



UNIVERSITY OF  
WESTMINSTER



**AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Partnership (CDP) studentship – ‘*Convinced ambassadors of Empire*’?: exploring the visual record of Black Caribbean men and women serving in the UK during the Second World War**

The University of Westminster and the Imperial War Museums (IWM) are pleased to announce the availability of a fully funded Collaborative Doctoral Studentship from October 2025 under the AHRC's [Collaborative Doctoral Partnerships \(CDP\) scheme](#).

This PhD will be the first to focus on the records in photographs and film held by IWM of Black volunteers from the Caribbean in the UK during the Second World War. It will open up new perspectives and information on this largely unexplored collection and engage in innovative field work which draws in minority communities, captures marginalised voices, and examines long-term memory processes in the context of postwar decolonisation.

This project will be jointly supervised:

At the University of Westminster by Dr Sara Dominici (Senior Lecturer in Photographic History and Visual Culture), Dr Ludivine Broch (Senior Lecturer in History), and Professor Pippa Catterall (Professor of History and Policy).

At IWM by James Taylor (Principal Curator, Public History)

The student will be expected to spend time at both the University of Westminster and IWM, as well as become part of the wider cohort of CDP funded students across the UK. The research will be primarily focused at IWM London.

The studentship can be studied either full or part-time.

We encourage the widest range of potential students to study for this CDP studentship and are committed to welcoming students from different backgrounds to apply. We particularly welcome applications from underrepresented backgrounds at this level and area of study.

Students should have, or expect to receive, a Master's level qualification in a relevant subject by the time of taking up the appointment, or be able to demonstrate equivalent experience in a professional setting.

The studentship is open to both Home and International applicants.

### **Project Overview**

This Collaborative Doctoral Partnership PhD will be the first to focus on the records in photographs and film held by Imperial War Museums (IWM) of Black volunteers from the Caribbean in the UK during the Second World War. It will open up new perspectives and information on this largely unexplored collection by looking at how and why these images and footage were commissioned, the

subjects chosen, the intended audiences and messages. It will also investigate how they have been used more recently in developing understanding and making memory.

During the Second World War, 10,000 Black men and women from the Caribbean served in the UK - in the armed forces, industry, forestry or the Merchant Navy. The majority of these volunteers responded to British recruitment drives in the Caribbean, while some, particularly early in the war, made their own way to Britain to join the fight. Although the Colour Bar had been officially lifted in 1939, many of them would experience discrimination during the recruitment process or in the course of their service.

The experiences of these people varied across the different areas where they contributed to the war effort. Many Caribbean volunteers served in the Royal Air Force, whereas the Army proved far less receptive to Black men and women serving in its ranks. Those involved in industry and agriculture experienced racial discrimination from employers, trade unions and government officials. Although the Colonial Office was keen to encourage recruitment of Caribbean men and women, it was mostly an exercise in public relations and an attempt to quell any dissent to ensure that those who served in Britain would return home 'convinced Ambassadors of Empire'.

The material at the centre of this project held by IWM was commissioned largely (though not exclusively) by government departments, including the Colonial Office, the Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Supply, or by branches of the armed forces. It formed part of a wider propaganda campaign that showed Britain's empire pulling together in a joint struggle, overlooking differences of race and ethnicity. Our understanding of this material is, however, very limited. There is clearly much to uncover and more nuanced stories to tell. This CDP PhD will ensure that we can address this gap in the historical record by working along three intertwined lines of enquiry:

1. History of Black Caribbean service/armed forces personnel and war workers in the UK and visual and material culture to unearth the lived experiences of the people in the visual records. Specifically, the student will: historicise the visual record to explore how and why these images were created, produced, circulated and preserved from the 1940s; and juxtapose these images with oral histories and testimonies to reveal the complicated dynamics between Britain and its empire.
2. Memory studies and history of emotions to explore how these records have been used since the war, thereby developing an understanding of postwar narratives and memory construction in Britain. Specifically, the student will: investigate attitudes to the visual records by consulting period newspapers to understand how this propaganda campaign was relayed by the British press; research Caribbean life in the UK in this period to give context to the experiences of the subjects represented in the official record; and map the images' lives as museum objects and the narratives they have been part of.
3. Participatory research methods working with diaspora groups from the Caribbean and local community organisations to retrospectively centre previously marginalised voices, in doing so bringing IWM collection into wider discussions of contemporary identity and memory. The details of these collaborations will be decided in consultation with the student but we anticipate the use of oral history interviews and of photography and collaborative storytelling workshops.

While the student who undertakes the work will be encouraged to choose their own focus, they will be expected to appraise IWM collections in relation to these three complementary perspectives.

The research questions will be developed in consultation with the appointed student but may include the following:

- How and why were the photographs and film commissioned and circulated?
- What subjects did the photographers and film-makers choose and how were those subjects represented?
- Who were the intended and actual audiences?
- Where do the tensions lie between the official narrative and the actual experience of Black men and women from the Caribbean serving in the UK?
- To what extent, and in what ways, have histories been obscured or excluded through the colonial context in which they were produced?
- How has this visual record shaped meaning making for families and communities today?
- How have these images and film been used more widely, in museums, and in education (including at IWM) since the 1940s?

This CDP PhD will also bring IWM collections into critical dialogue with other national and international collections (official and unofficial), perspectives and knowledge bases external to IWM, as well as other oral or visual sources. In addition to research at IWM, the student might consult:

- The UK National Archives
- Black Cultural Archives
- University of the West Indies
- Royal Air Force Museum
- National Army Museum
- Royal Museums Greenwich

The PhD student might also look at the official visual record of volunteers serving in the Caribbean itself, as well as in other parts of the world.

### **Training and arrangements**

The successful applicant will have access to the University of Westminster's comprehensive Doctoral Researcher Development Programme (DRDP)

(<https://blog.westminster.ac.uk/doctralsearcherdevelopmentprogramme/>) which consists of tailor-made workshops, specialist skills sessions and personal development planning activities, as well as to specific training and events through the School of Humanities.

The student will have desk space at the Imperial War Museum London for the duration of their PhD and will be embedded into the working environment of the museum, gaining invaluable professional insights. They will have access to wide range of training activities, related to for example acquisition, creation and commissioning, conservation management and preservation.

The project will include excellent opportunities for public engagement. These will be decided in consultation with the appointed student to support their future career plans but could include: blogs, temporary displays at IWM (onsite and/or online), public talks, participation in 'hands on'

collections events at IWM, and contributions to the preparation of learning material and research guides related to the IWM collections studied.

This project's strong focus on professional practice and their involvement at IWM will significantly enhance the student's future employability by providing skills and training that are integral to early museum careers as well as to the heritage, academia and the arts sectors more generally.

The successful applicant will receive training in conducting oral history interviews and working with community groups.

### **Details of Award**

CDP doctoral training grants fund full-time studentships for 48 months (4 years) or part-time equivalent up to a maximum of 8 years.

The award pays tuition fees up to the value of the full-time home fee. Research Councils UK Indicative Fee Level for 2025/2026 is £5,006. Students with an 'overseas' fee status are welcome to apply but will need to cover the difference between the UK and overseas fee rate. This for 2025/26 is £11,994. They will also be required to reside in the UK until completion of the PhD.

The award pays an annual stipend for all students, both home and international students. This stipend is tax free, and is the equivalent of an annual salary, enabling the student to pay living costs. The UKRI National Minimum Doctoral Stipend for 2025/2026 is £20,780 plus London Weighting of £2,000 per year. There is also a CDP maintenance payment of £600 per year.

Further details can be found on the [UKRI website: https://www.ukri.org/publications/terms-and-conditions-for-training-funding/](https://www.ukri.org/publications/terms-and-conditions-for-training-funding/)

The successful candidate is eligible to receive an additional travel and related expenses grant during the course of the project courtesy of IWM worth up to £1,000 per year for 4 years. There are internal funds at the University of Westminster available specifically to the PhD community, including the GER Scholarship Fund and the Geoffrey Petts Memorial Fund. (<https://blog.westminster.ac.uk/doctoralresearcherdevelopmentprogramme/ger-scholarship-fund-and-prof-geoffreypetts-memorial-fund/>)

The successful candidate will be encouraged to participate in professional development events and activities organised for all Collaborative Doctoral Partnership students who are registered with different universities and studying with cultural and heritage organisations across the UK. These activities are organised by a coordination team based at the V&A and are designed to provide CDP researchers with the knowledge, networks and skills to thrive in their future careers.

### **Eligibility**

- This studentship is open to both Home and International applicants.
- International candidates must have an IELTS 6.5 with a minimum 6.0 in each component
- To be classed as a home student, candidates must meet the following criteria:
  - Be a UK National (meeting residency requirements), or

- Have settled status, or
  - Have pre-settled status (meeting residency requirements), or
  - Have indefinite leave to remain or enter
- Further guidance can be found here based on revisions to Training Grant Terms and Conditions for projects starting in October 2025 - [Policy statement: review of the training grant conditions – UKRI](https://www.ukri.org/publications/terms-and-conditions-for-training-funding/): <https://www.ukri.org/publications/terms-and-conditions-for-training-funding/>
  - International students are eligible to receive the full award for maintenance as are home students. They will need to pay themselves the difference between what the AHRC provide to the university for tuition and the charge made by the university for tuition fees for international students studying for a doctoral degree in Visual Culture. This for 2025/26 is £11,994.
  - We want to encourage the widest range of potential students to study for a CDP studentship and are committed to welcoming students from different backgrounds to apply. We particularly welcome applications from people of Global Majority background as they are currently underrepresented backgrounds at this level in this area.
  - Applicants should ideally have, or expect to receive, a Masters-level qualification in a relevant subject by the time of taking up the appointment, or be able to demonstrate equivalent experience in a professional setting.
  - Applicants must be able to demonstrate their interests and aptitude for exploiting the unique possibilities of undertaking a collaborative doctorate that will allow them to develop career-enhancing skills in heritage and public engagement.
  - As a collaborative award, students will be expected to spend time at both the University of Westminster and the IWM.

NB. All applicants must meet UKRI terms and conditions for funding. See: <https://www.ukri.org/funding/information-for-award-holders/grant-terms-and-conditions/>

## **How to apply**

Please include in your application:

- Personal Statement (maximum 1,500 words) explaining why you are interested in researching this topic, including what you would bring to the project and how you think you would develop it to reflect your own interests and expertise.
- A sample of writing. This could be a piece of academic writing (e.g. MA dissertation) or a text written in the course of any current or previous professional work.
- Your CV
- Two references
- Transcript of university-level grades and qualification certificates

Please note, on completing the application form:

Please choose the following programme area when making your application 'MPhil/PhD Visual Culture'. You must apply for this programme to be eligible for the AHRC CDP studentship. If you apply for a programme in other areas your application will not be eligible.

Under 'Additional Course Questions' 'If you are applying for a Westminster Studentship' please write 'AHRC IWM CDP'

Applications will be shared with IWM for shortlisting, interviewing and selection purposes.

We ask all applicants to complete a voluntary EDI monitoring form [here](https://forms.office.com/pages/responsepage.aspx?id=pqhybT5ixEK4FwRbTfKt1A_ZUEAjvpBLsdyFHb6UzBJUMTFOVEc5UDEyTVA2Q0JNSE40MDhISUFMVy4u&web=1&wdLOR=cF04B8C64-7B7B-DE43-8866-6FCD9F30D67C&route=shorturl): [https://forms.office.com/pages/responsepage.aspx?id=pqhybT5ixEK4FwRbTfKt1A\\_ZUEAjvpBLsdyFHb6UzBJUMTFOVEc5UDEyTVA2Q0JNSE40MDhISUFMVy4u&web=1&wdLOR=cF04B8C64-7B7B-DE43-8866-6FCD9F30D67C&route=shorturl](https://forms.office.com/pages/responsepage.aspx?id=pqhybT5ixEK4FwRbTfKt1A_ZUEAjvpBLsdyFHb6UzBJUMTFOVEc5UDEyTVA2Q0JNSE40MDhISUFMVy4u&web=1&wdLOR=cF04B8C64-7B7B-DE43-8866-6FCD9F30D67C&route=shorturl) All responses are anonymous.

- For informal enquiries about the project, please contact the lead co-supervisor Dr Sara Dominici ([s.dominici1@westminster.ac.uk](mailto:s.dominici1@westminster.ac.uk))

For queries about the Westminster application process, please contact Dr Sylvia Shaw ([s.shaw@westminster.ac.uk](mailto:s.shaw@westminster.ac.uk))

- For queries about the interview process, please contact Dr Maria Castrillo ([research@iwm.org.uk](mailto:research@iwm.org.uk))

The University of Westminster and IWM will jointly assess the applications and hold interviews in order to reach a decision.

To apply:

PhD via MPhil Full-time Degree:

[https://srs21live.wmin.ac.uk/urd/sits.urd/run/siw\\_ipp\\_lgn.login?process=siw\\_ipp\\_app&code1=D09FRGEN&code2=0005](https://srs21live.wmin.ac.uk/urd/sits.urd/run/siw_ipp_lgn.login?process=siw_ipp_app&code1=D09FRGEN&code2=0005)

PhD via MPhil Part-time Degree:

[https://srs21live.wmin.ac.uk/urd/sits.urd/run/siw\\_ipp\\_lgn.login?process=siw\\_ipp\\_app&code1=D09PRGEN&code2=0005](https://srs21live.wmin.ac.uk/urd/sits.urd/run/siw_ipp_lgn.login?process=siw_ipp_app&code1=D09PRGEN&code2=0005)

**Application deadline:** Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2025

**Interviews (online):** Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> June 2025

**Enrolment and induction at Westminster:** w/c Monday 13<sup>th</sup> September 2025

**Start date:** 1<sup>st</sup> October 2025