



# STARLIGHT

Starlight Black Child  
Mixed Heritage Group

December 2007

A newsletter for families, friends and professionals with a keen interest in issues related to black young people of mixed heritage.

## Editorial by Christine Chambers

Welcome to this, the final edition for 2007.

I have a new grandson due in February 2008 and this exciting event has given me cause to think again about some of the issues facing mixed-race families. For a start, is it right to call mine a 'mixed-race' family? Is this now a defunct term? If so, then what is the appropriate alternative? Some like to use the term 'dual heritage' and this defines accurately many people. However, there are many more people who would be awarded this label who could reasonably argue that it does not address the true extent of their ancestry. Reading the account given in this edition's personally speaking column will illustrate the complexity and difficulties that can go with defining our identity.

My oldest son recently married a beautiful young woman of Serbian-Bosnian Orthodox Christian heritage. My son has Jamaican (including African, indigenous 'Indian' and unknown others) ancestry on his father's side and Irish (possibly including French) and English (possibly including Mediterranean) genes on my side. 'Dual Heritage' implies two sets of 'racial' characteristics or cultural influences. It certainly could not adequately or accurately address any children my son and his new wife would have. 'Mixed-race' would certainly seem more appropriate but may be a little outdated.

I remember hearing one baby referred to by her mum as 'our menu baby' because she was 'a bit

of everything off the menu'. It still makes me uncomfortable but it was more than a decade ago and that mum has moved on immeasurably in terms of political awareness about the issues her children face. One term that still has the power to stop me in my tracks is 'half caste'. Sadly, I still hear that term used and was recently in the difficult position of having to politely inform somebody lecturing at college that most people find it offensive. I literally felt it like a slap in the face when it came from her mouth. The woman in question was very gracious when I pointed out my objections and told me that she meant no offence and usually employs the term 'half and half'. Ouch!

As my new grandson has only one white grandparent, he would be considered as 'black' rather than as of 'mixed-race', but if he shares his older brother's fair complexion things can be less than straight forward. I have always encouraged my children to develop a strong 'black' identity but this has often caused problems for them in that other members of the black community have refused to acknowledge them as such. One of my grown-up children was told that he is a 'poisonous European' and they have been called 'yellow' and 'half-breed' too. The most accurate term is probably 'Mixed Heritage', of course, but a number of parents have told me that they feel this applies to all people with a mixed identity (which of course it does), whilst the issues that arise for them are not so much about heritage as skin colour or 'race'. The issues lie in the fact that people assume so

often that our children (and grandchildren) are not biologically related to us. This can be particularly relevant where a child has a very fair or dark complexion.

For me and my family, the shade of our new baby's complexion or how other people perceive him in terms of his identity are not important. If it had been, I am sure that the questions raised, and ongoing, about his health would have soon put things into perspective. We await his arrival with excitement. We wonder, of course, whether his hair will be loose or tight curls, or even straight like his uncle's, not because those are defining issues but because all families wonder about these things. The excitement is like that we experience at the receipt of any precious gift - touched mostly by immense gratitude.



He championed the beauty of an African Culture and History that had been lost, alongside the pride of a black nation but do you know who he is? Find out on page four.

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## Mary Seacole (1805 -1881) honoured



The work of Mary Seacole has been honoured in a ceremony to award a Blue Plaque to her former home in Soho. The plaque was originally placed on her former home at 157 George Street in 1985, but was removed before that home was demolished in the 90s. It was placed at 14 Soho Square in Soho by Professor Elizabeth Onionwu in a cere-

mony attended by the Minister of Culture, Margaret Hodge MP. Professor Onoionwu is the Vice chair of the Mary Seacole Memorial Statue Appeal.

Mary Seacole arrived in England in 1854, eager to put to good use her nursing skills in the Crimean War. On the grounds of her skin colour, her offer was refused. Instead, she made her way independently out to the scene of the war and worked voluntarily with the sick and injured, providing food and medicine to those who needed them. (The Voice Issue 1300)

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Please ensure any contributions/ adverts arrive by 29 February 2008

Next issue: March 2008

## Black History Month & African Caribbean Student Learning In Art - a review of Paul Dash's article by Sue Funge

In November 2007, Paul Dash, the PGCE Course Leader in Art & Design at Goldsmith College, London, who has recently completed his PhD, had an article published in the International Journal of Art and Design Education. A



summary of his article is reproduced here and we would like to take this opportunity of congratulating him on the successful completion of his studies. Paul, who was schooled in Oxford, participated in the 'I Can Do It!' conference held in Oxford in April 2005 and he refers to his involvement in this article.

The article begins with Paul referring to his visit to Bath with his wife in August 1999, for the Bank Holiday weekend break. Whilst staying in Bath they visited Bath Abbey where Paul was enthralled by the presence of the six hundred and forty tablets fixed in its walls and floor and in particular, the inscriptions chiselled into them that pay homage to the managers of empire. They celebrate the memory of functionaries of empire - diplomats, governors, explorers and soldiers who saw service in Ireland, India, Montserrat, Jamaica, Antigua, Barbados, St Croix and elsewhere. He had previously searched without great success in London, including attending the British Museum, for evidence of this intermingled past, and was thrilled to finally discover this in Bath. However, whilst he felt an excitement of discovery, a feeling of a past exposed, a masked identity revealed, the sense that it was solely in the cultural ownership of the white British was difficult for Paul to overcome, as he felt 'his cultural conditioning as a marginalised subject too deeply set to ignore'.

The visit to Bath destroyed forever the notion of separateness between Paul and the white superordinate - a notion which he was schooled to

adopt by a hand-me-down tradition in the Caribbean. He comments that history as we know it in the West is a linear reductive discourse in which the European subject is placed at the centre and although some minority ethnic groups in the UK can counterbalance this to some degree by their own teaching and records of the past, for the African Caribbean student the challenge is one of gaining a foothold on an historical framework in which they can attain a sense of value and self-worth. Paul argues that the challenge for teachers of art, therefore, is in creating pedagogies that can present a balanced view of our very different pasts and in so doing provide a pointer to what could be achieved in the future. He believes pedagogic approaches should be developed that throw light on the many entan-

**Paul comments that what tends to happen in Black History Month is that iconic diasporic figures such as Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela are lionised and celebrated. It is rarely associated with a cup of tea or the wealth generation that gave rise to the founding of the Tate Gallery.**

gements that define our shared communities in the West, which also means taking a wider view of diasporic culture. He refers to Njami who states 'the history of Europe in the past few centuries is an African history, whether one likes it or not. Just as African history is resolutely European'. Without our engagement in this process of recovery, Paul argues, we would only replicate the dubious ideologies and schisms of the past that nurture, in Said's words, 'an uncritical alignment between intellectuals and institutions of power which reproduces the pattern of an earlier imperialist history'. This outsider/insider ontology positions African Caribbean learners outside frameworks of ownership. Paul argues that the concept of 'Black History' is reductive and serves only to pigeonhole diasporic contributions to a shared way of life by presenting them as delimited by parochial 'black'

concerns that lay outside the flow of mainstream politics, histories and accumulated knowledges. He believes Black History Month essentializes and isolates the black presence and presents it as stand-alone and peripheral - in other words, irrelevant. Paul comments that what tends to happen in Black History Month is that iconic diasporic figures such as Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela are lionised and celebrated. It is rarely associated with a cup of tea or the wealth generation that gave rise to the founding of the Tate Gallery. For example, Stuart Hall writes:

*'I am the sugar at the bottom of English cup of tea. I am the sweet tooth, the sugar plantation that rotted generations of English children's teeth. There are thousands of others beside me that are, you know, the cup of tea itself. Because they don't grow it in Lancashire, you know. Not a single tea plantation exists within the United Kingdom. This is the symbolization of English anxiety - I mean, what does anybody in the world know about an English person except that they don't get through the day without a cup of tea. Where does it come from? Ceylon - Sri Lanka, India. That is the outside history that is inside the history of the English. There is no English history without that other history. The notion that identity has to do with people who look the same, feel the same, call themselves the same, is nonsense. As a process, as a narrative, as a discourse, it is always told from the position of the Other.'*

Paul argues that diasporic history is integral to Western 'white' history and vice versa: they shape and define each other and the tablets in the walls and floor of Bath Abbey are concrete evidence of that. He believes that in this regard, and in others, the city of Bath should be as important to the self-perception of the diasporic subject as Mandela or King. But he wonders how many perceive black history in that way, even if this construct of Black history reduces and dilutes the importance of the black presence in the mainstream. He comments it is little wonder that in the eyes of many black young people there is sense of betrayal and a feeling that their past is not taken seriously.

**Continued on page four**

## Personally Speaking

Our interviewee this edition is a 21 year old student.

"My dad is an African-Portugese-Goan and my mum is Indian. If I had to tick a box it would be 'Asian Other' but I see myself as Goan. I never met another Goan in school- there were Asians- Gujaratis- but no one quite like me. Indians don't accept us -they call us 'fishermen' or 'musicians'. I would say that my parents marriage broke up in the end because of cultural differences.

My Indian friends don't accept me. They'd say I'm not Indian. White people just say 'you're Indian', Indians try to guess where you're from. Mixed-race people just think you're like them, black people think you're 'coolie' and Africans, well, they just think you're not African. Indians on TV don't represent all the Indians -

they don't represent the Catholics, the Christians or even the Jews -they all exist in India. Society has to put you in a box. When British Transport Police filled out a form because I didn't pay for my ticket the woman, who was black herself, was ready to tick the box 'mixed' without even asking.

My mum has suppressed my Goan identity because she's bitter towards my dad. Me and my sister can't talk about Goa 'cos my mum won't have it. When I played Goan music she'd ask 'what's this shit?' My friends call me 'white' and say I'm a 'bounty bar'. Sometimes they don't speak English and I feel like they're just trying to remind me I'm different, you know, that I'm not the same as them. I am whatever you want to call me now -I get sick of it all, all this identity crap - I'm just me.



## Update from Starlight BCMHG

Hoping everyone enjoys a peaceful and happy Christmas and a VERY HAPPY NEW YEAR!

We no longer meet on a Wednesday and have elected to meet once a fortnight on a Saturday instead. We hope that this will mean more families can become involved in our activities and we can plan more outings and fun days for the school holidays.

The book and toy library is now being managed by Cud-desdon Corner Family Centre as they are able to open it three times a week and it is on permanent display in a room upstairs. It was difficult managing the library at the Adventure Playground as we always had to pack everything away and lock it in the cupboard between opening days. We are very grateful to the Family Centre for offer-

ing the group this facility and we hope this will also mean that more members of the community will access these lovely toys and books.

In 2008 we intend to focus on accessing some funding for the group as this will make a significant difference to what we can offer. We would like to arrange specific events, workshops and talks relevant to our group aim and objectives as well as offering a regular meeting place and support.

We always welcome new members and would be pleased to hear from anyone who would like to come along to our events or would like more information about the group, please contact Sue or Glen on Oxford 776691.



Adorable Rogan getting into the festive spirit.

## New Initiative to support Black Teachers

The London and the Black Child conference held on 8<sup>th</sup> of December saw the launch of a scheme, backed by Diane Abbott and Ken Livingstone, which aims to create a network of support for black teachers. It is hoped that this, in turn, will elevate the experiences and achievements of black boys in schools.

Dianne Abbott claims that the lack of black teachers and the stereotyping of black pupils by white teachers are two of the reasons which prevent black boys from fulfilling their potential. Despite the fact that almost a half of pupils in some London schools are black, black teachers make up just 12% of teaching staff in London state schools. White teachers fail to understand cultural differences and often misinterpret black boys' boisterous or playful behaviour as being aggressive.

However, not everybody agrees that the only, or even the best, way forward is to recruit more black teachers. Many parents feel that black students need good teachers, regardless of the teacher's race, and that black pupils might be made to feel conspicuously different by the initiative. (*The Voice issue 1299*)

### Difference

Difference is fun; Variety makes the world more interesting  
 Imagine a world where everyone was white, or everyone was black  
 We love our multi cultural home  
 We believe in different things, and we dress in all sorts of different ways  
 Our festivals are unique to us  
 Some of us fast, some of us party; We all want to have fun  
 Many beautiful buildings, churches, temples, synagogues, mosques  
 Full of wonderful things  
 People full of belief and hope, enjoying their culture, have you visited any of them?  
 In our school, children from different countries, Russia, Iran, Pakistan, Hong Kong  
 We like it because it's fun and we get along well  
 We love learning from one another, we respect our friends, and their beliefs.

(Joseph Howell - Navigation Primary School, reproduced in 'Celebrating Black History Month' calendar, Trafford 2007)

## 'Going for Gold' and other OCN Accredited Courses

It is an exciting time for Starlight Enterprise as Bristol City Academy are going to be running our 'Going for Gold' course with all Year 9 students, commencing in January 2008. They asked if the course could be adapted so that pupils from different ethnicities can still benefit from doing the course and gain the qualification so we went back to OCN and we now have a parallel course that can be completed by any pupil. We have also received funding from Oxford Brookes University to run the course as a pilot in the local community. The funding has allowed us to purchase a specific set of resources for young people completing the 'Going for Gold' course and we hope these are the first of many students who will benefit from the course.

All of the courses operate at both Level One and Level Two. The learning outcomes can be delivered to suit different learners in any given group and they can achieve at different levels, depending on the detail complexity of their responses. The key difference between the Level One and Level Two qualification is that the learners at Level Two are required to explore each learning outcome in a little more depth. For example, at Level One the learner is asked to: 'Identify two strategies that can be used to deal with discrimination effectively', whereas at Level Two they are asked to 'Identify and explain two strategies that can be used to deal with discrimination effec-

tively.' This means that learners at Level Two are expected to offer more detailed evidence that they have achieved the learning outcomes than the learner at Level One. All Level One and Two Portfolios of Evidence will include the completed learning outcome sheets and learner and tutor evaluations. In addition, Level Two folders will include records of tutor observations.

We are also working with a National Home Office Funded Social Inclusion Programme know as Positive Futures who have expressed interest in our accredited courses for their work with young people. We have begun visiting their projects, and are beginning to build up a network of people who want to run our accredited courses in their own setting. For example, Fulham FC's Community Sports Trust have purchased the full set of course manuals.

We would be pleased to hear from anyone who would like to find out more about our courses. We are happy to travel to your location or you are very welcome to come to Oxford. We are flexible and can fit around your requirements so please do not hesitate to get in touch. It is also worth visiting our website [www.starlightenterprise.co.uk](http://www.starlightenterprise.co.uk) as there are sample pages from each course handbook, along with the assessment criteria and other relevant information.



## Who was he?

William Edward Burghardt Du Bois was born 23rd February, 1868 to Mary Silvina Burghardt, a house maid who never left her hometown of Great Barrington and Alfred Du Bois a rebellious traveller, whose grandfather and father both championed the rights of black people. Du Bois' father left when he was very young and he was raised primarily by his mother.

Du Bois was brought up in a town where there were fifty black men and women out of a population of five thousand. In his accounts of his childhood he claims to not have experienced any overt racism. His mother installed a good work ethic by drumming into him that there was no such thing as discrimination and that all judgements were based upon hard work and ability. Dubois was clever and had the privilege of an education. His uncle had been an unpaid life long servant for the Kellog family, his lack of wages had in turn prevented their poverty. When one of the Kellog daughters married in to a wealthy family the debt was repaid in the form of funding part of Du Bois' education. Du Bois went on to achieve a Bachelor of Arts from Fisk College, a Masters from Harvard and a PhD, of which the doctorate

written, *The Suppression of the Slave Trade in America* is still a classic. He also had the opportunity to study in Germany, funded by ex president Ruther B. Hayes. In his early years he lectured and conducted research into 'blacks as a social system,' he excelled in this field and became known as the 'father of social science.' Dubois went on to write a succession of essays and books including *the Souls of Black Folk* and *The World and Africa*. In the former novel he sought to teach the 'White' man that 'Black' people had a soul. He explored the idea that identity was of paramount importance when seeking to build the confidence and assertion of the 'black race.' Du Bois was mindful of the fact that one mans identity was made up of fifty percent of how he viewed himself and fifty percent of how he saw himself through another mans eyes. He felt as a consequence that Black men constantly lived behind a 'veil' because they went unnoticed by the white men. The concept of the 'veil,' established by Du Bois, meant that the black men were no longer 'shadows' because they had been freed from slavery, but their existence was still denied which in turn left them covered. Although Du Bois openly de-

clared himself as a 'Negro', in the book he claims that he has experienced both sides, of the 'veil.' Du Bois explores the idea of Double Consciousness, which he explains as the balancing of two identities. In his case being both American and African. He deals with the notion of finding a balance between the two in order to establish a whole identity.

In *The World and Africa* he had a different approach he realised that he no longer had to seek the approval of the white man by justifying the black mans existence. Du Bois championed the beauty of an African Culture and History that had been lost alongside the pride of a black nation. The provision of knowledge sought to restore that pride for those in the Diaspora and Africa. Du Bois was a founding member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP - the largest and oldest civil rights organization in America).

Du Bois continued to write in self imposed exile in Ghana whilst promoting the Pan Africanist cause. By the time he died, in 1963, he had written 17 books, edited four journals and played a key role in reshaping black-white relations in America.

## Mixed Relationships - the facts

The facts challenge the stereotypes in a report due to be published early in the new year. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has commissioned a report titled 'Parenting 'Mixed' Children: Negotiating Difference and Belonging' which is based on research gathered over a two year period. It is the first attempt, at least on such a large scale, to explore the reality of mixed relationships in contemporary Britain and to offer factual evidence on the lives of 'mixed' children.

Despite the stereotypes which we endure in the media (think of Vicky Pollard and her boyfriend Jermaine), the research found that the vast majority of people living in mixed-race relationships are middle-class. They tend to be living in residences which they own rather than rent and are generally educated to professional or degree level. 55% of the parents of mixed-race children are still together, either married or living together.

Geographically, too, the facts are interesting, with many families living in small towns and affluent suburbs. There tended to be a concentration of mixed relationships in a band which sporadically runs centrally throughout England, from Leeds to Brighton. The evidence cannot fail to challenge traditional assumptions and to provoke thought among those already interested. (*The Guardian Society 26-09-07*)

For those eager to look at this and other evidence gathered by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, their website address is [www.jrf.org.uk](http://www.jrf.org.uk).

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### Send us your views or articles

We welcome contributions from our readers and look forward to receiving your contribution. We hope that this newsletter will provide a forum for promoting positive relations, encouraging an open debate and aiming to improve race relations in Britain today.

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Full page: £150      1/2 page: £85

1/4 page: £45      1/8 page: £25

Please contact us with details. The deadline for the March newsletter is 29 February 2008.

## Continued from page 2 - Black History Month & African Caribbean Student Learning In Art

Paul refers to the small pieces of research he has undertaken, including attending the conference in Oxford in 2005 and argues they seem to highlight the fact that black students are resentful of the fact that their cultural heritages are not represented in the curriculum. Their perception is that they are constantly confronted by 'white' interpretations of history without an opportunity to experience perspectives from their own cultural viewpoint. White people feel threatened by issues of black cultural recognition. Their position therefore is to exclude it. This encourages the view expressed by many, both in Paul's research in south London and in Oxford, that there is a form of 'racism at school' in the content and methodology of teaching. The lack of understanding and 'trust', a word used in this context by one of the participants, can only serve to further alienate

black students from a white, or Western dominated classroom.

Paul calls for change in the way teachers and schools treat black history, in effect he is proposing the eradication of Black History Month in schools. He has highlighted the integrated nature of history: our histories are not separate and distinct but entangled with each other. Greater emphasis should be devoted to those entanglements. It must mean that history is perceived as multi-vocal and multi-focused, not seen from the viewpoint of one group. Such adjustments to teaching and learning would require us to take into account the impact of British colonialism on the colonial subject and also the influence of other peoples on the British way of life. Paul's article argues that while raising the profile of some black icons, Black History Month does not effectively celebrate black achievement and contributions

to humankind. To do that, he believes, we need to look first at the mainstream - interrogating the dominant culture and acknowledging the presence there of the black subject. He feels that such reflections would require us to construct diasporic peoples differently from the stereotypes to which we are exposed, and perceive them as key contributors to our present-day world. He also argues that such teaching can only occur at the centre of the mainstream curriculum. He acknowledges that some visual art movements and individual artists have prioritised this, if only symbolically in what they communicate - it is now time to follow their example and embed their principles in our pedagogies. He concludes by saying that our failure to do so would diminish the importance of wonderful resources such as Bath, which should be in the ownership of all of us.