

# BBC lists UK's era-defining 'new Elizabethans'

Historians have compiled a list of the 60 people who have shaped Britain during the reign of Elizabeth II. But how do these 'new Elizabethans' compare to the subjects of Elizabeth I?



CITIZENSHIP  
ENGLISH & MEDIA  
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## HOW THEY SHAPE UP: ELIZABETHANS, OLD AND NEW

<b>EXPLORERS</b>		<b>EXPLORERS</b>	
WAL	LEIGH	DAVID	GH
<b>WRITERS</b>		<b>WRITERS</b>	
WILLI	SPEARE	GRAH	ENE
<b>POLITICIANS</b>		<b>POLITICIANS</b>	
MARY Q	SCOTS	MARGA	TCHER
<b>MUSICIANS</b>		<b>MUSICIANS</b>	
WIL	RD	JOH	KN
<b>ENTERTAINERS</b>		<b>ENTERTAINERS</b>	
WILLI	MPE	SIMO	ELL

Which individuals capture the spirit of Elizabeth II's Britain? That is the question that BBC Radio 4 is asking to celebrate the Queen's eagerly-anticipated Diamond Jubilee.

Their answers range from the obvious (Margaret Thatcher, Princess Diana, John Lennon), to the unexpected (DJ and graffiti artist Goldie is there, along with Vladimir Raitz, inventor of the package holiday). It takes in artists, actors, scientists and businessmen; sinners as well as saints. Anti-immigrant politician Enoch Powell claims a spot, as does the embattled media mogul Rupert Murdoch.

These, say historians, are the 'new Elizabethans' – successors of the great men and women who lived during the reign of the Tudor queen Elizabeth I. But how do this batch compare to the originals?

When Elizabeth I ascended to the throne in 1558, England was a relatively obscure nation; but over the next 45 years, England burst onto the interna-

tional stage with a swashbuckling cast of poets and politicians.

It was in this period of bawdiness, violence and intrigue that English literature came of age. Among the squalid streets of London walked two of England's greatest ever playwrights: William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe. Their immortal dramas were written from the belly of a sordid, semi-criminal underworld.

With the recent European discovery of the Americas, it was also a great age of exploration. Francis Drake and Walter Raleigh were ruthless politicians and accomplished seamen; but they were also pioneers in the New World. With their voyages, battles and trade, they laid the foundations for an empire that would become the largest the world has ever known.

Under Elizabeth II, by contrast, the British Empire dwindled almost to nothing. But with imperial decline has come a

rising standard of living and education.

UK universities sit at the hub of scientific progress. British cities have spawned wave after wave of musical innovation, from punk to the Beatles. And in Tony Blair and Margaret Thatcher, Queen Elizabeth II has had two of the most potent and divisive Prime Ministers in British history.

### Which Bess is Best?

'Elizabeth I is number one!' cry nostalgics. How dull our modern celebrities seem, they say, compared to the dashing adventurers of yore. And as for culture, who would dare cross quills with the great William Shakespeare?

But modernists are unconvinced. Peace and affluence might be bad news for bodice-ripping drama, they say; but Elizabeth II has had more than her share of great subjects. Despite declining power, Britain is still at the centre of the scientific, business and cultural worlds. History, they say, will remember the new Elizabethans more than the old.

## Q & A

**Q** What's the point of making a list of 60 random celebrities?

**A** For a start, it's not *just* a list: it will also form the basis for a radio series, in which each of the 60 will be profiled. Secondly, they're not just random celebrities. Each was chosen either for the impact they had

on Britain, or because they embody something about our culture and society. So this isn't just about individuals – it's about the spirit of the age.

**Q** And who gets to decide who makes the cut?

**A** Radio 4 listeners made nominations, but the final decisions were taken by experts. Not everybody agrees, of course, but sparking a debate is half the point. The reason

people are interested in such projects is because they are, to borrow a phrase, a 'first draft of history.'

### SOME PEOPLE SAY...

'The great men and women of the past have no equals today.'

WHAT DO YOU THINK?



RAINFORD  
HIGH

## READING HOMEWORK

1. Would you rather live in the times of Elizabeth I or Elizabeth II? Explain.

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2. Which names would you add to the list of 'new Elizabethans'? It could be anybody who has been influential such as singers, actors or sports stars.

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