

HISTORY

MATTERS

History Matters Journal

*Presenting the history
of African and
Caribbean people in
Britain*

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Contents:

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- Call for Papers: 2nd New Perspectives on the History of African and Caribbean People in Britain Conference

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History Matters Journal Editorial Working Group

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Marika Sherwood

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Hakim Adi - University of Chichester

Rey Bowen - University of Chichester

A.S. Francis - University of Chichester

Aleema Gray - University of Warwick

Montaz Marché - University of Birmingham

Kevin Seale - The National Archives

Claudia Tomlinson - University of Chichester

Research on the History of African and Caribbean People in Britain

Rey Bowen a PhD History student at the University of Chichester is researching for a thesis entitled 'Dusé Mohamed Ali's Pan-Africanism 1912-1945: His influence Across the African Diaspora'

A.S. Francis a PhD History student at the University of Chichester is researching women's involvement in Britain's Black radical organisations in the late 20th century. Her working thesis title is "'Committed. Black. Woman": Britain's Black women radicals, 1965-85'

Aleema Gray a PhD History student at Warwick University is researching for a thesis entitled 'Bun Babylon: A community engaged History of the Rastafari in Britain'

Montaz Marché a PhD History student at the University of Birmingham, is researching for a thesis tentatively titled: 'Mapping the Dark and Feminine: An Examination into Black Female Visibility in Eighteenth-Century Britain'

Claudia Tomlinson a doctoral candidate at the University of

Chichester is researching for a thesis is entitled: 'Journey from Communism in British Guiana to Black Radicalism in the Global North: A Political Biography of Jessica Huntley (1927 – 2013)'

We hope that you will support History Matters by sending information about your research interests. We are particularly keen to hear from those of African and Caribbean heritage who are researching this history in universities, schools and elsewhere, but we are interested to hear from anyone who is working in our field. Please let us know the title or focus of your research and send us a summary or any interesting findings.

Introduction

Introducing History Matters

The History Matters initiative was first launched in 2014 by historians, history teachers and history students concerned about the under-representation of those of African and Caribbean heritage within the history discipline. It later worked with the Historical Association, the Royal Historical Society (RHS), the University of Chichester and others to convene the first History Matters Conference at the Institute of Historical Research in April 2015. The conference heard from students, teachers, historians and others about the many challenges that have made it difficult for young people of African and Caribbean heritage to engage with history at school and university and the barriers that have stood in the way of those pursuing a career in History. The Conference made several recommendations which led to subsequent investigation into the nature of this under-representation by the RHS, as well as the creation of the [Masters by Research \(MRes\) in the History of Africa and the African Diaspora at the University of Chichester](#) and the founding of the [Young Historians Project](#) which has focused its work on the histories of people of African and Caribbean heritage in Britain. In order to encourage young and emerging historians History

Matters also organised the New Perspectives on Black British History Conference at Goldsmiths University in October 2017. Many of the papers presented at this conference were later published in the book edited by Hakim Adi, *Black British History: New Perspectives* (Zed, 2019).

BASA and History Matters

In 1991 Marika Sherwood, Hakim Adi and others founded the Association for the Study of African, Caribbean and Asian Culture and History in Britain (ASACACHIB) which aimed to encourage the study, teaching and preservation of this history. ASACACHIB was a name and acronym that few could remember, or pronounce, and so in 1997 the Association was renamed BASA, the name by which it is now much better known. For over thirty years BASA engaged in numerous activities to promote what today some people refer to as 'Black British' History. One of its most recent activities was the development of the new OCR GCSE course 'Explaining the Modern World - Migration to Britain' and the accompanying textbook *Migration, Empire and the Historic Environment* by Marika, Hakim, Martin Spafford and Dan Lyndon (Hodder, 2018).

One of the most important activities of BASA was the regular production of its *Newsletter*. It was a source of information about ongoing research and carried articles and other material relating to the history of those of African, Caribbean and Asian descent in Britain.

Unfortunately, with the demise of BASA, the newsletter also

disappeared but in recent years there have been numerous discussions between those involved in BASA and History Matters about the launch of a new publication. This is much needed as for some years there has not been a regularly published journal which focuses on what is today often referred to as 'Black British' History.

History Matters Journal

The many discussions have been enriched by the experience of Marika Sherwood and Hakim Adi who were the founders and for many years leading members of BASA but they have also benefitted from the perspectives and enthusiasm of a younger group of historians. The result is the first edition of this new *History Matters Journal*. The new publication will focus on the histories of those of African and Caribbean heritage in Britain reflecting the interests and concerns of our working editorial group.

What you can do

We hope that you will support History Matters by sending information about your research interests. We are particularly keen to hear from those of African and Caribbean heritage who are researching this history in universities, schools and elsewhere, but we are interested to hear from anyone who is working in our field. Please let us know the title or focus of your research and send us a summary or any interesting findings. If you wish to submit an article, or any piece of writing, please send **no more than 5000 words**, including any references. If you have information on any significant

historical figures and organisations, especially those that have hitherto been neglected and those outside London, please send information. We are also interested in interviews, photos and historic documents. If you have other ideas about what might be included, please let us know, we are always seeking to involve others. You can contact us at: hismatters@gmail.com

Why and how Black Lives Matter became important to me - Marika Sherwood

Marika Sherwood is one of the foremost researchers on the histories of people of African and Caribbean descent in Britain. She oftentimes describes herself as a 'Hungarian Jew', who developed a hunger for knowledge regarding global Black histories, and in particular the Black presence in Britain. Her research goes hand in hand with her longstanding commitment to better the educational experiences of young Black people in Britain, and encourage young people to develop as researchers and Historians. The recent uprisings of 2020, in which people all across the globe have called for an end to racism, police brutality and state terrorism in its many forms, prompted Marika Sherwood to reflect on how she came to be so concerned with studying Black history. Below is her short autobiographical article. This piece traces memories of living in Nazi-occupied Hungary, migrations to Australia, colonised New Guinea, and Britain, and working within Britain's school system. These experiences led to Marika's entry into Historical research and activism...

Given that there are now many campaigns to emphasise that

Black Lives Matter, I decided I must examine myself: why do these lives matter so much to me? After all, I was born in Budapest into a Jewish family and survived World War 2 there with the help of Christians. I have no early association with people with skin darker than mine. But Black lives matter so much to me! How did this develop? There is much that I must examine. Perhaps Budapest was the beginning of this long journey. Most of us middle class Jews lived in the same blocks of flats as middle class Hungarian (Magyar) Christians in central Budapest. We did not look different, dress differently, speak differently. But then the German Nazis took control and, presumably because we were indistinguishable, we had to wear a yellow star pinned to our clothes when outdoor. Now some of our fellow Magyars name called and spat at us. Was this just to please the Nazis? But some Christians helped us, baptised us, gave us their names, found places for us to live safely for the remainder of the war. Of course, with Christians. So to many (most?) we were all Magyars.

To cut this long story short, what was left of my family emigrated to Australia 1947-9. I did well at school, but did not like being in Australia. Never felt I 'belonged'. So I married an Australian, hoping I would belong. Had a son. I still did not belong. Divorced. No support for my son from my ex-husband. Wanted to leave Australia – but how could I with a young son? I noticed an advertisement for a job as a clerk in the Electrical Undertakings Department in Port Moresby, New Guinea. Had no idea where that was. Looked on a map. Well, nowhere near Europe, but at least not Australia. So I applied. Yes, I was told at the interview, the wife of one the staff would look after my son during the day while I was at work.

I accept the offer. We are picked up at the airport and driven to the office where I was to work. My boss welcomes me, takes me around the office introducing me to all the workers – all men – sitting at their desks. ‘Meet Mr. so-and-so’. Again and again. Until we arrive at the last desk, behind which sits a dark-skinned man. ‘Meet Joe’. ‘I can’t call him by his first name. He is much older than me.’ ‘You will call him Joe.... And now you will be driven to where you will be living. It is the home of one of our staff on long-service leave. They have locked all their goods into a couple of rooms but there is enough space left for you and your son. The boy will explain all to you.’ The only ‘boy’ I know is my son! Nothing my one year-old boy can explain to me! What on earth does he mean?

So I am driven to a street that looks like a bit of Sydney suburbia. The driver stops, tells me to get out, gets all my luggage out, drives off. I feel lost. Immediately a young dark-skinned man comes to me. I’m bewildered again. He smiles a little and says ‘I am your boy’. ‘What do you mean?’ I ask. ‘And please, what’s your name?’ ‘I clean the house, inside and out; do the cooking and then wash all the dishes. I also wash your clothes and iron them. I also do the gardening. And I will take your son to the neighbour who will look after him. Let me show you around the house. My name is...’ So in we go. There is not a room he calls his own. ‘Where do you sleep?’, I ask. He takes me out, points to what looks like a shed at the back of the garden. ‘That’s my home’. He tells me. In Hungary servants lived in a part of the main house or flat, so I am confused yet again! And I certainly did not expect to have a ‘servant’! ‘How much should I pay you for doing all this?’ I ask. He tells me. ‘That’s not nearly enough for all you will be doing. So I shall pay you.....Is that

OK?' 'Thank you very much.'

Begin going to work – there's a bus I can get to the office. A couple of days later my boss calls me into his office. 'I've been told that you are paying your boy more than the standard wage. He's told everyone; all are asking for more. If you want to keep your job, you will not pay him a penny more than the standard wage!' I am appalled. Understand nothing. But must keep my job. So when I get home, I tell my 'boy' that officially he will only get the standard wage, but that I will give him the extra I had promised him. But he must not tell anyone! To add to my bewilderment, walking down a street I notice the dark-skinned man from my office ahead of me. So I catch up, ask where he is going and then suggest that we could then walk together. 'No, we can't', he responds. 'I can only walk behind you. If I walk next to you I will be fired.' So he does that, but we do manage to hold a conversation. To cut this story short, I am invited to visit his family and we become friends. All totally hidden, of course. (I should add here that none of my other fellow workers offered me any friendship).

After about 6-7 months, when all 'white' children are tested for TB, which Australians had taken up to New Guinea, I am told we must return to Australia, as my son is showing some symptoms. So we return to Sydney. I manage to get a full-time job and a place in a kindergarten for my son. Began going to university at night as I wanted to understand the world I was living in. What was the official relationship of Australia to New Guinea? What were the Australians doing there? Why did they behave so badly towards the indigenous peoples? I had learned so much from my New Guinean colleague! And felt to

honoured to be accepted by his family. After all, I was a total stranger! It was a course at Sydney University on Primitive Legal Systems that blew my mind open. The focus was on the legal system in Kano, northern Nigeria. I went to see an old friend from Budapest, then a practising lawyer, and gave him the handout we had been given on this 'primitive system'. Asked him what he thought of it as it seemed to me to be anything but 'primitive'. A week later: 'Marika, that is the most sophisticated legal system I have ever heard about. Much better than ours here in Australia. And of course, ours is based on Britain's.' (Many many years later I went to Kano to say 'thank you!').

So I realised I'd been brain-washed. A 'primitive legal system' more sophisticated than Australia's! So I began trying to think for myself. Began to explore what had been done to the Aboriginal peoples of Australia by the settlers (and transported convicts – much hidden history) from England. Finished my degrees, earned enough to sail to England with my dear son.

I really wanted to return to Budapest, where I thought I would be at home, but I knew that my Magyar was not good enough to be able to get a job there using my qualifications. So London it had to be.

We arrived in the Mother Country in 1965. Yes, I still thought of England as this glorious Mother – I had not linked what I found in Port Moresby to her. As I had no relatives/friends in London, I realised the best way I could continue looking after my son was to teach in schools – then I'd be home not much later than he was in the afternoons, and we would be together for the school holidays. So I found somewhere to live in north

London and got a job – without teaching qualifications! – as a teacher in a Haringey Infants School. I was given a small room where I was to teach English to non-English speakers. I had expected those sent to me to be Turkish Cypriots, the only newcomers I knew about who might not be English-speakers. But I was sent Black kids, who spoke English, but with a non-English accent. As I did. I asked questions. Their responses were totally comprehensible, so no problem with ‘English’. One boy told me of his particular problems with his teacher: he wanted to sit by the radiators, but was always told to go back to the desk where he’d been told to sit.

I was confused. What sort of ‘mother’ was this country?

I asked my pupils where they were from. Gave me names of places I’d never heard of. Looked in an Atlas. Islands in the West Indies! Had never heard of such a place. Searched the school library. Nothing. Searched the local library. Nothing. So, with apologies, I went to speak to the parents when they came to pick up their children. Learned much. Much. They explained to me that it was fathers who came here first. They settled down, worked, saved enough money to send for their wives. Then, when both had jobs, they saved money to bring over the child/children they had left with their families back on the islands. So they were immigrants, as I was. As most worked in factories, and these shut for a Christmas break, that was the best time to bring the children over. So I immediately understood why a child arriving then from those tropical islands would want to sit by the radiators! I went to explain this to the teacher. ‘No, he’ll sit where I tell him!’ So I went to see the Head – same response! She also repeated that the others had to be taught

to speak English! I could not continue participating in this discrimination, so resigned. But had to find another school to teach in.

So I got a job at a local, north London Comprehensive Secondary school. When interviewing me the Head told me that as I was new to teaching, I would only be given the lower streams and all I had to do was keep them quiet. I was confused. How, why would you not teach your pupils? And what were lower streams? I asked in the teachers' Common Room. 'You've not been here long enough to understand. The lower streams are those with different accents, those from very different post codes, and coloureds. Too stupid to learn, so no point in even attempting to teach them. Really, all you have to do is keep them quiet.' I was bewildered. Confused. There can't possibly be any pupils in a comprehensive school too stupid to learn. I must teach them! The first class sent to me was first year pupils, so I had no problems with getting them to pay attention, to work. It was not so easy with second year pupils, and at first hopeless with third year pupils, who were mainly dark-skinned. I was their Maths teacher! I questioned them. No, they had been taught nothing. No, they had never been allowed into the Maths 'laboratory'. Yes, this was their last year as the school leaving age was 15. Yes, it will be very difficult to get work without exam certificates. I had to promise the Head that I would pay for anything missing if we were allowed into the 'laboratory'! Of course, nothing was stolen. Yes, they would be happy to work and even to stay after school for catch-up lessons. So we worked late some afternoons, until the school caretaker told me that this was not permitted. We then had these extra classes in the large shared flat I lived in not far from

the school.

But now I faced something else very new to me. ‘Why do you share your flat with an African?’ my pupils asked. And my co-tenant, a PhD student at the LSE, questioned me about expecting so much from West Indians. After all, they were the children of people who’d been enslaved. I was totally confused. Bewildered. Again, there was so much I did not understand, knew nothing about. Again I had to find books to read; no books in the school library and none in the local library. So I had to search the many local second-hand bookshops. I also had to try to understand why my fellow-teachers stopped speaking to me. As no other teachers were really teaching my third year class, I had no problem getting permission to take them on half-day excursions. The Head should not have approved, as a class of thirty taken anywhere had to be accompanied by two teachers. But he gave permission – many times. On these excursions I learned much more about the many kinds of discrimination my pupils had to face. I also learned more from the families I visited. Thank you!

Obviously I didn’t ‘belong’ here any more than I had ‘belonged’ in Australia. But why all this discrimination, against people with a different coloured skin, or from a non-middle-class neighbourhood? It was the Nazis who discriminated against me in Budapest – the English cannot be Nazis! So why?

The current Black Lives Matter campaigns are forcing me to try to understand myself. And to understand England. Great Britain. The Mother Country. I sit and think. Remember. Reflect. I realise I have to search the books I had bought all those

years ago. Yes, I do try to keep all the books I buy. What did they teach? About the colonies, Britain, et al? Let me give you some quotations from these books. But only those that were still in print when I bought them; some have been reprinted many times, as I note below. So many people at work today would have read these at school; and perhaps to try to teach themselves, as I did.

Books for schools: history

George Townsend Warner, Sir C. Henry Marten, D. Erskine Muir, *The New Groundwork of British History, 1783-1939* (Blackie & Son, 1943; last republication was in 1965).

'In 1831 there were over 800,000 engaged in the cotton spinning industry ... (p.744 – source of cotton not mentioned) 'New factories ...covered the north and the midlands. There children of 6 or 7 years old would work for 10 or 14 hours a day... they worked in the mines... and the factories... The Factory Act of 1833...only dealt with textile works...forbade the employment of children under 9... (p.779) Lord Salisbury: "When I returned to the Foreign Office in 1885 the nations of Europe were quarrelling with each other as to the various portions of Africa which they could obtain... It is a great force – a great civilizing, Christianizing force.'" (p.877) By 1900 'Great Britain increased her Empire by 5000 million square miles and 410 million people... Britain believed that her rule was beneficial... the civilizing mission of the Anglo-Saxon race.' (p.880)

Edward J Payne, *History of European Colonies* (Macmillan &

Co, 1878; last republication 2016) ‘We find that of all types of mankind the European type stands the highest.’ (p.7)

T.F. Tout, *An Advanced History of Great Britain, Part III From 1714 to 1934* (Longman, Green & Co, 1935; republished again & again, last I think was 2019) Not too bad a book, but more than somewhat biased. No mention of the trade in enslaved Africans: ‘...during the 18th century... Liverpool began to rival Bristol in American trade’ (p.626). Nothing on the 1807 Act, or the Berlin Conference splitting Africa between Europeans. Does refer to ‘abolition of negro slavery in 1834.... The West Indies...lost nearly all their prosperity, based upon monopoly and slavery...’ (p.721)

Donald Lindsay & E.S. Washington, *A Portrait of Britain between The Exhibitions 1851-1951* (Oxford University Press, 1951; last republication 1967). ‘Sudan – primitive peoples... savages’ (p.142-3) John Ruskin, Oriel College, Oxford: ‘... appealed to the youth of England to help their country to found colonies as fast as she is able... He sincerely believed in the imperial mission of the Anglo-Saxon race...’ (p.147) ‘In 1902 Colonel Lugard was responsible for the conquest and civilization of Nigeria.’ (p.183) ‘On 15 August 1948 the long and honourable story of British rule in India came to an end.’ (p.303) The ‘West Indies’ dont exist in this book – not even in the accounts of troops fighting for Britain in WWI and WWII.

Books for schools: geography

Chas. B. Thurston, *An Economic Geography of the British Empire* (Univ. of London Press; my copy was printed in 1925 – it was the 4th edition; last reprint is 2015.)

‘The million square miles of the Sudan are inhabited by some 3,000,000 natives, fanatical and almost uncivilised...’ (p.221) ‘British West Africa... there are many native tribes. Those who live in the forest areas are usually the most degraded, cannibalism and a horrible blood ritual in their idolatrous worship being common...’ (p.233) ‘British New Guinea... .cannibalistic tendencies of some of the tribes.... Has about a quarter of a million of natives, some of whom are becoming sufficiently educated to assist in the development of various vegetable and mineral resources by the white planters and prospectors.’ (p.339)

Thomas Pickles, *Africa, Australia, & New Zealand* (Dent & Sons, 1937; last republication 1959).

On West Africa: ‘Five hundred years ago this land was unknown to white men. Two hundred years ago it was known only for the gold, ivory and slaves obtained from it.... Only fifty years ago even the coast was still known as the “White Man’s Grave”... Today practically the whole region is under the government of British or French, who have established order and security everywhere...and we at home are coming to depend more and more on the labour of the West African negro for many of our foodstuffs and raw materials...’ (p.38) Most amusing: ‘If we were planning to visit ...we should take with us several suits...’ (pp.38-9) The author asks a good question in

his 'Exercises' at the end of this chapter: '3. Make a list of things in your home which may have been made from commodities produced in West Africa.' (p.53) But: no mention of segregation in South African cities (pp.81-5). 'Australia is a white man's country. There are only sixty thousand native "blackfellows"'. (pp.126-7) In New Guinea 'the natives of the interior are akin to the Australian "blackfellows" and still live in the Stone Age. The coastal peoples ...are of a rather higher type...' (p.195) His final chapter 'Mutual aid – the benefits of the trade' looks at the importance of what is imported and what is exported for the British economy.

Books for the public and Christians

Lord Avebury, *The Origin of Civilisation and the Primitive Condition of Man* (Longmans, Green & Co, 1911; first published in 1870; republished many times – last 2005)

'Though savages always have a reason, such as it is, for what they do and what they believe, their reasons often are very absurd... (p7) '...lower savages, whose mental inferiority we have most difficulty in realising...' (p.9) '...true love is almost unknown among them...' (p.70) '...There is no more striking proof of the low mental condition of many savage races than the undoubted fact that they are unable to count their own fingers, even of one hand.' (p.455) The index is about 'savages'.

T.H. Darlow, *God's Image In Ebony* (London Missionary Society, 1912; last republication was in 2016)

'The Nilotic negroes...naked savages...speech is so dependent on gesture that they are unable to converse properly in the

dark...' (p.35) 'The negro remains a mysterious fact in the Divine order of the world. ...We cannot even guess why He has appointed these vast multitudes to belong to the most backward of human races...' (p.59) 'It is the task of Christian Europe and America to educate these negroes till they may be able to govern themselves in a suitable state of civilization, and even to play an efficient part in the world's work in developing their own backward continent.' (p.38)

The Good News in Africa, no author given –preface by Rev. E.H. Bickersteth (Seeley, Jackson & Halliday, 1833; reprinted again and again, last 2018?)

Mostly on the work of the London Missionary Society and some others, which 'transformed' Africans from 'savage to civilized life'... 'Shut off from the rest of mankind, in the Dark Continent.... its interior was absolutely unknown, and dark with crime and bloodshed, and cruelty almost too terrible to contemplate...' (p.138, 195) In one of the schools set up in Sierra Leone the children were given the names 'from a long list of benefactors brought from England'. (p.19) The exploration of Africa is 'important as offering a road-way both for missionary and commercial objects'. (p.158)

There is a biography of a Yoruba boy named 'Adjai', born in 1811; enslaved; slave ship captured; he is freed and sent to school in Sierra Leone; 'baptised by the name of Samuel Crowther' in 1826. Sent to England, where he 'was lodged for a while in a tiny nook under a staircase in the Church Missionary College in Islington'. Returned to Sierra Leone; then back to England and in June 1843 'the rescued captive was ordained a deacon, and a priest.... On his third visit to England, 1864, he was

consecrated as the first negro Bishop of the Church of England in Canterbury Cathedral'. (pp.93-106)

Novels

I don't recall which of the many novels on my shelves are from the 1960s, but certainly those on Biggles, by Capt. W.E Johns, must have really caught my attention as I have four on my shelves. All the Biggles books are republished, again and again. So thousands have been reading them since the 1930s. It might have been the titles that grabbed my attention. For example, Biggles and the Black Peril, which turned out to be mainly about India! Biggles in the Jungle is about 'Honduras', where the 'native' is 'savage looking' and lives in 'primitive huts'. Biggles in Africa is about 'savages', 'untamed Africans', 'half-breeds', who his colleague Algy thought 'had been tamed by now'.

And I realised that to attempt to understand other cultures, traditions, ways of life, and experiences of life here, I had not only to read history and sociology books, but also novels. So my shelves have many many novels by African, Caribbean and Black British novelists. From these books I began to understand attitudes in the Mother Country. And realised not only that I needed to learn more, but that **everyone** had to.

So again, to cut this long story short, I trained as a psychotherapist and got a job as a Student Advisor at the Polytechnic of North London. Most of the students facing problems were either 'White' working class or 'Black'. So I learned more from them. Read more. And I attended the course on

'Underdevelopment' taught by Tobago-born Sr. Lecturer Colin Prescod. So a whole new range of books. New perspectives. New visions. Meetings to attend at the Institute of Race Relations. I asked Colin, very much an activist, why neither he nor his colleagues were doing any research on the history of 'Black' peoples in Britain. Yes, there were a couple of books, but what these indicated was the need for much much more research. 'If you think this is urgent, you'll get on and do it!' was his response. So, eventually I did.

My first book *The British Honduran Forestry Unit in Scotland 1941-43*, was published by One Caribbean Publishers in 1982; the second, *Many Struggles* (West Indian Workers and Service Personnel in Britain 1939-1945), by Karia Press, in 1985. I wrote many more, and also have many articles published. My last book, *Kwame Nkrumah and the Dawn of the Cold War: the West African National Secretariat, 1945-48*, was published by Pluto Press in London in 2019 and by Sub-Saharan Publishers in Accra in 2020. While I lived in London I used to walk up to Highgate cemetery quite frequently to sit by Claudia Jones' grave, to thank her for all she did, for inspiring me, for giving me the strength to continue researching. (My book on her, *Claudia Jones: a life in exile*, was published in 1999.) Ed Scobie, the author of one of these books, *Black Britannia*, befriended me and I learned much from him. Thank you!

The more I researched and read the more I recognised just how much Black Lives mattered to me. So eventually in 1991 with some colleagues we set up what became the Black & Asian Studies Association. In our first Newsletter, dated September 1991, we explained that:

“For a number of years we have discussed the paucity of opportunity to study and discuss the history and culture of peoples of Africa, Caribbean and Asian descent in Britain. This Newsletter and the Association are launched in order to develop and encourage interest and research and to disseminate information. We would like to establish a network of organisations and individuals to foster the exchange of information, support each other and to provide a forum for discussion and planning future events.....

We intend to explore the possibility of developing community-based workshops. We intend to explore ways of encouraging the media and schools and colleges to give more coverage to these subjects. We intend to attempt to persuade bookshops to increase their holdings of relevant books and pamphlets”

We held monthly seminars in London, annual conferences in different cities, and began campaigning for changes to the school curriculum in 1992. Got nowhere, as you all know. The Newsletter, published three times a year, contained articles; reports on BASA and other groups’ activities; a list of forthcoming events around the country; reviews of books and articles; and a biography of a ‘historic figure’. After a couple of years researchers began to send us parish records to include. Approaching my 70th birthday, I retired as editor of the Newsletter in 2006. Sadly the last issue was in July 2012. But Black Lives Matter to me very much, so I am continuing researching. After all, ignorance and discrimination are ongoing.

Researching Black British History in the Huntley Archives at the London Metropolitan Archives - Claudia Tomlinson

Claudia Tomlinson is a doctoral candidate at the University of Chichester whose thesis is entitled: Journey from Communism in British Guiana to Black Radicalism in the Global North: A Political Biography of Jessica Huntley (1927 – 2013).

One of the best ways of uncovering Britain's black history is to investigate the records held in specialist archives. The Huntley Archives at the London Metropolitan Archives is arguably the most extensive, well-organised, and comprehensive repository of black British history, covering periods from the 1940s.

The Huntley Archives was founded by Jessica Huntley (1927-2013), and Eric Huntley (1925 -), and an advisory group of supporters. Jessica Huntley was a former politician and worker's rights activist from British Guiana (now Guyana). She co-founded the People's Progressive Party (PPP) and was part of the struggle which led to the PPP's election in 1953, a very significant moment in the history of the country. After moving

to Britain in 1958, she became a prominent and influential British activist in Black Nationalism, and Pan-Africanism for many decades. She was also a renowned internationalist with campaigns covering Africa, the Caribbean, and the USA, working to liberate the oppressed and those facing harsh injustices, particularly black people.

She established Bogle L'Ouverture Publications and bookshop, becoming the first black woman in Britain, to establish and lead a radical black publishing company with clear Pan-African and Black Nationalist objectives. She was uncompromising in her vision for the liberation and uplift of black people, cooperating with many of the leading organisations and campaigns of her era including the Black Supplementary School Movement, the Black Parents Movement, the Stephen Lawrence Campaign, the New Cross Fire Campaign, and many others in Britain and internationally. Bogle L'Ouverture was the leading publisher of black writers in politics, arts, fiction, and non-fiction and launched the debut works of Linton Kwesi Johnson, Lemn Sissay, and Valerie Bloom.

The bookshop was described as an oasis for black culture, activism, and hosted the launch and promotion events for many international writers and artists including Courtney Pine, Ellen Kuzwayo, Ntozake Shange, John Agard, and Grace Nichols. Her international political associates included Walter Rodney, CLR James, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Maya Angelou, Angela Davis, and Alice Walker. She built a community that promoted black consciousness and one that aligned with her vision of liberation and justice.



Jessica Huntley and Eric Huntley

Eric Huntley is an activist and former Guyanese politician, a founding member of the People's Progressive Party (PPP), an anti-colonial activist, and fighter for the liberation of black and other oppressed people was Jessica's partner and husband for more than sixty years. He is also a publisher, public speaker, and writer. Jessica and Eric worked closely together and are well known for the network of loyal and prominent artists, activists, and politicians that frequented their home over many decades, which became a well-known focus of black activism in London since the 1960s, and has now been honoured with a Blue Plaque.

In 2005, the process of archiving the Huntley records began, and the Huntley Archives Advisory Group was formed. A Specialist Archivist, and trusted member of their networks, Maureen Roberts, was appointed at the London Metropolitan Archives to begin the work. She spent a year and a half in the

strongroom cataloguing the personal, family, business, political, and campaigning records of Jessica and Eric Huntley, their associates, and network members. The extensive records are broadly divided into their work as publishers and booksellers, political campaigners, and personal and family.¹

The Archives contain records of other prominent and significant individuals who were close associates of Jessica and Eric Huntley. Possibly the most significant of these is Walter Rodney (1942 – 1980), the Guyanese historian of African and black history, Marxist and Black Nationalist, author, and politician, assassinated by an agent with the cooperation of the Guyanese government.² Rodney was a close friend and associate of both Jessica and Eric. His first two books *The Groundings with my Brothers*, and *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, were developed, published and promoted by Bogle L'Ouverture and have internationally been recognised as foundational works for Black Power, and Pan-Africanism. Walter Rodney's years spent in London are under-researched, and the LMA has produced a guide for researchers to undertake this as they currently form part of the Huntley Archives.

¹ Roberts, M., 'The Huntley Archives at London Metropolitan Archives', *The Future of Literary Archives: Diasporic and Dispersed Collections at Risk*, David Sutton and Ann Livingstone, (London, Arc Humanities Press; 2018)

² Office of the President of Guyana, 2016, 'The Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Enquire and Report on the Circumstances Surrounding the Death in an Explosion of the late Dr Walter Rodney on Thirteenth day of June, One Thousand Nine Hundred and Eighty, at Georgetown' (pdf) accessed on 25 September 2020 (http://www.guyana.org/govt/Rodney_COI_Report-GNI_edition.pdf)

Researchers interested in Black African and Caribbean writers, musicians, artists in Britain, and the USA, will find records relating to many prominent figures from the 1960s onwards. They include Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Errol Lloyd, Faustin Charles, Sam Greenlee, Cecil Rajendra, E. A. Markham, Ellen Kuzwayo, Ntozake Shange, Andrew Salkey, Samuel Selvon, Amrit Wilson, Beryl Gilroy, Farrukh Dhondy, and many others. Records of authors, their manuscripts, and correspondence relating to their publishing processes are within the Huntley Archives. Some documents may not be available for general access due to data protection legislation, and where they relate to living individuals.

The archival records are diverse in format and include oral history interviews, tapes, videos, filmed records of events, display boards of the numerous bookshop events, campaign literature, photographs, correspondence, diaries, notebooks, manuscripts of a large number of Bogle L'Ouverture authors, and family records. There is also a library collection of books on race, and activism. Some of the records in the Huntley Archives remain uncatalogued but can be made available to researchers on request.

The Huntley Archives document hundreds of campaigns, actions, protests, and demonstrations that the Huntleys and their collaborators and associates organised, co-operated with and participated in. These include political organisations in Guyana such as the *People's Progressive Party of Guyana* (PPP), and the British PPP branch, *African Society for Cultural Relations with Independent Africa* (ASCRIA), *Committee Against Repression in Guyana* (CARIG), and the *Working People's Alliance*, (WPA). The

Archives also support research on the history of the resistance to injustices against black children in the British education system, the Grenada revolution, political repression in Kenya, the riots in London, the oppression of black people in the criminal justice system, and in the mental health system.

Records on specific campaigns such as Jessica's fight for justice for former death row prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal can also be found in the Huntley Archives. There is an opportunity to study the huge range of political organising among the black populations from the 1960s onwards including the myriad of organisations and groups, many of which remain unresearched and undocumented in scholarly research. The Huntley's association with activists such as Bernard Coard, Waveney Bushell, Maurice Bishop, Ansel Wong, Gus John, Sybil Phoenix, Eusi Kwayana, CLR James, Richard Small, Ewart Thomas, and many other activists is documented in these archives.



Jessica Huntley, left, hosts Angela Davis's talk at the Keskids Centre in 1974

In addition to the records of Jessica and Eric Huntley, the couple encouraged others in their networks to donate their records. For example, the papers of Andrew Salkey (1926 – 1995), author, editor, academic, activist, and co-founder of *Bogle L'Ouverture*, and close friend and collaborator of Jessica and Eric Huntley have been donated to the Huntley Archives. The personal records of Lionel Jeffrey (1926 – 1993), have been deposited in the Huntley Archives. He was born in British Guiana and was a close friend and collaborator of Jessica and Eric Huntley. He was an anti-Colonial activist, a PPP politician. In Britain, he was a leading political and community activist, in the Labour Movement and community activism. Pansy Jeffrey (1926 – 2017), also born in British Guiana, was appointed to assist in the post-riot community recovery in Kensington after

the 1958 riots, a women's rights activist, and founder of the Pepperpot Community Centre for Black Elders. She was also the wife of Lionel Jeffrey, and close friend and associate of Jessica and Eric Huntley, and her records have been donated to the Huntley Archives.

The Huntley Archives form the basis of community and educational activities in black and African British and international history. It hosts its own charity, and annual Huntley conference.

The London Metropolitan Archives is based in Farringdon, London.

African women and the British Health Service: Irene Ighodaro - The Young Historians Project

The Young Historians Project emerged as a solution which addressed both the lack of young Black historians and the exclusion of Black history from popular imaginations of British history. It is a familiar space where our members - between the ages of 16 and 25 - of African and Caribbean descent come together to work on a history project which draws attention to Black British history. The first project documented the Black Liberation Front (BLF) in order to raise awareness about the impact of Black political activism in Britain. Despite the project's success, its concentration on men of Caribbean descent was a shortfall which YHP was keen to address in their second project. The end of the BLF project also coincided with the proliferation of discussions on the 'Windrush generation' - a phrase which has seen Black British histories become characterised by a focus on people of Caribbean descent. The narrative of the 'Windrush nurse' tended to concentrate on the experiences of Caribbean nurses, which only told a small part of the story of the hundreds of women who came from the colonies to support the newly-founded National Health Service.

It was also a narrative which overlooked the contributions of women before 1948 and those with alternative medical careers. YHP therefore embarked on a new project which would document the histories and experiences of African women in the British health service throughout the twentieth-century. Oral histories lie at the heart of this project, in order to help repeal the hegemony of the archive over the production of history. It is important that these women are given the opportunity to communicate their stories in their own words.



YHP's interview with Esther Adi, July 2018

YHP are now in the final stages of this project and are working on its outputs: a series of documentary episodes, an eBook, an online exhibition, a podcast series and multiple murals in commemoration of African women's contributions. Our

volunteers come from many backgrounds and therefore possess a variety of skills which enable us to explore imaginative methods of representing this history to a diverse audience. The experiences of African women in the British health service have been overlooked for too long, and we hope our outputs capture the resilience, dedication and affection with which these medical professionals served this country. Below is a sample from our soon-to-be released online exhibition, which traces the extraordinary career of Dr. Irene Ighodaro during her time in Britain:

Dr. Irene Elizabeth Beatrice Ighodaro (née Wellesley-Cole) was born on May 16th, 1916 in Freetown, Sierra Leone.³ She came from an elite West African family - her father was a civil engineer and superintendent of Freetown waterworks and her brother became the first Black African to become a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons.⁴ After nursing her mother through a terminal illness, she decided to pursue a career within healthcare. Irene studied medicine at the University of Durham from 1938 to 1944 and was reportedly one of only three women

³ Nyaknno Osso, 'IGHODARO, Dr. Irene Elizabeth Beatrice', *Blerf's Who's Who in Nigeria (Online)*, <https://blerf.org/index.php/biography/ighodaro-dr-irene-elizabeth-beatrice/> (accessed 31 May 2020).

⁴ Royal College of Surgeons of England, 'Wellesley-Cole, Robert Benjamin Ageh (1907 - 1995)', *Plarr's Lives of the Fellows*, https://livesonline.rcseng.ac.uk/client/en_GB/lives/search/detailnonmodal/ent:\protect \TU\textdollar 002f\protect \TU\textdollar 002fSD_ASSET\protect \TU\textdollar 002f0\protect \TU\textdollar 002fSD_ASSET:380542/one?qu=%22rcs%3A+E008359%22&rt=false%7C%7C%7CIDENTIFIER%7C%7C%7CResource+Identifier (accessed 6 July 2020).

in a class of sixty.⁵ During the war, she manned the university's telephone exchange, became a member of the decontamination squad, and treated war casualties.⁶ Irene became the first West African-born woman doctor in Britain and decided that gynaecology would be the best route for her.⁷ Irene received her first medical case on the day of her results.⁸ She later worked as a house officer at the Royal Victoria Infirmary (1944-45) before she managed her brother's private practice whilst he assisted the Colonial Office in West Africa (January 1945- September 1946).⁹ Irene continued to manage the practice as her brother's assistant until he sold it in 1946. She relocated to Liverpool at the invitation of her other brother Arthur and worked at a family planning clinic without pay.¹⁰

Irene had founded the Society for the Cultural Advancement of Africa with her brother in Newcastle in 1943, but she also recognised the need for autonomous women's groups. She

⁵ Vanessa Mongey, 'Students on the Tyne: The colonial students' club in Newcastle', *Paths Across Waters: West Indian and West African stories in Tyne & Wear*, <https://pathswaters.wixsite.com/tyne/dispelling-misconceptions> (accessed 31 May 2020).

⁶ Irene Ighodaro, *A Life of Service* (African Books Collective, 1996), pp. 27 & 30.

⁷ Ighodaro, *A Life of Service*, 26. Also see: Letters from Dr. Irene Cole to Dr. Wellesley Cole, dated 24 April and 8 June 1947, Dr. Robert Wellesley Cole Papers, file #7, School of Oriental and African Studies Archives, London.

⁸ Ighodaro, *A Life of Service*, p. 39.

⁹ Mongey, 'Students on the Tyne'; Marc Matera, 'Black Internationalism and African and Caribbean Intellectuals in London' (PhD Dissertation, University of New Jersey, 2008), p. 217; Robert Wellesley-Cole, *Innocent in Britain* (Campbell Matthews, 1988), 1976 & pp. 183 -213.

¹⁰ Ighodaro, *A Life of Service*, p. 42.

thus helped found the West African Women's Association in 1946, the first of its kind in Britain. In 1947, Irene married Samuel Ighodaro, a Nigerian lawyer, in Newcastle before a large audience of prominent African and European individuals.¹¹ The couple moved to East Croydon where they lived at the International Language Club.¹² Irene began her work at the New Sussex Hospital for Women and Children in Brighton in 1947 - she resided at the hospital but returned to East Croydon at weekends.¹³ Throughout her time in Britain, Irene played an important role in giving women a voice in the West African Students' Union (WASU). She published pieces in *Wàsù* and presented a paper at the WASU Conference on West African Problems in 1942.¹⁴ This paper was the only one written by a woman that was published in *Wàsù*.¹⁵ In December 1949, Irene moved to Nigeria with her husband and their two sons, Tony and Wilfred.¹⁶ She continued her work as a pioneering social reformer and medical practitioner, and was awarded an

¹¹ Adebayo Adesoye, *Sojourn: Emeritus Professor V.A. Oyenuga's Biography* (Pittsburgh: RoseDog Books, 2010), 62.

¹² Ighodaro, *A Life of Service*, p. 42, 47.

¹³ Osso, 'IGHODARO, Dr. Irene Elizabeth Beatrice'; Matera, 'Black Internationalism and African and Caribbean Intellectuals in London', 217; Ighodaro, *A Life of Service*, 47.

¹⁴ Matera, 'Black Internationalism and African and Caribbean Intellectuals in London', pp. 213-214.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

¹⁶ Ighodaro, *A Life of Service*, p. 51.

MBE in 1958.¹⁷ Irene's achievements serve as a reminder of the capability of women within the medical field, and her activism paved the way for future generations of African women doctors.



Dr Irene E.B. Ighodaro, 1944

¹⁷ Barbara Morgan, 'Ighodaro, Irene (1916–1995)', *Encyclopedia.com*, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/women/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/ighodaro-irene-1916-1995> (accessed 31 May 2020).

Dusé Mohamed Ali and the Tenor Roland Hayes - Rey Bowen

Between the summer of 1919 and winter 1921 Duse Mohamed Ali, the founder and proprietor of the *African and Orient Review* (AOR), resided at 3 St James Terrace, St John's Wood, north-west London, a district neighbouring Regent's Park to the south and Primrose Hill to the north-east.¹⁸ His abode became a boarding house where he rented rooms to Asian and African students and visiting dignitaries. Two such visitors were the renowned African American tenor Roland Hayes and his accompanist Lawrence Brown.¹⁹

Hayes, a rising star trained at Fisk University and by the time of his arrival in London from the United States, had already performed with major white Orchestras played at Carnegie Hall and toured with his trio. Hayes and Brown arrived in London in May 1920. Ali, who introduced Hayes to the fashionable London circles, promote his early concerts and

¹⁸ BT 31/24684/155688/2. Africa and Orient Trade Exchange Ltd Certificate of Incorporation.

¹⁹ Ali, D.M. *In the Lands of the Pharaohs*, with a new introduction by Khalil Mahmud, (London: Frank Cass & Co, 2nd ed. 1968), ppiv-xxxiii, p. xix.

would eventually put him in touch with an able theatrical booking agent who would arrange future performances.²⁰ In a letter to J.E. Bruce dated September 1919, Ali wrote 'Hayes the tenor has written to me asking me to present him in England, and I am going to try to do this.'²¹



Roland Hayes

According to Hayes, Ali arranged for the classical music concert

²⁰ Ibid., p. xix. Lawrence Brown would later become the pianist for Paul Robeson, the African American bass baritone concert artist.

²¹ Duse Mohamed Ali to J. E. Bruce, 12th September 1919, p. 3, Bruce Papers, Schomburg Collection, New York Public Library in Duffield, I. 'Duse Mohamed Ali and the Development of Pan-Africanism 1866-1945', PhD Dissertation, Edinburgh University, 1972, p.408.

management agents, Robert Leigh Ibbs and John Tillet, to manage him. The agents promoted Hayes as the ‘Negro Tenor’.²² However, it was Ali who organised the first two concerts. The opening performance took place on the 31st May 1920, at Aeolian Hall in New Bond Street, London. Accordingly, Hayes sang modern operatics to Negro Spirituals, including ballads penned by the African American poet, Paul Lawrence Dunbar and one of Ali’s favourite composers, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor. Ali was nonplussed when he saw that the mainly white audience responded to the ‘Negro Spirituals’ as ‘funny’. He wrote in his evaluation of the concert:

*I suppose that it requires better knowledge of the conditions and surroundings amidst which these “spirituals” sprang up than is likely to be possessed by the average audience, to see, through their superficial grotesqueness, the pain and longing which gave them birth.*²³

The second concert Ali organised, was held at Wigmore Hall in Marylebone. In the audience were a group of illustrious Africans, which included the ex-mayor of the London Borough of Battersea, John R. Archer, the first man of African descent to hold such a post in the capital, in 1913;²⁴ and the Ghanaian lawyer and Pan-Africanist, Casely Hayford.²⁵

²² Fifield, C. *Ibbs and Tillet: The Rise and Fall of a Musical Empire* (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 110

²³ Ali, D.M. *AOR*, Vol. I, No. 7, p.47.

²⁴ M. Sherwood, M. *Origins of Pan-Africanism*, pp. 232-233.

Adi, H and Sherwood, M. *Pan-African History: Political Figures from Africa and the Diaspora since 1787*. (London: Routledge, 2003), p.192.

²⁵ Ali, D.M. *AOR*, Vol. I, No. 12, p.30.



Dusé Mohamed Ali

A Focus on Black Women in Eighteenth-Century Britain - Montaz Marché

Montaz Marché is a PhD History student at the University of Birmingham, her thesis is tentatively titled: 'Mapping the Dark and Feminine: An Examination into Black Female Visibility in Eighteenth Century Britain'

In 1772, a black woman called 'Harriot' having fallen into debt after her husband's death, was freed from debtors' prison by a group of admirers and from there, became a famous prostitute in Covent Garden and the first black bawd in eighteenth-century London. Meanwhile, a few miles away in Hampstead, Dido Elizabeth Belle, ward and protégé to William Murray 1st Earl of Mansfield and Lord Chief Justice of Britain, and one of the few black women captured in portrait, became an elite heiress wealthier than some of her noble family, adorned with the "articulation and accent of a native".²⁶ Within one year and one location, black women were making their mark in British history and these lives are merely representative of a century

²⁶ James Beattie, 'Elements of Moral Science' (1807), p. 59

of fascinating black female experiences in Britain.²⁷ Therefore, as a brief introduction to my PhD research into Black British women of eighteenth-century Britain, this article will look at some of the lives and experiences of black women and assessing why the black British female history is an 'invisible' history.

My research thus far, including an MA thesis on black female migrants from the Caribbean to Britain and a subsequent article for UCL History, has undeniably proven both the presence and the lives of black women in mainland Britain. Throughout this research, I have collated a database of over 200 black women in Britain, many of whom, as servants, propertied women, political radicals, criminals and more, depict a diverse and unique social experience that encompassed both Britain's geography and class social structure; an experience of opportunity, absent of the many racial segregations that impacted the rest of the contemporary western world.

In this research, thus far, I have established clear and significant narratives of black female migration, settlement, and experience. The draws of trade and labour from Britain's evolving empire, and, more specifically, the Industrial Revolution and the transatlantic slave trade encouraged a steady and global migration of black men, women and children into mainland

²⁷ My UCL MA Thesis is entitled "*For a Sable Venus to Move: An Analysis of Black Female Migration between Britain and the British Caribbean, 1700-1850 and the Politics of Black Femininity*". Shortly after I wrote a short article with the UCL History website called '*Uncovering Black Women in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain*' <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/history/news/2019/oct/uncovering-black-women-eighteenth-century-britain> [accessed 25.09.20].

Britain, from places like Americas, the Caribbean and even India. Black servants, particularly young men and boys, were seen as a symbol of luxury and status amongst the upper classes of society, ensuring a minute but constant black presence in British society across the century. Yet, in Britain, slavery was never codified into British law, like in the Americas or the Caribbean. Without the limitations of institutional slavery, black women and people possessed provisional freedom in Britain and utilised the working and living opportunities Britain had to offer.



Lady Elizabeth Keppel, 1760s Edward Fisher (1722–1785), after Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792), Mezzotint

In terms of experiences, black women were an extreme minority of the black population of Britain (with a likely total of less than half of the estimated ten to twenty thousand strong black population in Britain in the eighteenth century) and this provisional freedom afforded to black women was constructed through social assimilation. Black women would absorb into their social character British customs and standards of citizenship. Across largely urban cities such as London, Edinburgh, Bristol, Liverpool and Southampton (but also rural spaces and households in a much smaller concentration), black women fortified their freedoms within British institutions, participating in conventions that validated their female identity within the local community and wider British society. For example, 25% of the black women I have collated were baptised into the Church of England or non-conformist denominations. Many others married local men, both black and white in these same local parish churches. Most visibly, black women, across all classes, assumed the expected gender roles as wives, mothers, and homemakers. Yet, alongside these roles, working-class black women would also begin or continued roles within the limited scope of eighteenth-century female employment, many as servants, shop assistant or casual labourers. Overall, black women, in a large proportion, made themselves visible through their embrace of the necessary attributes of the British character: civility, Christianity, citizenship; shifting their 'foreigner' persona to reflect that of their neighbours and fellow members of society.

What I have described thus far is a brief, correlated and introductory narrative of black female settlement in mainland Britain. But the research I have collated reflects a wider spec-

trum of experiences expanding across social and geographic lines. First, many black women in mainland Britain utilised the opportunities of Britain to carve out their own space and identity, beyond what was ‘traditional’. For example, some marked their independence as propertied women of ample fortune like Sally Percival, who used her inheritance from her deceased husband to travel across Europe. Some black women of lesser fortune still expressed an independent and assertive nature like Phillis Jackson in Bristol who in 1778 left £4.0.0 of her own money in advance for her funeral.²⁸ Others like Marina Dellap a “slave servant”, were not afforded the provisional freedom other women like her took advantage of. Slavery, though uncodified, was still present in Britain. But there were black women like Marina who ran away from her enslavement; Marina running away on two occasions in the South East of England in 1765.²⁹ Some black women sought to shape the socio-political climates of Britain through activism, like Catherine Despard, with her husband Edward Despard of the London Corresponding Society or Charlotte Garden in The Gordon Riots in 1780. Whilst, others crossed the law as criminals, for example, Ann Duck, a known prostitute regularly arrested for assault and theft before her final conviction at Newgate prison and execution in 1744 or Jane Mower, the housekeeper turned thief, who, in 1715, was sentenced to death for her crimes at the Old Bailey only to be reprieved because of her pregnancy. Even within this small representative group, it

²⁸ November 1778 Phillis Jackson, Black, of Frog Lane, left £4.0.0 for her funeral. Quoted in P. Jones and R. Youseph, *The Black Population of Bristol in the 18th Century* (Reprint Edition, Bristol: Historical Association, 1994).

²⁹ *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 27th May 1765 and *Public Advertiser*, 24th June 1765

is clear that social assimilation for black women did not always equate to the assumption of idealistic British character, but in fact to the ways and cultures of British society in its entirety.



Strolling actresses dressing in a barn, engraving, William Hogarth, 1783 (a black woman seamstress is hidden in the front right hand corner of the engraving)

From this brief introduction to black female experiences in the eighteenth century, black women led curious lives in Britain. Yet why is the history of eighteenth century black women 'invisible'? To answer this, we must begin to unpack this label of 'invisibility'. The term 'invisible', as in 'an inability to see', is misleading. Is Dido Elizabeth Belle invisible in her portrait? Or the hundreds of women recorded in parish registers, criminal

trials, or hospital records? No. More accurately, this history is obscured by a lack of historical focus on black women. Suffering the dual impact of two 'inferior' identities, being black and a woman, black women were deemed insignificant to many of the contemporary writers of history. This perceived insignificance continued into historical archival practices and popular historiographical conversations, resulting in the few black female stories in historical materials, being omitted, suppressed, devalued or silenced by those responsible for determining 'what British history is'.



Lady Elizabeth Murray and Dido Elizabeth Belle, at Kenwood House, Johann Zoffany/ Ramsay Allan 1779 (Copyright Earls of

Mansfield, Scone Palace)

Beyond this, black women arguably contributed to their silence. Saidiya Hartman argues that “scandal...inundates the archive”.³⁰ From criminals to runaways, ‘scandal’ made many more black women visible to us in the archives; their scandalous actions superseding any historical biases as a violation of the social/cultural norms that facilitate British citizenship. But the proportion of ‘scandalous’ black women makes only a small spectrum of black female experiences and indicates a significant social consideration black women had to contend with. For black women, ‘scandal’ did not only impact their ‘reputation’, but it also dismantled the assimilation, position and security they had or would obtain in British society; a dismantling that could result in judicial punishment, penury or worse being “forced on board ship” bound for the Atlantic and enslavement.³¹ The threat of these dangers was undoubtedly a conscious thought for black women and fashioned their social behaviours. With this thought in mind, some black women chose obscurity, using it as a safety mechanism against scandal and to safeguard the provisional freedom Britain inferred. Therefore, the term ‘invisible’ is, more accurately, umbrella term, of what is lost, what is hidden and what could not or would not be told. Combining the challenges of ‘invisibility’ with the absence of focus on black women, historians are left with often brief, referential and third-person accounts

³⁰ S. Hartman, ‘*Venus in Two Acts*’, Small Axe, Number 26, Vol 12, No. 2, June 2008, USA: Duke University Press

³¹ Hannah More, 1790 quoted in G. Grezina ‘*Black London: Life Before Emancipation*’ (Hanover, USA: Dartmouth College Press 1995), p. 75.

or notes of black women in the archives, and must construct a history from this. Though this is a difficult task, it is not impossible. With this awareness of the contemporary, archival and historiographical challenges historians face alongside the inherent presence of black women in the archives, we can begin to rectify the erasures of the past and tell the history of black women in Britain.

Undoubtedly, black women possessed fascinating, fruitful lives in eighteenth-century Britain. Furthermore, the positions they held and the identities they forged in British society complexify conversations of race and gender within contemporary Britain. As black women in Britain, their stories belong within the popular narrative of the eighteenth-century British history and my continuing research help to ensure their rightful place as part of the story of Britain.

Writing Community-engaged histories: Rastafari in Britain - Aleema Gray

*Aleema Gray is a PhD History student at Warwick University. Her thesis is entitled *Bun Babylon: A community engaged History of the Rastafari in Britain**

'Why yuh talk 'bout research? Research? No, is an I-search.

The mon haffi search himself first. And yuh cyan study Rastafari.

Mi Say no mon can study Rastafari. You can only live Rastafari'³²

The starting point for many enthusiastic researchers exploring Rastafari, begins with a recognition that 'you cannot study Rasta'. If you ask any Rastafari about academic research, they will respond with suspicion and insist that you must first embark on 'i-search'; that is, why am I writing? Whose side am I on? And how am I positioned within the dominant discourses

³² Bongo Watto in Jahiani; Erin MacLeod Niaah, *Let Us Start With Africa : Foundations of Rastafari Scholarship* (West India Press, 2010).

that have marginalised the oppressed?

The starting point for my current PhD thesis, *Bun Babylon: A community engaged History of the Rastafari in Britain*, began with an understanding that our story is still untold. Throughout my research journey, I have found two knowledge systems in place; one that was connected with the researched, in my case, the Rastafari, and another that was academically charged and informed by Western disciplines. Positioning myself as the outsider from within, I found that the academic references that spoke of the Rastafari in Britain fell short in articulating the interior histories and the experiences of the community in motion. Questions such as how did the Rastafari arrive in Britain? How did they organise? And what were their key successes and challenges? Were addressed through ahistorical depictions of British-Jamaican subcultures, which privileged the symbols of the movement, in replace of the migratory experiences of ‘coming here, and being here’.

As someone who is situated within the Rastafari community and within the academy, I have observed the academy’s inability to grasp the meaning and significance of the Rastafari experience within a historical scope. Quite often, academic research has reinforced a romanticised image of alienated British youth united in escapism and rebellion. I had always found it strange, for instance, that Rastafari had only been examined as part of growing phenomenon of working class youth subcultures in Britain in the 1970s. One could easily link the movement of Rastafari with Teddy Boys and Punks. And yet, when we think of the Pan-African organising in Britain, the Rastafari only represents a footnote. Little is also know about the

early group of Rastafari who came to Britain in the 1950s and established the Jamaican Working Committee to advance the repatriation and reparation cause. From the development of international relations with Sylvia Pankhurst during the 1930s, to the establishment of the Ethiopian World Federation during Haile Selassie's exile Bath, England, the history of the Rastafari in Britain stretches beyond the margins of sub-cultures.



Audrey Parkes and friend with members of Afrikan Star reggae Band. Taken as part of the Handsworth Self Portrait project by Derek Bishton, Brian Homer and John Reardon, 1979.

My research recognises that task of bridging the gap between the community and the academy demands a reimagining of historical approaches to research in a way that centres the experiences of the researched. For me, this re-imagination is concerned with the tools used to govern academic research. Indeed, over 50 years since Walter Rodney's foundational book, *Groundings with my Brothers*, a new generation of scholars is still confronted with questions concerning voice, power and representation. How can we reimagine a decolonising practice that moves beyond seeing whiteness at its starting point? How can we foreground a radical ways of knowing into thinking about Black futures? And what does redistributive justice looks like within the context of academic work?

Understanding that real power lies with those that design the tools for academic research, my thesis has been informed by the Rastafari-centred 'i and I approach', which I have situate within a growing body of indigenous research approaches. I locate my thesis in the context of indigenous methodologies not because I see the Rastafari as indigenous, but rather, because I recognise the Rastafari's efforts in producing ways of knowing that is historically relevant and responsive to the experiences of the colonised and the legacies of forced migration, which have stripped African- Caribbean communities of any rights to claim indigenous identity.

The 'I and I' methodological approach is as an interpretive device to interrupt white-dominated historical narratives, and uncover a community-engaged history of the movement in Britain. i and I is not only concerned with how researchers can engage *with* Rastafari, but also considers how researchers

can adopt radical approaches to writing, in a way that can be responsive to the expectations of the researched community. I have analysed this under four strands: writing, listening, speaking and documenting. While writing and documenting are concerned with how scholars can create and embed critical practices within the research on the Rastafari, speaking and listening examines the linguistic and oral practices scholars can adopt to disrupt hierarchies of power between the researcher and the researched. If history is about change, and historians are the agents of that change, then we must foreground radical approaches to start thinking in terms of reparative histories.

The Mother of the Movement: Gerlin Bean - A.S. Francis

A.S. Francis is a PhD student at the University of Chichester, researching women's involvements in Britain's Black radical organisations during the 1960s-1980s, and the development of a Black women's movement. Her working thesis title is "Committed. Black. Woman": Britain's Black women radicals, 1965-85'

The first time I came across the name 'Gerlin Bean' was in 2017, while I researched for my undergraduate dissertation which explored women's experiences and activities in the Black Liberation Front (BLF), one of Britain's foremost Black Power groups during the 1970s-1990s. In November of 2017, I met Zainab Abbas, former member of the BLF's internationalist core in the early 1970s. I interviewed her in her home, and although I'd set out to discuss her own work with the BLF, the occasion allowed for Zainab to emphasise the importance of one woman in particular who had been overlooked by historians, researchers and many who claim to be interested in Britain's Black Feminist histories. Zainab has since explained that despite her being "the most underrated woman in the movement", Bean was "a mentor to us all" in

the Black movement.³³ I felt slightly embarrassed that I was only then finding out about Bean's unequivocally leading role in Britain's Black radical movement and its connected Black women's movement. I aimed to find out as much as I could about Bean, but could only provide a limited space in my dissertation for her in the context of her contributions to the BLF.



(Left to right) Stella Dadzie, Suzanne Scafe, Gerlin Bean and Beverley Bryan, London Metropolitan Archives, 2011. Photo via instant vintage74@thoughtful74

There is yet to be a research project, book, thesis or other form of work which focuses on Bean as a central figure. In existent work, while her important role in the Black movement is always underlined, mention of her remains condensed

³³ Zainab Abbas. Personal comment during meeting with the author. (London, 17/03/2018).

to one or two paragraphs, or she appears as peripheral to other women such as the late Olive Morris, who in contrast has become a well-known figure of Black British activist history whose legacy continues to captivate contemporary Black feminist writers. While Olive Morris is often presented as a singular embodiment of the nuanced, collective history of Black women's political organising in Britain, the lack of extensive research on Bean (and of course many others) highlights how women's history, and history in general, is too often condensed into repetitive narrations of a handful of individuals. In the last several years, however, as writings relating to the history of Britain's Black radical organising, and Black women's autonomous organising of the late 20th century have increased, so too have accounts of Bean's work in these movements. Nathalie Thomlinson, Tanisha C. Ford and W. Chris Johnson are among those who have emphasised Bean's role as a member of London's Black Power network, founder of many key Black women's organisations throughout the early to mid 1970s and subsequent recruiter and mentor for other activist women.³⁴

After migrating to England from Jamaica in 1960 and training as a nurse, Gerlin entered into radical political organising in 1970, becoming a member of the Black Unity and Freedom Party

³⁴ See Tanisha C. Ford, *Liberated Threads: Black women, Style, and the Global Politics of Soul* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press), Ch. 5. See also: Natalie Thomlinson, *Race, Ethnicity and the Women's Movement in England, 1968-1993* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). See also: W. Chris Johnson, 'The Spirit of Bandung' in 1970s Britain', in *Black British History: New Perspectives from Roman Times to the Present Day*, ed. Hakim Adi, (London: ZED books, 2019),

(BUFP), a Marxist-Leninist Black organisation with chapters in London and Manchester. In this year, Gerlin attended the National Women's Liberation conference held in Oxford, and recalled being one of only two Black women present despite the conference being attended by over 600 women, reflecting the overwhelming whiteness of Britain's women's liberation movement. The discussions which took place held little to no relevance for the issues facing Black women at the time, and as stated by Gerlin "our struggle wasn't just about women, it was an anti-imperialist struggle about black people and women were just a sector within that. So we were working together in organisations".³⁵ From this experience, Gerlin was inspired to establish the Black Women's Action Committee as a women-focused section of the BUFP. Upon the founding of the North-London based Pan-African and Socialist organisation, the BLF, in 1971, Gerlin transferred her vigour for facilitating Black women's initiatives by establishing a BLF women's group. Then again, in 1973, the Brixton Black Women's Group (BBWG) was established with Gerlin as its instigating member. Accounts of the creation of the BBWG varies somewhat, but certainly Gerlin Bean, Zainab Abbas, the Black Panther Movement's Olive Morris, Beverley Bryan and Liz Obi were among its earliest members when it functioned mainly as a study group for theorising Black women's liberation. The BBWG was therefore a marriage between women members of two of London's most active socialist-based Black Power groups.

In 1978, another milestone in the growing Black women's movement took place when Gerlin Bean, Olive Morris and

³⁵ Gerlin Bean, oral testimony, ORAL/1/3: Black Cultural Archives.

Stella Dadzie joined Ethiopian and Eritrean women students from the London School of Economics' African Students Union to convene the Organisation for Women of Africa and African Descent (later the Organisation for Women of African and Asian Descent) commonly known as OWAAD.³⁶ This organisation acted as an umbrella group for Black women's groups across England to support each other and organise together around issues affecting Black people, with an emphasis on global Black women's struggles. The impact of OWAAD upon a generation of Black women in Britain cannot be overstated. Ama Gueye, co-founder of the East London Black Women's Organisation, credits OWAAD with providing a blueprint for organising politically in a formal manner.³⁷ Women learned the essential skills for collective organising within their communities, including challenging the discriminatory practices against Black children in schools, minute-taking, analysing political texts and understanding the effects of governmental policies upon Britain's Black communities. Bean acted as chair for OWAAD's first National Black Women's Conference in 1979, which attracted an unprecedented number of over 300 women at the Abeng Centre in Brixton, and inspired the establishment of many Black women's groups across the country.

After several years of intensive activity, OWAAD ceased to operate as an organisation in the aftermath of its third conference in 1982. The theme of the conference was Black Feminism, yet the

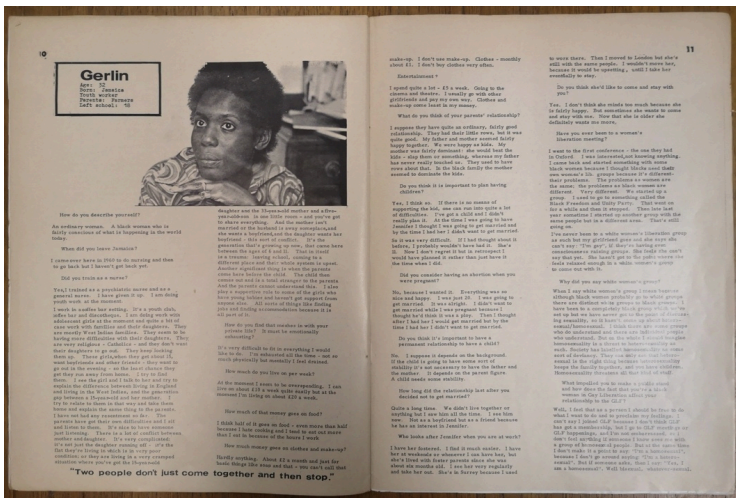
³⁶ Stella Dadzie, interviewed by the author, (London: 25/07/2019), transcript p. 9.

³⁷ Ama Gueye, interviewed by the author, (Essex: 29/09/2020).

overriding topic of discussion was sexuality and lesbianism - an often undiscussed topic within the Black women's movement at the time. Heated arguments between attendees pervaded the day, as some attendees fought to organise a workshop on Black lesbianism exclusively for lesbians, and others did not see the need for a separate workshop, or a workshop on this topic at all. Many straight women felt they were being attacked simply for being straight, and many queer women felt they were not being heard. The conference highlighted the tensions within the movement surrounding sexuality. Such topics were largely considered luxury conversations, and Britain's Black women's movement had for the most part organised around the day-to-day survivals and resistances against racism and imperialism. It is not surprising then, that the only testimony that I and other researchers have come across in which Bean discusses her sexual orientation, appears in a 1971 interview by *Shrew* magazine, whose contributors and readership were predominantly white middle-class women. At the time of this interview Bean was in a relationship with a woman and involved with the Gay Liberation Front. She reflected on her usage of labels, and the Black movement's approach to the topic of sexuality:

"I have been to a completely Black group which we've set up but we have never got to the point of discussing sexuality, so it hasn't come up about heterosexual/homosexual... I don't feel anything if someone I know sees me with a group of homosexual people. But at the same time I don't make it a point to say; "I'm a homosexual"... But if someone asks then I say; "Yes I am a homosexual". Well bisexual, whatever-sexual".³⁸

³⁸ Gerlin Bean, *Shrew*, 1971.



'Gerlin', Shrew 1971

OWAAD's third conference indicated the end of the organisation. Yet another perspective, held by Stella Dadzie and others, is that OWAAD was established for a specific purpose, achieved a great deal in its lifetime and then folded as people moved on to other things.³⁹ And by the time of the third conference, Gerlin Bean had turned her attention to Zimbabwe to assist with post-independence nation building where she coordinated a volunteer programme. Until recently, Bean was involved with programmes in Jamaica to support and empower young and disabled people.

One of the most valuable methods of collecting information about Gerlin Bean has been through speaking with women who participated in the Black women's movement. Bean has

³⁹ Stella Dadzie, interviewed by the author, transcript p.12.

described herself humbly as “an ordinary woman. A woman who is fairly conscious of what is happening in the world lately”,⁴⁰ or with three simple words which indicate her perception of her role and contributions in society: “Committed. Black. Woman”.⁴¹ However, many women remember how she recruited them into the movement, supported them and contributed to their political development. Ama Gueye fondly described Bean as one of her heroes, and that it was Bean who provided her with the incentive to become involved in community work in Brixton, when she and longstanding activist Ansel Wong visited the University of Sussex’s African Society, of which Ama was a member, and encouraged the society to volunteer to help disenfranchised young Black people.⁴² Stella Dadzie recalled “I’d always looked at (Gerlin) and thought “she’s a serious woman, I should listen to her. What she says makes sense”. So she was definitely a mentor in retrospect”.⁴³ Gail Lewis, in an interview for the *Heart of the Race oral history project* with the Black Cultural Archives, described how Bean introduced her to various Black organisations and invited her to join BBWG.⁴⁴ It would appear then, that to many people Gerlin Bean was an *extraordinary* “ordinary woman”. Through my research I hope to uncover many other extraordinary ordinary women who participated in Britain’s Black radical movement during the 1960s and 1980s.

⁴⁰ Gerlin Bean, *Shrew*, 1971.

⁴¹ Gerlin Bean, oral testimony, ORAL/1/3

⁴² Ama Gueye, interviewed by the author, (Essex: 29/09/2020).

⁴³ Stella Dadzie, interviewed by the author, transcript p.9.

⁴⁴ Gail Lewis, oral testimony. ORAL/1/21: Black Cultural Archives.

Call for Papers: 2nd New Perspectives on the History of African and Caribbean People in Britain Conference

October 2021, London (venue tbc)

Through a series of presentations and discussions, this conference seeks to provide a platform for the sharing of knowledge regarding the histories of African and Caribbean peoples in Britain.

The first New Perspectives conference convened by History Matters (2017) brought together scholars and activists to explore how young and emerging scholars of the history of African and Caribbean People in Britain, particularly those of African and Caribbean heritage, were pushing the boundaries of knowledge and redrawing the field. Many of the conference's presentations were subsequently published in *Black British History: New Perspectives*, edited by Prof. Hakim Adi. This second conference will be open to the public, and will again focus on highlighting research produced by young and

emerging scholars, particularly those of African and Caribbean heritage, who remain poorly represented within the wider history field as well as in academia.



New Perspectives on Black British History Conference, Goldsmiths University, London 2017

History Matters invites paper proposals for a second conference entitled *New Perspectives on the History of African and Caribbean People in Britain* which will take place in October 2021 (location tbc). Proposals for papers are due by **31st March 2021**.

History Matters particularly welcomes research papers focusing on historical periods before 1900; on women and gender history; on LGBT+ histories; on the history of African and Caribbean people outside London; on the history of continental

African communities and organisations in Britain; and the historical relationships established by those of African and Caribbean heritage in Britain with the African continent and the wider African diaspora. However, proposals covering all fields of 'Black British' History are welcome.

Following on from the 2017 conference, selected papers from this prospective conference will be included in a second volume of *New Perspectives* edited by Prof. Hakim Adi and published by Bloomsbury.

Proposals should be submitted via email to **histmatters@gmail.com** by Wednesday 31st March 2021. Accepted proposals will be confirmed by 1st May 2021.

Individual proposals should include an abstract of up to 350 words and a one-page CV. They must include the author's full name, email address and institutional affiliation (if applicable). Please also include the title of the presentation. (It is not certain if the conference will be live, or online, but also include any equipment needs.)

For all further inquiries, please contact **histmatters@gmail.com** or visit our website for more information.