In my own compartment the baby was being fed. Its nose ran; its mouth leaked; it slurped and squelched and was frequently winded.

' "So you want rent?" ' the baby-feeder was saying. ' "I tell you I ain't paying any more than what I was paying before." He say, "Blackie, I coming up to get my rent or to get you out of that room." I watch at him and I say, "Good. Come up, *bakra*." He come up. I give him one kick *bam*! He roll down the steps *bup-bup-bup*.

'I pass round there last week. He have up a big sign in green paint. Please No Coloured. In green paint. I tell you, man, is like Stork.'

At Southampton there was a further thinning out of passengers. The man with the Nat King Cole hairstyle was only seeing off his wife and baby; he himself was remaining behind to face aggressive landlords and foremen and Please No Coloured signs.

We were directed to one of the ocean terminal's less luxurious waiting rooms, next to the railway sheds, in the gloomy recesses of which we could see the immigrants who had arrived that morning on the *Francisco Bobadilla*: a thick, multi-coloured mass herded behind wooden rails, and as silent as though they were behind glass. We stood at the doors and watched. No one stepped out of the travellers' waiting room into the immigrants' shed. There was interest, disapproval, pity and mockery in the gazes, the old hands sizing up the clothes of the new arrivals, clothes like those in which they had themselves landed some time before: thin white flannel trousers, sky-blue tropical suits, jackets with wide shoulders and long skirts, and those broad-brimmed felt hats, unknown in the West Indies yet *de rigueur* for the West Indian immigrant to Britain. Cheap cardboard suitcases were marked with complete addresses, all ending with E N G L A N D in large letters. They stood motionless in the gloom; about them bustled dark-coated porters and railway officials; and there was silence.

The Negro with the ruined face stood, tall and totem-like, in the centre of the waiting room. Beside him was the stunted Negro with the short trousers, long arms and big eyes; from time to time he swivelled his head, his eyes never changing expression, his mouth open and collapsed, his large clumsy hands loosely clenched. The fat Englishman gave a cigarette to the man with the ruined face and lit it for him. There was much solicitude in this gesture, and I wondered about their relationship.

As yet we were subdued, as silent as the immigrants outside. But whispered rumours were beginning to circulate. Seven hundred, a thousand, twelve hundred immigrants had come on the *Francisco Bobadilla*. Two trains were taking them to London, from where they would make for those destinations written so proudly in those illiterate hands on their suitcases.

Essays and documents

George Lamming

Journey to an Expectation (1960)

It is now ten years since that morning in mid-March when Sam Selvon and I left for England. I have tried to chart, through my own experience, some of the events of that period, for it is also the decade in which the West Indian acquired recognition as a writer, first outside and later within his own society. This order of acceptance was logical since a native commodity of any kind must always achieve imperial sanction before it is received back in its own soil . . .

. . . It is not inappropriate, therefore, that I should reverse one or two of Prospero's meanings, and make this last chapter the prologue to my book. The voyage was over. The captain would soon turn the stowaway over to the police. England lay before us, not a place, or a people but as a promise and an expectation. Sam and I had left home for the same reasons. We had come to England to be writers. And now we were about to be anchored at Southampton, we realised that we had no return ticket. We had no experience in crime. Moreover, our colonial status condemned us fortunately to the rights of full citizenship. In no circumstances could we qualify for deportation. There was no going back. All the gaiety of reprieve which we felt on our departure had now turned to apprehension. Like one of the many characters which he has since created, Sam said on the deck: 'Is who send we up in this place?' For it was a punishing wind which drove us from looking at the landscape. An English voice said that it was the worst spring he had known for fifty years. We believed him, but it seemed very cold comfort for people in our circumstances.

The emigrants were largely men in search of work. During the voyage we had got to know each other very well. The theme of all talk was the same. It had to do with some conception of a better break. We lived between the deck – which was a kind of camping ground – and the

communal dormitory where we slept, wrote letters, or simply wondered what would happen.

But the atmosphere returned to normal when the Boys were getting ready to board the train. We were on our way to London; and every one felt fine. The old emigrants, men who were returning from holiday, were putting the amateurs through their paces. There were strange stories about white women who misbehaved on boats. All this was perplexing, however true. But it was that instinctive return to our respective roots which made for a different kind of confidence. The Boys had now turned the coach into a West Indian occasion. They joked; some sang; and the experiences of childhood were always on the agenda.

This journey from Southampton to Waterloo is an important lesson in colonial history. Many of these Boys had never before been asked the questions: 'Will you be having lunch, sir?' But it is exactly the question which they had often asked an employer who looked like an English waiter. They had entered a wholly new role; and they would reply to the waiter as though he had been serving them for a lifetime. At least, one aspect of the old myth was in serious danger. For they realised – not read or heard but realised that white hands did nigger work in this country. They would not yet begin to rationalise this astonishing reversal of roles, but one of its meanings had sunk in their consciousness. It had gone home, so to speak, and it would stay there; in the soil of their thinking.

. . . the West Indian arrives here as a man reprieved from the humiliation of this arrangement which he has known all his life. He sees this new place as an alternative: open, free with an equal chance for any British citizen; and since the white hands do nigger work, it certainly looks as though the colour screen has been removed once and for all. The students, in particular, are victims of this way of thinking. Moreover, their relative comfort in Oxford or Cambridge will help to reinforce the illusion. They notice a cold stare, an enigmatic sneer, the built-in compliment which is used to praise, and at the same time remind them who and what they are. But education has trained them in duplicity; their whole life becomes an experiment in double-think. The factory boy's anger expressed on bus or in the Tube, strikes them as uncouth; for in the remote sanatorium of Oxford they exist as a kind of an expensive casualty. And Oxford wakes up one morning to an appalling scandal. It is England's scandal. For the bells have tolled over Notting Hill Gate; and

student or not, Oxford knows that the bell has tolled for all who suffer from a defect of colour . . .

At Waterloo the Boys started to get nervous again. The train had encouraged amnesia; but at last we were on solid ground. Most of us had no idea where we would be going from here; but the question remained: 'Where will John sleep?' Like a staff of indomitable mid-wives, representatives from the British Council were waiting at the station to receive those who qualified as students. At that time, their exclusive concern was for the students. The rest had to hope that Fox, Goliath Number Two, or Bat Ears – all Boys from back home – might have come to Waterloo. During this interval of waiting, another lesson is learnt. They realise that some islands are really very small; for this London doesn't sound like a place at all.

'Where Jo Jo living?' one of the amateurs will ask.

'In a place call High Gate,' the veteran says.

'And where Bat Ears 'cause he always writing to say how he see Jo Jo every Saturday night?'

'Bat Ears was living in Camden Town,' the veteran explains, 'but I hear some o' the Boys say he collect some trouble and had to move down Wimbledon.'

It is all names to the amateur; and he is not afraid of names. He wants to make a move; for he must see Bat Ears and Jo Jo before he settles down. In fact, the whole problem of shelter hasn't crossed his mind; for Jo Jo, Bat Ears and Goliath Number Two are all in England, and come rain or hurricane, he must find somewhere to sleep.

'Let us walk by Camden Town first,' he says, 'then perhaps we can track back 'pon the place where you say the Gate High. 'Cause Jo Jo will be vexed blue murder if I don't go see him first.'

The veteran tries to explain that these distances are not quite like the gulley hill tracks back home, a brief quarrel ensues; for the amateur has made a damaging accusation.

'But is what wrong with you, Sphinx?' he asks. 'Only two years you leave home, and now you are talking tourist talk 'bout how it don't have no walking in this town. Tell me, Sphinx, is how come you drop you ol' walking habits?'

It is the amateur's lesson in size.

But Selvon and I were duly recommended for a place in a London student's hostel; and it is here that we met Mate. There were three of us to a room the size of a successful publisher's office . . .

The second evening after we arrived, Mate suggested that he and I should go for a walk. We went along Gloucester Place towards the High Street and into Kensington Gardens. What strikes me as interesting now is that I don't think I asked Mate anything about Africa. We talked about England, and in particular about those people, meaning an active regiment of women who were either introducing their dogs to one another, or plotting the direction their journey should take. There was something strangely business-like about them; and there was a look of obvious comprehension on the dogs' faces. Like that Trinidadian on the boat, I made a typical colonial discovery that evening. On first appearance the women reminded me of the expatriate English who live it up in colonies like Barbados and Trinidad; and it crossed my mind then that one or two might have been Governor's wives back home on long leave. So I stopped walking when Mate said in the most casual tone of voice: 'Want one?' I know there were prostitutes the world over; but couldn't relate these ladies to the Trade. For in the West Indies whores didn't dress in such magnificent finery, and they would never be seen with dogs.

C.L.R. James

Africans and Afro-Caribbeans: A Personal View (1984)

When I came to England in 1932 there were few black people, in London or in the country. I can best compare them to what had happened by the 1950s, and what continued to happen afterwards because these things are relative. I only recognised how few there were in the 1930s when I saw a whole lot of them in the 1950s.

In those early days there was no particular prejudice, rather the English responded to our presence with curiosity. I spent my first few months in Nelson, Lancashire at the house of Learie Constantine. He was a famous cricketer and local figure. I started to write in the *Manchester Guardian* and before long both he and I were being asked to speak all over the place. We spoke about the West Indies and it soon became obvious to me that most people had no idea where they were at all. Many thought they were some part of India.

What surprised me most was that I had read more and had absorbed more of English literature and history than almost every English person I met. My knowledge astonished them and I was astonished too because I thought I had been reading what the average educated person in England read. I only realised the width of my reading and the range of my memory by coming to England and meeting educated people at the universities.

I was often asked to speak on the West Indies and the case for independence. I spoke quite easily and many of my audience were astonished at my easy mastery of the English language. At first I explained that I knew no other language – I had spoken English from childhood. What would have been miraculous was if I had not been able to speak it. There was an old student of mine from Queen's Royal College in England in 1932, a boy called Ribeiroo, quite elegant in his manners and speaking English very well. By that I mean he spoke much closer to the English rhythms and accents than the average West Indian. There were always a few of us who did that, I not being one. Ribeiroo was asked so often about his mastery of the English language that he devised a special answer: 'learnt it on the boat coming over', he used to say. Many English people used to nod their astonished heads and accept this outrageous fantasy for the truth.

I was on my guard in those early days in England against being the object of racial prejudice and I assumed a kind of protective reserve. Nothing, however, of prejudice affected me in any way but I was aware of the race question in certain personal ways.

Periodically I would pass on the street or in the Underground a man who was a mulatto or more than a mulatto, almost English. With my Caribbean experience I could often see that he was a man of coloured ancestry. What made the encounter notable was that if his eye caught mine, he looked away and turned down the nearest street or into some building. At that time people of colour were not at all anxious to acknowledge it.

On another occasion I went to hear the famous pianist, Schnabel, play in London. There was a particular woman around at that time who made it her habit to talk to black people. She was a member of the aristocracy and she was well known for making contact with the small circle of black intellectuals and students in the capital at the time. I remember particularly that I had gone to hear Schnabel and when it was all over I was sitting quietly; she came over to me, very patronising as usual: 'Well you came to the concert.' I said, 'Yes.' 'Did you enjoy it?' I replied, 'Yes, did *you*?' And at that she faded away. She could ask *me* questions but when I said, 'Did you?' she could not take it.

By the mid 1930s there was quite a collection of notable black people in London – Paul Robeson, Jomo Kenyatta, George Padmore, Wallace