The years 1919 to 1953 were marked by dramatic change and instability in both the racial makeup of Britain and gender and sexual mores in British culture. Men of color have a long history in Great Britain. In port towns, white residents coexisted with sailors of color for centuries, their nonwhite populations augmented by colonial sailors after the First World War. Although Britain’s prewar black population is difficult to ascertain, historical consensus is that it hovered between seven and ten thousand, most of whom lived and worked in large port cities. Yet by 1945, there were 132,000 African American GIs alone stationed in Britain.\(^1\) And after the war, the British government appealed to workers from its colonies to fulfill their labor needs in a moment of economic crisis. This ushered in the migratory movement known as the “Windrush generation,” inaugurating a new era of a “multiracial Britain.”\(^2\) Although this was the largest movement of colonial settlers into Britain in its history, Britain’s black population did not reach its 1945 level until the late 1950s. The men in question changed throughout these decades, from sailors and dockworkers in the interwar period to American soldiers during the Second World War to a more permanent group of West Indians (largely service sector workers) in the postwar period, but the nature of the responses to “miscegenation” have themes that echo across all three periods.

It is no coincidence that these three demographic upheavals – the post-World War I period, the Second World War, and the Windrush generation – also brought with them increased popular and policymaker preoccupation with interracial relationships. Race and sex were inextricably linked in twentieth-century Britain and my research shows that mentions of race in newspapers, government correspondence, and Mass Observation surveys invariably led to discussions of sex, while concerns over sexual morality among women and girls in those same sources often prompted discussions of interracial sex. Examining this heightened concern with interracial sex helps uncover the social values and anxieties that interested parties projected onto these relationships.