

STARLIGHT

Starlight Black Child Mixed Heritage Group
March 2007

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

Editorial

My oldest son (please be sure to read his 'personally speaking' article in this edition!) went away to university in South London last September. He consciously chose a uni in an area where there is a higher black population than our home city of Oxford. After he'd settled in, he phoned to tell me that there was a significant black majority and for the first time in his life he lived in a place where he wasn't a conspicuous minority. A few weeks ago, I visited him for the first time. It reminded me of the significance of having the experience of being a minority. I think that those of us who are white parents of mixed race children are often in danger of forgetting or underestimating the massive impact of this everyday reality for our children. Of course, I'd been to blues parties in my teens where I was a minority but it was only at my wedding reception in 1986, where I was one of two white people among the 60 or so guests that I began to grasp the issues faced by

my daughter. If we never have that



Christine Chambers
The Editor

experience how can we empathise? My Mum loves her grandchildren and worried that I made a bit too much of an issue of their race when I frankly discussed with my kids whether they'd been the only black child at a birthday party. Then on a coach trip to the seaside, stopping at a service station, my mum was at the end of her party's queue for the loos. When she emerged from the cubicle to wash her hands she found that she'd been joined by the members of another coach party

and was suddenly the only white person among dozens of black women. She told me later that she understood in that moment why I thought it was an issue and that she'd never really imagined how it might feel to be a conspicuous minority. I was glad that my trip to London had reawakened my awareness of this issue when I took my eight-year-old to watch Oxford United play last weekend (the things we do for love!) and realised the only other black person in sight after we had taken our seats was on the pitch! I'm not implying this is an issue our children can't deal with but I do think it's something that as white parents of mixed race children we need to remember this is their reality. I hope you enjoy reading this issue of the Starlight newsletter and that there's lots to get you thinking -and talking- about. As always, contributions from readers are welcome and we look forward to hearing from you.

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Is Black History Month a good idea?

In Britain, October is Black History Month and many organisations and local authorities use this opportunity to look at the contribution to society made by the presence of the black community. However, many commentators on both sides of the atlantic (they celebrate Black History Month in February in the USA) are asking whether this actually marginalises black history rather than celebrates it. Elaine Sihera argues (Vibes and Voices December 06) that black history should be incorporated with the wider subject of history itself and taught to all. The process of allocating one month of the year to celebrate the contributions of a section of society who exist for twelve months of the year may indeed smack of tokenism. What really needs to be celebrated is the diversity within British society which would embrace the celebration of contributions of all races and cultures all year round instead of limiting it to one month of the year. This would, Sihera argues, allow all of our citizens to feel included.

Do you know this man?



He was born on a slave ship in 1729 but what happened next? Turn to page 4 to find out.

In America it seems that even the Multinational organisations are getting wise to the existence of Black History Month and use it as a chance to cash in. Sheri Parks, the University of Maryland's Professor of American Studies, claims that Black History has been diluted and the Month is often merely used as an opportunity to increase sales figures (The Associated Press, Feb 15th 07).The more difficult history of African Americans is overlooked or ignored. President Bush honoured contemporary black heroes in a special ceremony and the Super Bowl made history by featuring two African American coaches for the first time ever in February this year. But is this enough? Special broadcasting of programmes aimed at a black audience were used by advertisers to make them a target group during the commercial break - even soft drinks companies used black images to cash in. So is Black History Month a useful opportunity to explore and celebrate the contribution of black inventors, leaders, writers and musicians (among others!), without which they could be overlooked or ignored? Is it acceptable for the advertising industry, which widely overlooks all minorities, to cash in on what should be an educational and celebratory event? Or is Black History month an excuse to continue to exclude those contributions from the wider history and the curriculum?

Special points of interest:

- Personally Speaking ..
- Multiple Heritage Voices Project
- Commemorating the abolition of slavery
- 'Going for Gold' an OCN Level One accredited course

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Please ensure any contributions/ adverts arrive by 31 May 2007

Next issue: June 2007

Multiple Heritage Voices Project

Multiple Heritage Voices (MHV) was an innovative nine-month project, started in June 2006, designed to encourage young people to explore aspects of their heritage. There are growing numbers of people who identify as mixed race, yet they may not have had enough support and guidance to look into their own heritages and learn about the unique history and experiences of their ancestors. Of the mixed race population, 55% are under 16. The project provided a resource aimed at young people to help them learn about other people's experiences and the history of multiple heritages from the 1950s onwards, through photographs and biographies.



Picture of Ayo, the Project Officer

MHV was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, coordinated by Race Equality West Midlands (REWM), and has worked with the Inheritance Project, the Ladywood Detached Youth Project and Sistertree. They ran four-

week summer schemes with young people from Ladywood, Birmingham that involved lively debates and discussions, striking art work, performing arts, and fun day trips, including a slavery history tour in Liverpool.

In a heritage hunt recently, the young people found out just how diverse Birmingham is in an exercise where they interviewed members of the public and created a flag to represent all of their nationalities. Other activities have included mask making, where young people



A mask created by a young person representing multiple heritage

moulded masks on their faces and decorated

them with the theme of national flags to reflect their national heritages and cultural identity.

The next step is to produce a book that will contain biographies, poems and photographs and will act as a resource for people to view now that the project has ended. In addition, a travelling exhibition circulated to 19 libraries in Birmingham brought the project to the local community.



Group Work

The grand finale of the project was a celebratory event where all participants and local community groups were invited to an evening of performance, music, food, and dance.

For more information please contact Race Equality West Midlands rewm@rewm or 0121 250 3859.

Personally Speaking ...

Written by Patrick Chambers, aged 19

As an individual of mixed parentage I have had my own very unique experience. Due to the diversity of environments I have been in, I can say that the issue of race is something which always varies depending on the situation. I have no end of respect and love for my mother who I thank for being extremely understanding and explaining that growing up as a black male I would face obstacles, however I will always be determined and will never give up and let all of my mother's hard work go to waste. Every time that I faced a problem and explained it to my mother she would always educate me about the reason why it happened and then would make sure I was well equipped to deal with it next time. From being a small child my mother made the best effort to educate me at home and give me a head start. In primary school and for the two years of middle school, I was ahead of the others in my class yet I was moved down in sets even though I was capable. However, despite being placed in almost remedial classes, I knew that I didn't belong there so I was more determined to prove the teachers wrong and achieve the grades I deserved. Living in a single parent household there was not a lot of money around so I had to do badly paid jobs as well as going to school full time. Throughout my time working I can recall countless racist comments but I never let it get to me. In Oxford I can remember that the form of racism is simply from no understanding of other ethnic groups,

and the fact that people are not very open and therefore have only really been exposed to the negative stereotypes that the media portrays us as. There is also the problem of immediate judgment, most people just believe what they are told and have only encountered bad examples of black people.

When I moved to South London I began to see people in society reacted to me. I noticed a big shift in people's perception of me, moving from being 'black' to 'half caste'. There is a large African population who are perceived as hard working, but people of mixed parentage are vilified and seen as inferior. Being of mixed parentage and living in London I noticed that it is a very different experience

to living in Oxford. I discovered that most of the racism I receive is actually from black people, they do not accept mixed race individuals as black. Often, mixed race people are referred to as yellow or half caste. People claim that mixed race people have 'watered down their race' and others claim that they are a mistake. I just shrug off such crude comments as being meaningless, racial bigotry. Mostly for feelings of resentment and the reason that they assume that because of having a

slightly lighter complexion I would get preferential treatment by the rest society, although that assumption is incredibly untrue. It is much more difficult living in London due to the racism that comes from both sides, even though I've met some very understanding people. But in all honesty I've never let race be an issue to me and I will never be tricked by it as I really can't see why someone's skin colour is important. After noticing racist attitudes from all kinds of people I have noticed that it is simply just a symptom of their own self hate and dislike for themselves which they don't know how to deal with; they only hate me because they don't love themselves. Maybe they might feel like they are being victimised and racism is a defence mechanism for them.

I know that the biggest torment for mixed race people as that they are begging to either be white or black, and are mocked and eventually rejected by both. As a mixed race person I have never wanted to be identified as something as insignificant as a colour. I'm proud of myself and proud of anyone that isn't ashamed of their differences no matter what they are. I never waste any time to think about race as I know it's a trap that limits people's perspectives in life. When you think about it colour is a minor thing in comparison to the really important issues in life. I hope that any person despite colour can read my article and be inspired to be a strong and determined individual.

BE THE FIRST VERSION OF YOURSELF

Starlight Black Child Mixed Heritage Group - Launch of our Multicultural Book & Toy Library

We are very excited at the prospect of offering a multicultural book and toy library to the local community and are busy planning the launch event.

The books have been purchased from Letterbox Library who offer one of the most accessible sources to black history. They provide a range of children's books and resources that celebrate equality and diversity. Letterbox believe that challenging stereotypes and discrimination should play a fundamental part in every child's education and that we all have a collective responsibility

to make every child feel valued, regardless of their background or abilities. The toys are being purchased from NES Arnold who offer a range of multicultural toys and educational resources.

By making these resources accessible to families locally, we hope that we will encourage all children to grow up accepting individual and group differences without judging one to be superior or inferior to another.

We are very grateful to the Local Network Fund for the grant and we

hope that we will be able to sustain the book and toy library for many years to come.

Following the Easter holidays we hope to put on a series of workshops and events relevant to our families. Topics may include understanding Race Equality policies, racial identity theories, hair and skin care and similar topics. We would also like to re-introduce a 'bring a dish' event once a month as this was a very popular event in the past. Let us know your ideas.



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

Commemorating the Abolition of Slavery



Josiah Wedgwood's 'Am I not a man and a brother' popular abolitionist motif of the eighteenth century.

After all, what makes any event important, unless by its observation we become better and wiser, and learn 'to do justly, to love mercy, and walk humbly before God'? - Olaudah Equiano

25 March 2007 marks the 200th anniversary of Parliament passing the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833 that gave all slaves in the British Empire their freedom. But how should we commemorate this anniversary?

The legacy of slavery still permeates society today. Black people's contribution to British society, both in history and in contemporary Britain, often remains unrecognised even today. Perhaps therefore, the only clear way we can do justice to the atrocity of slavery and acknowledge the contribution of the freed slaves and abolitionists who fought for this outcome, is to tackle the roots of prejudice.

These roots are - Ignorance, Power, Vulnerability, Upbringing and Con-

formity. The more we know about and understand another person or group of people who are different from us, the less we will find them as a threat. By obtaining accurate information and explanations we have no need to 'fill in the gaps' and we can overcome our prejudice. We may not be powerful enough to challenge 'institutional' prejudice, but we all exercise some power in our work, community, school or home, and we can use this power to challenge prejudice. By recognising our vulnerabilities and how prejudice can arise from them, we can begin to address these prejudices both in ourselves and others. By being willing to re-examine our values, attitudes and beliefs we can become

conscious of them and we can then begin to discard the unhelpful ones. After all they are not facts and they can be reviewed and amended. By failing to stand up and challenge openly hostile comments we are, in effect, as guilty as the person expressing these views. Therefore, in order to uproot prejudice and discrimination we must be prepared to 'stick our neck out' and stand up for what we believe. Surely this is the only real way of commemorating the abolitionists?

'After all, what makes any event important, unless by its observation we become better and wiser, and learn 'to do justly, to love mercy, and walk humbly before God'? - Olaudah Equiano

Starlight Black Child Mixed Heritage Group Multicultural Book & Toy Library



**Come and celebrate the launch of
a local multicultural book & toy library**

AT BLACKBIRD LEYS ADVENTURE PLAYGROUND

ON SATURDAY, 31 MARCH 2007 2PM—6PM

Caribbean
Cuisine

EVERYONE WELCOME

Music

This brand new multicultural book & toy library is provided for the local community. Come and view the toys & books and find out how to join.



Who was he?

Ignatius Sancho was the first African prose writer whose work was published in England. He was born in 1729 on a slave ship in the mid Atlantic. On the coast of Colombia he was christened Ignatius but his mother died soon afterwards and his father killed himself rather than exist as a slave. When he was about two years old Ignatius was brought to England by his owner and given to three unmarried sisters who lived in Greenwich. These ladies called him Sancho because they thought he looked like Don Quixote's squire. Whilst they did not believe it was a good idea to educate Ignatius as they "judged ignorance the best and only security for obedience", Ignatius managed to teach himself to read and write. The Duke of Montagu, who lived nearby in Blackheath, admired Ignatius and gave him presents of books and

encouraged his learning. When Sancho was twenty he ran away from the three sisters and sought refuge with the Montagus. The Duke had recently died but his wife engaged him as a butler. He was now free to indulge in his passion for reading and to cultivate a broad range of talents. He wrote poetry, two stage plays, and a "Theory of Music". Sancho adored the theatre and often went to see Garrick, the greatest actor of the age, at Drury Lane. It was Garrick who suggested that Sancho attempted acting the black roles of Othello and Oroonoko, but he was not a clear enough speaker due to a speech impediment. However, London's fashionable literary and artistic circles soon took him up. Gainsborough painted his portrait in 1768. He became a friend of Garrick. Other friends included the historical painter John Hamilton

Mortimer, the sculptor Joseph Nollekens, and the writers Samuel Johnson and Laurence Sterne. Sancho left the service of the Montagu family in 1773. By now he was married to Anne, a black woman from the Caribbean, and they had six children. Helped by a small legacy and annuity left him by the Duchess of Montagu, Sancho opened a grocery shop in Charles Street, Westminster. He continued to work in his shop until his death in 1780, six months after he had witnessed the Gordon Riots of which he totally disapproved. His *Letters* were published two years later with the express intention of proving "that an untutored African may possess abilities equal to a European". The first edition sold so quickly that a second edition was published the following year.

Has 'Multi-culturalism' become a swear word?

Writing in *The Voice* (5-11th Feb), MP Diane Abbott explored the recent attacks on multi-culturalism through the media. Leading political figures have seized the chance to blame multi-culturalism for an ever-increasing list of societal problems, particularly the alienation of young British Muslims. This offers the opportunity to ignore the real issues which lead to minorities self-segregating, including the powerful impact of enduring racism and the resulting effects which drive people to seek protection within their own

communities. This is exacerbated by discrimination within the social housing organisations and poverty itself. Attacks on multi-culturalism in the past have been from the right and have, in essence, equated to attacks on the existence of black and ethnic minorities. Abbott calls on us all to reflect on the massive contributions made to British society by the creation of multi-culturalism and offers a timely reminder of what it truly means- that we live in a place that is home to people from many different places and races!

www.blackpupils.com

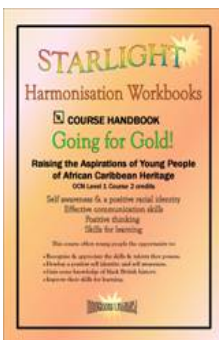
January saw the launch at the House of Lords of a new website by the National Black Boys Can Association, aimed at providing links for black pupils to education establishments and government and the community. Hosted by the first black leader of the House of Lords, Baroness Amos, the launch was chaired by Lord Bill Morris. It is hoped that the website will also help schools and teachers to evaluate the real needs of pupils within their school communities.

'Going for Gold' - OCN Level One course (3 credits)

If you work with young people of African Caribbean heritage aged 11 and over, purchasing this resource will provide you with a 'ready-made' course designed to support them to do well in their lives.

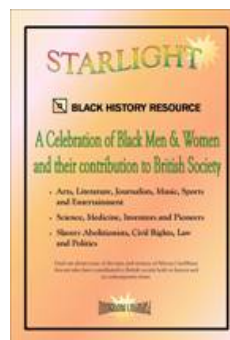
our, cartoons and pictures, to encourage participants to engage in, complete the activities and worksheets, and achieve the qualification. The young people build up a folder of evidence that will not only cover the learning outcomes but will also provide them with a useful resource. If they ever doubt 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.

By purchasing these resources and setting up a course in your own area, you can offer young



The course handbook includes fifteen prepared one-hour sessions that cover the learning outcomes. The activities and worksheets for each session are attractively laid out, using col-

Alongside the Course Handbook, a black history resource is included, offering the course facilitator further information about black men and women who have contributed to British society, both in history and in contemporary Britain. It has suggestions for work in schools and includes a list of resources and websites for further research.



people of African Caribbean heritage, the opportunity to gain a qualification whilst exploring their heritage, gaining knowledge and life skills designed to help them to do well in their lives.

Visit our website for details of how to purchase a copy. www.starlightenterprise.co.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. The deadline for the next issue is May 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 March newsletter is 31 May 2007.