Setting yourself free is giving yourself permission to feel. It's giving yourself permission to be completely present in the totality of your human experience, without being bound by guilt or shame. It's rooted in embracing the uncomfortable parts of yourself to establish an uncompromising sense of self-worth that is not defined by circumstances or dictated by unqualified opinions.

Our lives are a reflection of the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves. To be Black and free is not simply having the world accept us, but to also courageously accept ourselves so that even in moments of chaos, we can always find a place of refuge within.

Black people are further taught that in order to dispel perception and transcend stereotypes, we must uphold an unrealistic standard of perfection.



Letitia Wright as Altheia Jones-LeCointe in Mangrove. Photo Credit: Des Willie / Amazon Prime Video.

prime video