

STARLIGHT

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

Editorial



Christine Chambers
The Editor

The importance of positive black role models is once again in the news. We should be seeing more black and mixed heritage figures for our children to identify with in every area of authority, none more so than in our schools. Three of my four children have been through the state education system in Oxford and none has had a black or mixed heritage teacher, despite the fact that it is a multi-racial city with an ever-increasing mixed heritage population.

Two of my sons were born only a year apart. They share the same two parents and they grew up in the same home. They went to the same schools up to the age of 13, with the younger boy often following his brother into the same class. My oldest son is now 19 and is just about to embark on his second year at university. My second son is 18 years old and is in prison. Of course, they are very different people and have different life experiences but if I was asked to pinpoint one crucial factor that had catalysed their current places in life, I would have to say it was in the way they handled their experiences of prejudice.

My oldest son endured the usual name-calling and, as he got into upper school at 13, was confronted by a number of teachers who seemed to have taken a dislike of him. If he raised his hand to answer a question, he was ignored, even told to put his hand down. One particular teacher made him the butt of her jokes.

My son never told me any of what was going on, I heard it from other pupils in his class. He handled the prejudice by keeping his mouth firmly shut, even when severely provoked to retaliate. He had a clear belief that this was not his problem but the teacher's problem. He recognised that the prejudice existed before he became its target, and that it would continue after he'd left -that it wasn't his fault. He was aware of his own capabilities and had a long-term goal of going to university. If it influenced anything, it was probably his choice of university. He was keen to enrol somewhere that could offer him the opportunity to be taught by black lecturers and where, as a student, he would not be a conspicuous minority.

My second son never failed to re-

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spond vocally when he felt he was being victimised. Unlike his older brother, he always told the teacher when he experienced racism. He coped well enough until he was 12 and was buoyed by his large circle of friends. But things started to change as he changed from a cute little boy into a strapping adolescent. When he suffered racial insults in middle school he retaliated verbally and was punished. If he tried to offer his version of events he was called a liar. The head teacher told him he was stupid and useless and that he would end up in

jail and my son took on board everything he was told. He was overwhelmed by a sense of injustice and his behaviour gradually deteriorated. He was finally excluded at the age of 13 and never returned to mainstream education. Unlike his older brother, he never saw racism as the other person's problem. He believed, fundamentally, that it was something about him that caused the problems and that it was his fault he suffered.

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Recognise this man?

He was born in Massachusetts in 1848. His mother and father were escaped slaves from Virginia. When he was a boy his father was arrested and tried as a slave fugitive. The judge ordered his return to Virginia and slavery, but money was raised by the local community to pay for his freedom. However, his father feared his re-enslavement and went underground.

Despite these hardships we have all benefited from this man's inventions. Find out who he is on page four.

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Starlight BCMHG

1 Mole Place

OXFORD OX4 7SD

Tel: 01865 776691

E-mail: StarlightEnt7788@aol.com

www.starlightenterprise.co.uk

Please ensure any contributions/adverts arrive by 30 Nov 2007

Next issue: December 2007

Intermix

Sharron Hall, began Intermix in 1991 and is the founder and editor of Intermix.org.uk, a website offering news and views of the mixed-race experience from all over the world She has received a [Family Learning Millennium Award](#) for her work. The Intermix website is an interesting site, offering information on many issues to mixed families. There are some fantastic poems to be read by a wide range of writers. These alone are worthy of your time!

Statue of Mandela erected in London

A 9ft bronze statue of Nelson Mandela was unveiled in Parliament square on 29th of August. The infamous South African leader was at the ceremony, along with Prime Minister Gordon Brown and London Mayor, Ken Livingstone. The 89 year old Nobel Peace Prize winner is the first to be honoured in such a way within his own life time. After much debate over where the statue should stand, it was finally placed facing the Houses of Parliament, alongside effigies of other leaders such as Abraham Lincoln, Benjamin Disraeli and Winston Churchill. It is the first significant monument of a black figure in Britain and is the result of a 7 yr long campaign by, among others, Ken Livingstone and Lord Attenborough.

The London Mayor paid tribute at the event to South Africa's freedom fighter, saying

'Long after we are forgotten, you will be remembered for having taught the world one amazing truth; that you can achieve justice without vengeance -I honour you and London honours you.'

Nelson Mandela was imprisoned for 27 years on Robben Island during the struggle against the dreadful system of apartheid and emerged

to become the President of South Africa.

The Prime Minister claimed that the world

Long after we are forgotten, you will be remembered for having taught the world one amazing truth; that you can achieve justice without vengeance -I honour you and London honours you'.

will remember Mr. Mandela as the man who put an end to the racist system. Gordon Brown stated that the great leader is

'The man whom no prison cell, no intimidation, no violence, no show trial and no threat of execution could ever silence.'

Mr. Mandela was modest in his response to the tribute being paid to him by the unveiling. He reminded the audience of the others who had lost their freedom and even their lives in the struggle for freedom, saying; **'Though this statue is of one man, it should in actual fact symbolise all of those who have resisted oppression, especially in my country.'** (The Voice 3-9 Sept 07)

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I believe that two children can experience similar adversity but be affected in totally different ways. One may be determined to prove himself against all odds whilst the other's failure becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Teachers are able to qualify without ever having to confront their personal prejudices or racial stereotypes. They can go into a teaching position in a racially and ethnically diverse community without ever having any racial awareness training. This is a fundamental flaw in our education system and if our young people are ever to reach their potential, there needs to be change. I am not trying to abdicate my son from any responsibility for his own actions. He takes total responsibility and is paying a high price for his mistakes. I do, however, argue that the school system systematically destroyed his self-esteem and his potential and that the same thing is happening to thousands of other children from minority backgrounds. Of course we need more teachers to reflect the racial and religious origins of the children they teach. In the mean time though, we need **all** teachers to have a clear idea of the multitude of manifestations of prejudice, including isolation and exclusion.

**Christine Chambers,
Editor**

Mixedness and Mixing e-conference

Between the 4 and 6 September the Commission for Racial Equality organised an e-conference in partnership with the Runnymede Trust, London South Bank University's Families and Social Capital Research Group, and the Department for Communities and Local Government.

It aimed to take a closer look at issues relating to Britain's mixed-race population (mixedness) and mixed families (mixing).

They chose to focus on mixed-race groups because 'this group is one of the most diverse and least well understood in Britain'. They felt there are many vital questions that need answering, for example:

- Given that this group is so diverse, can we really talk of a 'mixed-race population', or a mixed-race 'group' or 'community' at all?
- Have attitudes to mixed-race couples, people and families changed in Britain?
- Do mixed-race groups get overlooked when policies attempt to engage ethnic minorities?
- Does inequality take specific forms for mixed-race people, and, if so, this is the same across all mixed-race groups?
- Do mixed-race families have to cope with different issues that families from the same racial backgrounds? Can mixed race people be treated as a single group by policymakers?

Through this eConference, they hoped to provide a forum to bring together the broadest variety of perspectives on this topic to date. They wanted to identify and discuss key issues related to mixed race/ethnicity experience, research, practice and policy.

Specifically, they wanted to begin to:

- consider how we do and can think about mixedness and mixing;
- identify the extent of, and gaps in, our empirical knowledge, and
- point to ways forward in the development of services and policies.

CRE Chair Kay Hampton launched the Mixedness & Mixing e-conference with an article in the Guardian Unlimited's 'Comment is Free' *Thinking outside the ticked boxes*. She discussed how the growing mixed-race group raises

questions of how our understanding of ethnicity affects policy. In 2001 the census introduced a new category: 'mixed'. Approximately 677,000 people identified themselves as "mixed-race" in this last census. It is also the youngest group - half of all those who regard themselves as "mixed-

race" in the UK are under the age of 16. Hampton points out that those of mixed parentage will have children and grandchildren who will be increasingly and variously diverse in terms of nationality, ethnicity and skin colour. She feels that perhaps it is time to rethink how we gather data that captures the varied patterns of social interaction and integration in our society. She believes that policies must allow for societies to progress by creating fluid structures that can adjust to include new and emerging identities and communities and not necessarily expect individuals to express identities in predefined ways. By the

same token, she argues, individuals need to be able to adjust and feel secure in their chosen identities. Only then, she believes, can we achieve our goal of equality, fairness and justice.

The online conference featured a number of short papers written especially for the event. Participants discussed and debated the issues raised in a number of forums alongside policymakers, academics and people working in the voluntary sector. Each day a panel of experts offered their perspectives on the papers. Day 1 considered the inequalities faced by Britain's mixed-race population and how these may be overcome. Day 2 discussed the nature and characteristics of mixed relationships and families, and how members of the mixed-race population relate to, and interact with, people from other ethnic groups. Day 3 considered how mixed race people are involved in decisions about how society works, both at a national and local level, and through informal structures as well as formal ones.

Whilst the e-conference has now ended it is still possible to view all the papers submitted for each of the three days themes. The forums are now closed for comments but you can still read the discussions that took place by visiting the website www.mixedness.org.uk/mixedness/forums. It is worth a visit as there are a number of personal stories about how they have made sense of their experiences growing up. There is a follow-up conference on Friday, 28 September in London at South Bank University to discuss key issues related to mixed race/ethnicity research, practice and policy in the British context. An update will be included in the next issue of our newsletter.



Update from Starlight Black Child Mixed Heritage Group

Our Family Fun Day planned for 28 July was postponed due to an unforeseen clash of events with ACEF's (African Caribbean Education Forum) Cultural Education Afternoon. We were unaware they were planning a similar day of activities and because we wish to support this initiative, we decided to reschedule our event for later in the year.

In the meantime, our visit to the Aston Rowant Nature Reserve in August was a great success. (See page 4 for more information.)

We have not opened the book and toy library

during the summer holidays but we will be re-opening on Wednesday, 26 September.

The 'Fantastic Crew' have now completed their role as a children's panel for Oxfordshire Children's Fund. The Children's Fund hosted a day of celebrations for all the children who had participated in a children's panel. The 'Fantastic Crew' made 66 decisions about who should get funding and they spent £9,103. Apart from enjoying a BBQ, and fun and games, they were each awarded a certificate and a voucher entitling them to an out-of-school activity or equipment to the value of

£25. We would like to thank Zoe Elford and Yarrow Davies for their work with the children. They learned a lot from the experience including being a member of a team, writing out cheques and making decisions about spending money. We are keen for the children to continue to work together and welcome ideas and suggestions about what they might like to do.

We meet every Wednesday from 5-6.30pm at the Blackbird Leys Adventure Playground, re-commencing 26 September. We always welcome new members and hope to see you there.

Black leaders told to step up to responsibilities to their community

The government backed a report, entitled *Reach*, into the affects of gang culture and inner-city deprivation on black teenagers. The report called for more black role models from a diversity of professional backgrounds to step up to their responsibilities as role models to the young people of the black communities. It called for an extension and development of outreach work and mentoring programmes. It is interesting to note that the Big Brothers Big Sisters organisation in the US, the blueprint of most mentoring organisations, concentrates its work greatly in the deprived black and Hispanic communities.

Mayfair's Dorchester Hotel was the venue for the Mayor of London's inaugural Black Leaders Dinner, attended by many of those on the New Nation newspaper's list of Britain's 50 most powerful black men and women's list. Organisers of the event stated that they felt it is important to focus on the many black success stories which usually get overlooked by the media. The guest list was comprised of such figures as Richard Taylor, father of the murdered schoolboy, Damilola Taylor, and the fa-

ther of Formula One racing driver Lewis Hamilton. The guest of honour was Nelson Mandela, who ensured that each guest was handed a personal message from him which stated **'It is important for you as leaders to harness those responsibilities and ensure that you also empower those around you who scale the mountains with you'**.

One organiser of the Black Leaders Dinner stated that the role models were already there in the form of the many successful figures on the guest list. He called for people to recognise the achievements made by those already succeeding in positions which many young people aspire to.

There has been much debate about the responsibilities of the wider black community in preventing black youths from gravitating towards gangs and street violence. It remains unclear how much help should be offered by, and indeed accepted from, central government to address this issue. In August, Jesse Jackson, the first ever black candidate for the American Presidency, launched Equanomics, which is aimed at focussing on the economic situation of black communities. (The Guardian Aug 28th 07)

Strange Fruit

**'Southern trees bear a strange fruit
Blood on the leaves and blood at
the root
Black body swinging in the Southern
breeze
Strange fruit hanging from the pop-
lar trees.'**

Many of us are familiar with the haunting sound of the late Billie Holiday's rendition of the song Strange Fruit. Not so many of us will know that she was so overcome by the images it evoked for her that she inevitably closed her eyes to perform it. She would not begin to sing the lyrics of the song, with which she always closed her shows, until waiters had stopped serving and only a single spotlight shone on her.

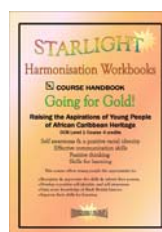
The song began its life as a poem, written by Jewish schoolteacher Abel Meeropol (under a pseudonym) after he saw a photograph, taken in August 1930, which deeply disturbed him. The image showed two bodies hanging from a tree surrounded by a dense white crowd, many laughing and pointing to the dead teenagers, Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith. Many people in the southern states possessed such photographs and they were sold as post-

cards, often door to door. The song was revolutionary as the lynchings carried out in the US -an estimated 3,883 between 1889 and 1940- were almost always of black men in the southern states and therefore not referred to in the media. Indeed Ms Holiday's producer refused to allow her to record it on her usual Columbia record label. She eventually managed to get the song recorded on the Commodore label in 1939. It was the image of those two teenagers that Billie Holiday pictured in her mind as she sang.

A 1944 novel of the same name told the story of an inter-racial relationship and was widely banned by bookshops across America. This did not, however prevent it from becoming a best-seller and the white author, Lillian Smith was honoured by the all-black Fisk University. She stated that segregation was evil and that *'there is no pattern of life which can dehumanise men as can the way of segregation'* (The Guardian Review 18-08-07).

'Civilisation began the first time an angry person cast a word instead of a rock'

Sigmund Freud

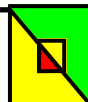


Going for Gold OCN ACCREDITED COURSE

Claudette Radway, Head of EMAS, Bristol City Council invited Starlight Enterprise Limited to provide a Training the Trainer session in July so that local community leaders and schools could run the Going for Gold course from the autumn term. It is hoped that many other schools and community groups will also see the value of running this course in their local area. There is already excellent work taking place in the community and in some schools to support young people of African Caribbean heritage to do well in education. The 'Going for Gold' course is designed to provide an additional tool that can be adapted for use in a local setting. There are specific learning outcomes that need to be demonstrated to achieve the qualification but any other work already taking place with young people of African Caribbean heritage can be easily incorporated. The real advantage of running the 'Going for Gold' course alongside this work is that young people can gain a recognised qualification.

The course offers young people of African Caribbean heritage an opportunity to explore their black heritage, gain skills that can help them to develop a strong sense of self and resilience, whilst also achieving a qualification and certificate. By exploring key figures in black history they can gain knowledge of their achievements and reflect on what they can learn from these life stories, helping them to succeed. As they work through the course material they can begin to shed any negative thoughts, values or beliefs and become the person they are capable of being.

Anyone interested in finding out more about how they can access this course to run in their local area, please contact Starlight Enterprise Ltd, 1 Mole Place, Oxford OX4 7SD. Tel. 01865 776691 or visit their website www.starlightenterprise.co.uk.



Who was he?

His name is Lewis Latimer, (1848-1928) a very talented inventor, draftsman, engineer, author, poet, musician and philanthropist.

His father's light skin had enabled his mother and father to escape slavery by his father pretending to be a plantation owner and his mother pretending to be his father's slave. Shortly after Lewis was born his father was arrested as a fugitive slave but the community, including former slaves Frederick Douglass and abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, spoke out against the arrest. Whilst the court ruled that he still belonged to his owner, an African American minister paid \$400 for his release but his father disappeared, probably fearing for his life.

In 1864, Lewis lied about his age and joined the U.S. Navy to fight in the Civil War. At the end of the war, he received an honourable discharge and returned to Boston to look for work. He began working as an errand boy for a law firm who specialised in protecting the rights of inventors.

Lewis picked up the skills of a draftsman, and his employers acknowledged these skills and promoted him. Lewis went on to work with two of

the most important inventors of the time. First, he assisted Alexander Graham Bell in drafting his blueprints for the telephone. They managed to get the patent application in only hours before a rival inventor.

He later went to work for Thomas Edison assisting him with electric lighting and filing the patents for it. His most important contribution to the Edison team was the development of carbon filaments for the light bulb. Before his work, Edison had settled on bamboo for the filament. This didn't last long but it did work. However, the carbon filament that Latimer and Nichols developed worked much longer. Latimer and Nichols received a patent for an incandescent light bulb with a carbon filament as well as the process for manufacturing them in 1881. After his work with Edison, Latimer worked for a patent consulting firm until his eyesight began to fail.

He married Mary Wilson on December 10, 1873. He wrote a poem for his wedding entitled *Ebon Venus* that was published in his book of poetry, *Poems of Love and Life*. They had two daughters, Jeanette and Louise.

Why Multicultural toys and books are important for all our children

Emmanuel Blackman, writing in Mosaic's September issue of their newsletter, re-iterates the need for multicultural toys, books and greeting cards. He argues that multicultural play and learning resources are essential to all children's development. He is the Director of Kids Like Me Limited that offers multicultural toys, books and educational resources. The founders of Kids Like Me have a mixed heritage background and know how difficult it can be to find multicultural children's gifts in the High Street. The Kids Like Me concept grew out of a need to create a 'one-stop-shop' multicultural children's store that would meet the needs of like-minded parents, grandparents, carers, childcarers, teachers and other educational professionals.

They believe that these are important resources for all families because they encourage social inclusion, promote equality and improve cultural awareness. They argue that multicultural toys and stories enable children to understand and value, not only the things that make us all different, but the things that bind us all together. They feel that if we can encourage children to embrace cultural diversity during their formative years, then we can help to make a difference to our children's futures.

We wholeheartedly agree with this view - this is why we have set up our own multicultural book and toy library and we will certainly be ordering further resources from Kids Like Me when we have raised further funds to continue to expand our library. Anyone interested in finding out more about Kids Like Me, particularly as we are heading for the Christmas period, please visit their website www.kidslikeme.co.uk.

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.

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 December newsletter is 30 November 2007.

Trip to Aston Rowant on 9 August 2007



'smelly smoothie' from the collection of leaves and bark on the woodland floor before 'meeting a tree'. The families enjoyed a picnic lunch with stunning views before setting off on a mini-beast safari in search of creepy crawlies and brilliant bugs!

A trip to Aston Rowant Nature Reserve was offered to members of Starlight's Black Child Mixed Heritage group and local residents. Jenny Crook, the Community Liaison Officer, who works for Natural England, very kindly offered this day of activities for the children and even provided the group with a 52-seater coach! The event was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The party left Blackbird Leys just after 10 in the morning and the activities began as soon as they arrived at the nature reserve. Despite precautions due to the foot and mouth scare, the children were able to enjoy a number of educational and fun activities in this ancient woodland. They began with a blind fold walk with guiding ropes to take them safely round the roots of the trees. They then made a

The trip was such a success that it is hoped this will become an annual free event for the group, their friends and families in the local community.

Jenny would be pleased to hear from any other community groups who would like a tailor-made visit. Please contact her by calling 01844 351833 or 07766 991020.



New Nation's black power list of 100 leading role models

On the 27 August 2007, New Nation released the Power List 2007 featuring Britain's 50 most powerful black men and 50 most powerful black women. They decided to compile the list because they wanted to demonstrate the strength of Britain's black community at a time when many black people were falling into the trap of believing they were lacking any. Its editor, Michael Eboda, writing in *The Observer* (26.08.07), stated that they wanted to not only put the 'feel good factor' back into the community, they were also 'sick of people telling us that African Caribbean people weren't getting anywhere. We were tired of seeing the usual suspects rolled out every time the role model debate hit the news, and we were bored with the idea that the only black people on the planet who were doing anything constructive all lived on the other side of the Atlantic'. To find out who they included in their Power List please visit www.powerlist.co.uk.