

STARLIGHT

Starlight Black Child
Mixed Heritage Group

March 2009

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 Spring issue of our newsletter. We hope you enjoy this issue of the newsletter and that it sparks some interesting debate amongst our readers.

We wonder what readers think of the article about black history on page 2? Perhaps it is necessary for everyone to 'unlearn' history in order to redress the balance and prevent another generation of white children possibly growing up with a false sense of superiority. This is our approach and why we are pleased to offer a multicultural book and toy library in our local community. No one is born with racist views, therefore the more we educate children to value and appreciate difference and an acceptance that we all have a positive contribution to make to our society, the less we may need anti-discriminatory laws, rules and regulations.

It is also quite shocking how little we may know about Hitler's treatment of black people in the Second World

War. In February there was a Holocaust Memorial Day to commemorate the millions of Jews who perished in Hitler's regime but there is little mention of black people's suffering in the same period.

It is also twenty-eight years since the New Cross Fire and the loss of eleven black youths yet we do not have any day to commemorate this loss or to remind us of how united people were in their condemnation of this tragedy.

Putting together the articles for this newsletter reminds us yet again that we must not be complacent. Black children still suffer negative experiences in school and 'switch off' from learning. We need to continue to work towards breaking this cycle of underachievement and it would seem that knowing more about black history could be one vital part of an approach to motivate and encourage our youngsters to do well.

He was the author of two very famous novels but do you know who he is?



His books have been adapted for film, including a popular cartoon series in the 1980s. Most people have heard of these stories but most people probably assume the author was a white European. Any ideas?

Turn to page 4 to find out who this author is.

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Underachievement due to laziness?

A recent article in the *Voice* (January 12-18 2009) referred to Dr Cheron Byfield's claim that whilst black boys are continually portrayed as lazy underachievers heading toward crime and poverty, they really want to achieve academic and social success. In her recent book she hopes to shatter these devastating perceptions of young men of African Caribbean heritage and has made it her life's work to dispel these negative myths. She provides examples of young black men from the UK and USA who have overcome great obstacles and achieved both academic and social success. She also offers parents the necessary tools to help their sons to achieve.

Locally, we have been working with secondary school aged young men and women of African Caribbean heritage and, in our experience, they also face peer group pressure to underachieve. It would appear that it has become a culture of our local education system to mock students who work hard at school and achieve good results. For example, one young man, who is talented in maths, suffered ridicule from his friends and he had begun to do less well in his maths tests in order to gain favour with his mates. As a consequence he also faced his maths teacher's frustration as he failed to do his homework and keep up with his school work. In talking to us he felt it was worth it to gain popularity outside of the classroom; learning to play the fool. Fortunately he was able to let us know, out of the school environment, that this was his strategy and we have encouraged him to look at the longer term view. He recognised that he was not doing him-

self any favours by beginning to fail and he admitted he actually really enjoyed maths. Sadly, we do not have the opportunity to have this conversation with all students of African Caribbean heritage and this is why we are still pushing for the opportunity for the *Going for Gold* OCN accredited course to be run in schools. Not that it is a magic formula but if we can work with groups of young people in school they will have the opportunity to learn about their cultural heritage and how black people have shown great courage and resilience to achieve against the odds. They can begin to recognise the importance of gaining qualifications for themselves and the need to support one another to do well having been inspired by the courage and persistence of others.

We intend to revise the *Going for Gold* course to include a stronger emphasis on goal setting and mentoring to monitor progress and keep students on track to achieve good grades in their GCSEs. We decided to make this revision as it is apparent that the combination of stereotypical ideas of what black boys are capable of and peer group pressure to be 'cool' can contribute to a loss of momentum to do well.

Whilst our *Going for Gold* course is run with boys and girls, generally the emphasis is on black boys underachievement. Our colleague is currently studying for her PhD at London South Bank University, and she is focusing on black girls underachievement. It is a much needed area of research and we will be pleased to provide a summary of her findings when she completes her PhD in 2010.

Special points of interest:

- Hitler's Forgotten Victims
- New Cross Fire
- 'Racially offensive' classic novel
- First black mayor
- **FREE SUBSCRIPTION**

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Next issue: June 2009

Why black children need to 'unlearn' history taught in schools

Mark and Charmaine Simpson have launched their own company 'Black History Studies' (BHS) in order to dispel the myth that black people have contributed very little to history and contemporary society.

They decided to launch BHS to help educate black people to educate themselves. They state that slavery and war has played a big part in eradicating black history. Since European colonisation history books are filled with European achievements and a complete omission of the great contribution Africa has made. They feel it is important to pass on this history in order to redress this balance as this lack of knowledge has heavily influenced where black people are at in the world today.

They argue that mainstream media has dictated who the black role models are whereas, accord-

ing to the Simpsons, they are only playing a



role in order to get paid while the black community 'get played'. They feel that change must come from the black community through education first. For example, the way the history

of Egypt is currently taught leads to a false account of black history. As they go on to explain, once white Europeans began to explore Africa they demolished any evidence of an established civilisation. This has led to a view of Africa as inferior. They argue that the Sphinx and numerous other statues in Egypt were defaced due to their black features and the libraries of Timbuktu in Mali were destroyed.

BHS offer a number of short and long term courses covering subjects such as ancient Nubia, the first civilisation, black psychology and religion. They run their courses in London, Birmingham, Leeds and Liverpool for anyone aged 12 and above. To find out more visit www.blackhistorystudies.co.uk

The lesser known story of what Hitler did to black people

Much is known of the treatment of Jews during the Second World War in Hitler's Germany but less is known about the plight of black people during the same period. German's defeat in the First World War fuelled racist attitudes that had been planted even earlier by a senior geneticist, Doctor Eugen Fischer. He developed his racial theories in German South West Africa (now Namibia) long before World War I, claiming there were genetic dangers arising from 'race mixing' between Germans and African women during their colonial rule. Germany demonstrated their genocidal tendencies when, in 1904, the Herero tribe revolted against the Germans in a bid to keep their land. The rebellion lasted four years and led to the death of almost eighty per cent of their population. The rest were imprisoned and some were used as guinea pigs for medical experiments.



The caption states: "The result! A loss of racial pride."

After Germany's defeat in the First World War, the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 stripped Germany of its African colonies and many Germans based there returned to Germany bringing their racist views with them. Also, the Treaty allowed allies to occupy the Rhineland in western Germany and French colonial troops were used, some of whom were African, and this sparked further anti-black sentiment in Germany. There is evidence of Germans complaining

bitterly in newspapers and propaganda films about African soldiers from the French colonial army having relations with their women.

Once Hitler reoccupied the Rhineland in 1936, he targeted black people living there. At least four hundred mixed race children were forcibly sterilised while a similar number disappeared. Hans Hauck, a victim of this sterilisation programme says they were lucky that they weren't victims of euthanasia. They had no anaesthetic and once he received his vasectomy certificate he had to sign an agreement that he was not allowed to have sexual relations whatsoever with Germans.

There were an estimated 20,000 to 25,000 black people living in Germany at the time Hitler came to power. In 1932 in Breslau, Hitler gave a speech in which he ordered Africans, Jews and anyone not Aryan to leave Germany or go into the camps. But most black people in Germany could not heed Hitler's warning as they were German citizens with German passports and had nowhere else to go. While a fair number escaped to France, others tried to return to the former German colonies, taken

over by the League of Nations in 1920. The British colonial authorities in the newly named South West Africa would not allow black Germans refugee status on the grounds that they had fought for the Germans in World War I.

One of the early black victims of the Nazis was Lari Gilges, a black activist who founded an organisation of entertainers that fought the Nazis in Dusseldorf. He was murdered by the SS in 1933. A black German actor, Theodore Michael said that black people in Germany 'were aware that if the Nazis wanted to get rid of us, they could catch us in one swoop. I was eventually sent to a munitions factory, where I was liberated by Russian soldiers. They were surprised to see a black man still alive.'

Hans Massaquoi, was born in 1926 in Hamburg. His mother was a German nurse and his father was the son of a former African king. His father returned to Liberia leaving him and his mother in Germany. In a fascinating book *Destined to Witness: Growing Up Black in Nazi Germany*, he recalls growing up in Germany and his fascination with the rise of Adolf Hitler as a young boy. He talks of his desire to join the Hitler Youth organisation but not being allowed because he was black. His teachers often reminded him that he was not 'one of them' and he was also told by one teacher that when they were done with the Jews he would be next.

Captured black prisoners of war were often shot on the spot or taken to camps where they were segregated from white prisoners. Not only black Germans suffered at the hands of the Nazis black soldiers were also targets. Between 1939 and 1945, an estimated 200 000 black troops from African colonies were serving in Europe. The Nazis segregated black inmates for extra special treatment of the fatal kind. In breach of the Geneva Convention, black prisoners were denied food, and given dangerous jobs. Black soldiers and civilians scavenged for scraps of food in garbage heaps at the Hemer POW camp near Dortmund in north-west Germany but no one knows how many black soldiers or civilians died in the camps at the hands of the SS guards because where Jews were noted as Jews, blacks were noted by nationality.



Two survivors prepare food outside the barracks. The man on the right, presumably, is Jean (Johnny) Voste, born in Belgian Congo, who was the only black prisoner in Dachau, Germany, May 1945.

New Cross Fire - 18 January 1981

Young black men and women were celebrating a joint birthday party at 439 New Cross Road when, in the early hours of Sunday morning on the 18 January 1981, a serious fire took hold of the house, killing thirteen youths and injuring a further sixteen. One of the birthday girls, Yvonne Ruddick died of her injuries whilst Angela Jackson, who shared the party, escaped injury because she had left earlier.

The fire took hold extremely quickly. At the time, many believed it had been started deliberately in a racist attack, by a firebomb thrown through the window. The forensic evidence did not bear the firebomb theory out but most activists and relatives agree that the police were not strenuous enough in their inquiries, and were too quick to discount the theory of a racist attack.

Nerissa Campbell, the mother of one boy who died and another who survived, said the police simply appeared uninterested. "Not one word of sympathy was offered to us. The police officers who were originally investigating the fire were not interested in finding out how it started and who started it. "When they interviewed the youngsters who survived, they were insensitive in their line of questioning and treated them as though they were criminals."

The fire happened against a background of racial tension and poor community relations in the area, and accusations of oppressive policing. The fire had a massive impact on the black community and two months after the fire about 10,000 people, led by Darcus Howe, marched to Downing



28 years on, and the cause is still not known

Street protesting at the police reaction to this perceived racist attack. The fire, and the police's reaction to it, is widely held to have been the catalyst for the Brixton riots which exploded in April 1981.

In recent years the Racial and Violent Crime Task Force, set up as a result of the Lawrence inquiry, took on a New Cross reinvestigation. But for some activists, a new inquest or even criminal charges will not be enough. The New Cross Massacre Action Group demanded a Home Office Commission of Inquiry into the matter. It says: "Britain will take a great leap forward into a modern multi-ethnic, multicultural, multinational state and society when such outrageous inci-

ents as the New Cross massacre are properly investigated, the truth uncovered and appropriate action is taken."

Dotun Adebayo, writing in *The Voice* believes we need to come together to mark the loss with an annual day of mourning. He argues that books need to be written and a film made, similar to the film Spike Lee made about the four little black girls who died when their church was bombed in Birmingham, Alabama by racists in 1963. He feels that the New Cross fire is Britain's equivalent to this American tragedy and whilst those four little black girls will not be forgotten, how can we ensure that the young people killed in the New Cross Fire are also not forgotten?

First black mayor elected in Norfolk



Dr Allan Glais(y)er Minns: first black Mayor in Britain

Until recently it was believed that John Archer, who became mayor in Battersea, South London, in 1913, was the first black man to hold this title. However, new research, conducted by the Norwich and Norfolk Racial Equality Council (NNREC), the Norfolk Record Office and historian Sean Creighton, has found that the first ever black mayor was elected a few years earlier in 1904 in Thetford, Norfolk. The 'American Negro Year Book 1914' re-

corded that: 'In 1904 Mr Allan Glais(y)er Minns, a col'd man from West Indies, was elected Mayor of borough of Thetford, Norfolk'.

Dr Minns was born in the Bahamas on the 19 October 1858 and was educated at Nassau Grammar School. He moved to Britain to study at London's Guys Hospital and later became the medical officer at Thetford Workhouse and at Thetford Cottage Hospital. He was a prominent figure in his community. As well as becoming Mayor, he was a member of the Town Council and Director of Thetford Gas Company. He also became a member of the British Medical Association and wrote papers and lectures on hygiene, literature and horticulture. He was president of Thetford Horticultural Society and mayor of Thetford from 1904-1906.

Archives Support Services Manager, Rachel Farmer, says that Norfolk is proud of its history and 'Dr Allan Glaisyer Minns will always be remembered for an outstanding record of service to his local community.,

(*The Voice*, February 16-22, 2009)

Prison Service failing on equality

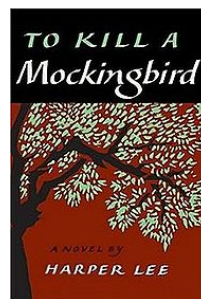
According to an independent review, *The Race Review 2008*, the prison service has a long way to go in addressing racial inequalities in the system.

Whilst the review acknowledged that some progress has been made, since the

findings of a CRE report on race equality five years ago, the experience of black and minority ethnic prisoners and staff had not been significantly improved.

Continued on page 4

Protest at 'racially offensive' classic novel



First edition cover

A 16 year old black student walked out of his school in protest at being forced to read the classic novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The book was published in 1960 and is loosely based on the author's observations of her family and her neighbours in the 1930s. It deals with serious issues of rape and racial injustice.

The student attends a school in Manchester and is the only black boy in his class. He was studying

the novel for his GCSE exam but protested after his class mates were allowed to act out scenes from the book, using the word 'N**ger'. He said that reading the book made him feel 'inferior and undermined' and that he has suffered racist taunts.

He decided to walk out of the school because they ignored his complaints about the 'racially offensive' novel and his request to study an alternative book. Teachers argued that the point of studying the book is to challenge racism but he disagrees claiming that books like this do nothing to alleviate or reduce racism. In fact he feels they have contributed negatively to the school community and he has suffered the brunt of this negativity. He believes it is time for these books to be buried in the past as times have changed. His mother supported his move claiming that he should not have been put in that position. However, the Headteacher, speaking to the *Manchester Evening News*, claimed that the school deals severely with any incidents of racism and that her staff had handled the subject sensitively by telling the black student in advance that the book included some offensive words!



Update from Starlight

January 2009 began with the news that the Learning Communities Initiative that Sue was heavily involved with was ending on 31 March this year. Sadly, Sue had given a lot of her time to this project and ended up being quite unwell. This has meant that our normally active calendar was put on hold through the first months of this year.

Plans to host a conference are still in the pipeline and we are hoping to get funding to stage this conference in early July. We want to provide a stage for the young people we work with in order to demonstrate to schools the skills and talents they display outside of school. We plan to make this an upbeat event, with a focus on looking to the future and what can be done to tackle underachievement in schools. By hosting the conference in July we hope to attract teachers who work with our children preparing for their GCSEs.

The Going for Gold Showcase evening held in October 2008 demonstrated some of the capabilities our children have and yet in school they can be the very group of students sent out of class, put on temporary exclusion orders or who generally do not flourish in the school

environment.

Following our work with this group of young people of African Caribbean heritage, and the tough time they can sometimes face in school, we intend to revise the Going for Gold course to place a bigger emphasis on long term goals and the need to have an action plan and mentoring programme to keep them on track. We hope to re-launch the revised edition towards the end of April 2009. Apart from this the father's group is getting back on track and the book and toy library has attracted some young volunteers to help ensure we can keep this going. Local children have also asked us to help them run a fundraising event for young carers. We are so impressed with their initiative and we hope to host a fundraising day early in the school summer holidays.

We are also aware that we need to attract funding to sustain our work locally and are currently looking into the possibility of forming a Community Interest Company to allow us to continue to offer all our courses free at the point of delivery. Watch this space!

Starlight's OCN Accredited Courses

We now have six accredited courses and if anyone is interested in finding out more please do get in touch. They are as follows:

- 1. Going for Gold** - supporting young people of African Caribbean heritage to do well in school.
- 2. Move on Up!** - aimed at young people aged 14-19 not in education, employment or training.
- 3. Enterprising Women**
- 4. Raising the Aspirations of young men & fathers**
- 5. Community Champions** - providing official recognition of volunteer's skills & attributes.
- 6. Community Development in Action** - helping local people take collective action for positive change.

Who was he?

His name is Alexandre Dumas. His grandfather was a Marquis and his grandmother was a black slave who died shortly after the birth of his father Thomas-Alexandre Dumas.

His father became a celebrated 'mulatto' general who participated in many of Napoleon's campaigns. He married Marie-Louise Elizabeth Labouret and in 1802 she gave birth to their son, Alexandre.

When he was four years old his father died and left them in poverty. His mother told Alexandre stories of his father's brave military deeds and this is probably what led to his great love of adventure and heroes.

At the age of twenty he went to Paris and worked for Duc d'Orleans, who later became King Louis Philippe. He

began his writing career in 1829 and between 1844-45 he wrote his two most famous novels - *The Three Musketeers* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*.

Despite Alexandre Dumas' success and aristocratic connections, his being of 'mixed-blood' would affect him all his life. He was not known to define himself as a black man, however one quote exists of him referring to his black heritage when an arrogant white man dared to say: 'And I hear you actually have Negro blood in you!' 'Yes'. Replied Alexandre, 'my father was a mulatto, his father a Negro, and his father a monkey. My ancestry began where yours ends!'

He died on December 5, 1870 from a stroke.

(Adapted from <http://www.intermix.org.uk/icons>)

Prison Service failing on equality

Continued from page 3

A member of the Independent Advisory Group, Nacro, a crime reduction charity, commented that there was still a disturbing degree of inequality. Paul Cavadino, Chief Executive of Nacro said that 'prisoners from minority groups are more likely than white prisoners to be segregated and to have force used against them.' He went on to say that they gave the worse per-

ceptions of their treatment and of their relationships with staff. The charity is calling for the Prison Service to improve relationships between staff and minority ethnic prisoners.

The Justice Minister Shahid Malik recognises the challenges that still lay ahead and wants to see the Prison Service working co-operatively with partner organisations to tackle these inequalities.

(The Voice 22 December - January 4 2009)

Some Good Done

By Jennifer Lisa Vest*

Biologically I am
A mixture More and less
Complicated than I claim to be
Culturally

My mother my father they
Have their own identities
My phenotype is another story
Entirely

Where I grew up and how
Who my ancestors were
And why they died
All conspire to define me
In ways that are beyond even me.

Ambiguity is my home
Either/or does not apply
And my existence defies
So many names and claims
Of place
It would be a lie to check a race

All I know for certain
Is that it matters
That my existence
Confounds you
That your inability to classify me
Bewilders you
And there is some good done
Each time I cause confusion
There is some good done

* Jennifer Lisa Vest. Is a mixed race poet, originally from Chicago. Visit her website, mxdmessages.com to hear more.

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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 31 May 2009.

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1/4 page: £45
1/8 page: £25
Please contact us with details. The deadline for the June newsletter is 31 May 2009.