



From left to right: football player Bukayo Saka, politician Kemi Badenoch, rapper Skepta, all part of the Nigerian diaspora. (SIPA / iStock)

THE ECONOMIST

How British-Nigerians quietly made their way to the top

The secret success of British-Nigerians (to make one's way to the top to accomplish success)

De la politique à YouTube en passant par le sport et la musique, les membres de la diaspora nigériane se sont imposés au sein de l'élite du Royaume-Uni. Dernier exemple en date, le mois dernier, la Nigériane Kemi Badenoch devenait la première femme noire nommée à la tête du Parti conservateur. Un pan de l'immigration anglaise dont on parle moins mais qui a pourtant un rôle important dans la vie du pays.

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. Staff shuttle steaming bowls of jollof rice across the restaurant to clients paying £120 (\$160) for a tasting menu, plus another £95 for a wine pairing. 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.

2. What is happening in food is happening elsewhere. From politics to YouTube 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 and stages tells its own story," points out Jimi Famurewa in

Settlers, a recent memoir-cum-history of black African London. A Nigerian moment has begun.

3. 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 in 1948, points out David Olusoga, a historian (himself a British-Nigerian). They lack the numbers of, say, British-Indians or the geographic spread of Poles. Instead, theirs is a prosaic story of modern migration.

1. **upscale** expensive, upmarket / **staple** basic product / **stodgy** heavy, dense / **savoury** salty / **overripe** fully developed fruit and as a result very (too) soft / **fine dining** sophisticated cuisine, gastronomy / **to shuttle** to bring to/from / **steaming** very hot / **across** all over, everywhere in / **tasting menu** fixed menu of a selection of small portions of dishes / **wine pairing** combining each dish with a particular wine / **to join** to accompany / **joint** restaurant / **owner** proprietor / **have-a-go** brave new /

spot place / mainstay fundamentally stable and successful business / **barely** only just.

2. **to happen** to take place, to develop / **beaming** smiling, radiant / **fixture** element, aspect / **award-show red carpet** ceremony where prizes are given in the film industry / **stage** platform in a theatre / **to tell its own story** to clearly demonstrate the truth of a situation / **to point out** to explain /

memoir-cum-history both autobiographical and historical (-cum- partly one thing and another thing).

3. **overlooked** not noticed or taken into consideration / **folk tale** traditional story / **to match** to equal / **to lack** to not have / **spread** expansion / **Pole** person from Poland / **prosaic** ordinary.



SUPPLÉMENT VIDÉO

L'ancienne secrétaire d'État aux affaires et au commerce Kemi Badenoch, a été élue à la tête du parti conservateur britannique après quatre mois de campagne pour remplacer l'ancien premier ministre Rishi Sunak. D'origine nigériane, c'est la première femme noire à accéder à ce poste.

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4. 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. Michelin stars are just the start of it. British-Nigerians have put their stamp on the country's music scene. Grime, probably the most influential British genre in the past few decades, was shaped by British-Nigerians.

From Lagos to London

5. Or as Skepta, who won the Mercury Prize, a prestigious award, in 2016, put it: "I'm a badboy from Nigeria/Not St Lucia/Joseph Junior Adenuga/Big lips, African hooter." Skepta's brother, JME, is another well-known MC; their sister, Julie, is a prominent DJ. It is not just a family affair. Four of the eight Mercury Prize winners since Skepta have had Nigerian heritage.

6. 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, as in the case of the Adenugas, on a council estate in Tottenham. What is big in London becomes big in Britain. A niche genre like grime can spread from pirate radio to critical acclaim in a few years.

7. 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 men-

tion 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.

8. That application is a typical British-Nigerian story. For a demonstration, head to any train station in south-east London during term time, says Mr Famurewa. While commuters head into central London, British-Nigerian children in oversize blazers travel often absurd distances in the other direction to outer London boroughs and Kent, which still have selective grammar schools. Not everyone can play for England but anyone can hop on the 7.30am train to Gravesend (providing they have the grades).

9. 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, the new leader of the Conservative Party, 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.

GCSE = General Certificate of Secondary Education public examination in the UK taken in different subjects by 15/16 year olds / **homework** schoolwork / **ground** football pitch.

8. **to head to** to go to / **term time** period of the year when children are at school in the UK / **while** here, at the same time as / **commuter** person who travels a certain distance every day to go to work / **oversize** too big / **blazer** school uniform jacket / **outer** peripheral, exterior / **borough** area of London / **grammar school** secondary school with selective entrance / **to hop on** to jump on, here, to take / **Gravesend** town in the county of Kent / **providing** as long as, on the condition that / **grades** school results.

9. **emphasis** focus, priority / **path** route, way / **hardly** not exactly / **uncommon** rare / **influx** mass migration / **pretty** quite / **to begin with** in the first place / **case in point** good example / **rise** ascension to success / **previous** past.

10. 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*, a new book. It is those with plenty of privilege who tend to make it to the top.

11. 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. ●

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10. **to make it into sth** here, to be mentioned in sth / **powerful** successful person with influence and power / **slightly** a little / **likely** probable / **background** social origins / **peer** person of the same age / **according to** as stated/shown by... / **plenty of** a lot of / **to tend to** to have a tendency to / **to make it to the top** to succeed.

11. **cream of the crop** the best in a group / **dietary** related to food, nutritional / **at large** in general / **alone** just / **predominantly** principally, mainly / **social care** social services / **to look like** to resemble.

SUR LE BOUT DE LA LANGUE

Préfixe up

an upscale restaurant (§ 1)
restaurant haut de gamme
Comparez :
upmarket très chic
to upgrade revaloriser, surclasser
to update mettre à jour
to uplift améliorer, éléver
to upstage éclipser, voler la vedette à quelqu'un

4. **to bear** to carry / **steady** regular, constant, here continuous / **throughout** during the course of / **to put one's stamp on sth** to change sth in an important way / **decade** period of ten years / **to shape** to form, to influence, to define.

5. **lips** mouth / **hooter** nose / **MC = Master of Ceremony** (here, rapper) / **prominent** well-known, famous.

6. **to trace to** here, to attribute to / **raised** to bring up / **whether** if (or not) / **wealthy** rich, prosperous / **council** area of social housing / **niche** specialised / **critical acclaim** praise, enthusiastic approval, here, recognition.

7. **boy made good** working-class person who has become successful /