



## Carnival and the performance of heritage

### *Notting Hill Carnival: memory lane*

The last of the four films focuses on the relationship between carnival and multiculturalism. To a large extent, this film revisits the themes raised across all three of the previous films.

The film and the two audio perspectives provide ideas and information relating to:

- the relationship between multiculturalism and heritage.

If you haven't already done so, watch the film 'Notting Hill Carnival: memory lane' and listen to its associated academic perspectives now.

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So what do you think about the following question?

- **Based on the information contained in the four films, what sort of multiculturalism do you think exists in Britain today?**

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## Feedback

To a certain extent, the evidence of the video and the interviews is conflicting. One view is that the carnival is essentially a representation of the survival of a Trinidadian and Caribbean tradition (itself retaining aspects of African music and performance), created by people who shared a common ethnic origin and a shared history of oppression for people who could understand and participate directly in this culture. In the second film, Claire Holder could say that 'Carnival is about commenting on the sacrifice our ancestors made to be here' and in the fourth film says that she feels the need 'to step out onto the street to pay homage to those people who fought for their history'. Similarly, we are told that some of the costumes that parody the white slave masters are designed to be understood by ethnic Caribbean people but not by others. Much of the power and energy of the event is thus seen as an expression of a minority group presenting itself as different to other groups in London. The fact that witnesses repeatedly drew into the discussion the oppression of black men and women in London in the 1950s and 1960s, and referred to the race riots and police brutality in the 1976 Carnival, testifies to this identity.

On the other hand, the carnival has long been absorbed into the annual calendar in London as a major generator of tourist and commercial income, with significant participation by Londoners of all social and ethnic groups. The generally trouble-free, friendly and socially mixed crowds might give the impression of a completely homogeneous culture. Chris Mullard refers to the culture of the carnival as integrated and increasingly holistic. As we saw in the second film, economic pressure is nudging the organisers towards commercial sponsorship and an increasingly bureaucratic organisation (note the website for the sponsors' logos). This tendency towards making the carnival another branch of mass entertainment is being resisted because it threatens the cultural integrity of the core group. As more and more British African Caribbean people move out of the Notting Hill area, chased out first by the M40 and then by the gentrification of the area, the sense of community is necessarily shifting from a territorial one to a kind of fictive kinship in which the historical and mythical stories created by artists and writers in the 'mas camps' (where the costumes are conceived and made up) play an increasingly important role in keeping the 'authentic' and original idea alive.

## Conclusion

This is the end of our series of short activities based around the iTunes U album 'Carnival and the performance of heritage'. I hope you have enjoyed exploring some of the ways in which heritage and multiculturalism intersect. If you would like to take your interests in heritage further, you might like to explore one or more of the Open University's other heritage albums on iTunes U. You can find out more about heritage studies at the Open University at [www.open.ac.uk/Arts/heritage-studies/index.html](http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/heritage-studies/index.html), and about Understanding Global Heritage, the course from which this material was taken, by watching the Course Taster video or listening to the introductory remarks about the course by the course team chair which are also contained within this album. If you would like to find out more I have provided a list of further reading which you should find of interest. You can find more information about enrolling in the course at [www.open.ac.uk/Arts/ad281](http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/ad281)

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### Further reading

Benton, T. (ed.) (2010) *Understanding heritage and memory*, Manchester University Press/The Open University, Manchester/Milton Keynes.  
Fairclough, G., R. Harrison, J.H. Jameson Jnr. and J. Schofield (eds) *The Heritage Reader*, Routledge, Abingdon and New York.  
Harrison, R. (ed.) (2010) *Understanding the politics of heritage*, Manchester University Press/The Open University, Manchester/Milton Keynes.

West, S. (ed.) (2010) *Understanding heritage in practice*, Manchester University Press/The Open University, Manchester/Milton Keynes.