

STARLIGHT

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

Editorial

Welcome to the June edition of our newsletter. There is lots going on across the country of interest to all of us concerned with the issues of equality and diversity and with summer coming the debate can only get hotter! Read the review of the conference in Bristol at which Starlight's managing director, Sue Funge and Bradley Lincoln of the Multiple Heritage project were guest speakers. Closer to home, here in Oxford we are going to be holding a summer fun day on Saturday the 28th of July at the Blackbird Leys Adventure Playground from 1 til 6pm. We continue to meet at the same venue (BLAP) every Wednesday from 5-6.30pm and our toy and book library is open on alternate Wednesdays from 6th June onwards (term-time only).

The Voice (please see the review of the article, 'Only Joking') recently asked whether it's ok to use racial stereotypes in the cause of 'humour'? Many of us have shared the experience of being accused of being too sensitive or 'having a chip on our shoulder'. My own brothers have been known to make an evening's entertainment out of sending me the most offensive racist jokes they could find after a rather heavy drinking session. They apparently nearly split their sides laughing in the knowledge that I would be simmering with anger and unable to

recognise the number (my oldest



Christine Chambers

brother had a new mobile!). The old adages are definitely true; 'there's no accounting for taste' (or the lack of it!) and 'you can choose your friends but you can't choose your family'. My brother explained that I'd been sent the jokes because I'd be offended, and that was amusing in itself, not because the jokes are funny per se. So, apparently my brothers do think I'm too sensitive! If I'm sensitive, it's because of the experiences of racism my children have had and the prejudice I've survived as a white mum of mixed race children over the past twenty two years.

In fairness, my oldest brother did have the good grace to look embarrassed when I confronted him and told him how upset I was, but I don't think he'll ever really know how of-

fensive those jokes are to me because he sees my sons as his nephews, not as the black men who are the butt of the jokes.

He wasn't there when, as my son walked home from Tae Kwon Do, a car pulled up next to him and the driver screamed 'niggers' at him and his friend. The outcome of that incident cannot be told here. Suffice to say that it holds a valuable lesson in predictability; that is, if you shout racist insults at people from your car, make sure the light ahead is not red, forcing you to stop, particularly if you are driving with the top down! It would also be the springboard for a healthy debate about whether violence is ever the answer as it is fair to say that the parents of my son's friend had taught him more of the Malcolm X approach to racism than the Martin Luther King approach.

I think this is one of the many issues that arise in having a mixed race family. There's often prejudice on both sides and in my experience it's been pretty evenly balanced between both sides of the family.

I hope you find this edition interesting and warmly invite any comments or ideas you may have to contribute. Or maybe you'd like to share your experiences for the 'personally speaking' column. Contact details are on the first page.

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What's in a name?

The celebrity actor and playwright, Kwame Kwei-Armah, reveals that reading the autobiography of Malcolm X when he was 19 proved to be a catalyst which drove him to change his name from the rather Scottish-sounding Ian Roberts. However, at the tender age of eleven, moved by the portrayal of the suffering of slaves in the TV series Roots, he had informed his mother that he would adopt an African name when he grew up. His mother recalled this incident when he decided he could no longer live with the name she had given him and he traced his roots to reclaim his heritage by adopting an African name. Kwei-Armah states that he has had to address the prejudices within the black community towards their African genes, particularly as he inherited 'the worse possible combination' of his mother's broad nose and his father's dark complexion.

Intrigued by the negative attitude he felt many black people held towards their African ancestry, he began to explore its origins. He read the book *Post traumatic Slave Syndrome* by Dr Joy DeGruy Leary and acknowledge that this self-hatred was born from the resounding messages of slavery, whereby a darker complexion was sufficient in relegating a person to the hardest and dirtiest of jobs.

Kwei-Armah states that he witnessed the epitome of the

value put on having a fair complexion when his 13 year old son and his friends were discussing who they thought were the prettiest girls. Apparently, they ranked black girls (although these most resembled their own mothers) below mixed-race and white girls respectively. He draws attention to the tendency for black women on TV to be of a fair complexion rather than dark-skinned and refers to this as 'BBC Brown' and believes that black people have the power to free themselves from this legacy of slavery by exploring its origins and by placing greater value on themselves as black people (**The Observer 25 03 07**).



Do you know who this is?

He was born in 1868 in America. He founded the largest and oldest civil rights organization in America. To find out more about his life turn to page 4.

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Please ensure any contributions/ adverts arrive by 31 August 2007

Next issue: September 2007

'Only Joking!'

Review of 'Are we touchy?' article in The Voice (2-8 April 2007)

In March, the Advertising Standards Authority banned the Trident chewing gum adverts following more than 500 complaints from the public against the four TV and one cinema commercials. The catch-phrase of 'mastication for the nation' in a strong Caribbean accent by both black and white actors in itself was bizarre. Complaints included allegations that the advertisements were racist and offensive and held black people up to ridicule. After hearing that the commercials had been banned by the ASA, manufacturers Cadbury Schweppes announced that they were 'disappointed'.

In the same month there was reaction to the Jewish Conservative Councillor for Brent in North London, Brian Gordon, 'blackening up' and donning African dress to portray himself as 'Councillor Nelson Mandela' at a local celebration. He claimed he had not intended to cause offence when challenged on his choice of costume.

The co-founder of the Campaign Against Political Correctness, John Midgely, claims that in our democratic society people have the right to offend and that people claim offence at things which are not directly aimed at them. However, senior policy advisor to the London mayor, Lee Jasper, argued that the black community is able to laugh at itself and is not over-reacting when it finds media portrayals of negative black stereotypes offensive. He gives an appropriate and timely reminder that March this year saw the celebration of the bicentenary of the abolition of slavery. Jasper's feelings were echoed by Kofi Klu of the Rendezvous of Victory campaign group. He claims that the historical experiences of black people must be respected and that when black people state that they find something offensive it should be accepted as such. He makes the credible argument that those who find themselves living in a hostile environment are taught to accept things which they don't feel comfortable with.

So is it ever acceptable to use stereotypes to

amuse or entertain for the purpose of increasing sales' figures? Surely one of the biggest issues is that we're still having to hold this debate. Is it time for society to accept that a person stating that something is offensive to them is sufficient to make it so? As always, we at Starlight are keen to hear what you think.

Mixed-race people make up the fastest-growing ethnic group in Britain

The 2001 census revealed that 'mixed' is a larger ethnic group than any other black group (680,000). It is also the fastest-growing group in the UK, making up 1.2% of the overall population and 15% of the minority population. More than 50% of mixed-race people in Britain are under 16. More than 3% of under-16s and 5% of under-5s are mixed-race. In Lewisham, south London, 11% of school children are mixed race (**Society Guardian 6th Sept 06**).

Personally Speaking ...

'Estelle' has a white Anglo-Irish mother and black African-Caribbean father. She is in her early twenties.

As a little girl, I simply saw myself as 'brown'. My mum encouraged me to call myself 'black' and told me about great black heroes and historical figures. When they taught us about Florence Nightingale at school, my mum taught me about Mary Seacole. She told me and my brothers about inventions that black people had contributed to the world. I had some beautiful black dolls but my Grandma bought me a doll that was exactly the same colour as me and I loved her more than my black or white dolls because she really looked like my baby. At five years old, I was Mary in the school nativity play and the teacher allowed me to choose my baby Jesus from all the dolls in the nursery class. I chose the darkest black doll there and I believe that I recognised that we were the same in some way, even though I'm quite fair.

As I was the only mixed-race girl in my year I obviously realised I was different but it was only really an issue when I was nine or ten. I decided I wanted my hair cut into a sleek bob like the most popular girl in the year. When I asked my mum she was quite blunt and said "it won't work because you don't have straight hair." She said I should be proud of my hair and that the other girl, who I wanted to emulate, probably wished she had curly hair. My dad was really angry with mum and said I shouldn't be told that anything was impossible because of my race. He bought me a black hair magazine and told mum I should be allowed to have the bob and I did. Mum was right on both counts though -my hair looked awful in that style and the other girl got a dodgy perm because she wanted curly hair. I might not have loved my

hair at that time but my friends did - they used to pull my bands out and tell me to shake my hair out so I looked like Scary Spice!

I'm not denying my heritage or my identity but I still don't call myself 'black'. I've never liked the term 'mixed-race' because it's too close to 'mixed up'. I hate being called 'coloured' - I'm not coloured. I suppose 'mixed heritage' is the most PC term to call myself and the most accurate. I don't have a problem ticking a box for myself -there's usually one for 'Mixed -White and Black Caribbean' but I find it a bit more difficult ticking a box for my son. His dad's black so, with three black grandparents and only one white, I accept that he'll be seen as black. But he's quite fair -his complexion's not really any darker than mine so it's blatantly obvious he has some

white heritage too. I see him as mixed-race. I know that's based largely on his complexion and might even sound quite racist, as though I don't want him to be called black. But it's just that I know what issues he'll face. His black family are far more concerned and have made more comments than his white family about his complexion.

People often ask me "so what are you then?" and it annoys me when I tell them my dad's from Rosehill in Oxford and they say "yeah but where's he really from?" When I tell them his parents are Jamaican, they say "oh, so you're Jamaican then?" I was born here, my parents

were born here, but they think I'm Jamaican. I feel no connection at all to Jamaica. I think this is because my dad wasn't there for me when I was growing up. He was always letting me down. But what's strange is that my white Grandfather was Irish and I feel a really strong connection to Ireland. I grew up on my Gramps' stories of leprechauns and banshees and the poverty in rural Ireland sixty years ago.

I know my dad would say that I don't have a positive identity because I don't 'act black' but what does that mean? Whenever he's around other black people he breaks into a strong Jamaican accent. When I was little I used to be really embarrassed but now I feel quite sorry for him because he can't be comfortable to just be himself. He makes himself into a caricature of a black man with exaggerated mannerisms and patois. He's trying to prove something. At least I'm comfortable being me around black and white people. I know people laugh at my dad behind his back for being such a stereotype with his gold teeth, string vests (although he's pushing fifty) and his Jafakin accent. He's always talking about how the 'man tries to keep him down' but he's got a management level job within the local authority. He'd say because I don't eat rice n peas every day I'm not black but my mum used to cook that for us all the time. My black friends used to say my mum cooked like a black woman. I'd say my mum had much more significance in giving me a strong and positive identity than my dad. Feeding my son rice n peas won't give him a strong black identity - I'll do that how my mum did, by teaching him about black history and encouraging him to love himself and enforcing a positive attitude towards his black features and his beautiful hair.



Update from Starlight Black Child Mixed Heritage Group - and the Multicultural Book & Toy Library



Elissa Mortimore with a doll from our library

We are so pleased with our book and toy library and hope to encourage many more members to come along and join. It costs a family £5 per year to become a member and 10p per toy or book for two weeks hire.

As you can see from the photo, one of our little members is very

happy with her doll from the library.

We open the library alternative Wednesdays during term time at Blackbird Leys Adventure Playground (behind the Youth & Community Centre) between 5 and 6.30pm. The next date we are open is Wednesday, 27 June.

.... and look, it can even be of help at bedtime!



We have been invited to participate in the Cowley Road Carnival procession on Sunday, 1 July between noon and 6pm. There are workshops on Saturday, 23 & 30 June between 1 & 3pm so please come along and help to make your child an outfit. The theme for their outfits is the element 'Fire' - so its all hands on deck to help get everyone kitted out in time.

Finally, we have been offered transport and free admission to the Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve, thanks to Jenny Crook from the Reserve. More details to follow.



Saturday, 28 July 2007 1pm - 6pm

Face Painting - Glass Painting - Hair Braiding

Mask Making - Toy Workshop - Pottery Painting

BLACKBIRD LEYS ADVENTURE PLAYGROUND

(behind the Youth & Community Centre)

EVERYONE WELCOME

CARIBBEAN FOOD & REFRESHMENTS

For more information please contact Starlight Black Child Mixed Heritage Group on Oxford 776691 or e-mail StarlightEnt7788@aol.com www.starlightenterprise.co.uk
SBCMHG reserve the right to make changes to the activities available without prior notice.

Harmony in Education conference in Bristol 28 April 2007

We travelled down to Bristol on Saturday, 28 April to participate in a Joint Conference for Multiple Heritage (Mixed Race) young people aged 10 and above and their parents and carers.

Sue was asked to provide a presentation in the morning, concerning her experiences as a white mother of a black child of mixed heritage reasons, why she set up Starlight Enterprise Limited and to share her vision of racial harmony. Sue passionately believes that racism is the key to the issues facing our black children of mixed heritage and argues that we must take responsibility as white parents, to educate ourselves and our children about black history. She believes this not only helps to develop resilience to the racism our children inevitably suffer it also gives them a pride in their black heritage. It will also help white parents to begin to undo the inevitable misinformation they will have absorbed about black people as they grew up.

She always remembers the quote Beverly Prevatt-Goldstein used at a conference in Birmingham:

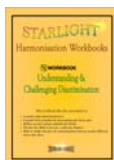
"Black children with a white parent are already likely to experience racism ... (They) need to feel not only comfortable with a black identity but able to include it in their particular experience.... Black is not a colour, it is a statement of a shared past, a present reality and a future intent."

A perspective Sue shares. Sue has at times been challenged for wanting to promote her son's 'black heritage', they ask 'what about his white heritage?' Sue is quick to explain that for her, her white heritage is reinforced every day of her son's life, there is no

need to promote it directly, whereas, if she had left her son to evaluate what his black heritage meant to him, he may well have ended up picking up lots of negative stereotypes and become ashamed of who he is. Clearly, this was not an acceptable option.

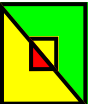
Bradley Lincoln, the other guest speaker from the Multiple Heritage Project comes from a different perspective. His father is black Jamaican and his mother is white British. His parents split up when he was quite young. When he got involved in a fight with some boys his father asked him what all the fuss was about. Bradley told him they had called him 'nigger' and 'blackie' and his father responded by saying '..Well, you're not black, so what are you worried about?' A similar experience happened when he was back home with his mother. She said he should tell them he was black and proud. This left Bradley feeling somewhat confused and as he looked for answers he felt that mixed heritage young people were completely invisible in school, or stereotyped. He now recognises that his confusion as a child was not his own but a condition imposed on him by others.

He argues that the important thing is that the 'lived' experience of multiple heritage young people is listened to and understood. To date, young people of multiple heritage tend to be subsumed under a 'black identity' where their specific concerns are rarely raised. They are often forced to choose one racial identity at the exclusion of another. Multiple heritage young people tell him they no longer want to be ignored and whilst their cultural heritage is only a part of who they actually are, it is still significant. They see their 'mixedness' as a cause for celebration and they want schools and wider society to join them in this positive recognition.



'Understanding & Challenging Discrimination' Published: Feb 2007
ISBN 978-0-9555668-5-1 34 pages
Size 294 x 210mm Price £35

A workbook that offers an opportunity to consider what discrimination is and how prejudice & stereotyping play their part. If we really want to work towards a fairer, more tolerant and peaceful society, we must continue to be willing to challenge ourselves, as old habits and patterns of thinking can be difficult to break. By reflecting on our values, attitudes & beliefs, we can begin to separate facts from unhelpful opinions and attitudes. This workbook can help us to develop the skills to become a reflective thinker as we begin to become aware of how these values and beliefs may be inhibiting our ability to experience another culture or person from a different background to our own.



Who was he?

His name is William Edward Burghardt Du Bois and he was born on 23rd February, 1868 to Mary Silvina Burghardt, a house maid and Alfred Du Bois a traveller, whose grandfather and father had both been ardent supporters of the campaign for the rights of black people.

Du Bois' father left when he was very young and he was raised primarily by his mother. He was brought up in a predominantly white town where he claims he did not experience any overt racism. His mother argued there was no such thing as discrimination and that people were assessed on their hard work and ability.

He was a clever child and, as a result of the Kellogg family repaying a debt to his uncle for a life long role as their servant, he was able to receive funding for his education. He went on to achieve a Bachelor of Arts degree, a Masters from Harvard and a PhD. The doctorate he wrote *The Suppression of the Slave Trade in America* is still a classic. He also studied in Germany

and in his younger years he lectured and conducted research into 'blacks as a social system'. He was recognised as an expert in this field and has been referred to as the 'father of social science'.

He went on to write a number of essays and books including *The Souls of Black Folk* and *The World and Africa*. He explored the idea that identity was of paramount importance when seeking to build the confidence and assertion of the 'black race'. He felt that a man's identity was made up of 50% of how he viewed himself and 50% of how other's viewed him. He claimed that this is why black men often live behind a 'veil' as they went unnoticed by white men. Despite being freed from slavery, their existence was still denied which in turn left them covered. Du Bois defined himself as 'negro' but he also claims to have experienced both sides of the 'veil'. He explored the idea of 'double consciousness', which he explains as the balancing of two identities. In his case being both American and Afri-

can. 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 as he realised that he no longer had to seek the approval of the white man by justifying the black man's existence. Du Bois celebrated the beauty of an African Culture and History that had been lost alongside the pride of a black nation. He believed that empowering black people with knowledge of this great continent and its history would restore that pride for those in the Diaspora and in Africa. He was a founding member of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP - the largest and oldest civil rights organization in America).

He continued to write and by 1963, when he died, he had written seventeen books, edited four journals and played a key role in re-shaping black and white relations in America.

Practical OCN accredited Courses that help a variety of professionals in their work

Life experiences, including school, home and community life, can all impact on a person's confidence and they may find themselves displaying patterns of behaviour that cause them to continue to make choices in life that are unhelpful to their own wellbeing and those around them.

The courses, developed by Starlight Enterprise Limited, provide an opportunity for the learner to reflect on how they may have adopted particular traits, helping them to realise they can be the change they wish to see in their lives. There is an opportunity to consider significant life events that may have contributed to this view of them self and as they work through the course material they can begin to shed negative thoughts, values and beliefs and become the person they are capable of being.

The activities and worksheets are attractively laid out, using colour, cartoons and pictures, to encourage participants to engage in, complete the activities and worksheets, and achieve the qualification. The learner builds up a folder of evidence that will not only cover the learning outcomes but will also provide them with a useful resource. If

they ever doubt their capabilities or begin to focus on negative thoughts and actions, they can use this folder to remind them of the strategies and tools they have identified to help them.

(1) Going for Gold - The course offers young people of African Caribbean heritage aged 11 and over an opportunity to explore their black heritage whilst gaining skills that can help develop a strong sense of self and resilience. Raising their aspirations and improving their opportunity to achieve. Alongside the Course Handbook, a black history resource - '*A Celebration of Black Men and Women and their contribution to British Society*' - compliments the 'Going for Gold' accredited course. Offering the course facilitator further information about black men and women who have contributed to British society, both in history and in contemporary society. It provides information relevant to the course as well including suggestions for wider work in schools and youth settings, for example, with a list of resources and websites for further research.

(2) Move On Up! -The course offers young people aged between 14-19 an opportunity to gain a greater understanding

of them self as well as being offered practical skills that can help them with their search for employment or for continuing in education. Presentation skills, completing application forms, writing a cv, practising interview skills and identifying their preferred learning style, is all included in the course.

(3) Enterprising Women - This course is designed to help young mothers and women accomplish their dreams. Developing skills that support women going back to work or college, coping with change, promoting a healthy lifestyle, a positive self-image and self-confidence.

(4) Raising the Aspirations of Young Men & Fathers - This course is designed to help young men and fathers develop their communication skills, gain confidence and raise their self-awareness. Exploring what it means to be a man in today's society, including the role of a father. Gaining skills to improve their relationships both at home and at work, promoting a healthy lifestyle and coping with change.

For more information please contact us - details below.

I'm not a Breed
I'm not Half-caste
I come first, you come last
No matter what you say I'm not a 'No nation'
We are all still God's creation
What have you got against me?
I've got rights and I am free
You call me Coconut, Checkerboard & Monkey
You call me Black, Borderline and Bounty
I'm not the one who should feel ashamed ...but you should be
(Poem written by Young People at the Multiple Heritage Conference in Leicester)

Subscribe to this newsletter

The cost of subscribing to this newsletter is £20 for four issues. They will be produced in December, March, June and September. Please send us a cheque, made payable to *Starlight Enterprise Limited*. If you need to be invoiced please let us know and we will arrange to send it to you.

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 September 2007.

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 2007.