



"[We demand] full self-government at the earliest opportunity for people living under British colonial rule, and an end to discrimination on racial grounds in all spheres of public life in the UK."

The Charter of Coloured Peoples, 1944

DR HAROLD MOODY

Britain's Martin Luther King

Born in 1882 in Kingston, Jamaica, the son of a pharmacist was determined to become a doctor. In 1904 he moved to the UK to study medicine at King's College London. Despite finishing top of his class, and obtaining numerous academic honours, he was repeatedly refused an appointment. One hospital matron stated they wouldn't allow 'a coloured doctor' to work there. Moody then established his own medical practice in Peckham, South-East London in 1913.

His multiple ecumenical ties provided a network as well as a platform to push for equal rights of people of colour. His home in Peckham became a place for West Indian students and other travellers seeking assistance.

In 1931 he founded the 'League of Coloured Peoples' with the goal of promoting racial equality around the world. Prominent members include Jamaican writer and activist Una Marson (the first Black woman employed at the BBC), anti-colonial activist and later Prime Minister of Kenya Jomo Kenyatta, and Sam Morris, Grenada-born educationalist, anti-colonialist and later deputy chair for the Commission for Racial Equality.

Dr Moody engaged in racial matters in the UK and abroad in South Africa, the US, and the Caribbean. He fought for the employment rights of black merchant seamen, fair pay for the Trinidadian oil workers, and the lifting of the colour bar in the British Armed Forces. He was appointed to a government advisory committee on the welfare of non-Europeans in 1943.

Dr Moody died at his home 164 Queen's Road, Peckham, in 1947 after ill-health had cut short a speaking and fundraising tour to the West Indies and America.

FURTHER READING

- [Our Heritage TV](#)
- [Mother Country: Britain's Black Community on the Home Front, 1939-45](#) by S. (2010)
- ['To do something for the race'](#) Harold Moody and the League of Coloured Peoples by D. Killingray (2018)
- [The Story of Dr. Harold Moody, 1998](#)
- [Under Fire: Black Britain in Wartime 1939-45](#) by S. Bourne (2020)

WHY WERE THEY IMPORTANT?

A philanthropist and Civil Rights Campaigner

Dr Moody's experiences are exemplary for the rampant racism pervading all levels of social, political and economic life in Edwardian Britain, showcasing how racial bias overshadows education, achievement, and status.

Nevertheless, as part of an intellectual elite, Dr Moody was in a position to build an international network of influence. Throughout the 1930s, the 'League of Coloured Peoples' and their newsletter 'The Keys' challenged prejudice and discrimination. Dr Moody has been at the forefront of many fights, personally confronting employers, and powerfully arguing for black workers' rights.

Despite the racial injustice he had experienced over the years, Dr Moody stood by his values and beliefs, and deliberately set out to improve the lives of people of colour in Britain. Having married a white nurse himself, Moody's vision appears to have been one of a fully equal society, not colour blind, but colour neutral; a vision of an equal, but mixed, society, where everyone no matter their colour, sex, or gender can enjoy the same rights and opportunities.

An active member of the Christian community, he had a reputation as a compassionate humanitarian and philanthropist, treating countless youths and travellers free of charge. This was a big deal at the time pre-dating the National Health service which was only introduced after the second World War in 1948.

Both his political activism and morally motivated efforts as a physician massively contributed to the development and wellbeing of his local community and beyond.