# Exploring the hidden histories of Black communities in the UK



In a profound exploration of forgotten narratives within British culture, Lanre Bakare's upcoming book, "We Were There," delves into the rich history of Black communities across the UK during the 1970s and 1980s. Drawing initial inspiration from Tony Palmer’s documentary "The Wigan Casino," which depicts the vibrant northern soul scene, Bakare embarks on a journey to illuminate the often-overlooked contributions of Black Britons to this cultural phenomenon.

The Wigan Casino, transformed into a legendary venue for all-night soul parties, drew in crowds of approximately 1,200 attendees throughout the late 1970s. These gatherings were characterised by their focus on obscure soul records that had faded into obscurity. Bakare identifies a remarkable aspect of this scene: the presence of Black and British dancers, whose experiences and contributions often contradict the predominant narrative that northern soul was exclusively embraced by white working-class audiences. "The crowd I’ve got an eye on...they’re different from the majority of the 1,200 dancers crammed into Wigan Casino,” Bakare noted while reflecting on the visibility of Black attendees in the documentary.

Bakare provides a nuanced view of the socio-political climate in Britain during the Thatcher era, a pivotal time marked by intense social upheaval and cultural renaissance. As he recounts, issues such as rampant unemployment and increasing far-right sentiment contributed to a backdrop of unrest in various cities, including Brixton and Liverpool. The narrative of Black Britain extends beyond the capital, as Bakare argues that many vital stories exist outside London, in places like Birmingham, Bradford, and Liverpool, which have their own histories of struggle and resistance.

He points out that a simplistic understanding of Black British history often focusses only on London, failing to acknowledge the rich tapestry of communities and diverse experiences throughout the country. This oversimplification leaves out significant events and movements that have shaped Black identity, such as local campaigns against racism, the creative explorations in music, and the intricate social dynamics in cities like Manchester and Leeds.

For instance, in Liverpool in 1981, violent unrest sparked by police relations with Black communities led to significant confrontations that encapsulated the broader national discontent. Concurrently, Bakare highlights the contributions of Black artists, academics, and activists who were pivotal in navigating these challenges, asserting that these localised events compose the broader narrative of Black British history.

Bakare’s reflections are further fueled by personal memories of growing up in Bradford during the period, providing a lens through which he examines the socio-cultural developments that shaped his own identity. He notes the surprise of other Black individuals in London when they learn about thriving Black communities and histories beyond the M25, suggesting a gap in understanding the complexities of Black British experiences.

As the discussion of Black representation in popular culture becomes more pronounced—following the global impact of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020—Bakare critiques the tendency of creative industries to centralise their narratives in London. He asserts that while these representations are important, they do not encapsulate the full scope of Black British identity and history, which is woven deeply into the fabric of towns and cities across the UK.

The book, scheduled for release on 17 April, promises to be a critical examination of how Black culture has shaped and been shaped by the UK’s history, catering to the need for a more comprehensive understanding of its influence. Bakare reminds readers that the economic and cultural contributions of Black Britons are found not only in major urban centres but also in less celebrated locales, revealing a vast landscape of history that remains to be thoroughly explored.

Through "We Were There," Bakare aims to expand the recognition of Black British identities and experiences, adding depth to the collective understanding of the UK’s past and present. This exploration is necessary for acknowledging the significance of these narratives in shaping modern British society.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://brittlepaper.com/2022/05/lanre-bakare-explores-what-it-means-to-be-black-and-british-in-debut-book-we-were-there/> - This article discusses Lanre Bakare's book 'We Were There,' which explores the impact of Black British people on the country, focusing on stories beyond London. It highlights Bakare's background as a culture critic and his aim to address what it means to be Black and British.
* <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-liverpool/lanre-bakare> - This event at Tate Liverpool features Lanre Bakare discussing his book 'We Were There,' which delves into Black culture, resistance, and community across the UK, beyond London. It emphasizes Bakare's journey to highlight extraordinary Black voices and stories.
* <https://guardianbookshop.com/we-were-there-9781847927477/> - This page provides details about 'We Were There,' including its publication date and reviews. It supports the book's focus on exploring Black Britain beyond London, highlighting its significance in understanding Black British history.
* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_soul> - This Wikipedia page provides information on the Northern Soul scene, which is referenced in the article as a cultural phenomenon involving obscure soul records. It supports Bakare's exploration of this scene and its diverse attendees.
* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1981_Brixton_riot> - This page discusses the 1981 Brixton riot, an event that reflects the broader social unrest during the Thatcher era. It supports Bakare's narrative about significant events shaping Black British identity and experiences.