

CJ Rivers

The Congregation

Oral History Transcript

CJ Rivers is a parent and TfL Train Operator who lives and works in London, and grew up in Trinidad and Tobago.

My name is CJ Rivers, my pronouns are they/ them. I live in Brixton. I've lived in Brixton since I was maybe 15 or 16 and I also work at Brixton underground station. I have done that for about nine years now.

When we moved to the UK from Trinidad, first we lived in Ilford. Suddenly my mum was like okay, we found a house somewhere else and moved us to like kind of West Norwood, but basically, she wanted to be anywhere near to Brixton.

I almost felt annoyed because I remember thinking like, why does that matter? Like why do we need to be around people who look like us? And then food. Food means a lot to me. And I think you really underestimate how special it is to be somewhere completely different to everything that you know, with like sensations that you've never felt before. Like when we stepped off the plane and moved here the cold went straight to our bones and I did not know that was a thing that was physically possible

I think you have sensations, things that you see, things that you feel. But also food, it was just so different, like the availability of food. And to suddenly have like mummy be like I'm making Callaloo tonight. Ah what! Like after like however long, staying close to like accessing my food has been really, really important to me.

But I was, I will say, really scared of Brixton for a while. When I was a teenager and in my early 20s. Because being queer, like back home, I was being told like, we don't do this. That's not us. And then, so when I moved here, at first I thought, oh well, people will accept me here. But then, when we moved to Brixton, I suddenly was like, oh no, like that's not going to be a thing anymore. And I definitely had a lot of experiences as a teenager of like people being threatening to me or just kind of like yelling at me in Brixton and it made me really scared of Brixton and I would avoid it for a long time.

Before people in Brixton showed me that that was not true. I think art in Brixton showed me that that was not true. Like just being able to see, like 'wall art' or even like going to the black culture archives for the first time and seeing like even just like hints of queerness.

And I'm really glad that I stayed and settled because I think I probably would have continued to avoid it, and it would have had a huge impact on my identity, like as a person, but like as an immigrant and as a Caribbean person.

ART ON THE UNDERGROUND

And definitely, especially now that I'm raising a kid, I feel like I'm choosing to stay in Brixton which is huge for me and it's because I feel like they have even way less of a physical connection to Brixton than I do.

Like I want them to like feel Caribbean, like to like have a taste on their tongue or like a feeling in their body. And like, music, you know and their like steps when they think about like being Caribbean.

Yeah, I think the only thing we're missing is steelpan music. We need to get a steelpan just like a steel yard somewhere in Brixton where they practice every night, so I can just hear it floating behind me on the way home because that that would be the quintessential. That will make me like taste the sea, I think. So, if somebody could do that, that would be... that's just the last thing that's missing.

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