

'Jafaican' may be cool, but it sounds ridiculous

By [Ed West](#)



Tim Westwood: fluent in Jafaican (Photo: Philip Hollis)

I was surprised a few years ago to hear an acquaintance more Left-wing than me (admittedly that's not saying much) saying he was moving out of London because he'd just had kids and "didn't want them growing up talking like Ali G".

And Paul Weller said the same thing in an interview with the *Telegraph* a few years later, about his choice of school for his kids, although perhaps having mixed-race children made him feel bolder about facing any accusation of racism.

And I don't think an aversion to Jafaican (fake Jamaican), which according to the *Sunday Times* (£, obviously) will have completely replaced Cockney by 2030, is racial. The West Indian accent from which it came is fairly pleasant, nice enough for various drink makers to use it to flog us their products. However, its by-product is rather unpleasant, sinister, idiotic and absurd.

Imagine that an Englishman were to start speaking in an inexplicable French or German accent – people would probably take the trouble to wind down their car windows to shout abuse at him. Yet enough people talk with an affected West Indian accent for it to become an accent, Jafaican, partly thanks to Radio One's Tim Westwood, and despite the Sacha Baron-Cohen character, Ali G, mocking the phenomenon.

It's unusual for a small minority to actually change a city's accent, in this case one that is supposed to date back to the time of Chaucer (although how similar a *coke* of that time would have sounded to modern-day cockneys is hard to know). The only previous British accent to have been significantly changed by immigration is Scouse, which took on a

distinctive Irish sound in the late 19th-century, but the Irish made up well over of a third of the city. West Indians are barely 10 per cent of the London population.

Multiculturalism probably played a part. Jafaican's rise may have been accelerated by the 1975 Bullock Report into education, "A Language for Life", which heralded the start of multiculturalism in the classroom. It recommended that "No child should be expected to cast off the language and culture of the home as he crosses the school threshold, and the curriculum should reflect those aspects of his life", and recommended that teachers were expected to have an understanding of Creole dialect "and a positive and sympathetic attitude towards it".

Never mind that speaking Creole would not have been much of an advantage for a young black kid trying to get on in London; there seems to have been a general approach in teaching that accents were authentic and should not be ironed out.

And the replacement of Cockney with Jafaican may reflect something more profound. Accents and fashions display underlying insecurities and cultural aspirations; the rise of Received Pronunciation reflected a desire by the lower-middle class and provincials to embrace the values, lifestyles and habits of the British upper-middle class. In London the adoption of Jafaican, even among the privately-educated, reflects both a lack of confidence in British cultural values and an aspiration towards some form of ghetto authenticity.

Anyway, what are house prices in North Yorkshire like at the moment?