BLACK HISTORY 365

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WINNER OF THE BLACK HERITAGE AWARD 2007

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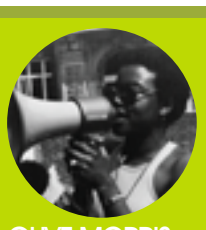

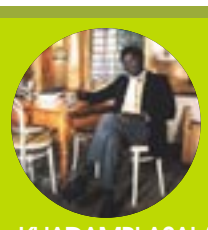

CATCHING THEM YOUNG:

BEATING THE SYSTEM UK-STYLE

HELLO AND WELCOME

Welcome to the spring/summer edition of the award-winning newspaper Black History 365, brought out in conjunction with Smaart Publishing to complement www.black-history-month.co.uk

Once again, we have a wealth of interesting stories for you to delve into. Some concern well-known figures like the one time calypso singer and actor Cy Grant, others remember those whom history seems to have passed by like the boxer Len Johnson, or who need introducing to a wider arena such as the artist Khadembi Asalache.

One person who has managed to make history in a very short time is of course Barack Obama, by all accounts, the most popular politician on the planet. As he gets into his stride as the 44th president of the US following his momentous inauguration in January, we asked a cross range of people about what his presidency meant to them and, in view of his mantra of 'change', its impact on global politics.

Each new edition brings a new anniversary. Two writers remember the aftermath of the Notting Hill riots, a defining moment in British post-war history that saw the fatal stabbing of Kelso Cochrane by a group of unknown white thugs 50 years ago this month.

It was a slaying reminiscent of the Stephen Lawrence case in 1993. The Macpherson report into the botched investigation into Stephen's murder labeled the police institutionally racist. On the tenth anniversary of its publication, one commentator asks what has happened since.

We also have a round up of the best of the new books and selected listings of what's on around the country. Don't forget that you can still see previous issues of the newspaper electronically on www.black-history-month.co.uk.

So once again, sit back relax and enjoy the latest edition of Black History 365.

Mia Morris

Any comments or queries about the edition
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What people said about the previous issue of Black History 365

Thank you so much for all the fantastic review coverage of our books
Fliona MacDonald, Walkers Books

I think the magazine is excellent!
Andrew Jones, Gazelle Books

Congrats! I just took a quick look through the latest edition and as I would have expected it looks like another great read! Give yourself a big pat on the back!!! How do you do it?
Dr Kay Trailie, Atlanta, Georgia, US

I work in HMP xxx and have just discovered your website and your brilliant magazine Black History 365.
Anonymous

The magazine is very well put together with a lot of relevant information. Well done to you and your team.
Pat Green, Oxford

Having read story about the Meriken [freed US slaves who fought on behalf of the British during the War of 1812] settlers in Trinidad, I immediately knew that you were writing about my own history – I am a Meriken descendant. I contacted my father who resides in the US and we discussed the article at length as he has more knowledge about our family history than me. He was extremely happy to hear about your article and I am sending the magazine over to him so he can read it for himself.
Mrs Deborah Henry-Adolph

Thanks very much for sending me copies of the publication, the article on John [McAnuff] is absolutely brilliant!
Marie Kouppari, Asst Press Officer NIACE

Just to say I am delighted with the magazine. It is a fantastic read
El Dora Barnett

I came across your magazine and found it not only insightful but a very interesting and refreshing read.
Sophia Afrifa

Well done – you and your team have once again pulled out the stops and created an amazing and engaging magazine.

I've had a quick glance through and am I looking forward to settling down with a biscuit and a cup of teas for an in depth read!
Kelly Foster, Black Cultural Archives

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This edition is dedicated to
Jean Adebambo and Lawrence 'Stretch' Noel

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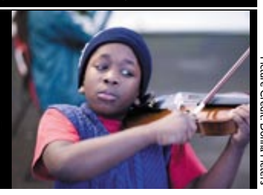
Our cover picture shows nine-year-old Tre Johnson trying his hand at the violin during a Fun Day led by musicians from the London Philharmonic Orchestra. He as taking part in the government's In Harmony music education programme taking place on the south London estate where he lives. See pxx for full story



Picture Credit: Donna Pieters

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FOREVER OLIVE

Activists want to hear from those who knew the late grassroots campaigner Olive Morris, who achieved a great deal in a short lifetime, writes *Mia Morris*

The grainy black and white photo shows a picture of a young woman speaking through a megaphone. It was a familiar pose for Olive Morris, the 1970s political firebrand and community leader who became a leading light of the early black women's movement and a lot more else.

Within a few years of this picture being taken, Olive was to tragically die just as one of the groups she helped found, the Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent (OWAAD), was beginning to ascend to the national stage.

Although Lambeth Council in south London named one of its offices after her in recognition of her campaign work in the Brixton area, she has become all but forgotten by the wider community. Now the Black Cultural Archives in London is attempting to revive Olive's memory with the help of those who knew her as part of an oral history project on the black women's movement.

The project is themed around the seminal 1985 book, *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain*, by Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie and Suzanne Scafe, a mix of interviews and history from black women's perspective.

Dadzie, who co-founded OWAAD, remembers Olive as a dynamic and inspiring figure. She says, 'Those of us who knew Olive, and whose lives were touched by her, are determined to keep her memory - and the legacy of her fighting spirit - alive.'

Tara Atluri never met Olive but became fascinated by her after reading about what she had achieved in her short life. She is now a member of the Remembering Olive Collective (ROC), which in 2007 launched a weblog to collect personal memories of Olive. She describes Olive as a figure of defiance and passion. 'If you come to our meetings you begin to see that [people] are not drawn to Morris in grief but out of inspiration.'

Olive was born in Jamaica in 1952 and moved to Britain with her family when she was nine. Her introduction to grassroots activism came at the age of 16 when she was arrested and assaulted after trying to help someone who was being harassed by police.

These were the days when the sons and daughters of early Caribbean migrants began to actively resist the racism of British society that routinely cast them in the role of second-class citizens. Olive became one of their number and within a few years she was well known figure in the south London area where she lived, involved in all manner of campaigns.

'Olive was a dynamic, outspoken sister who became known as a fearless defender of equal rights and justice,' remembers Dadzie fondly. 'She was respected and much loved for her readiness to confront the police when she saw them harassing black people on the streets of Brixton – as common an occurrence in the 1970s as it is today. On one occasion, she challenged them for stopping a black man driving a very fine car. Turns out he was an African diplomat!'

The 1970s was also a period of acute housing shortage and Olive was also at the forefront of the squatters rights campaign, taking over an empty private building in Railton Rd in 1972, from where a bookshop, Sabarr, was run.

The squat became the focus of several notorious eviction attempts, one of which took place while Olive was out. When she returned she got back into the building, climbed on to the roof from where she harangued the police on the street. An iconic picture of Olive climbing onto the roof of the building went on to grace the cover of the *Squatters Handbook* in 1979.

In 1975 Olive began a degree in social sciences in Manchester. It was during this period that she and Stella Dadzie first met up. 'I first got to know Olive when we attended a meeting at Coventry University that led to the founding of OWAAD,' she recalls.

Courtesy ROC

Olive Morris addressing a protest against police brutality outside Brixton Library in 1972

'We were both students at the time, but Olive was also a representative of the Brixton Black Women's Group and as such she brought to our discussion an understanding of the need for women's equality that was in many ways ahead of her time. Apart from her sense of humour, she had a fine brain, an astute understanding of black community politics and an unwavering commitment to social change – qualities that touched everyone who met her.'

In 1977 she visited China with a group of fellow activists, but would be dead within the year, felled by an aggressive form of cancer. She was only 27 years old.

Her immediate legacy lay in OWAAD, which held its first national conference in 1979 at the Abeng Centre in Brixton, shortly after she died. The organisation very quickly became a rallying cry for those who felt that the wider feminist movement did not address black women's needs and issues.

The oral history project is funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Seminal book

Three centuries of heritage

The Black Cultural Archives was established in 1981 to collect, preserve and promote understanding of black heritage. Its collections span 300 years and include a wide variety of material reflecting the history of the African diaspora and the presence of black people in Britain. It was recently awarded £4m from the Heritage Lottery Fund to establish a centre in Brixton, south London, to open in 2011.

On May 19 its project, Oral Histories of the Black Women's Movement, was launched at the Karibu Centre, formerly the Abeng, in Brixton, together with the unveiling of its online catalogue.

www.bcaheritage.org.uk
www.rememberolivemorris.wordpress.com

A DEVON CHILDHOOD

Restaurateur *Zena Burland* grew up in the north Devon town of Barnstaple, the daughter of a Jamaican father and an English mother. Here she recalls life in rural Britain of the '50s and '60s

In 1948 my father, Laurieston Davis, was one of the many young West Indians who arrived on the *Empire Windrush*.

He, with many others, came over to England to help with rebuilding Britain after the war. My father had joined the RAF in Jamaica, so he already had a role to play.

Due to ignorance, white British people treated my father and others like him shamefully – name calling, slamming doors in his face, not allowing him in bars – even though he was wearing the Queen's uniform.

My father met my mother in London, where they subsequently wed. I was born in 1950 and due to my father being in the RAF we were posted to Egypt. I was christened with the water from the River Nile. Not long after that my two sisters were born and then my two brothers.

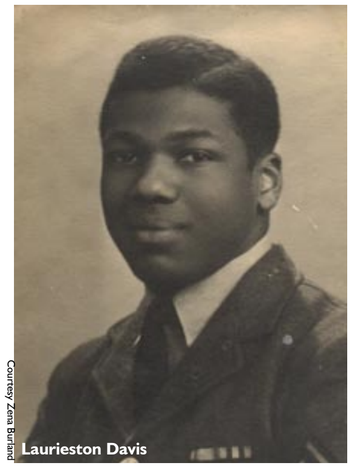
As RAF children we were frequently on the move and I grew up in a world where I constantly heard, 'What is that woman doing with that n-----? Or 'Who the hell does he think he is marrying a white woman?' Then it was my turn: 'What a pretty little thing, pity she's a half-caste.' You can't play with me. My mum says you're dirty.' 'How do you comb your hair?'

When I was five, Dad was posted to north Devon to the RAF base at Chivenor. It was here that things started to change and life seemed to be a lot easier for me. The kids at school were nice and we had some super teachers.

We lived off camp in rented accommodation, first in the village of Braunton near Barnstable, then in Barnstable itself.

Dad was a stickler for making sure we were kept busy. He would give us essays to write or sums to do – and this was in the summer holidays! It seemed cruel and unnecessary at the time but now I realise it was his way of keeping us safe, away from those who would accuse us of doing something just because they would remember the black face in a crowd. That was easy in Devon.

My father loved boxing but his other love was cricket and he played for the RAF and for a team in Barnstable. He also enjoyed listening to the radio, especially to two popular comedies of the day, *The Navy Lark* and *Round the Horn*. His newspaper of choice was the *Daily Mirror* because of the cartoon Andy Capp, which always made him laugh.



Courtesy Zena Burland

Laurieston Davis

Zena Burland

At Christmas he would always make a punch and invite all the neighbours in. The music of Harry Belafonte and Cy Grant would be on the record player with other West Indian calypsonians, who Dad would sing along to.

After 22 years' service, he left the RAF and was awarded the British Empire Medal for his contributions. He had a dream of taking us all back to Jamaica and we spent nine months there before returning to Devon.

Dad got a job with the Ministry of Overseas Aid and Development in London and commuted back and forth each week. Then he found civilian work back at RAF Chivenor and later with North Devon District Council's housing department.

What with this, the cricket and helping out with the Barnstable sea cadets, Mr Davis became a well-known figure in the town. He would be frequently seen crossing Barnstable Bridge, tipping his hat to the ladies. He was invariably well dressed, always telling us that 'clothes maketh the man'. Like so many who arrived on the *Windrush*, he was smart from the very day he arrived in Britain.

He died at the early age of 45. Only one week later his appointment as a magistrate came through the post. This would have made him the first black magistrate in Devon.

I stayed on. Although I experienced no real hostility as a child in Barnstaple, where we were more a novelty than anything else, it was when I started working that I began encountering problems. I was a nurse and some elderly Devonians, who had never met a black person before, didn't want me attending to them. Later I became a member of North Devon District Council and although I was elected vice-chair, it was made clear that I would never become chair.

I now run my restaurant, Zena's, in the town and divide my time between Britain and the Bahamas. Over the years I have learned that personal achievement is the biggest conqueror of racism.

OPINION: NOW YOU SEE IT, NOW YOU DON'T

Ten years after the Macpherson report concluded that institutional racism was widespread in Britain, politicians are trying to convince us it no longer exists, writes *Gus John*

In his 1999 report of the inquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence, Sir William Macpherson came up with no less than 70 recommendations to tackle institutional racism. Ten years on, we are in a period of reckless revisionism and irresponsible denial, a period in which it is being suggested that the nation and its black population have more urgent cause to worry about what black people are doing to themselves rather than focusing on what racism is doing to them.

The logic appears to be that even the police have come up to speed as far as sanitising racist institutional cultures is concerned. So we should bury the notion of 'institutional racism', which the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry report made so prominent and which so exercised and infuriated the British police.

The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) was supposed to be the watchdog overseeing the performance of public bodies and various government inspection regimes in implementing the Race

Gus John

Relations Amendment Act of 2000 (that required them to have a race relations policy or scheme in operation). So abysmal was its enforcement, that many public bodies carried on with business as usual.

And then last year, the government decided to replace the CRE with the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC). The agenda to combat racism, promote equity and safeguard the fundamental entitlements of black people of all ages has somehow morphed into programmes to 'value diversity', promote 'community cohesion' and qualify for 'citizenship'.

Trevor Phillips, who presided over a lame and largely irrelevant CRE, is now promoting the notion of a 'soft touch' approach to challenging those who adopt a less than robust approach to meeting the statutory equality duties. Persuasion and self-regulation rather than zero tolerance and visible enforcement seem to be the order of the day. This is a recipe for social unrest, irrespective of all the hype about 'community cohesion'.

The police may welcome the fact that in many of our communities there is such fear generated by the activities of some of our youths that the community is less watchful than before over the tactics police forces use in confronting young people on our streets. But, therein lies the danger.

We come to accept as 'normal' the establishment of mini police stations in our schools and our children being carted off to cells for offending behaviour, which headteachers used to see it as their duty to deal with. We come to accept as a fact of life the over-representative number of black youths who are permanently excluded from school only to end up in youth custody less than 12 months later, so that by age 17 they have already served a stretch in gaol.

We come to accept as a given that black boys continue to bump along the bottom of the school examination results year on year, as they have done since the late 1960s. We come to accept that they die with their aspirations at an increasingly young age.

The fact that there have been considerably more black deaths at the hands of black youths than as a result of racist attacks since Macpherson is an even worse indictment of British society than if it were the other way round.

If we fail to see the phenomenon of young black people dying in such numbers on our streets as having everything to do with the condition of being young and black in British society, and how that condition is shaped by British racism, we fall into the trap of believing that black young people are congenitally prone to evil and murder.

We collude with the 'settlement' if we fail to organise independently as parents, students and communities to hold schools, the police, our youths and the EHRC to account.

The relentless Lawrence campaign led eventually to the Macpherson Inquiry. The murders of scores of other young black men since Stephen Lawrence appear to have led only to the reinforcing of racial stereotypes and to handwringing in the most affected areas, while the rest of Britain continue to see that deeply disturbing phenomenon as an unwelcome canker on the body politic, that, according to Tony Blair, the black community itself must deal with, and which has precious little to do with the majority of the society.

Gus John is Associate Professor at the Institute of Education, University of London

LIVING ON THE FRONTLINE

Two vivid recollections of life in west London following the Notting Hill riots of 1958 and the unprovoked murder almost a year later of a young West Indian man

Fifty years ago this month Kelso Cochrane was murdered by a gang of white youths during the tense aftermath of the Notting Hill riots. Much of the blame for whipping up racial hatred was laid at the door of Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists (BUF), which had targeted the area. Just months after Kelso's fatal stabbing, Mosley hoped to benefit from continued racial tensions by contesting the 1959 elections in Kensington North, which Notting Hill was a part of. He came last, receiving less than 3,000 votes. At the time, the academic and writer **EA Markham** *was living in the area, having arrived in England from Montserrat to join his mother as a 16-year-old three years earlier. Their house was in Bevington Rd, just round the corner from where Kelso was murdered; and their next door neighbour was a high ranking member of the BUF. Here he recalls what happened the day Mosley called round. And, below, lawyer* **Colin Bobb-Semple**, *another recently arrived youngster, remembers the oppressive atmosphere of life on the frontline*

My mother was sitting at her window, as always, looking out. It was a Saturday afternoon in 1959 and [a] crowd had gathered. Mosley's helpers – maybe Geoffrey Hamm, his second-in-command, who lived next door to us, among them – set up a podium on the street outside our front door; and Mosley climbed up on it, bringing his head level with my mother a few feet away, at which point he tipped his hat to her.

I heard the scattered cheers. I was focused on my book; but I looked up and saw the gesture. My mother sat at her window, unflinching, apparently unaffected. At that point I joined my mother, briefly. I had been sitting on the bed inside, running through either some Latin or Italian homework. This studied casualness was the idea of my brother, Norman. We mustn't shut the window, we mustn't lock ourselves away.

We were lucky in one respect; our cousin, Terry, was visiting from the army, and he was in uniform. So my brother urged him to go out in the street and stand among the crowd, in his uniform, to prove a little point, a gesture that Terry – with exaggerated cool – was willing to make. He stood towards the back, but prominently, apparently in rapt attention, while the fascist spoke.

Bevington Rd: 'A podium was set up on the street outside our front door and Mosley climbed up on it and tipped his hat at my mother'

The point that Terry was supposed to be making didn't need to be spelt out. Here was a black man in uniform geared to defending the country, fighting its wars, not one on the dole. Or, as the fascists would have it, living off the immoral earnings of their women.

Alternatively, here is a black man a trained solider, able to defend himself if trouble started. And again, here is a black man, a solider, emerging from this house; you may have targeted this house, you have brought your rabble to this address, but this house, the family in this house, are not a push over.

None of this was, as I say, spelt out. And the meeting – the rally – passed off without physical violence.

Mosley's speech [was] predictable, though delivered with restraint and politeness. We were misled, he told my mother, in having been brought to this country on the promise that the streets of London were paved with gold; and now we were here we knew that was not the case. We should feel aggrieved that we had been encouraged to leave our own countries where the sun shone, and where it was warm, and brought here to this country where it was cold, and where we were unhappy.

Surely it was time to admit the mistake that had been made, and to return to our own countries where the sun was still shining, and where we would be happy again. This might not always be easy, for we were in poor, low-paid jobs (except the few who were dishonest and criminal); and we would not be expected to have the financial means to return; that's why he proposed that the government help us to do so. And more of the same.

So this was our most graphic experience of Mr Macmillan's You've Never Had It So Good 1959 elections. We talked about it so much that it's difficult to know now what sense we made of it. The unpleasant feeling of being targeted – the only black-owned household in the street, with Geoffrey Hamm as neighbour.

That Mosley lost [the election] and lost badly made us in retrospect not unhappy that he had held the rally outside our house and that we had faced him down.

Welcome to England

I was a schoolboy when I travelled from British Guiana via Trinidad, to England on the Italian ship, *MV Ascania*. I came to join my mother and aunt, who were living in "the Grove" [Ladbroke Grove, a part of Notting Hill].

Kelso Cochrane's murder, Teddy Boys' attacks on people of African descent, and the Notting Hill riots of 1958, were frequent topics of conversation of my mother, other members of our family and friends, who had lived in the Grove and had undergone the traumas of the 1950s.

They talked of the widespread discrimination in housing and employment and how even those who had served in the RAF during the Second World War, including one of my uncles, were no longer welcome in Britain

I quickly learned that black people, especially black men, had to be careful not to walk alone as they were vulnerable to attack by Teddy boys who would arm themselves with weapons like flick-knives and knuckle-dusters. Dressed in black leather jackets, "drainpipe" trousers, and "winkle-pickle" shoes, they were at least easy to identify.

The riots of 1958 had lasted four days and were considered one of the worst outbreaks of civil unrest and racial violence in 20th century Britain as Keep Britain White mobs went on the rampage.
In response, the Chief Minister of Jamaica, Norman Manley, paid an urgent visit to the UK and my mother is pictured among a group of residents meeting him in the Grove. The event was recorded for posterity by Getty Images and is reproduced in Paul Gilroy's recent book *Black Britain*.

Demonstrators march outside Whitehall following Kelso Cochrane's murder

Pic courtesy of Searchlight

Like other local black people in the Grove, she was also grateful for the solidarity shown by those Jamaicans who had travelled up from Brixton, south London, to assist them in the fight back.

Kelso Cochrane, a 33-year-old Antiguan carpenter and amateur boxer, was murdered eight months later, on Saturday, May 17 1959, while on his way home in Bevington Rd. He was seen being attacked by a gang of white youths who were never caught.

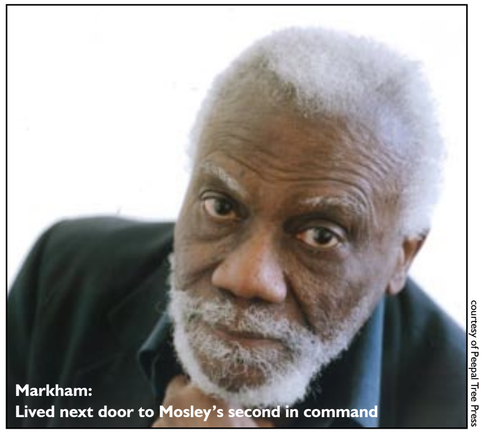
An account of a possible fascist connection with his murder is given by Graham Macklin in his book *Very Deeply Dyed in Black: Sir Oswald Mosley and the Resurrection of British Fascism after 1945*.

He writes, 'Mosley was convinced that immigration offered him the chance of political salvation, and on 6 April 1959 he announced his intention to stand in the General Election as a candidate in North Kensington … During the course of the election campaign Kelso Cochrane a young carpenter from Antigua passed the Earl of Warwick, "then a favourite drinking place for Mosley's supporters". He was harangued and chased by six white men who stabbed him to death on the corner of Southam Street and Golborne Road.'

Many decades have passed since I lived in the area but the memory of those times and of Kelso's killing still haunts me. Although he was working as a carpenter, I later discovered that he was only doing this to save money to study law. Had he not been out on the streets on that fateful day, he might well have become a lawyer like myself.

***Colin Bobb-Semple** is a lawyer and senior lecturer at the City Law School, City University, London*

Taken from the late EA Markham's autobiography **Against The Grain: A 1950s Memoir** *published by Peepal Tree Press. See review pxxx*



Markham: Lived next door to Mosley's second in command

courtesy of Peepal Tree Press

THINKING OF GOING TO UNIVERSITY?

You may not have felt ready, or not have been qualified, to go to college or university when you first left school; maybe it just didn't appeal to you; or you got a job and focused on working instead. Whatever your reasons for not doing it when you were younger, there are plenty of good reasons for considering it now. For many mature students it can be about personal ambition and fulfilment, or about the opportunity to gain new qualifications or retrain in order to develop a new career.

A higher education qualification can prove to be a passport to new experiences and improved employment opportunities, and student life can be a rewarding and life changing experience – but it's also a challenge and a big commitment.

Whether you're going into higher education straight from school or whether it's something you come to later in life, a concern most potential students, their parents, partners and sponsors have is – how is it going to be paid for? Well the good news is that there is financial help available for students of all ages.

Financial support to help you study

Student Finance England is there to provide financial support to students in higher education. They administer a wide range of non-repayable grants and bursaries as well as student loans to help students deal with the two main areas of expense they will have whilst studying – course fees and living costs. Student Finance England is administered by the Student Loans Company, a non profit making, government owned company, which manages the student finance system in England.

The best place to find out more is at **www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance** - there you'll be able to get all the details about exactly what help is available and how you apply for it.

Mature students have the same entitlement to financial help as those students who go into higher education straight from school – the only exception is that you must be under 60 at the start of your course in order to qualify for the Maintenance Loan. But there is a wide range of products designed to offer the kind of support which a mature student, in particular may need. For example:

- **Do you have children or an adult who depend upon you financially?**
  Extra help is available for people who want to study and who have dependants. For example students with children may be able to get a Parents' Learning Allowance and help with the cost of registered or approved childcare. Students who have an adult who depends on them financially (other than an adult child) may be able to get an Adult Dependants' Grant. To find out more, check the Directgov website at www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance. You can also download or order a copy of the guide 'Childcare Grant and other support for student parents in higher education'.
- **Are you on income support or other means tested benefits?**
  If you are studying full-time you could be eligible for a Special Support Grant which will not be taken into account when assessing benefits. This will be payable instead of the Maintenance Grant.
- **Do you have a disability, mental-health condition or specific learning difficulty?**
  If you have a disability you may be entitled to a Disabled Students' Allowances, which is money to help with costs you incur in attending your course as a direct result of your disability. You won't have to pay this back. Go to www.direct.go.uk/studentfinance and download or order a copy of 'Bridging the gap: a guide to the Disabled Students' Allowances in higher education' to find out more.

Studying part-time

Studying part-time is an increasingly viable and attractive alternative to full time study. It is flexible and the range of higher education course on offer on a part-time basis is growing fast.

If you have children or adult dependants, don't want to give up your job, or simply want more flexibility around the time you spend studying, then this could be the option for you. And the good news is that there is financial help available for those who want to take this route to a higher education qualification. Check out 'A guide to financial support for part-time students in higher education', available from the Directgov website.

DID YOU KNOW:

- 59% of undergraduates in 2007/08 were aged 21 or over
- Over half a million, part-time, English, undergraduate students were enrolled at English higher education institutions and further education colleges in 2007/08
- You only start repaying your student loans once you've left your course and are earning over £15,000 a year and then you pay 9% of your earning above this threshold – so, for example, if you earn £20,000 per year, you would pay 9% of £5000 which would be £450 pa, or £37.50 per month or £8.65 per week.

CATCHING THEM YOUNG

A government-funded scheme is hoping to tune in with youngsters Venezuelan-style

Winning ways: Lambeth Music Service led the winning bid to run the London segment of the scheme in partnership with the Southbank Centre and Amicus Horizon, the housing association managing the Landsdowne Green estate. Julian Lloyd Webber is pictured centre back row; and Donna Pieters first left

Among the audience of a sell-out performance of the Simon Bolivar Youth Orchestra at London's Southbank last month was a group of children who might have once turned their noses up at classical music.

They were all beneficiaries of a government scheme inspired by El Sistema, the revolutionary Venezuelan music education programme that has rescued thousands of children from poverty and turned them into first class musicians.

'We thoroughly enjoyed the concert and came away from it on a real high, ' says Leroy Morrison, who went along with three of his four children, Rebecca aged 11, Uriel aged 9, and Matthew, 6.

The family live on the Landsdowne Green Estate in Lambeth, south London, one of three areas where the UK scheme, In Harmony, is based. Launched in April, it offers free instruments and intensive free tuition for 120 nursery and infant children from two schools with a large intake from the estate, as well as after-school music classes for 7-11 year olds, due to take off soon.

The invitation to the Royal Festival Hall to see Venezuela's exhilarating amateur orchestra in action was one of In Harmony's several warm-up events to get youngsters interested. Another was a Fun Day taster session led by musicians from the London Philharmonic Orchestra on the estate in February

'My children are really interested in the project and are keen to get started,' adds Leroy. 'I have been assured that this project will be on the estate for sometime – I do not want my children to begin playing and then have to stop because there is no more funding.'

The acclaimed cellist Julian Lloyd Webber, who is rolling out the project with a dedicated team of teachers and music professionals, is excited about the possibility of creating a youth orchestra out of children who might never have dreamed of ever picking up a musical instrument.

He said, 'When I was at the Royal College of Music in the early '70s, most of my peers were from state schools. That's not the case at all any more, and I think it's hugely unfortunate. It gives a totally false impression of classical music. Most [famous] composers weren't from rich or even middle-class families.'

In Harmony is funded by the Department of Children, Schools and Families until 2011, when it will be evaluated and, hopefully, continued. Lambeth Music Service was one of three successful bids to run the pilot projects, along with West Everton in Liverpool and Norwich.

Founded in 1975, El Sistema has involved half a million children from the slums of Venezuela and produced a world-class amateur music ensemble that regularly stuns the classical music fraternity.

Similarly, In Harmony seeks to 'offer possibilities to children who would rarely be given the opportunity to change their lives,' says Donna Pieters, Lambeth In Harmony co-ordinator. 'It gives children and their families the chance to widen their horizons, to teach them discipline, enhance their self esteem and provide a sense of belonging to a musical community.'

BLACK HISTORY 365 | VOL. THREE, ISSUE ONE | SUMMER 2009 | www.black-history-month.co.uk

CARING IN LAMBETH

At Lambeth we have many children in our care. Each one deserves to grow up in a loving, caring home, and to feel safe and secure with the families responsible for them.

Fostering for Lambeth offers our children the chance of a stable life when it has become impossible for them to remain with their birth families.

As a foster carer you will be caring for children and young people in your own home on behalf of the council whilst their own parents are unable to do so.

At Lambeth we welcome foster carers from all backgrounds to represent our hugely diverse population of children. You can apply whatever your race or sexuality, whether you are married or single and whichever religion you choose to follow.

Children needing homes range from babies to teenagers, young people with disabilities, brother and sister groups and young mothers with children of their own.

As a Lambeth carer you will receive unrivalled support from our Fostering Service. They will be on-hand to listen, provide you with advice and help you guide the children and young people in the right way. Each foster child also recieves support from the council whilst in their foster placement.

We recruited a number of new carers in 2008 and our longest serving couple have been fostering for over 30 years – so it really can be a fun, long-term challenge. You will receive an allowance and first-class training, giving you the opportunity to gain CWDC qualifications.

You may have talked about fostering to your friends, you may have thought about fostering on your own, but the best way to find out about it is to contact the Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team for an initial interview.

All you need to do is call this number, 0800 952 2926 / 020 7926 8710 and the duty social worker will arrange an interview with you.

We are waiting to hear from you.

SOUL PURPOSE

Ten years after becoming the first black face to appear regularly on British TV as a calypso singer, Cy Grant began reinventing himself. *Angela Cobbinah* finds out what happened next.

The first night Cy Grant performed his one-man show of Aime Césaire's epic prose poem *Return To My Native Land*, a white woman fainted in the audience.

She had come to see Cy Grant the calypso singer and matinee idol, but what she got was Cy Grant in a trenchant, if lyrical, attack on colonialism and European values.

'It must have come as a bit of a shock,' he says remembering the show's mixed reception as he began touring it in 1977.

'But for me performing Césaire was about having the courage to stand up, to shout from the roof tops "accommodate yourself to me; I will not accommodate myself to you."'

Written in 1939, *Return To My Native Land* was a philosophical call to arms for black pride, or Négritude, that came to be considered a masterpiece of the French language.

'I had never even heard of Césaire and I came across the book by accident,' recalls Grant, who, as the first black person to appear regularly on TV, film and stage in 1950s Britain, had been the post-war equivalent of a superstar, gracing the cover of *Radio Times* and on first name terms with the darling of British theatre, Laurence Olivier.

'It was a sort of epiphany. Blackness, Africa, return to my native land, to the source, to new values, caring, community.'

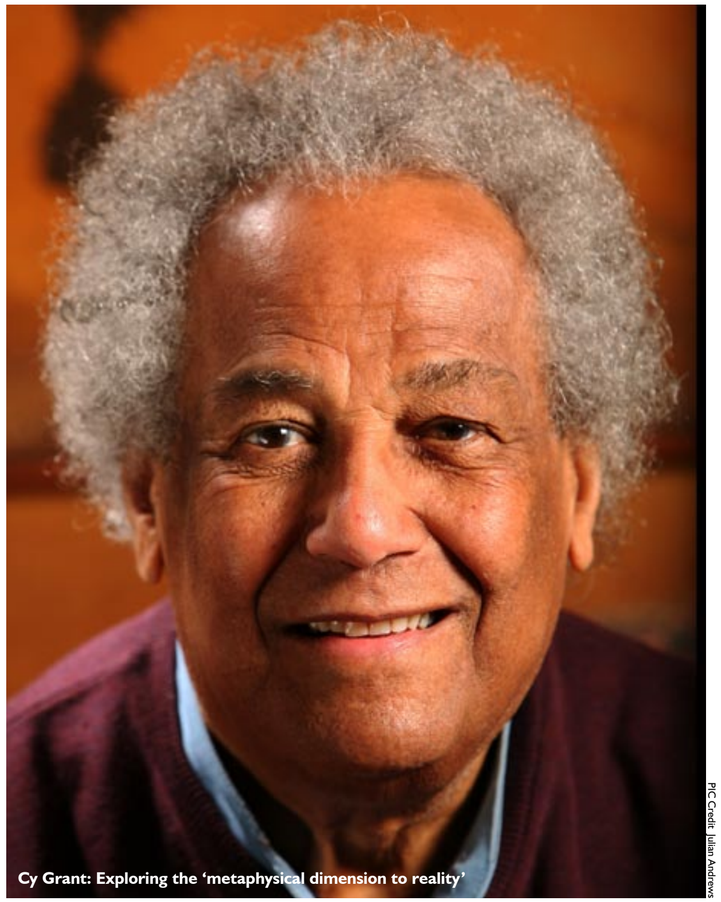
By this time he had already effectively turned his back on stardom, setting up Drum Arts Workshop as a platform for black actors and making his first forays into politically conscious poetry.

But his chance encounter with the French Caribbean writer would take him on a restless journey of self-discovery, central to which has also been the study of the ancient Chinese text, *Tao Te Ching* and its emphasis on universal balance.

He came to see that racism was a reflection of a wider western malaise that places the material before the spiritual in all things and has sent the world hurtling towards its own destruction.

It signalled a dramatic turning point but it was certainly not the first in a life that has been an exhilarating tale of the unexpected mixed in with sheer good luck.

Now a vibrant-looking 89-year-old whose straight back owes itself to regular exercise with Tai Chi, he sees it all as a rehearsal for his biggest role: 'My life has been one of synchronicity – things came to me for a reason.'



Cy Grant: Exploring the 'metaphysical dimension to reality'

PIC Credit: Julian Andrews

Born into a middle class family in Guyana in 1919, Grant had left school with only one wish – to escape the narrow confines of life in a sleepy colonial backwater where he would only ever be a second-class citizen.

Then two years after the outbreak of the Second World War opportunity knocked. Faced with huge losses in manpower, the RAF decided to drop its colour bar and allow young men from the colonies to enlist. He was among its 500 or so Caribbean recruits and qualified as a navigator before being made an officer, one of the few black men to do so. But his flying days were to be brief. On his third mission Grant was shot down over the Netherlands and made a prisoner of war for two years.

'I had plenty of time for reflection in that prison camp – how I was fighting racism in Europe but was still subject to racism back home in Guyana.' Having resolved to study law on his release as a way of fighting colonialism, Flight Lieutenant Grant became a member of the Middle Temple in London, finally qualifying for the bar in 1950.

But despite his distinguished war record and legal qualifications no one was interested in giving him a job. 'This was Britain in peacetime and I was no longer useful,' he says ruefully.

Forced to find some other way of earning a living, a friend suggested acting as a temporary stopgap. At least it would improve his diction for when he finally got work at the bar. After treading the boards with what he describes as a third rate theatre-company, his luck changed sensationally with a successful audition with Laurence Olivier's outfit, which saw him perform in London and then New York. Tall, good looking and charming, he was already being eyed up as lead man material.

Even so, the roles open to him as a black person were limited so Grant decided to increase his earning potential and become a singer: 'I had always enjoyed singing and playing the guitar,' he explains in a matter-of-fact tone. The move was seamless – within a short time he was singing Caribbean folk songs on the radio and in nightclubs and concert halls.

In 1956, he co-starred with Nadia Cattouse and Errol John in a BBC TV drama *Man from the sun*, about Caribbean migrants, and, acted alongside Richard Burton in *The Sea Wife*, the second of a number of films he was to appear in.

But a year later, he was to hit the stratosphere when he was asked to take part in the BBC's innovative daily topical show, *Tonight*, to sing the news in calypso. The journalist Bernard Levin provided the words and Grant strung them together.

'Calypso's natural role is as a singing newspaper hence ideal for Levin, who was up with the news, witty and quite brilliant. The show went out live – nerve racking but great fun.' *Tonight* was hugely popular and turned Grant, the first black face to appear regularly on TV, into a household name. But he left after two and a half years, anxious not to become typecast.

Although in 1965 he played Othello, his general frustration with the lack of good parts for black actors was heightened by Olivier's own 1968 portrayal of the Noble Moor, for which he had notoriously "blacked up".

'Of course I was aware of racism in British society but despite the ongoing difficulties I had been able to forge a reasonable career in show business. The crunch came with Enoch Powell's "Rivers of Blood" speech in 1968. I was forced to confront myself; to stand up and be counted so to speak.'

In 1974 he helped set up Drum, asking Olivier to be its patron – only to be told he was being 'separatist'.

Grant and Chris Mitchelmore, *Tonight*'s presenter

'Olivier was a charmer; that's why I approached him. I was amazed by his response but I suppose it was typical of opinion at the time – "you must try to be like us, old boy".'

But Drum was a landmark in the development of black theatre in which plays by leading writers – Wole Soyinka, Michael Abensettes and Mustapha Matura among them – were performed at prestigious venues like the ICA and the National Theatre. 'Drum proved that black people could act as well as anyone else, that it was ridiculous to think otherwise.' He puts its eventual demise down to lack of support from the arts establishment and from sections of the black community.

But its absence gave him the opening to develop his one-man production of Césaire, which he toured for two years. It was, he says, one of the highlights of his career.

Another was as director of Concord, a series of nationwide festivals, which saw a vast range of international performers appearing in all manner of venues, from provincial theatres to village halls in counties like Devon and Gloucester. 'Concord championed the rich cultural diversity of Britain before the idea of multiculturalism became popular. The media ignored it despite its resounding success.'

A clue to what Grant has been up to in the last couple of decades can be found in his 2007 book *Blackness and Dreaming Soul*, which begins as an autobiography but is for the most part a scholarly explanation of his personal philosophy – an attack on our secular and materialist world that has created 'the more is best spiritual vacuum of globalisation.'

As a member of the Scientific and Medical Network, a forum which seeks an alternative way of seeing things, his worldview takes in quantum physics, the ancient masters Pythagoras and Lao Tzu, and African mythology, which all expound the unity of life as against the 'dualistic delusion' of Western thought.

The anger and frustration that catapulted him towards performing Césaire all those years ago has been replaced by the calmness of one who has reached deep within himself and come up with some universal truths. 'If I have learned anything from Césaire is that we have to deal with our anger if we can ever hope to affect change in society.'

Racism, he adds, is just a symptom of the fragmentation of knowledge and issues into categories, which have no connection with each other. 'Ecological problems, like racism, go back a long way but as they are directly linked to the psychological rift between man and nature, they cannot be seen as unrelated to each other – making it impossible to express concern for ecology and be racist at the same time.'

He insists that there needs to be a fundamental shift in politics to bring about real change. 'We are one human race with the same needs and desires. We live on a small and beautiful planet in which everything we need is provided. We evolved by symbiosis and not, as Darwin claims, by ruthless competition. Until we know and acknowledge this, we will hasten the end of life on earth as we know it.'

Blackness and the Dreaming Soul: Race, Identity and the Materialistic Paradigm *by Cy Grant is published in the UK by Shoving Leopard, price £14.99. Also by the same author,* Member of the RAF of Indeterminate Race, *Woodfield Publications, 2006*

Black History Month

I strived for concord
For unity in diversity
Efforts still unheard

now the climate's changed
awash with funds
of appeasement
floods that feed
the seasonal scramble;
tropical islanders
grabbing trader of temperate
tourists –
crumbs off history's imperial table

Is it not a shame
that black activists
bite the bait –
you can have de money
if you don't buck the State;
the only access
minimal concessions

pawns in an achromatic
colourless game
that loads the dice
of light and dark
of men and mice.

Predators
oblivious to their second
class status,
acquiesce,
ignore the historical
perspective
how they were dis
empowered

From* Rivers of Time: Collected Poems of Cy Grant, *Naked Light, 2008

The magic of the steelpan

In 1995 I was asked to write a book about the steelpan of Trinidad and Tobago. From the very start of my research I realised I was dealing with something very special and quite magic – the story of the only acoustic instrument to be invented in the 20th century.

It was the mythic story of the transmutation of industrial waste material into a musical instrument, which led me to explore the nature of sound and the harmonics of music.

In making the steelpans, the top of the drums are sunk into a concave surface. This is followed by marking the notes and grooving, all of which disturb the molecular and crystalline balance of the steel which is corrected by tempering – the drums are heated for a specific time over intense heat to make the metal stronger and more ductile, the soul of the material lingering on, induced into liquid iridescent sound colours or overtones.

In Trinidad in the middle of the last century, discarded oil drums were transformed into a highly tuned percussion instrument without its innovators being aware that they were alchemists.

Much despised at first, the steelpan is now the national instrument of Trinidad. It has healed a divided society and it is played by all races. Today the music of pan resonates around the world.

In my book [*Ring of Steel*, 1999 Macmillan], I proposed that the universal appeal of steelpan music may be due to its special harmonic structure. I also suggested that steelpan music produces healing natural harmonics by virtue of its unusual and complex acoustics and tuning.

The humble steelpan, created out of industrial waste

What seemed certain is that the sound the instrument makes follows the rules of physics, which are universal.

From *Blackness and the Dreaming Soul*

His one-man show of Cesaire's poem was one of the highlights of his career

THE HOUSE THAT KHADAMBI BUILT

The interior of an unassuming London house that has been turned into a unique work of art by a Kenyan artist is now poised to become a national treasure. *By Isaac Nyang*

Obscured by trees and looking somewhat down at heel, it is the sort of house you wouldn't normally give a second look at. But step inside and you are transported into another world – walls, ceilings and doors are adorned with elaborate wooden fretwork, painted motifs decorate the floor and the fixtures and furnishings of everyday life double up as ornaments to create a rich visual feast that takes time to digest, there is so much to see.

It is the work of the Kenyan artist and writer Khadambi Asalache who bought the house in the early '80s and spent the next 20 years re-inventing it as part of an artistic journey that took in African, Islamic and British art and design.

When he died three years ago at the age of 71, he willed his home to the National Trust, which now hopes to raise up to £4 million to preserve it for future generations. 'His house is a truly special place which celebrates diversity and through this we are presented with an important opportunity to develop our understanding of contemporary British culture,' said Dame Fiona Reynolds, the Trust's director-general.

Asalache, a relatively unknown figure in Britain, was part of the African literary renaissance of the 1960s, penning the best selling novel *A Calabash of Life* in 1967. He was also a poet and his collection *Sunset in Navaisha* appeared in 1973.

He had arrived in Britain in 1960 having studied architecture and fine art in Kenya and continental Europe and, like many educated Africans, made ends meet by juggling a variety of jobs, including shifts on the BBC African Service and teaching Swahili, the Kenya *lingua franca*. After taking an Mphil in mathematics in the 1970s, he became a civil servant in Whitehall.

It was this job that led him to buy the terraced early Victorian house at 575 Wandsworth Rd, south London, in 1981. 'Its main attraction was that it was on the 77a bus route which could take him to the Treasury, where he worked,' recalls his partner, the basket maker Susie Thomson.

'It had been squatted and was a bit run down, so it was also very cheap.' Ironically, his labour of love was embarked upon for very practical reasons. 'The basement was very damp and he decided to cover it up with decorative panelling, which he designed.' explains Thomson.

Drawing on his knowledge of architecture and art and inspired by a poetic vision of the world, he began extending the scheme to the rest of the house, building up his skills as he went along. 'Khadambi was entirely self-taught in fretwork,' adds Thomson. 'It came purely out of his own inspiration.'

For his raw materials, Asalache would walk the streets looking for skips that might contain discarded wood like door panels. Later odd bits of furniture, wine boxes and small quantities of bought pine were brought into service

Then, using a humble plasterboard blade to carve with, he would create intricate friezes of geometric shapes, animals, flowers and birds, sometimes working up to 14 hours a day if he had the time.

'When I first saw the interior, I was completely entranced by its beauty, the effect was extraordinary,' says Thomson who first met the artist at one of his social gatherings. The dinner parties had become regular events as more and more people heard about the treasure trove. 'People would ask to bring their friends around – even the man who came to read the gas meter.'

Asalache relaxing in in his dining room

Pic Credit: Gered Mankowitz

No 575 Wandsworth Rd:

The house is transformed as you walk through the door

Pic Credit: David Clarke

Asalache had visited the Great Mosque of Cordoba in Spain on several occasions and particularly admired Moorish art for its balance and inclusiveness. Its inspiration is striking in every part of the house, mixed in with an array of other styles, from Beatrix Potter-like nursery motifs and bold African wall prints to the wooden décor found in traditional houses in Kenyan coastal towns.

What could have turned out to be a messy pastiche is a triumph of harmony that, according to Giles Waterfield of the National Heritage Memorial Fund, is both compelling and seductive: 'It has, still, a very strong sense of the man who created these interiors. It is such a gentle place, so soft and welcoming, and yet at the same time it could be seen as a statement of independence and individuality in terms of ethnic origin.'

The National Trust has already committed £1 million to the project but is seeking to raise between £2 million to £4 million bring it into public use. This could take up to 18 months and may involve the purchase of the adjoining house. 'To maximise the benefits of acquiring Khadambi Asalache's house the National Trust would consider buying additional premises close by which would enable the extension of a community programme and provide a centre to offer a forum for discussion and study on issues relating to the man and his house,' explained a spokesperson.

Elsie Owusu, founder of the Society of Black Architects, believes 575 Wandsworth Rd to be of international significance. 'It could be described as an embodiment of the social and political and artistic history of the British colonial experience in the 20th century,' she said. 'In addition, the breadth of the interest in architecture and design ranges from African, American, to Moghul, European and Islamic. The fact that it is hidden in an "ordinary" English city terrace is all the more intriguing.'

I AM THEREFORE ICAN

These kids have worked up quite an appetite after a day out in the country, compliments of the Swansea-based ICAN project.

Run by the African Community Centre (ACC), ICAN works with the city's small black community, particularly families and young people. The bulk of its activities takes place during the school holidays, involving trips to places of interest that are designed to be fun and educational at the same time.

Although Swansea's ethnic minority population is tiny compared to that of Cardiff and Newport– less than 5,000 according to the last Census in 2001 – there has been a significant black presence there since the mid 19th century when the city was a key centre of the copper industry, at one time processing up to 60 per cent of the world's copper ore.

Jamaicans were among those who flocked to find work in the heavy metal industries. Others found jobs in the surrounding coalmines and in the local docks, including the first black foreman of the nearby Port Talbot docks, whose son, Len Lawrence, is the ACC's patron.

Once nicknamed Copperopolis, little now remains of Swansea's industrial might. But the £1bn rolling redevelopment of the city centre, its two universities and its designation as a dispersal area for asylum seekers have helped restore its cosmopolitan profile.

'The ACC sees its main task as community development, promoting and developing African culture, ethnic awareness and community spirit,' says co-ordinator Emily Robertson. 'We also aim to increase the confidence and self-esteem in African and Caribbean young people, who may live in different parts of Swansea and feel isolated.'

The ICAN project, set up last year with three-year funding from BBC Children in Need, runs group and one-to-one mentoring schemes. It also works in partnership with the Black Environment Network (BEN), giving the children the opportunity to enjoy the beautiful woods and beaches around Swansea in an educational way. One recent half- term project involved learning woodland skills at a popular local activity centre, Forest School. Public transport in Swansea is expensive, prompting BEN to set up two bike projects – one teaches 16-18 year olds basic bike mechanics; the other recycles donated old bikes then sells them at a nominal price.

ICAN also has its own dance troupe that regularly puts on shows. Its make-up is a microcosm of Swansea itself, with young people of Welsh, Asian, African and Caribbean origin taking part.

Courtesy ICAN-ACC

For more information about the ACC's ongoing programme of events and its summer holiday programmes for children and young people please contact Emily on 01792 470298 or email emily.robertson@africancommunitycentre.org.uk

DEFEATED BY THE COLOUR BAR

The whites-only policy of Britain's boxing authorities during the 1920s and '30s permanently blighted the career of one the country's greatest fighters, writes *Korkoh Duah*

In the 1920s he was one of Britain's best known boxers following a string of victories both at home and abroad. Modest and affable, crowds would gather outside his Manchester home as he made his way to his latest bout in an awaiting taxi. But middleweight master Len Johnson was to remain an uncrowned champion thanks to a ban on black fighters contesting title fights.

Backed by the government, the boxing regulatory board's notorious rule 24 stipulated that boxers competing for the championship belt had to have two white parents – ruling out Johnson whose father was from West Africa.

As a result, his name does not appear in the official boxing hall of fame and he has all but faded from view. 'He was basically ignored,' says former amateur boxer Rob Howard, author of a just-published biography on Johnson.

'I have read and re-read the record books and you can't find any mention of him. If you do it is as usually as a footnote to someone else's boxing career, often someone he defeated.'

The book *Len Johnson and the Colour Bar: Britain's Uncrowned Champion* is an indictment of the boxing establishment's dogged determination to keep black boxers from the reaching the top of the game, even forbidding them to fight in prestigious venues like the Royal Albert Hall.

It is also a tribute to a brilliant boxer and local hero who, though bitterly disappointment by his treatment at the hands of the authorities, ended his days trying to fight social injustice and racism as a prominent member of the Manchester Communist Party.

'Len Johnson was one of the truly legendary boxers and figures of his era,' says Howard. 'His achievements in the ring rate him with the very best of the British middleweights and if there is any justice, his name and reputation should never be forgotten.'

Len Benker Johnson was born in the working class Clayton area of Manchester in 1912, the eldest of four children. His mother Margaret hailed from Ireland and his father, Bill, was a seaman from Sierra Leone who had arrived in England in 1897 via Liverpool.

Although Johnson senior had fought professionally, his mild mannered son did not appear to share his enthusiasm for the sport and had limited success in small local competitions. When he was 19, during a strike at the iron foundry where he worked, he was persuaded to approach a fairground boxing booth in which members of the public were invited to fight resident fighters, a popular form of entertainment at the time. Sensing the shy young man's talent, the owner decided to take him on as a member of his team.

Johnson was good enough to contest the world title

Johnson around 1929

Robeson: 30 year friendship

© Donald Hinds

Johnson's fighting skills rapidly improved and when his ring career proper was launched a few months later he secured more victories than defeats and was soon being invited to fight in continental Europe.

In 1925, he hit the big time when he defeated Roland Todd, the reigning British middleweight champion, in a non-title bout on points, repeating the feat in a rematch.

Noted for his clever defensive skills, he steadily began to dominate the middleweight division with impressive victories over leading British and European middle and light heavyweights of the period.

These wins should have automatically earned him the right to a title contest, but the colour bar operated by the sport's overseers, the National Sports Council and the British Boxing Board of Control (BBBC), ruled this out.

Fed up with the attitude of boxing officialdom in Britain, Johnson spent six months in Australia in 1926, where he won the British Empire middleweight championship. But when he got back to England, he discovered that his title was not recognised by the boxing authorities, who awarded it to someone else.

Regarded by boxing fans as Britain's uncrowned middleweight champion Johnson, by now married with three children, was showing the sort of form to contest the world title. But this cut no ice with the BBBC, which in 1929 officially sanctioned the colour bar as rule 24, paragraph 27 of its constitution.

Johnson was even barred from the fight game's most prestigious venues, the Café Royal and the Royal Albert Hall in London, even though he could have easily filled both, such was his popularity.

Completely disillusioned, he told the *Sporting Chronicle* in 1931, 'Wherever there is big money I am kept out of [these venues]. The prejudice against colour has prevented me from getting a championship fight. I feel therefore there is no use whatsoever going on with the business.'

'Johnson was like a voice in the wilderness,' remarks Howard, a retired secondary school teacher. 'While promoters were happy to feature him in their shows because he was such a crowd puller, they were less keen to join his campaign against the colour bar, fearing retribution from the powerful boxing authorities.'

Johnson did eventually get to fight in the Albert Hall thanks to the efforts of a maverick promoter. That 1932 fight was a rematch against Cornishman Len Harvey, the prospective world title challenger, whom Johnson had defeated earlier. Much to the chagrin of the BBBC, it was headlined as the unofficial middleweight championship.

Johnson lost and never really managed to regain his form. Plagued by mounting health worries, he retired in 1933 to go on the road with his own boxing booth. Although he had not been particularly vociferous about the treatment he suffered, he found a strong political voice later on in life.

This may have been due to his connections with the singer and civil rights campaigner Paul Robeson whom he met in 1930 after a concert appearance in Manchester. Robeson had heard about the boxer's plight and gave the despondent Johnson some words of encouragement.

Johnson later wrote, 'He drew me a picture of his fight for recognition. He pointed out that my job was fighting and that if I could fight in the ring I ought to be able to fight outside it. I took his words to heart.'

It was to be the beginning of a longstanding friendship and the two corresponded by letter for 30 years. When the US authorities withdrew Robeson's passport during the McCarthy witch-hunts, Johnson became a leading sponsor of the Let Paul Robeson Sing Committee to get it restored.

By this time Johnson had joined the Communist Party, for which he unsuccessfully contested six local elections between 1947 and 1962. A well-known public speaker and campaigner who personally took up the cases of those who had suffered injustice, he was deemed a subversive whose public appearances were monitored by police.

He was also secretary and a founder member of the New Internationalist Society, a Manchester-based organisation formed to combat racism. And among those who were frequent guests at his Moss Side home during 1940s were leading African nationalists like Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Jomo Kenyetta of Kenya who were living in the UK at the time.

He died in 1974 following a prolonged period of steadily deteriorating health. But at least he lived to see a new generation of black boxers become champions in their own right following the lifting of the colour bar in 1947.'There was a new mood of social consciousness both in Britain and its colonies and the post-war Labour government leaned heavily on the boxing authorities to have it removed,' explains Howard.

It was too late for Johnson but just in time for Randolph Turpin, a black boxer from Leamington Spa who quickly rose through the ranks to become world middleweight champion in 1951.

Len Johnson and the Colour Bar: Britain's Uncrowned Champion *is published by Rob Howard, Stockport, Cheshire, UK* (email: robaccord5@hotmail.com)

The 1932 poster advertising the 'unofficial middleweight championship'

ARE YOU SITTING COMFORTABLY?

Mara Menzies is entertaining Scottish children with the folk tales she grew up with in Africa

When Mara Menzies gave birth to her daughter Imani 18 months ago she was struck by the dearth of children's stories from Africa.

Born in Kenya but brought up in Edinburgh, she decided that the best way to deal with the problem was to write one herself.

The result is *Koko The Crocodile*, an amusing tale of a sick Nile croc in search of a strange cure.

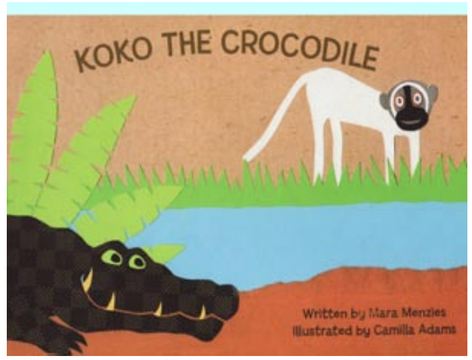
Realising she had many more stories up her sleeve, the 30-year-old former arts marketing specialist decided on another course of direct action – to become a professional story-teller.

She now visits schools, communities and libraries all over the Scottish capital and beyond with stories that her mother and grandmother told her.

'Story-telling has so much to offer as it allows young people to express themselves and listen,' Mara says in an accent slightly tinged with a Scottish brogue_

Apart from helping children to appreciate different cultures, it also helps children of African decent in Scotland embrace their heritage, beginning with her own daughter Imani.

'There isn't a large African community in Scotland and there are few positive African role models and images, so it's important for them to be able to learn about their culture and take pride in their heritage,' she says.



'It is also important for other Scottish kids to learn about Africa and to see the role it plays in the world.

'I believe my contact with young people increases their understanding of Africa and brings Africa to the forefront.'

Born near the Indian Ocean city of Mombassa, Mara came to Edinburgh at the age of 13 with her family. She remembers it all as being a bit of whirl.

'When we first arrived in Scotland it was like a big adventure – so much was different. I had to get use to how things are done very quickly like queuing at bus stops and generally getting used to order and structure.

'If you are late by a couple of minutes it can be a big deal in Scotland whereas in Kenya things are much more laid back. I also had to get used to the way that people spoke – I can understand them now.'

Koko The Crocodile is based on a story she used to hear as a child. Told in rhyme and aimed at young children, it has been illustrated by Camilla Adams, whose colourful pages are full of contrast and texture. Then to get round the problem of finding a publisher for it, Mara decided to set up Toto Publishing.

She hopes that this will be the first of many books. In the meantime, she is busily spreading the word, sometimes running workshops for the Scottish Storytelling Centre Edinburgh where young people also get the chance for more hands on participation.

Mara Menzies in full flow

Finding the stories to tell is no problem, explains Mara. 'I get a lot of them from my mother and grandmother. But most Africans I meet are only too happy to regale me with their favourite story too.'

Her ultimate aim is to collect a body of African stories to create an anthology. 'There as so many stories available throughout Africa and I intend to find them get them published and continue to tell them to as many children as possible.'

TROUBLE IN PARADISE

Life will never be the same again in France's two Caribbean departments of Guadeloupe and Martinique which were recently crippled by a wave of furious protests, writes *Joy Fraser*

The general strike that raged through Guadeloupe and Martinique earlier this year has brought about a significant change in relations between France and its two Caribbean departments.

The six weeks of protests, which began in Guadeloupe on January 20 and spread to neighbouring Martinique on February 5, were against the high cost of living and domination of the békés, a tiny white elite descended from slave-owners. They still control most industry and agriculture and have led to the anomaly of locally produced goods like bananas costing more at home than abroad.

What started off as a single challenge over the extortionate price of petrol, made worse by the global financial crisis, soon turned into a comprehensive list of demands including higher wages and price controls on imported essential goods.

In fact, there were no fewer than 149 stipulations, which were felt to be modest given the level of poverty and high unemployment, which in Guadeloupe is put officially at 22.7 per cent but believed by some analysts to be much higher.

People were furious that despite being French nationals entitled to equal status with the rest of France they were being treated like second-class citizens.

The strikes crippled the two islands, closing down the airport, gas stations, schools and government offices and saw rubbish piled high on the streets.

In Guadeloupe strikers, headed by the *Lihannaj Kont Pwofitasyon* (LKP), the Collective Against Super-exploitation made up of 49 community and union organisations, swelled the biggest demonstration in the country's history of 100,000 people, a quarter of the population.

Matters were not helped when the French daily, *Le Monde*, published a report about corruption in the oil refinery industry, vindicating campaigners' claims abut the exploitative cost of petrol in Guadeloupe. Meanwhile, the popular French satellite channel, Canal Plus, aired a documentary entitled *Les derniers maîtres de la Martinique* (The Last Masters of Martinique) which featured the members of the béké making racist comments.

Three weeks into the unrest, trade union leader Jacques Bino was shot dead by an unknown assailant at a barricade in the Guadeloupe's main city, Pointe-a-Pitre, prompting Paris to deploy military police units to the island. By this time, the unrest had spread to neighbouring Martinique, led by the February 5 Collective, and had sparked rumblings of discontent in French Guiana and on the Indian Ocean island of Reunion, two other French overseas department.

With the Caribbean unrest dominating the news in mainland France, French workers protesting against the government's handling of the economic crisis held up banners proclaiming 'Nous sommes tous Antillais' (We are all Caribbean).

As pressure mounted, French President Nicholas Sarkozy pledged £507m in economic aid to its Caribbean territories.

The strike saw the biggest demonstration in Guadeloupe's history, when a 100,000 turned out on the streets, a quarter of the population

The 44-day general strike in Guadeloupe ended on March 4 with the Jacques Bino Agreement, raising workers' pay and reductions in the cost of basis goods. However, rioting continued apace on neighbouring Martinique until Paris and local bosses entered into an agreement similar to that made with the LKP on March 10.

Anaylysts say there is still much to do and a distance to go before the agreements have any real impact on the lives of the people of Martinique and Guadeloupe. But relations between these two islands and France have been irrevocably altered. Indeed, in the words of the demonstrators, 'Nothing will ever be the same again.'

Joy Fraser is a teacher who has lived in Martinique

I WAS THERE TOO

Maureen Roberts travelled from London to Washington to witness the inauguration of the first African American president of the US. Here she recalls of the big day. And below, readers and contributors record their own thoughts of the Obama presidency

At 2am on Tuesday January 20, 2009 I was standing in Manhattan, outside a Babies R Us department store with a complete group of strangers waiting for the coach that was going to take us to Washington for the day.

We had come from all over the world but the group also included students of the Benjamin Banneker Academy in Brooklyn, New York. Their teacher, the head of the film department, had organised the trip so that 13 of his best high school students could film and take photographs of the event.

Every seat in the coach was taken. The youngest participant was a baby a few months old and there were several children of primary school age. There was a general air of excitement and impatience as we chatted about what we expected to experience during the next few hours.

We arrived in Washington as daylight was breaking. Those of us who were awake saw the dark grey of the sky giving way to a lighter grey, then a slow spreading of gold tinting the lining of clouds as the sun lingered in the background. Finally the buildings of Washington stretched out ahead of us.

The city felt silent and expectant as we moved through it. Then, as we passed the motels and hotels along the way, we saw people stepping out on the streets getting ready to walk. They walked in ones, twos, threes and groups: often groups in which three generations including babies were represented.


Watched by millions worldwide, Obama's inauguration was a combination of statesmanship and glitz

It was like some cinematic 'Close Encounter of the Third Kind –' they were all being drawn as if by a magnet to the same spot. There was purpose and patience in the strides of the walkers, as if they had all the time in the world and nothing could happen before they arrived for this appointment mandated by the events of election day on November 4. Nothing could start without them, without us. We were invited because we had invited ourselves.

All coaches were met by special stewards, who gave us maps, a city guide and advised us on what we could take with us. We took photographs to mark our arrival and from this point on the photographs and filming did not stop. If you were there you were in someone's picture.
We had arrived early enough to see the preparation, the framework of empty stalls waiting to be filled, the white gazebos, the soldiers at each crossroad.

We looked in awe at the long lines of people waiting at the metro station. The lines snaked their way out of the stations and meandered for a couple of blocks down the road. We decided to walk. It had to be quicker, and it was.

The crowd wore Obama and his family in a way that I had not expected. They were wrapped in printed towels and blankets, wore T-shirts and sweat shirts, carried bags, wore badges, bracelets, hats and scarves all bearing their image. When you thought you had seen the best designed hat, or other Obama motif item you would see someone who had something better.

Finally we walked towards the Washington Monument trying to get as close as possible. A few thousand people had beaten us to it and when we couldn't walk any further, stopped by the sheer volume of bodies in front of us, we stopped.

It was already 11 o'clock and the dignitaries were slowly filing in to take their seats. They were Lilliputian from where we stood but the giant screens made up for this. I turned around to look back at the way we had come.
To my left was the White House and behind me what had been empty space as we had walked forward was now filled with people. People were even hanging out of the trees that lined the area.

By midday we could feel the warmth of the sun's rays and the blanket of clouds had given way to blue skies. There would be no rain. We felt blessed.

During President Barack Obama's speech the crowd was silent. People were nodding their head in agreement with him, some were saying, 'yes, time for change'. Mostly they were taking photographs. Above the heads of the crowds cameras were held high and never stopped clicking.

It was after 4pm before we finally shuffled our way with the rest of the crowds back onto the streets of Washington to find food and rest.
Most people slept on the journey back to New York, but when we arrived at that most magical of hours, midnight, the dream we had woken up from was still a reality. We had been present at the inauguration of the 44th President of the United States and the first African American family to reside in the White House.

Maureen Roberts is a poet, writer and lecturer

OBAMA: YOUR VERDICT

Rasheed Ogunlaru, life and business coach

Obama was dealt a fair hand with a diverse family background and parents who believed in him. What he has already achieved with that hand has changed not only history, but more importantly the mindsets of millions of people.
Barack is a reminder that you must never be limited by what you can see or what you're told. And that mindset must begin with belief and acceptance of yourself.
He is also a reminder that dreams must be followed up with planning, persistence, patience and perspiration if they are to become a reality.
But of course he is also reminder that all champions are the result of a team effort not just vision and belief alone.

Yepoka Yeebo, Journalist

'I can't help feeling it's an elaborate plan to get the world to love America again,' law student Ama Pratt told me as we drove through Accra, Ghana in August.
'There's something too perfect about him.' The world has always been familiar with the American dream, and the uglier aspects of its history: from slavery to its involvement in contentious democracy building efforts – from Ghana to Iraq.
Barack Obama continues to represent great social and political evolution, but as Ama stressed, he is the leader of the world's only superpower: an American president with American interests.

Colin Grant, author of *Negro With a Hat: the Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey and his Dream of Mother Africa*

'Nothing fills white America with more dread than the prospect of waking up one day to the news of a black man in the White House.' So argued Marcus Garvey, on the eve of his imprisonment for mail fraud in a business which was also his greatest triumph: The Black Star Line.
President Obama's inauguration called to mind the initial, ecstatic reception of the Black Star Line, and the seismic shift in black people's perception of themselves. Garvey spelt out, I suspect, what many felt about Obama's elevation. 'For centuries the black man has been taught by his ancient overlords that he was "nothing" and never shall be "anything"…Today he is a new man.'

Nah Dove, US-based academic

People, tired of losing their jobs and homes, tired of poverty and racism and the out-of-control aggressive politics of the US, gathered in solidarity to witness a politician who believed that the world could change.
Whilst the world is changing with the impact of such a man, it is important to note that Barack Obama, a bi-cultural American man of African and European descent, is attempting to lead the most powerful European/western nation state government in the world.
Given its history and nature, if any advances in human development are possible with such a system, it will be during this time, with this man. Countless people the world over share this hope.

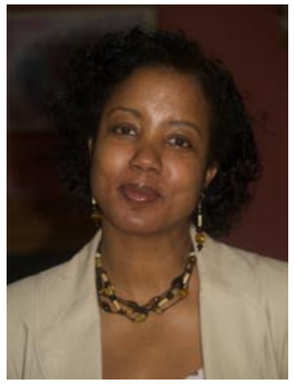
Michael McMillan, writer and curator

I had followed the Barack Obama phenomena through 2008 with 'the audacity of hope' as his book suggests. On election night on November 4, I was in Amsterdam and attended President's Night with like-minded souls. There were debates, comedians, music, dancing, drinking and up to the minute coverage on CNN and Fox News.
I couldn't bear to leave until 5am when 'Obama President Elect' flashed across the television screen. I saw two black women cry with joy in Chicago and tears came to my eyes, because in that moment, across thousands of miles it was if our ancestors were speaking through us.
I caught the flight back to London that morning with a broad smile across my face like when I saw my son born.

Hakim Adi, Reader in the History of Africa and the African Diaspora at Middlesex University, London

What does it mean to have the first black president of the US, since the same political system that brought Bush to power also ushered in Obama? The new president began with the bombing of Pakistan, along with unapologetic support for Zionist Israel. He has continued the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the attacks on Cuba, Iran and North Korea, bailed out the financiers, and boycotted the UN Conference against Racism. So where is that change that was so loudly proclaimed? That cannot come from a system designed to keep people disempowered. We should know – that's the system we have in Britain.

Juliet Alexander, media consultant and lecturer



I was asked to coordinate the Obama inauguration celebration at Bernie Grant Arts Centre in London. It was a request I couldn't refuse – a tribute to an outstanding leader on a momentous occasion held at the centre named after one of the UK's own political pioneering giants and one of its first black MPs.
It was a time for reflection too. It's nearly ten years since I helped coordinate Bernie Grant's funeral. So much has changed and improved in that decade. But where are our Obamas? Perhaps amongst the 700 people from Tottenham and afar, young and old, black and white who packed (quite literally) into the centre on January 20th to share a common realisation of an audacious idea which they had dared to dream and lived to see. That night back home I rewatched the reruns with my children, chatted with everyone doing the same, smiled big big, clapped crazily, cried happily, gave thanks and praise. In this case the revolution was televised.

Tony Warner, director, Black History Walks

It's great to see a black man in the White House but what sort of policies is Obama endorsing? In 2001 Bush sent a delegation to the World Conference Against Racism in Durban. The delegation led, by Colin Powell, walked out after objecting to criticism of Israel and its treatment of Palestinians.
In 2009 the US refused to even send a delegation to the same conference in Geneva unless it agrees in advance not to criticise Israel and remove criticism of American slavery from a previous document. In the aftermath of the alleged war crimes in Gaza what does this stance say about our black president?

Richard Reddie, writer and academic

I'm currently reading Barack Obama's bestselling autobiography *Dreams from my father*, which I'm finding insightful, poignant and inspiring. However, what I find most intriguing about the former Senator's life story is whether he can turn the 'dreams' he had into reality now that he is US president.
We are all aware of visionary political leaders who took office promising 'change', only to be bogged down by bureaucracy, expediency and compromise. It is my hope that President Obama carries his father's dreams into the White House enabling the US and the world to experience tangible change that is under-girded by a commitment to justice, equality and inclusion.

Jeffrey Morris, television producer

Many people in the US and across the world expect a great deal from President Obama. Some ask, has he the capacity to deliver? Can the 44th President align his soul purpose with that of the soul of the US?
An insight from Albert Einstein seems relevant to this question. In essence, 'We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.'
In this formula is the key to successes or setbacks. It will be a great test of leadership - facing what needs to be made visible, and gaining support for regeneration and renewal during the recessionary phase of globalisation. Whatever happens, the effects will be felt worldwide.
In Britain, as in the US, a fiscal apocalypse is foreshadowing the social and economic futures of us all!

Barbara Jackson, US-born, London-based writer

Not since Dr King 'had a dream' on that famous mountain top have black people had such reason to shout Hallelujah, Hallelujah. We who were in Washington on that sunny day in 1963 never thought that we would see a black man in the White House in our lifetime. Barack Hussein Obama has made us proud, by proving to all those people who told us we 'weren't ready'. . . that it 'would take another 100 years'. How wrong they were, for they forgot that we had ruled an ancient world, and helped build a modern one, and that our footprints are found on every continent in the world.

Shirley Dowden, counsellor

Obama's election was clearly a momentous occasion in history. As the first black president of the US, he bestrides the world like a superstar. If anyone is in a position to effect change, it is Obama. However, he works under the enormous expectation that he will be able to quickly rescue the US economy and bring stability and peace to the troubled regions of the world. My fear is that change will not come quickly enough – and that's when the blame game will begin.

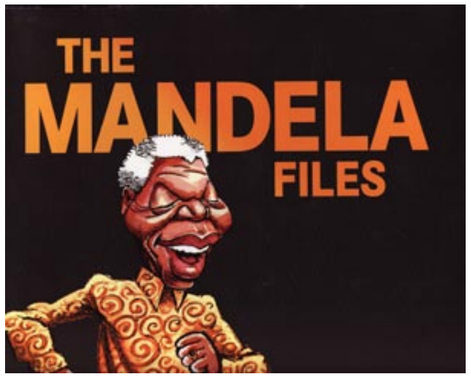
Alem Seged Abay, UK-based Ethiopian community development worker

Obama has created a new beginning and a new vision but his way forward will not be easy given the terrible legacy he has inherited from Bush. That said, he has made a good start. He is taking a more conciliatory approach in foreign affairs and this will have a positive impact on the way the US is viewed by the rest of the world. His social reforms, particularly in the health sector, will help empower many people who hitherto felt they had no stake in society. This increased feeling of wellbeing can create wonders.

Yv, US academic based in London

The current US president is in place to continue the policies of his predecessors. His cabinet selections are evidence enough: Bush's Republican secretary of defence; and Clinton's wife, as secretary of state. By definition, the world experiences American foreign policy primarily through its secretaries of state and defence; therefore, selection of the current secretaries directly contradicts claims of change on any significant scale.
Guantanamo's closure is announced as imminent, but what of its countless sister prisons at undisclosed locations? Closing one publicly acknowledged institution does not mean hundreds of others will not thrive and expand unacknowledged.
However, let us return to the people around the President, in order to conclusively contextualise his role. His choice of advisors has been rationalised in the name of reassuring Wall Street - the very demographic responsible for collapsing the transnational economy, yet which had already been given more money than anyone else in history. On what rational grounds is placating such individuals a priority?

BOOKS ROUND UP



The Mandela Files

Since the 1980s the political cartoonist Zapiro, aka Jonathan Shapiro, has been documenting the dramatic political changes taking place in South Africa. **The Mandela Files** *(Double Storey Books, Cape Town, price $33.95)* chronicles the life and times of the man who played a central role in all this, Nelson Mandela. A mix of cartoons, commentary and personal anecdote, the book is a personal tribute to the living legend, whom Zapiro describes as 'my hero and greatest inspiration'. It helps that Mandela is one of Zapiro's fans who has followed his work in the South African *Mail&Guardian* and the *Sowetan* and met him on a number of occasions. As Mandela approaches the end of is life, this handsome coffee table book will be a treasured piece of memorabilia.

Against the Grain: A 1950s Memoir

If you want a good read as well as a good companion EA 'Archie' Markham provides both in his delightful memoir **Against the Grain: A 1950s Memoir** *(Peepal Tree Press, price £10.99)*. Markham, who died last year aged 70, was many things – academic, poet, dramatist and novelist. He was also, as this book makes clear, quite a character. As he takes you on a journey through his early years in Montserrat through to his arrival in London as a 16-year-old in 1956 and beyond, you will find yourself chuckling at his deadpan wit and wry observations of people and places.

His story opens with his return to his homeland, half of which lies under volcanic ash, and the rediscovery of his grandmother's house, where he grew up. Bright and ambitious he joins his mother in England on the 'frontline' of Notting Hill, their neighbours Kelso Cochrane, slain victim of racist thugs, and Geoffrey Hamm, Oswald Mosley's second-in-command. An academic high flyer, he opts for a while to become a pop star, with hilarious results. Reading this book, it is no surprise to learn that Markham was a man whose erudition made him a free spirit not a stuffed shirt, and a man whose warmth and conviviality endeared him to many. He died unexpectedly just as this book was about to be published. A great loss.

The Adventures of an Economic Migrant

If anyone epitomises the can-do spirit of early Caribbean migrants to Britain it is Tony Wade, one of three business partners behind the phenomenally successful Dyke and Dryden black hair and beauty company. The story of how he helped build it into a multimillion pound concern from a small store in Tottenham, north London, at a time when it was difficult for black businesses to obtain finance is told in his autobiography **The Adventures of an Economic Migrant** *(Ian Randle Publishers, Kingston, Jamaica)*.

Wade was not just a clever corporate animal – he also saw himself as a community leader and was at the forefront of a number of enterprise and development initiatives.

His heartfelt memoirs, which open in the country of his birth, Montserrat, certainly attest to an adventurous and energetic spirit.

The Gift of Inner Success

Rasheed Ogunlaru's self-published **The gift of inner success** helps explain why he has become such a successful life coach. Written in a simple and measured style, it exudes the kind of age-old wisdom that has become lost in our mad quest for "making it". True success, he says, relies on developing the self and finding inner peace and balance. This book will help give you the tools to embark on a journey of self-discovery.

To obtain a copy of this book log on to www.rasaru.com

Gifted At Primary, Failing By Secondary

Also self-published, **Gifted At Primary, Failing By Secondary** explores why black children begin to underachieve once they make the transition from primary school. Decreasing parental involvement, negative peer pressure, low teacher expectation and unimaginative teaching methods linked to league table standings are some of the reasons. Maths teacher Neil Mayers sets out how you can prevent your child falling victim to a skewed education system.

To obtain a copy of this book log on to www.giftedatprimary.com

The Thing Around Your Neck

The short story is a difficult medium that can leave you hanging in mid-air. But each of the 12 tales in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's **The Thing Around Your Neck** *(Fourth Estate, price £14.99)* is a perfect whole and as you finish one you will hurry to read the next.

Like her self-declared inspiration, fellow Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe, Adichie has already proven herself to be a consummate story teller, winning the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for the best debut novel, *Purple Hibiscus,* and the Orange Prize for Fiction for her second, *Half A Yellow Sun*.

Only 31, she has the ability to enthrall her readers from the first few opening paragraphs with compelling and perceptive narratives, as these stories show.

Adichie writes about what she knows best – the corruption and violence of modern day Nigeria, and the dislocation of modern-day Nigerians who go abroad in search of wealth and education. All her protagonists hail, like herself, from the still-traumatised Igbo heartland of eastern Nigeria and most are woman, victims of cheating husbands, predatory men and incompetent security forces.

The Silent Twins

Most twins are very close but Jennifer and June Gibbons were unusually so. Born in 1963, they grew up in a world of their own, refusing to speak to adults, even their Barbadian parents. Experts were baffled by their strange behaviour and concluded they were either mad, sad or bad.

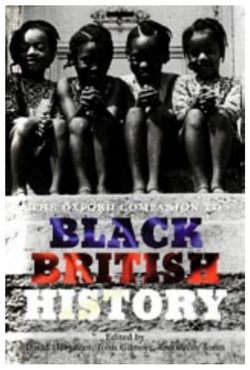
Their intriguing and ultimately tragic story is told in **The Silent Twins** *(Vintage, price £7.99)* by former *Sunday Times* journalist Marjorie Wallace. Now republished, the book first came out in 1986, four years after the twins' conviction for arson, criminal damage and theft led them to being detained 'without limit of time' at Broadmoor hospital for the criminally insane.

Visiting them there, Wallace became one of the few people able to befriend them. She discovered that they possessed a rich inner creative life that over the years they poured into the diaries and exercise books as acutely drawn observations, poems and short stories.

Their writings also reveal how they saw themselves locked in a 'mystic bondage', an eternal love hate relationship from which the only escape was death.

Although the word racism barely gets a mention, this is a haunting and riveting story.

The Oxford Companion to Black British History

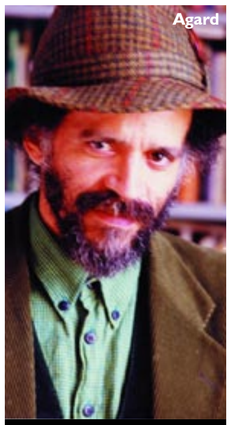


The Oxford Companion to Black British History *(Oxford Univesity Press, price £16.99)* boasts of being the first reference book to explore 2,000 years of the history of black people on these isles, from Roman times to the present day.

Edited by David Dabydeen, John Gilmore and Cecily Jones, it was put together in response to the government's concern that the black presence in Britain was not being properly acknowledged by the school curriculum, hence the backcover endorsement from David Lammy MP. Set out in a simple A-Z format of named individuals – all deceased – and subject areas, it can be used in schools and colleges as well as by the general public.

One can imagine the discussions that went into deciding who and what was to be included, but the editors admit there are not enough women; when they are mentioned they are often African American like the singer Marian Anderson who lived for a while in the UK.

Blair Peach, the slain anti-racist activist, and the poet William Wordsworth, who wrote a sonnet to slave leader Toussaint L'Ouverture, are among the non-blacks listed, indicating the Companion's range. There are 400 entries in all, some of them like Reparations running to several pages. Each is clearly and concisely written. Definitely one for the bookshelf.



Alternative Anthem

Guyanese-born John Agard has been entertaining children with his mischievous but perceptive verse for the last 30 years, his poem *Half Caste* now studied in schools as part of the national curriculum. In celebration of his contribution to British poetry and children's literature, Bloodaxe Books has brought out a retrospective collection of poems for both children and adults.

Agard is above all a performance poet and **Alternative Anthem** *(£9.95)* is accompanied by a 100-minute DVD of highlights from recent shows. Poems include selections from his 1982 book *Limbo Dancer in Drax Glasses*, *Come Down Nansi*, written in 2001, and *We Brits*, 2006. What binds them all together is playful and lyrical use of language, whether plain English or rhythmic Guyanese. BloodAxe has also published **Clever** *(£7.95)*, the poet's irreverent take on Darwin's theory of evolution on this the 150th anniversary of the *Origin of the Species*.

Listings 2009

THEATRE

Theatre Royal Stratford East
Foreplay, written and directed by Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom, in association with The South African State Theatre looks at a South Africa obsessed with sex and violence and where Aids is still taking too many lives. Until June 13. Tues-Sat 7.30pm.
Theatre Royal Stratford East, Gerry Raffles Square, London, E15 1BN. Stratford (Central line, Jubilee line, Overground, DLR & mainline). From £12.
Box Office: 020 8534 0310; or book online at www.stratfordeast.com

Hackney Empire
Judith Jacob Yabba Yabbas talks to singers, actors and comedians to find out what makes them tick. Sunday May 31st Victor Romero Evans and Curtis Walker. Sunday June 7: Tameka (3 Non Blondes) Empson and Wayne Marshall. 8pm, Marie Lloyd Bar. Tickets £8.50

Strictly Come Laughing A side-splitting night of laughter with Eddie Nestor, Robbie Gee and Kat as your hosts featuring a host of comedians including, Richard Blackwood, Jocelyn Jee Esien, Eddie Kadi, Felix Dexter, Felicity Ethnic, Quincy, Glenda Jaxon plus many more. There will also be surprise guests from the world of television, film and music. All proceeds from the night will go to Kwahu-Tafo in Ghana. 31 May, 8pm, main theatre. £15

Find The Funny An evening with comedian Stephen K Amos. June 5, 8pm,main theatre. Prices from £14.50

Iyanla Vanzant Author and founder of Inner Visions Worldwide, is back in London to share her wisdom on life, love and men. With a special message to the brothers on this, Father's Day. June 21, 7pm. Main theatre. From £13.50

Four Bulla and Pattie A comedy set around Mr John's local store in the small rural district of Bell Castle, Jamaica. Starring Charles Tomlin, Lavern Archer and Oliver Miller. Bring the whole family to see this hilarious Jamaican comedy. June 27-28, 8pm. From £17.50
Hackney Empire, 291 Mare St, London E8 1EJ. £8.50. Box Office: 020 8985 2424
www.hackneyempire.co.uk

National Theatre
Death and the King's Horseman Don't miss out on the opportunity of seeing Wole Soyinka's 1975 play about the clash between Yoruba culture and European colonialism. Set in south west Nigeria during the Second World War and apparently based on a true incident, the play centres around Elesin, Horseman of the recently deceased King, who is due to commit ritual suicide so that he can guide the spirit of the King to a peaceful afterlife. Visually stunning with live music and dazzling choreography, it stars Nonso Anozie as the king's horseman and Lucian Msamati and Jenny Jules, who 'white up' to play the governor and his wife.
Olivier, National Theatre, London SE1, until June 17. Death and the King's Horseman *is a Travelex £10 Tickets production: almost half the seats for every performance are £10.*
National Theatre, South Bank, London SE1 9PX. Box office: 0207 452 3000.

COURSES/ CONFERENCES

PCS in conjunction with Black History Studies presents the following:
The Lost Civilisations of Kenya Early history of Kenyan coastal area explored. Monday, June 8.

Economic Development in the Black Community Journey from poverty to financial independence. Monday July 13.
The Rise and Fall of Black Wall Street The amazing story of how African Americans created their own centre of black business during segregation. Monday August 10

Christianity in Early Africa Africa was an early centre of Christianity. Many of the early Church Fathers were African as were the first Christian martyrs. This presentation tells their story. Monday September 14.

Rispek juu! - Respect is due!
The 2009/2010 conference series providing up to date information about the development, use and spread of Caribbean languages today. Wed June 3, London; Fri June 5, Birmingham; Mon June 8, Manchester. Speakers and workshop leaders include Prof Hubert Devonish of the University of the West Indies and author of *Language and Liberation;* Professor Gus John, chair and chief executive of Gus John Partnership Ltd and visiting Professor to the University of Strathclyde; Yasus Afari, performance poet and author of *Overstanding Rastafari*; Barbara Ledgister, Jamaican lawyer and co-founder of Patois Personnel. Standard Delegate Fee: £150.00.
To book places or for more information contact the Conference Team on 01902 429185/or email: info@learninglinksinternational.com

What is Black Women's History?
Fascinating five-week course consisting of two hour weekly lecture on the achievements of great women from ancient and medieval Africa, through the slave trade and up to the modern era. Week 1 The African Mother Goddesses and the Birth of Civilisation; Week 2: Women in Ancient Egypt; Week 3: The Queens of Ancient Ethiopia; Week 4: The Queens and Great Women of Medieval Africa. Week 5: Black Women in the Age of the Atlantic. Wednesday evenings starting July 1 at PCS Learning Centre, 3rd Floor, 231 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 1EH (5 mins walk from Victoria Station). The course costs £60 per person.
If you would like to attend this course, please contact us for a booking form at info@blackhistorystudies.com

EXHIBITIONS

International Slavery Museum
The International Slavery Museum explores the historical and contemporary aspects of slavery. Discover the stories of bravery and rebellion amongst the enslaved people. Learn about the legacies of the slave trade and celebrate Black achievement through our interactive displays.

Shoot Nations An exhibition of photographs taken by young people as part of the Shoot Nations global photography competition. The images capture the impact of our changing environment, particularly the effects of global warming and intensive farming. Until 26 July

My Life, My Words is a small display exploring the lives and experiences of elders from Liverpool's Black community and their relationship with an ever-changing city. Until July.

The museum is running a series of events to accompany its displays

African arts and crafts Try your hand at African art and make your own mask to take home. June 7, 1–4pm
River arrivals Celebrate the cultural diversity of Liverpool in this arts & crafts session. June 13, 14; 1-4pm

The wonderful adventures of Mrs Seacole A moving performance about the life of Mary Seacole, a nurse in the Crimean War. (all) June 28, 2pm (BSL interpreted) & 3pm.
Free entry. Open daily 10am–5pm. International Slavery Museum, Albert Dock, Liverpool. Telephone 0151 478 4499
www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk

Slavery Remembrance Day August 23. Victims of the slave trade commemorated in Liverpool, once Britain's busiest slave port. Organised in conjunction with Liverpool City Council. For details of venue, ring International Slavery Museum *0151 478 4499 or email*
www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk


Pic credit: National Museums, Liverpool

The International Slavery Museum on Albert Dock, Liverpool

National Portrait Gallery

The National Portrait Gallery recently acquired a group of vintage prints of Elisabeth Welch from her biographer Stephen Bourne (*Elisabeth Welch: Soft Lights and Sweet Music*, Scarecrow Press, £15.99). They were taken in the 1930s and 1940s by Carl Van Vechten, Humphrey Spender, Cannons of Hollywood, and Paul Tanqueray. American-born Welch was an important figure in the world of popular song and worked on stage with some of the great names of the Harlem Renaissance. On Broadway she popularised Cole Porter's *Love for Sale*, and in 1933 she introduced *Stormy Weather* to British audiences. That year, with the Cole Porter musical *Nymph Errant*, Welch began her 60-year love affair with English musical theatre. She died in London in 2003 aged 99. Until September 13. Room 31, National Portrait Gallery, St Martin's Place, London WC2H OHE. Leicester Sq/Charing Cross underground.

Elizabeth Welch in 1946, one of the images on show at the National Portrait Gallery

Museum of London Docklands

Living Ancestors An exhibition of portraits of women over the age of 100 from the island of Dominica, including the world's oldest woman Ma Pampo who was 126 years old when she was drawn. Accompanying the ten portraits are stories recorded by the artist, Gabrielle Le Roux as she and the women elders got to know one another during the drawing process. Until July 31

There are a series of events accompanying the display.

***Dance the quadrille*:** Thu July 30, 12.30-1.30pm & 2.30-3.30pm
Enjoy a performance of the quadrille, a traditional Caribbean dance which is the result of the fusion of African and European folk dance. Then learn the steps and have a go yourself. The event is free but book in advance by calling 020 7001 9844.
Stories from Dominica: Wed July 29, 12.30-1pm, 2.30-3pm & 3.30-4pm
Enjoy songs and traditional stories from Dominica with Patsy Scott. Free

***Changing Faces*:** Tues 26 May, Sat May 30 & Sat June 27, 12.30-1.30pm & 2.30-3.30pm.
Pick up your artist's pallet and create your own self-portrait inspired by images from the *Living Ancestors* exhibition. Free but book in advance by calling 020 7001 9844.
Museum of London Docklands, West India Quay, Canary Wharf, London E14 4AL. Mon to Sun: 10am-6pm. Box office: 020 7001 9844By DLR: West India Quay By Tube: Canary Wharf.

October Gallery

Benin-born Gérard Quenum re-uses old dolls that he restructures, recomposes and paints adding other elements such as wood and red ribbons. Until June 27
October Gallery, 24 Old Gloucester Street, London WC1N 3AL. Russell Sq tube. 12.30-5.30 Tues-Sat. Telephone: 020 7242 7367
PIC CAP: Living dolls at the October Gallery, London

The City Gallery, Leicester

Philomena Francis exhibits her latest installation ***Mo'Lasses IV***. Taking inspiration from a variety of colonial and popular reference points, she creates astonishing installations based around treacle wall drawings to explore the experience of black women in contemporary society. Sugar, from which treacle is derived, played a vital economic role in the slave trade. Until June 6.
The City Gallery, Leicester, 90 Granby St Leicester LE1 1DJ Tue – Fri : 11.00am – 6.00pm Sat: 10.00am – 5.00pm. Tel 0116 254 0595
PIC CAP: Distance and Proximity by Philomena Francis at the City Gallery

UK CARNIVALS

Notting Hill Carnival, August 30-31. The big daddy of them all needs no introduction. Now in its 50th anniversary year, the event has evolved into Europe's biggest street party boasting up to two million revelers. The carnival weekend begins on Saturday with its best kept secret, the ***Panorama*** at Pleasance Park, Kensal Road, London W10, when the countries top steel pan players battle it out for the Champions of Steel title. Free event.

Acton Carnival, London W3. July 11, 12am-7pm. Parade leaves Woodlands Park at 1pm, traveling through the streets of Acton via Churchfield Road, to Acton Park. *More info: 020 8993 6158* www.actoncarnival.org.uk

Blue Devils in action at last year's jump up

Tottenham Carnival, London N17, June 20, 11am-2pm. Since its launch in 1997, the event has grown in popularity each year and now has up to 60,000 people attending. The carnival celebrations include a two-mile long parade, through Eade Road, High Road and Bruce Grove, with up 60 floats taking part. *More info: 0208 801 4824* www.tottenhamcarnival.co.uk

Balham & Tooting Carnival, Tooting Bec Common, London SW17. An expected 30,000 people will gather for two-day event on August 30-31. 12am-7pm. www.balhamtootingcarnival.com

Birmingham Carnival, August 2, 1pm-9pm. The procession starts in Oxhill Road, Handsworth, and ends up at Perry Park at approx 3.30pm. *More info: Dorothy Wallace on 07931 356 072 or Ava Johnson on 07713 237 502.* www.birminghamcarnival.co.uk

Cardiff Mas Carnival South Wales Intercultural Community Arts (SWICA) celebrates its 20th anniversary with a Cardiff Mas Carnival on August 1. Parade starts promptly at midday from the Butetown Youth Pavilion; grand finale takes place in St Mary's Street for Wales'first ever 'street jam', before culminating at Cardiff City Hall lawns as part of Cardiff Festival. *More info: 029 2038 2094* www.swica.co.uk

Other events: ***Mas Camp Launch*** Tuesday July 14, 6.30 – 8.30pm; ***Mas Camp Workshops*** Daily (except Sundays) July 15-31 from 12pm-9pm. Free. All ages welcome (children under 12 will need to be accompanied by an adult. Children over 12 will have to have a signed parental permission slip if attending without an adult).
Coventry Caribbean Festival, July 25, 12pm-7pm. The event began in 1991 as a small community gathering of local families and friends. Within a few years it had become so popular it was moved to the Coventry War Memorial Park, Kenilworth Rd, Coventry. *More info: 07956 511921* www.coventrycaribbeanfestival.org

Derby Caribbean Carnival, July 19-20, 12pm-7pm, bringing a taste of the Caribbean to the city with live music and mas parade. *More info: 01332 371529*
www.derbycaribbeancarnival.co.uk

Leeds Carnival, August 30-31, 12pm-7pm. Now in its 42nd year, this hugely popular multicultural extravaganza goes from strength to strength. *More info: 0113 307 0001* www.leedscarnival.co.uk

Leicester Caribbean Carnival, August 8, 1pm start, Victoria Park. After humble beginnings in 1985, it is now one of the biggest events on the city calendar. In addition there will be a ***Caribbean Culture Day*** in the City Centre on August 1, Emancipation Day. *More info: 0116 2211 785 or email/* Leicester Caribbean Carnival

Manchester Carnival, August 15, 12pm-7pm. Launched 30 years ago, this is the north west's largest celebration of Caribbean music and carnival arts; 12pm-7pm. *More info 07748 145 276/or email* Manchester Carnival

Northampton Carnival, June 13. This year's theme – 'Sole of the People'. Revived in 2005 after being launched in the 1960s, the event is regularly replenished by carnival communities from around the UK, giving it a special feel. www.northamptoncarnival.co.uk

Nottingham Carnival, August 8-9. Up to 80,000 people are expected to turn up to one of the city's biggest events. Sunday (Aug 9) is main Carnival day, with the parade leaving Sherwood Rise at 2.30pm. *More info: Sharon Lindo-Corre* on *0115 9152751* www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk

MISC

Nubian Spirit: The African legacy of the Nile Valley is a beautifully shot documentary about Ancient Sudan. Directed by independent filmmaker Louis Buckley. Fri May 29, 7pm. Westminster City Hall, 17th floor, rm 5,6,&7 , 64 Victoria St, London SW1E 6QP. This is a free event organised by Westminster Staff Diversity Group and aimed at 16+ audience. For booking and further information, please contact Ann-Marie Smith Email: amsmith2@westminster.gov.uk Tel: 020 7641 8547

Father's support group
Six-week workshop starting on Thu June 4, 6.30pm-9.30pm, Lewisham Way Youth and Community Centre, 138 Lewisham Way, London SE14 6PD. To book call 0208 692 1577/07946 423 431

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