

What is BRIG? – Birmingham Race Impact Group

Who are we?

We are a consortium of activists, academics and amateurs who have worked tirelessly to promote racial justice and equality in the City of Birmingham individually and collectively for more than half a century

We have created and managed projects, shifted policies and campaigned for a Better Birmingham.

Why are we?

The pandemic has highlighted the extent of race inequalities in our society. BME people face disproportionately worse health outcomes, and are more likely to be financially affected by lockdown. At the same time, the Black Lives Matters protests have led many people to think about our attitudes to inequality and created an appetite for more ambitious approaches to fighting racism. Crucially, though, these new approaches have to create a narrative that inspires and engages everyone in identifying shortcomings and driving lasting change.

Birmingham has done this before, and – as we begin to imagine a new, post-Covid society – we believe it can do it again.

We want to see how past campaigners changed organisations, created consensus, and shaped the very fabric of the city we live in. Our aim is to celebrate and cement legacies of our untold history alongside the Commonwealth Games in 2022 and beyond. To do this, we need to answer three questions:

- What has been the cumulative impact of our efforts?
- What have been the most effective means of obtaining those changes?
- What lessons do we leave for the future generations?

But we cannot answer these questions without further investigation.

What will we do?

This organisation will:

- create a repository (*virtual or physical*) of past activism – over the past **60** years.
- support and train history detectives to unlock the past in the present and inform the future.
- support and train tomorrow's activists, policy makers and campaigners for racial justice.

Whilst there is much to do, our first 3 years of activity will focus on the following projects:

- **Impact Review of Race Equality Initiatives in Birmingham since the 1960s:** to establish a map, of existing researched documented contributions to the delivery of race equality in order to establish baseline and to provide analytical commentary. We want to know what has been researched and documented from institutional policies and community activism campaigns, and understand what has and hasn't worked well in delivering on race equality in greater Birmingham.
- **Launch Symposium - Seeking The Pioneers - July 2021:** to Launch BRIG and create awareness of our objectives and the impact this body or work can make. This project will launch with an inaugural 'Race Impact' annual lecture to formally acknowledge the

contributions of race pioneers in the city and beyond, encouraging institutions to reflect on the role they have, or have not, played in bringing about race equality and to open a dialogue about what we can do now. This is also where we rehearse and refresh our cultural and structural analysis of the 'problem of race' in 21st Century Britain.

- **'Be the Power' Bi-Annual Race Summit - May 2022:** to bring 'truth to Power', (Malcolm X) by creating an independent collective transparent accountability platform to ensure continued momentum in driving change via a progressive Citywide race equality agenda. This will be our '*Davos*' and '*Good Law Project*' as we challenge inaction, promote what works and innovate fresh approaches beyond being stuck a groove, and powered by an evidenced based research and monitoring hub. Time to be counted.
- **Gilding the Ghetto:** an analysis of regeneration programmes over the past 60 years and the impact these often-vast budgets have had to progress justice and the reduction of poverty or crime, within our communities, policy and wider equalities. Did we deliver change or simply fatten the wallets of the already fat cats?
- **Seeking the Pioneers - The Race History Detectives:** this project will recruit and train a pool of researchers to become our investigators and ultimately future leaders and activists. These students of history will support communities; grass roots organisations' and institutions' to trace, investigate and record journeys that have contributed to Birmingham's Race Equality Story.
- **What Did You Do?' - #BlackLivesMatter** - The murder of George Floyd and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 refreshingly led by young people, led many of them to ask their parents and grandparents generation 'What Did You Do?' This project will begin the collection and collation of our collective activism.
- **Capturing The Archives** – in partnership with research and library partners: There are many existing potentially valuable archives residing with former activists, which are in danger of being lost to us either because they are now starting to clear them out from their homes, or they hand them over without instructions for their materials to be preserved or passed on. These living histories need to be captured, catalogued and made available in accessible formats. This project is designed to seek or create a permanent repository of our collective work.
- **Birmingham's Commonwealth Diaspora - Passing the Baton Back:** It is crucial that the significant opportunity provided by the games does not simply pass us by with a limited cultural splash in the opening and closing ceremonies. The story of our Commonwealth diaspora must be reinterpreted and retold. BRIG wants to promote and support the commissioning of an array of arts, literature, history and community projects which celebrate and or tell the story of our legacy.

An example of the type of projects that could be commissioned through literature and the arts include:

- **What did the Commonwealth Ever Do for 'us'?:** to build on 'the 'Past is Now: Birmingham and the British Empire' (Birmingham Museums Trust -2017) to exploring the transformation of 'Empire' to post WWII 'New Commonwealth' as a hangover of Empire; its significance today for better or worse; and what opportunities does it hold if its diaspora links were truly realised. This is as much about 'The Birmingham Story' of the past, as it is of the challenges for 'our city's' future success.
- **Birmingham's Letter to the Commonwealth:** Collection of cross generational letters about our Birmingham lives and links with our Commonwealth Diaspora. What we are; what we

bring from our countries of motherlands and how these connections feed our spirit. These can be sent to individual visiting Commonwealth Team, athletes or friends and relations.

- A Birmingham Anthology of Poems to and across the Commonwealth
- Handing the Baton Back to the Commonwealth Diaspora - pre & post schools links with commonwealth schools. Develop experiences, pen pal scheme etc. to watching and witnessing the games.

These are just a few examples of the projects BRIG wants to spearhead.

There is much to do, so let's get started.