**Faculty of Letters and Languages – M’sila**

**Department of English**

**Level:** Master 01

**Course:** British Civilization.

**Lecture**: The People

**Lecture number**: 02

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**INTRODUCTION**

The British-Irish Isles have attracted settlers, invaders and immigrants throughout their history. The contemporary British are consequently composed of people from worldwide origins and are divided into what became the English, Scots, Welsh and Northern Irish. But these groups often have mixed roots derived from varied settlement, internal migration and assimilation. Such descent patterns are important elements in considering the ethnicities of the British peoples today.

For example, an individual may have an ethnic family background consisting of intermarriage between English, Irish, Scottish or Welsh. A Guinness survey in March 2001 reported that 42 per cent of people aged 18–34 in England, Scotland and Wales believed that they had Irish roots. Other polls show that one in four adult Britons claims Irish blood, although experts argue that the true figure is probably one in ten.

There are also immigrant minorities with their own identities who have come to Britain over the centuries and who have sometimes intermarried with the existing populations. Even the English language, which binds most of these people together linguistically, is a blend of Germanic, Romance and other world languages. This historical development has created a contemporary society with multinational and multi-ethnic characteristics. But it also raises controversial questions about the meaning of ‘Britishness’ and national identities.

**Early settlement to 1066 AD**

**1-The Celtics and the Romans**

Between ca 600 BC and AD 43 there was a movement of Celtic tribes into the islands from mainland Europe, bringing an Iron Age civilization with them. But the Celts possessed at least two main languages and were divided into many different tribes with conflicts between them. The Celtic tribes were then subjected to a series of Roman expeditions from 55 BC. The Roman military occupation of the islands (except for Ireland and most of Scotland) lasted from AD 43 until 409. The term ‘Britain’ derives from the Greek and Latin names given to England and Wales by the Romans, although it may stem from Celtic originals. It is argued that the Romans did not mix with the existing population and that their lasting influence was slight. But some Christian practices spread throughout the islands and there is still physical evidence of the Roman presence.

**2-The Anglo-Saxons and the Vikings**

After Roman withdrawal, Germanic tribes such as Angles (from which ‘England’ is derived), Saxons and Jutes from north-western Europe invaded the country. They either mixed with the existing population or pushed it westwards. The country was divided into separate and often warring Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in England (except for Cornwall), with Celtic areas in Wales, Scotland and Ireland. Many of these regions suffered from Scandinavian (Viking) military invasions in the eighth and ninth centuries, until the Scandinavians were defeated in England, Scotland and Ireland in the tenth and eleventh centuries. The Scandinavian presence, after initial fleeting raids, was reflected in some permanent settlement, assimilation, farming and political institutions.

**3-The Normans**

Early English history was completed when the Anglo-Saxons were defeated by French-Norman invaders at the Battle of Hastings in 1066 and England was subjected to their rule. The Norman Conquest was an important watershed in English history and marked the last successful external military invasion of the country. It influenced the English people and their language (since French was the language of the nobility for the next three hundred years) and initiated many of the social, legal and institutional frameworks, such as a feudal system (hierarchical structure from top to bottom of society), which were to characterize future British society.



**4-Twentieth Century Immigration and Growth**

Britain expanded agriculturally and commercially from the eleventh century, and also developed manufacturing industries. Immigration was often characterized by financial and agricultural skills. Jewish moneylenders entered England with the Norman Conquest, to be followed later by Lombard bankers from northern Italy. This commercial expertise helped to create greater wealth and was influenced by the merchants from Germany, who set up their trading posts in London and on the east coast of England. Around 1330, Dutch and Flemish weavers arrived, who by the end of the fifteenth century had helped to transform England into a major nation of sheep farmers, cloth producers and textile exporters. Fourteenth-century immigration also introduced specialized knowledge in a variety of manufacturing trades. Some immigrants stayed only for short periods. Others remained and adapted themselves to British society, while preserving their own cultural and ethnic identities.

**5-Immigration after the 1900s**

Despite legal controls, and partly as a result of the 1930s world recession and the Second World War, refugees from Nazi-occupied Europe and immigrants entered Britain. After the war, Poles, Latvians, Ukrainians and other nationalities chose to stay in Britain. Later in the twentieth century, political refugees arrived, such as Hungarians, Czechs, Chileans, Libyans, East African Asians, Iranians, Vietnamese and other Eastern Europeans, in addition to Italian, French, German, Irish, Turkish, Cypriot, Chinese and Spanish economic immigrants. These groups today form sizeable ethnic minorities and are found throughout the country. Such newcomers have often suffered from discrimination, some more than others, since racism is not a new phenomenon in Britain.

But public and political concern then turned to the issues of race and color, which were to dominate the immigration debate and focused on non-white Commonwealth immigration. Before the Second World War, most Commonwealth immigrants to Britain came from the largely white Old Commonwealth countries of Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and from South Africa. All Commonwealth citizens were allowed free access and were not treated as aliens.

But from the late 1940s, people from the non-white New Commonwealth nations of India, Pakistan and the West Indies came to Britain (sometimes at the invitation of government agencies) to fill the vacant manual and lower-paid jobs of an expanding economy. West Indians worked in public transport, catering, the Health Service and manual trades in London, Birmingham and other large cities. Indians and Pakistanis later arrived to work in the textile and iron industries of Leeds, Bradford and Leicester (which may be the first British city to have a non-white majority population).



**EXERCISES**

**1-**Explain and examine the following terms

Naturalization –Racism-Britishness- Iberian- Discrimination- polls

**2-Write a short essay about:**

Is it correct to describe contemporary Britain as a ‘multi-ethnic’ and ‘multinational’ society? If so, why?

**REFERENCES**

Oakland, John. 2002. *British Civilization: an Introduction.* London: London University Publication Office.

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