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# At “tipping point”: New report signals limited drive within the Home Office properly to address the Windrush scandal

Juanita Cox , Eve Hayes de Kalaf | 05 April 2022

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*In a much anticipated [independent review](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/windrush-lessons-learned-review-progress-update) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/windrush-lessons-learned-review-progress-update>), published on the Windrush scandal last week, Wendy Williams warns that the Home Office is at “tipping point” and must maintain momentum to ensure systemic and cultural change.*

As early as 2013, Caribbean diplomats had contacted the Foreign Office to express concerns that some members of the Black-British Caribbean community were finding themselves wrongfully accused of holding an illegal immigration status. Frustrated by the lack of concern the government was giving to this growing crisis, the Windrush scandal finally erupted during the Caribbean Heads of Government Meeting (16-18 April 2018). Once it became [front page news](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/windrush-scandal) (<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/windrush-scandal>), the scandal was very quickly met with disbelief and outrage across the country.

In a [statement to MPs](https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/home-secretary-statement-on-the-windrush-generation) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/home-secretary-statement-on-the-windrush-generation>), Amber Rudd declared the Windrush generation - persons who had settled in the UK before 1<sup>st</sup> January 1973 - to be:

*“British in all but legal status”*

Rudd assured parliament that a taskforce would make immediate arrangements to right these wrongs, compensate people for the hardships they were facing and ensure that no such scandal could ever take place again.

In her [independent report](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/windrush-lessons-learned-review) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/windrush-lessons-learned-review>) from 2020, Wendy Williams called for the Home Office to recognise the harm it had caused to the Windrush generation, and to place people and their humanity at the very centre of policy decisions. The report included

30 recommendations that the Home Office agreed to meet. Regrettably, the 'Windrush Lessons Learned Review' – released earlier this week – evidences that the British government has categorically failed to honour this commitment.

On a relatively positive note, Williams welcomes the creation of a new Strategic Race Board, the only such advisory board within the Civil Service. Established in March 2021, Williams hopes it will go some way to holding the department to account (pg. 110).

Nevertheless, she also expresses grave disappointment with the Windrush Compensation Scheme (pg. 132), stating that the Home Office is still not communicating effectively with affected individuals. It is somewhat concerning, Williams notes, that no independent review of the impact of the government's hostile environment policies has taken place. She also observes that disappointingly the number of senior civil servant Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff has actually decreased since 2018 (pg. 110).

Issues around history and institutional memory are central to Williams' conclusions. She acknowledges that the Home Office has (re)trained some of its staff on nationality law and the history of immigration. Yet she highlights major concerns with their understanding of Britain's colonial empire and its impact. Troublingly, this knowledge gap means the Home Office is failing to learn from its past mistakes and is not engaging with Black Britons and their communities in any meaningful way. As Williams wrote in her first report (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/windrush-lessons-learned-review>):

*"[there exists] an institutional ignorance and thoughtlessness towards the issue of race and the history of the Windrush generation" (pg. 14).*

Williams warns that if the Home Office is unable to learn from past mistakes, these important lessons cannot inform future immigration legislation and decisions.

There is a distinct danger that such induced and selective amnesia about the past becomes yet another – contemporary - episode in the perpetuation of an ongoing hostile environment. It can only be actively addressed by making this problematic history 'live' in the minds of all officials. She suggests that it would be most helpful for the Home Office to conceptualise the scandal as a current and continuing potential problem which can only be truly addressed through active understanding of this history:

*"an historical series of events deeply embedded in past structures, policies and cultures." (pg. 7).*

As writers of this article, we are keen to make a contribution to this learning process. We are concerned that the government is yet to organise a formal reconciliation event to apologise directly to the victims of the Windrush scandal. Nor has it publicly acknowledged the detrimental, and continuing, impact of these policies on the lives of tens of thousands of Black Britons and their families.

To address this concern, and to mark the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Windrush, the Institute of Commonwealth Studies at the School of Advanced Study, University of London, will host a hybrid conference on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2023, in partnership with History & Policy (<https://www.historyandpolicy.org/>). The event will bring together academics, community activists and Windrush survivors in an atmosphere of dialogue, exchange and sharing.

Our 'Windrush Scandal in a Transnational and Commonwealth Context' Project (<https://windrushscandal.org/about-project/>) speaks to a strong academic interest in oral history as means of recording and listening to the perspectives and experiences of the Black-British Caribbean and wider Commonwealth communities. It aims to provide invaluable teaching resources for academics seeking to decolonise the curriculum of their institutions. We hope, too, that it will provide an important bridge between academics, researchers outside the academy, campaigners and community groups who have been active in this field for decades.

**Please note:** Views expressed are those of the author.

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## About the author

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**[Dr Juanita Cox](https://research.sas.ac.uk/institute-icws/staff/1610/dr-juanita-cox/)** (<https://research.sas.ac.uk/institute-icws/staff/1610/dr-juanita-cox/>) gained her PhD in the Department of African Studies and Anthropology, University of Birmingham, in 2013, and is a winner of the prestigious RE Bradbury Memorial Prize. She is currently the leading authority on the life and work of the Guyanese novelist, Edgar Mittelholzer (1909-1965) and editor of *Creole Chips and Other Writing* (2018). She co-founded the ground-breaking series Guyana SPEAKS in 2017, an education and networking forum, which has become a key monthly event in the calendar of the London-based Guyanese diaspora. Dr Cox is a Research Fellow at the University of London's Institute of Commonwealth Studies and is working on a three-year AHRC-funded project, 'The Windrush Scandal in a Transnational and Commonwealth Context'.

**[Dr Eve Hayes de Kalaf](https://research.sas.ac.uk/search/staff/1685/dr-eve-hayes-de-kalaf/)** (<https://research.sas.ac.uk/search/staff/1685/dr-eve-hayes-de-kalaf/>) has an extensive academic and professional background working across Latin America and the Caribbean. She obtained a distinction in a PGDip in Human Development with the United Nations in 2010 and a Master's degree at the Institute for the Study of the Americas in 2011. Eve completed her PhD in Latin American Studies from the University of Aberdeen in 2018. She is currently Research Fellow at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies (ICWS) and Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Latin American and Caribbean Studies (CLACS), Institute of Modern Languages Research (IMLR), University of London.

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