

# STARLIGHT

Starlight Black Child Mixed Heritage Group

June 2006

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

## Summer time is here!

Welcome to our Summer issue! We have been extremely busy so apologies for the late arrival of this issue.

Apart from successfully running some workshops concerning 'Tackling Racism in Predominantly White Areas' and 'Supporting Dual Heritage Children' we have been involved in developing a Level One OCN course for young men and fathers known as 'Raising the Aspirations of Young Men and Fathers'. We are delivering this course in partnership with the UKdadsposse/The Potential Project. Making this link with the UKdads has also been of huge benefit to the group as we begin to link our activities with theirs. We are also able to use their office space and we want to develop a book and toy library for families in the area from this base.

Our plans to host two 'Does Colour Matter?' roadshow conferences in Bristol and Brighton did not work out as anticipated due to a low take up but in talking to

professionals in the area it is clear there are issues they want to have an opportunity to discuss so we will keep trying to find ways of making these events more successful. We have included a summary of the debate we had in Brighton as we decided we would still host the day with Professor Chris Gaine in attendance and we hope you find it an interesting read.

Other points of interest in this newsletter is a review of Professor Gus John's new book 'Taking A Stand'. Two children's books kindly reviewed by Christine Chambers, the Vice Chair of our group. She has also written a small article on why she finds the group helpful to her and her family. A summary of the UKdadsposse/The Potential Project is also included.

As always, contributions from readers are welcome and we look forward to hearing from you.

### What link do I have with the saying 'The Real McCoy'?



You are probably familiar with the saying and you may think of a certain brand of crisps or think that it means 'Is this the genuine article?' but do you know where the saying originates from or why it has anything to do with me? Any ideas? Turn to page four to find out.

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## Review of Professor Gus John's book: 'Taking a Stand'

'Taking a Stand' is a collection of essays and talks by Professor Gus John concerning education, race, social action and civil unrest between 1980 and 2005.

He explains that this book has come about as a result of both requests by people who wanted copies of papers he has written and by young people who wanted to understand the series of interventions he has made over a number of issues and events which they were too young to have experienced.

In talking with these young people he became aware of the lack of assistance given to them to understand the current state of Britain and the impact on British social, cultural and political landscape as a result of the post-war black presence. He argues that neither black nor white young people have an understanding of their place, and the contribution of their parents' and grandparents' generation, in the shaping of British social and

economic history in the last forty years.

He also feels that whilst there are more black people involved in the management of affairs of the state and in public institutions, this is not truly representative of a shift in the situation of black people in this country. He believes we are making a false promise to young people if we claim that black people's access to these positions in society actually makes a material difference to the overall condition and status of black people in civil society and the economy. Despite a growing number of black staff associations, very few are actually empowered or constitutionally able to tackle issues that they and their communities face. Given this, there are two issues for black and ethnic minority communities to address. One is the extent to which the growth of a professional class actually advances the interests of the community as a whole. The other is

the extent to which ethnic minority communities are prepared to support individual black employees and their networks, in a manner that will empower them to challenge institutional practices and workplace cultures that serve these communities.

This book attempts to shed light on these issues. Professor Gus John shares his own understanding and analysis of events, policies and social trends and his prescription as to what action black communities and public institutions in Britain need to take. This derives from his own involvement in the struggle for racial equality and social justice since 1965 and his reflections on that struggle as a social analyst.

A book highly recommended for anyone wishing to gain a greater understanding of these issues. By sharing his wealth of experience Professor Gus John has supplied us with much to consider if we are genuinely committed to social

### Special points of interest:

- UKdadsposse/The Potential Project
- Professor Gus John's book
- Brighton debate on successfully tackling racism in predominantly white areas
- Why Oxford needs a support group for mixed race families

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Please ensure any contributions/adverts arrive by 31 August 2006

Next issue: September 2006

## A SUMMARY OF THE BRIGHTON DEBATE - 'HOW CAN WE SUCCESSFULLY TACKLE RACISM IN PREDOMINATELY WHITE AREAS?'

The debate began with an opening address by Professor Chris Gaine, Chair of Social Policy at University College, Chichester, creator of the race equality site for children & young people: [www.britkid.org](http://www.britkid.org) and author of 'No Problem Here'; 'Still No Problem Here' and 'We're all White, thanks'. Peter Fryer, Oxfordshire County Council UNISON's Assistant Branch Secretary, chaired the debate throughout the day. The group comprised of a small number of professionals all committed to finding ways to successfully challenge racist attitudes in predominantly white areas.



**Professor Chris Gaine and delegates discussing the issues**

One of Chris's real preoccupations is, if only there were a magic wand to find a way to switch certain teachers on to 'understand', or he could say, 'to care'. He feels you need to care really in order to understand. He also feels strongly that racism in Britain is not predominantly about cultural difference. It is not primarily about not knowing somebody else's culture the trouble with racist adults and young people who pick up these ideas is not that they think they don't know, the problem is they think they do. For example, 'they are taking our jobs' 'England is about to sink under the weight of all the illegal immigrants', 'bogus asylum seekers', and 'they take people's houses' and so on. So Chris would argue class and economic based things is the real engine that drives racist attitudes and the idea that you can get rid of that by understanding a bit more about Sikhism for example, or eating a curry, is naive. Chris therefore does not focus on raising cultural awareness in his books or the website.

The issue that culture and multiculturalism doesn't really create acceptance was raised by a delegate. They argued that there are some black cultures which are very well accepted but there are other cultures that have no high status. There are lots of complexities within this debate, for example, the Eastern European population has added another dimension concerning difference. They can't particularly be racialised but there are many different components to British cultures with roots overseas but which count as being a part of what it means to be British. For example, it may have its roots in the Caribbean but some white youths have learnt patois as they see it as kind of cool but there is also a kind of simultaneous rejection of other aspects of this

culture.

Chris raised the issue of how culture can sometimes be overtaken by explanations that appear to be biologically determined, for example, if you are born English you are supposed to have a sort of genetic predisposition to play cricket, or if you are Welsh, particularly South Wales, then as a man you can genetically sing, (but not as well as an Italian!!). There is a kind of biological element that troubles Chris, he feels it's a real indictment of the education system over the last 60 years that is still there. The throw away remarks such as 'black people have got the boogie gene', for example. But what if African Caribbean people's ability to dance is admired - is this racist? It is important to challenge these assumptions, for example, if a black young man in prison gets angry, they may be seen as being angry because they are black rather than they are angry because something has made them angry.

There is a seductive simplicity about this particular racial explanation but the odd thing is how often it appears to be reflected in what we experience. If we look at the number of athletes in Britain there are a disproportionately large number of black athletes and perhaps, although Chris has not done any empirical survey to confirm this, black people may well boogie better than white people! However, Chris would argue that the explanation for this is a social one and not a biological one. For example, we might say black people are good at sport but if we take a closer look at which sports they are seen to be good at, we tend to find that they are sports that don't require many material resources. If black people are good at sport then why are they not represented in all sports?

A delegate asked how black history month could be put to better use to challenge some of these stereotypical images of black people as sporting heroes and musicians. They would be particularly interested in resources that moved away from these icons and the teaching of slavery in schools. We need to be able to access more teaching resources and gain knowledge to be able to weave other significant contributions into all curriculum subjects; helping teachers to move away from simply referring to black people's achievements in the month of October.

It was suggested that if a school were to adopt the United Nations Rights of the Child within the school curriculum and whole school policies, this could help to challenge the roots of racism in predominantly white areas. If the whole school adopts all of the Articles and discusses each one with the students and staff, then the school can create an environment where everyone begins to experience an environment that values the individual and celebrates the uniqueness of each person. Encouraging children and young people to adopt non-discriminatory thinking is a great way to move things forward and it is

time for this whole issue to move on.

It is also about recognising how deeply engrained prejudicial attitudes can be buried and it is about encouraging teachers to become 'reflective thinkers' checking out where and when they adopted a certain value or belief.

Chris referred back to ten years ago when it was compulsory in his university for every student to take an equality course. Every first year student had to do an intensive race awareness course and Chris tracked some of these students as part of a seven year study to see how effective the training had been. He felt that, roughly speaking, the course worked for about one third of the students. They needed to be able to feel comfortable challenging assumptions and for some it was too threatening. Another significant factor is, that no matter how inspired, motivated or great the students understanding becomes, once they begin teaching there are lots of anxieties about actually teaching and they are not best placed to start to challenge the school's ethos. Newly qualified teachers can also get drawn into the culture of their school and feel unable to challenge the status quo. Teacher training is therefore not a panacea for shifting the culture of schools.

A delegate shared their experience as a black parent, stating that teachers appear to be the hardest to shift and this is worrying; some of the police have moved on but they would have thought their children's educators should have been a brilliant example but this is not the case. Is this because they haven't got the time? Are they really busy?

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There is a policy/practice gap and the policy is often better than the practice. How can we work with schools who may genuinely believe that there is no racism in their school and therefore they don't even recognise racist incidents in the first place? A delegate shared their experience of supporting a mother whose child had been racially bullied in school and how the school continued to deny that it had occurred. The mother had to take it to the Governing Body before the suffering her child had undergone was acknowledged and dealt with!

Clearly there are many issues that still need to be addressed and we welcome hearing from our readers, Please let us know your perspective and how you think we can make a difference, successfully challenging racism and bringing up our children to value and respect each other.

## Starlight Black Child Mixed Heritage Group

We have been meeting every Thursday since the 20 April thanks to the Blackbird Leys Adventure Playground for allowing us to use their space. The children think it is a great venue and there is plenty of play equipment to keep them occupied.

We will be celebrating the end of term with a B-B-Q, (see advert below), and we hope that as many people as possible will join us. We hope to have a bouncy castle, face painting, along with other activities for the children.

The children have also been given the opportunity, thanks to the local Community Chest, to complete applications for funding for activities they would like to do as group members. A new Community Chest panel is also starting at Starlight which means that children attending our group can

decide other children's applications to take part in sports and leisure activities and spend one thousand at every meeting!

We are hoping to hold a couple more family events over the summer break and we will aim to make a decision as to what they might be before we break up for the summer. Funding is still an issue as we can't seem to find the time to explore this as much as we need to but we are hoping that, now we are working with the UKdadsposse, we will be able to put in a couple of bids for some funding for events over the summer. We will also be applying for funding to start a book and toy library, we will need about £1,000 to get this off the ground so any donations towards this fund will be greatly appreciated.

The regular Thursday meetings

will stop in July as we are aware that this day clashes with other activities, particularly football training for the boys. We are either going to change it to Wednesday or Friday evenings, between 5 and 6.30, so if you have a personal preference let us know and the majority vote will decide which day we opt for.

Beginning again in September we will plan to hold the sessions identified by parents at the end of this term. We will always evaluate how members have found the sessions at the end of each term and decide what we want to organise for the next term. So even if you haven't been able to attend as yet please do get in touch because we are always open to hearing new ideas and will make every attempt to incorporate them into the programme of events for the next term. Looking forward to hearing from you.



*Providing a forum for families and friends with black children of mixed heritage.*

### Starlight Black Child Mixed Heritage Group's

## END OF TERM B-B-Q

Sunday, 23 July 2006 4pm onwards

Blackbird Leys Adventure Playground, Blackbird leys, OXFORD

**We hope you will come and join us and find out what the group may be able to offer.**

**For more information contact: Oxford 776691**

**E-mail: [StarlightEnt7788@aol.com](mailto:StarlightEnt7788@aol.com) [www.starlightenterprise.co.uk](http://www.starlightenterprise.co.uk)**

### Children's book reviews by Christine Chambers

#### **'Double the Love' by Bernard Ashley, Orchard Picture**

**Books £4.99** Little Blossom has two grandmothers - City Nan is black and Country Gran is white. They do different things with her and sing different songs but they love her equally. A family celebration means that Blossom gets to see Nan and Gran together for the first time at last and she is thrilled. Sadly, it doesn't turn out to be as much fun as she'd hoped ... or does it?

This is a book all children will identify with - all families have their own ways of doing things after all. This delightful story is supported by endearing and evocative illustrations. The moment I saw this book I just had to buy it for my own baby grandson - the image of this little girl sandwiched in a hug between her black and white grandmothers brought a definite tear to this Grandma's eye!

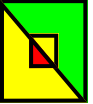
Besides being a wonderful book for mixed race families to share (the images help to enforce a powerful message of normality and acceptance) it presents an excellent opportunity for all parents and child practitioners to gently address issues of diversity in society. As a pre-school worker I have encountered hundreds of children's books but this is one of the best. In fact, I've been intending to write one just like it for years!

**A Picture Book of Rosa Parks by David A. Adler, Holiday House Books £5.50** In Montgomery, Alabama on 1 December

1955, when riding home from work on a segregated bus, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat for a white man. Her immediate arrest and subsequent prosecution for breaking racial segregation laws became a catalyst for events which helped to change America and the world. The black community in Montgomery, began a boycott of public buses, which was to last a year and left most of them walking to work - some as far as twelve miles.

This publication portrays the life story of an immensely strong and tenacious woman who campaigned with her town's new minister, Dr Martin Luther King, in the civil rights movement. Growing up in the southern states, Rosa faced a system of segregation and racism and was aware of the activities of the Ku Klux Klan from an early age. This book serves as a reminder of the courage, integrity and perseverance which black people have globally exercised to overcome what the eloquent Rev. King described as *'the brutal feet of oppression'*. An excellent tool for parents and those working with children and young people to explore, not only issues of prejudice and discrimination, but also those of personal responsibility and conviction.

The recent international coverage of the news of Rosa Parks' death and consequent acknowledgement of her achievement, must serve as the greatest accolade for this great woman. It also presents a particularly appropriate time to look at this beautifully illustrated biography. It deserves a place on any book shelf.



## 'The Real McCoy'

Elijah McCoy was born in Colchester, Ontario, Canada on 2 May 1844 to former slaves who had escaped to Canada. Elijah's father, George McCoy, was given one hundred and sixty acres of farmland in return for his loyal service to the Canadian Army and Elijah was raised on this farm as a free Canadian citizen. Elijah attended a school for black children in Colchester where he learned to read and write. However, his parents soon realised he had a special talent for working with tools and machines and they managed to save enough money to send Elijah to a school in Edinburgh, Scotland to study mechanical engineering. After completing his studies in Scotland he went to Michigan after the Civil War. Discrimination forced him to become a fireman on the Michigan Central Railroad. Nevertheless he worked for two years on a design that he patented in 1872. This was the first automatic lubricating cup which oiled the locomotive while the train was in motion, thus eliminating frequent stops for oiling, it was a successful invention and was installed on the Michigan Central Railroad locomotives. Others tried to imitate his invention but the engineers knew the difference and they always asked for "the real McCoy". Variations of Elijah McCoy's oil cup are still used in factories, in mining and construction machinery, on naval boats and in space exploration vehicles. In 1975, the city of Detroit celebrated Elijah McCoy Day by placing an historic marker at the site of his home and by naming a street – Elijah McCoy Drive – in his honour.

## UKdadsposse/The Potential Project

The UKdadsposse aims to provide emotional and practical support to fathers and male carers and their families. This idea was initially developed by Carlton Gabbidon in East London when he was involved in a Sure Start programme and he felt he would like to bring this idea to Oxford. The Potential Project is a community idea, which has been funded by the Learning Skill Council (LSC) in association with Oxfordshire County Council and various local service providers and partners. It is based in Greater Leys, Oxford.

The UKdadsposse provides a safe environment for men to meet and share their experiences with others and gain support. The aim of the programme is to encourage active participation in the nurturing and development of our children whilst promoting the personal development of members,

volunteers and paid staff.

Fathers, male carers, young men, boys of school age who may feel isolated in their role and need information, support and friendship are all welcome. It makes no difference if you are single, divorced, married, step-father or non-resident, regardless of age or ethnic background. Residents of Blackbird Leys or Greater Leys are particularly welcome.

This project has reached an exciting stage in its development - by working with Starlight Enterprise Limited we are about to commence a *Raising the Aspirations of Young Men and Fathers* OCN Level One course. The course will offer young men and fathers an opportunity to develop their self confidence and self awareness, helping them to understand and manage their emotions more effectively, improving their communication skills and becoming the

man and father they are capable of being. The course is designed to help them achieve their goals and ambitions and to live a healthy lifestyle. We are hoping that this will be the first of many courses specifically designed to meet the needs of young men and fathers in society today. This course has been developed as a direct result of consultation with local young men and fathers and the course material reflects the areas they felt they would like further opportunities to develop.

**For further information please contact Carlton Gabbidon, Project Manager, The UKdadsposse/The Potential Project at 26 Kingfishers Green, Greater Leys, OXFORD OX4 7BX. Telephone Oxford 779298 E-mail: ukdadsposse@yahoo.co.uk**



**Consultation Day with Fathers that led to the development of the Raising Aspirations Course for young men & fathers**

### Subscribe to this newsletter

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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. The deadline for the next issue is August 31 2006.

### Advertise in this Newsletter

Let us know about your events, services and situations vacant. Our rates are very reasonable.

Full page: £150

1/2 page: £85

1/4 page: £45

1/8 page: £25

Please contact us with details. The deadline for the September newsletter is 31 August 2006.

## Why does Oxford need a support group for mixed race families? by the Vice Chair, Christine Chambers

When I gave birth to my first child in 1985 I had little idea of the issues which would face us both from that point on. She was my beautiful little girl with the silky black hair and darkest brown eyes that I had always wanted for myself.

My little brother was only five when my daughter was born. A girl in his class told him that his new niece was a 'paki', her mum had said so! The first time my daughter was called a 'nigger' I was so shocked; the fact that it was said by a boy of nine did nothing to soften the blow, she was still only four months old! Gradually I became aware of the enormity of the issues facing us but it didn't stop me from going on to have three sons.

There are many anecdotes I could include here that demonstrate how others have perceived my

children. Whatever I might have formerly felt or believed was irrelevant - I was a white mum bringing up four black children. I was extremely lucky that the group in Oxford had formed in 1994 and I got involved very early on.

I feel parents of mixed parentage children are exclusively equipped to empathise with one another. There is a safety in numbers - we can challenge things as a group which, as individuals, we can only tolerate. Issues arise all the time which you might not have expected - in education, out of school activities and even on our own doorsteps. There are various pathways which we, as parents, can explore. I chose to follow that of accepting and celebrating my children as black young people and am so glad I had the opportunity of being involved in the group.