**How British-Nigerians quietly made their way to the top**

* *The Economist*, Oct 2nd 2024

At Akoko, an upscale restaurant in central London, Nigerian staples such as moi-moi, a stodgy bean pudding, and mosa, a savoury doughnut made from overripe plantain, become fine dining. This year Akoko won its first Michelin star. It was joined by Chishuru, another Nigerian joint. Its owner, Adejoké Bakare, has gone from being a have-a-go chef working out of a temporary spot in Brixton Market in south London to a Michelin-star-winning West End mainstay in barely four years.

What is happening in food is happening elsewhere. From politics to [YouTube](https://www.economist.com/leaders/2024/09/26/youtubes-do-it-yourself-brigade-is-taking-on-netflix-and-disney) to sport to music, members of Britain’s Nigerian diaspora have established themselves in the country’s elite. “That beaming West African mothers are now such a regular fixture on award-show red carpets tells its own story,” points out Jimi Famurewa in “Settlers”, a recent memoir-cum-history of black African London. A Nigerian moment has begun.

British-Nigerians are curiously overlooked in the folk tales Britain tells itself about immigration. There is no iconic episode to match the arrival of *HMT Empire Windrush*, the boat that brought [a few hundred people from the West Indies](https://www.economist.com/britain/2018/04/18/the-national-shame-of-britains-treatment-of-windrush-migrants) in 1948, points out David Olusoga, a (British-Nigerian) historian. They lack the numbers of, say, [British-Indians](https://www.economist.com/britain/2021/11/18/british-indians-are-emerging-as-an-important-group-of-swing-voters) or the geographic spread of Poles. Instead, theirs is a prosaic story of modern migration. Airplanes bearing the parents of future chefs, footballers, politicians and musicians arrived in steady numbers throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The results, however, are extraordinary. […]

Much of their success can be traced to geography. All the recent British-Nigerian Mercury winners were raised in London, which is the heart of the country’s Nigerian population. A home in the British capital is often vital to making it into Britain’s creative elite, whether that is in wealthy Hammersmith or on a council estate in Tottenham. What is big in London becomes big in Britain.

Bukayo Saka, a British-Nigerian who plays football for England and Arsenal, is another London boy made good. Mr Saka is the golden child of a golden generation of England players. No profile is complete without a mention of the fact that Mr Saka achieved four A\*s and three As in his GCSE exams. Homework was done during the 90-minute drive from West Ealing to Arsenal’s academy ground in Hale End. […]

An emphasis on education as a path to prosperity is hardly uncommon. What made the Nigerian influx different was that many arrivals were pretty middle-class to begin with. Kemi Badenoch, one of four remaining challengers for the Conservative Party leadership, is a case in point. Her father was a doctor, her mother a professor. In one sense, Ms Badenoch’s rise to the cabinet in the previous government is extraordinary. In another, it is becoming normal: another middle-class British-Nigerian was determined to enter Britain’s elite and succeeded.

Britain’s Nigerian elite proves an often overlooked rule. Ethnic minorities who make it into “Who’s Who”, a guide to the powerful in Britain, are slightly more likely to come from middle-class families (rather than a working-class background) than their white peers, according to [“Born to Rule: The Making and Remaking of the British Elite”](https://www.economist.com/culture/2024/09/16/how-todays-wealthy-present-themselves-differently), a new book. It is those with plenty of privilege who tend to make it to the top.

**From Lagos to Latymer Upper**

Judging a group by the cream of its crop has its limits, just as Michelin-starred restaurants reveal only so much about the dietary habits of a country at large. Last year alone about 141,000 Nigerians arrived in Britain, predominantly to do low-paid jobs in areas such as social care. Their tale will be different. But the story of the British-Nigerian elite is a simple one. They are generally middle-class, always well-educated (often privately) and predominantly from London. Why are there so many British-Nigerians in the British elite? Because, often, they look just like the rest of it. ■