**The First World War and its aftermath**

During the War anti-German feeling in Britain erupted into violent incidents and large numbers of Germans and Austrians were interned as ‘enemy aliens’.

Meanwhile, a quarter of a million Belgian refugees were welcomed to Britain temporarily, most returning home after the war.

Many white merchant seamen were drafted into the armed forces and replaced by non-white migrant seamen who formed the majority of many of the merchant crews on Atlantic convoys.

In 1919 tension between returning white British servicemen and ‘coloured’ seamen erupted in violent confrontations in many port cities, with some deaths.

Multiracial communities in Cardiff, South Shields, Liverpool and Glasgow defended themselves from attack. After these ‘race riots’ there were attempts to deport black seamen and a 1925 Act imposed an effective colour bar on migrant seamen.

**The Second World War and its aftermath**

Internment of ‘enemy aliens’ was low-key at first, but intensified in 1940 following attacks on German and Italian properties.

As in the previous war, Asian seamen formed a large part of the merchant convoys bringing essential food across the Atlantic to the UK, but were paid far less than white crew members.

At the start of the war Bengali seamen went on strike across the British Empire to demand better wages and working conditions. While some strikes were unsuccessful, others managed to secure concessions and a pay rise from their shipping companies.

Two major waves of immigration came as a result of the war. After initially refusing, the government passed the 1947 Polish Resettlement Act, which allowed Polish servicemen who had served in the armed forces against Germany to be joined in Britain by their families. The acute shortage of labour – especially in the transport and health services – led the government to invite people from the ‘New Commonwealth’ (the Caribbean, Africa and India) to come and fill the gaps. The 1948 Nationality Act allowed full right of entry and citizenship to all Commonwealth citizens.