R.I.E.P
Chief Mrs Elouise Edwards
MBE, MA (Hon)
affectionately known as
"Mama Edwards"
1932 - 2021
Manchester (UK)
Community Activist &
Life-long Campaigner
For Racial Equality & Justice
Assuming that all the recent news has got you feeling a bit overwhelmed, it would be understandable that you might not realise that Valentine’s Day is in a few days. The tradition of going out and spoiling your significant other at a restaurant will be a little difficult this year, since only one person is allowed outside every fourth day, or so it fells.

The day celebrates Saint Valentine of Rome, a third century priest of the Roman Empire who ministered to persecuted people throughout the region. He was a crusader for courtly love, a Medieval European concept emphasising nobility, chivalry, and selfless acts of charity.

Most of contemporary culture celebrates Valentine’s Day as an opportunity for couples in love to exchange flowers, jewellery, cards and chocolates and share romantic evenings at fancy restaurants. It is a wonderful tradition we should continue to practice and hold dear.

Alas, not everyone enjoys this day.

For many who live devoid of romance or any form of intimate love, Valentine’s Day comes and goes as just another day ending in “y.”

For some of those, the day presents an annual reminder of love they lost, long for, or perhaps never had.

Stay blessed and enjoy the day.

M. Tolu Fiberesima BA (Hons); CILEx
Executive Editor, The Advocate Magazine.
Chairperson, African and Caribbean Community Association (ACCA).
CELEBRATION OF LIFE
AND LEGACY OF CHIEF
MRS ELOUISE EDWARDS
MBE, MA (Hon) 1932 – 2021

Elouise was born in Guyana, South America on the 28th December 1932. Her mother
Erica Grimes was married to Samuel Chandler and they had ten children, five boys and five girls –
Elouise was the youngest child.

Her father was a civil engineer who extracted gold from the goldfields of Guyana and her
mother was a housewife. She married Beresford Edwards in 1955 at St George’s Cathedr-
dral, Georgetown. Beresford came to England in 1960, and Elouise followed in 1961 with
her three year old son.

She was instrumental in celebrating Black culture, battling racism and developing vital community
resources in Moss Side. Over the years, Elouise was an active community worker and was involved in over 35 organisa-
tions throughout Greater Manchester including the co-founder of Manchester Sickle
Cell & Thalassaemia Centre, Awarak Walton Housing Association, Cariocca Enterprises
Manchester Limited, NIA Cultural Centre, Culture Week, Roots Oral History Project,
Roots Festival, I’N’I Rules OK Radio Programme on BBC Radio, African & Caribbean
Mental Health Services, Mosscare Housing Association, Black People In The Criminal
Justice System, Abasindi Women’s Co-operatives, African Caribbean Care
Group For The Elderly & Infirm, Family Advice & Community Resource Centre and
many others.

Elouise was also involved with the following organisations over the many years, namely:
Northwest Arts Group, Iqbal Ullah Centre, Kath Locke Centre, the Progress Trust, Chel
Group, 1981 Disturbance Committee and many others. She was very instrumental in
celebrating Black culture, battling racism and developing vital community resources in
Moss Side.

“I never wanted to come to England. Mr. Edwards wanted to, he was a printer and he wanted to
study lithography. So he came over first and then I followed but it was never my intention to leave
home. I was very, very unhappy when I came here” she said in one of her interviews.

Elouise received an MBE (Membership of the British Empire) for her amazing contribu-
tion and tireless services to the local community. The University of Manchester also awarded
her an honorary degree of Master of Arts for service to the community. Elouise also was
awarded an African Chieftainty. She was nominated for her work with African people in
Manchester and the honour was bestowed by the Nigerian organisation at the British
Council. Nigerian Community of Manchester gave her the title of Honorary Chieftain with
an official naming ceremony conducted by Chief Reogigi-Ugo of Nigeria, who performs the
ceremony and present her with an award.

The Manchester Black community call her “Mama Edwards”. She will be missed.
May her gentle soul rest in perfect peace.

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R.I.P.
Chief Mrs Elouise Edwards MBE, MA (Hon)
Affectionately known as “Mama Edwards
-A True Pioneer-
Benefits in the UK

When you have an illness, such as kidney disease, it is normal to worry about what will happen to you financially.

By: Hilaria Asumu

You may be wondering if you will be able to keep your job, if you will be able to claim benefits, and if you will have to pay for any of your treatment. The good news is that there are several benefits and financial support schemes that can help people with kidney disease, and these can vary depending on your circumstances.

You may be eligible for a range of benefits, but the process of claiming these benefits can be complicated. The process of claiming benefits when you are a kidney disease patient is quite simple. The first thing you need to do is speak with your GP, Renal team, and/or other support organisations like Citizens Advice Bureau, Kidney Care UK or WSH BME Network benefit application service. They can tell you what benefits you are eligible for and advise on how to request for the forms from the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) and support you to fill out all the necessary forms.

As a kidney disease patient, claiming benefits could be very important to you. While in some cases, it may be possible to work part time or during the day, you may find that you are unable to do so. This may be a good time to apply for benefits. Of course, you cannot claim benefits without informing the DWP about your kidney disease and how it affects your ability to work. You can claim benefits if you are unable to work because of your kidney condition although this is not always necessary e.g., Personal Independence Payment (PIP).

There are three main ways to claim benefits as a kidney disease patient.

* if you are retired and no longer earning an income,
* if you are still working but unable to work due to your kidney disease and,
* if your kidney disease has left you unable to work.

The first two cases are the same as claiming benefits as any other person with a medical condition and you should seek advice from any of the benefits application organisations like WSH BME Network. However, the third case is slightly different. The rules for claiming benefits if you are unable to work due to kidney disease are not well understood and many people do not know how the rules apply to them.

Claiming Benefits

It is difficult to claim benefits as a kidney patient. There are certain criteria that you need to meet to be eligible for these benefits. Not only does your condition require you to have regular check-ups and monitoring, but you also need to provide evidence for your illness, which can be tricky.

The benefits you can claim depend on how severe your disease is. To claim benefits, you must have been diagnosed and on dialysis from stage 4 or 5, and on the kidney transplant list. This will provide you with an indication of how serious your condition is. Claiming benefits for a chronic condition is difficult, and you will probably find many obstacles along the way.

The benefits system can be complex, especially if you are not fully aware of the rules and regulations. There are also certain conditions that mean you may not be able to claim any benefits. Your first point of contact should be your doctor or renal team. They should be able to provide you with advice on if you can claim for benefits depending on how your condition affects you.

Many of these benefits are provided by the government, which is free at the point of use, however there are also several additional benefits that are provided by the government to help cover the cost of necessary medical care. You should be aware that not every one is eligible for these benefits, and you should take the time to confirm your eligibility with your doctors before applying for any of these benefits. One more thing: BME Network is a part of a larger network of charities that offer support to kidney patients, but they all focus on different areas of the population.
Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)

If you are a kidney disease patient and have been diagnosed as unfit to work, you may be able to claim Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) or PIP. Normally, to be eligible for ESA you would need to have paid enough National Insurance Contributions, but if you have been diagnosed with kidney disease and are unfit to work you do not need to have paid contributions.

In fact, you can claim ESA whether you have paid or not, if:

- you have been diagnosed with Kidney Disease.
- you are receiving regular dialysis or renal treatment.
- you have previously worked but cannot return to your previous job (for example, if you were a care worker or builder).

If you meet the above criteria, you can make a claim. Additionally, you can apply for income support if you have low income and unreasonably high housing costs.

Personal Independence Payment (PIP)

Personal Independence Payment (PIP) was introduced in 2008 alongside the Disability Living Allowance (DLA). The new benefit was designed to replace the old system, which was widely criticised for being too inflexible and difficult to get. Since then, the PIP has been the subject of constant criticism and controversy, with many people arguing that the benefit doesn’t provide enough support to those who need it most.

If you are aged 16-64 and have a long-term health condition or disability, you can claim Personal Independence Payment (PIP) to help with the extra costs caused by your condition. To claim PIP, you need to be under State Pension age and need to be assessed by a health professional. The assessment is carried out by a health professional called a DWP healthcare professional.

Who are we?

WSH BME Network is a non-profit charity committed to helping African-Caribbean people with kidney disease and/or transplant, who need advice and support. We have always been passionate about it, and that is why we have always been about the story of others. We are driven by our passion for the causes we support and have been campaigning for organ donation for a couple of years. Our belief is that everyone can take action to help save lives by acting as donors. As the number of people on dialysis increases, it becomes harder and harder for African-Caribbean people to receive an organ.

We provide different services for our service users but the most popular is our benefit application and appeals services, where we help people with their PIP application and/or appeals.

Contact us today by email:
wshbmenetwork@gmail.com

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STAY HOME
PROTECT THE NHS
SAVE LIVES

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Students call for more Black mental health professionals to tackle ‘cultural incompetence’ in the field View 10 comments

Natalie Morris

A student who experienced ‘culturally incompetent’ mental healthcare has launched an initiative to encourage more Black professionals into the field. Kelechi Mathias, a psychology student at the University of Warwick, has experienced first hand what it is like to receive counselling from someone who doesn’t truly understand your lived experiences as a minority. ‘The lack of culturally competent care within the mental health service is very much a danger to the Black community,’ Kelechi tells Metro.co.uk. ‘It can often lead to inappropriate, harsher, or even ineffective treatment with Black people being more likely to be detained, sectioned and restrained.’

Kelechi experienced inadequate care from a mental healthcare professional that was only remedied when she was seen by a counsellor from a similar cultural background to herself. Having a Black therapist made Kelechi feel listened to, understood and seen. So, she founded The Black Mind Initiative to help ensure that more people from Black and minoritised communities can experience mental health support that is more suited to their needs. People from Black, Asian and other ethnic minority communities have a higher risk of developing mental health conditions than white people – but they are less likely to be able to access mental health services. Currently, only one in 14 counsellors in the UK are from a Black or other ethnic minority background, and this is what Kelechi is hoping to change. The Black Mind Initiative aims to reform the current mental health system nationally, by encouraging Black people to take a degree related to the mental health profession. The programme will then support them in their studies and encourage them to work in senior roles in mental healthcare.

The representation of the Black community in mental healthcare is considerably low, and when it comes to leadership roles – such as clinical psychiatrists, psychologists and consultants – there is barely any representation at all. ‘The people in the boardrooms, making the basis for these treatments, neither look like us nor understand us, yet they have the authority to make the decisions most affecting our community,’ says Kelechi. ‘Many organisations make big statements about committing to diversity in the workplace, but if this diversity isn’t being reflected in the boardrooms, then what changes are really being made? ‘This isn’t to downplay the importance of having Black people in other roles in the mental health service, as diversity throughout the workforce is very important. However, having Black people in senior roles means the necessary changes are being made from the top down, which is better for both Black service users and other Black professionals.’ The initiative, run by Kelechi and fellow Black students, is a non-profit organisation that aims to provide the tools for the next generation of mental health professionals, so they can break the cycle of systemic racism within the mental health service.
The initiative will offer interactive sessions in schools, colleges and universities with Black professionals who can tell students about their journey, and offer tips to help them. There will also be networking events between current professionals and the next generation, as well as matching young people with mentors in the field. Supporting the students and their initiative is Professor Sotaro Kita, from the Department of Psychology at the University of Warwick, he comments: ‘Having been in the psychology profession for 25 years I have seen first-hand how our knowledge about human mind is based on skewed ‘It is based on studies conducted with participants from a small section of the world, majority white participants in Western Europe and North America. In this globalised world, and in this multicultural Britain, the conventional psychological knowledge and practice are showing its limitations. ‘We need more diverse perspectives. This initiative will contribute to solving this problem in the area of mental health. ‘I hope that their initiative will help shape the future of psychology, and that we will see more ethnic diversity among mental health professionals and researcher.’
Is ‘unconscious bias’ just a convenient way to avoid acknowledging racism?

Natalie Morris

All of us have biases; snap judgements and assumptions that we make about groups of people based on a flawed system of beliefs. These become discrimination – racism, sexism, ageism, ableism – when we act on these beliefs in a way that has a negative impact on people from these groups. There has long been a narrative that some of our biased beliefs are conscious, and some are unconscious – meaning that we don’t even know they’re there. ‘Unconscious bias’ – or implicit bias – is frequently used to explain instances of systemic discrimination, like why a white boss might not promote a Black employee, for example, or why a Black child is more likely to be suspended from school.

Is calling it ‘unconscious’ simply an easy excuse for racist behaviour? (Picture: Metro.co.uk/Getty)

The argument is that the behaviour is triggered by a deeply embedded belief that the individual is unaware of, rather than an act of conscious and intentional racism. But if the outcome is the same, is calling it ‘unconscious’ simply an easy get-out clause for racist behaviour? Is the concept of unconscious bias just a convenient way for people to avoid acknowledging racism, or taking any responsibility for their actions? Can bias ever truly be ‘unconscious’? ‘Bias can indeed be genuinely unconscious, which is why one of the most important things that people can do to minimise the impact of their own biases is to get to know what they are,’ says Nic Hammarling, partner and head of diversity at inclusion training firm Pearn Kandola. Existing research has shown that while explicit attitudes and demonstrations of racial prejudice have declined over the past few decades, implicit racist attitudes have not declined. ‘This is clearly indicative of something much more ingrained, that, for some, is unconscious,’ explains Nic. ‘From a technical perspective, unconscious bias is an important element of understanding racist attitudes. However, we often see people assuming that labelling something as an unconscious bias means that it is a fait accompli, which it most certainly is not.’ Diversity and inclusion facilitator Bilal Khan says it is possible for there to be things in your mind that you aren’t really aware of, but that we must be careful when we label things ‘unconscious’. ‘When we are talking about discrimination – racism, sexism, or any form of “ism” – to call those things “unconscious” takes away any form of responsibility and accountability to do something about it,’ Bilal tells Metro.co.uk. ‘It ignores the fact that things are systemic, and locates the problem solely in the fact that something is randomly in your head.’ He says that the impact for people of colour is a clear message that people are not willing to acknowledge their part in perpetuating racism, or their role in creating change. ‘From a personal perspective, if someone blames their unconscious bias for something, it makes me feel as though they are actually not recognising their part in a wider system that is putting me at a disadvantage,’ says Bilal. ‘I think fear and fragility are the biggest barriers to creating systemic change. ‘People become so defensive when they hear the word “racism” or “antiracism”, about who they are, and the belief that we all have about ourselves that we are good people. ‘But we have to recognise that this is not an issue of morality. It’s not about whether anyone is a good person or a bad person. It’s about acknowledging a system that disadvantages people, and what part you play in that.’ Is unconscious bias training useful in the workplace?
When Keir Starmer took the knee and pledged to undertake unconscious bias training in the wake of the death of George Floyd, there was a barrage of criticism. Critics said that in light of the Labour party’s alleged inaction on anti-Black racism in the past, the unconscious bias training – that turned out to be a 20-minute online video – felt like a watered-down and per formative response to racism.

But is unconscious bias training always a pointless box-ticking exercise for corporations and businesses? While it can be dangerous to simply label all of your individual biases as ‘unconscious’ – particularly if that is used as an excuse to not address or change them – that doesn’t mean their aren’t any benefits for people in professional spaces to learn more about unconscious biases and, crucially, how to limit the impact they have on behaviour. ‘Unconscious bias training is much like any other form of training – the quality of the design and the delivery is paramount. If you have a programme that is just designed to raise awareness but not do anything to change behaviour, then you can’t be surprised when no behaviour change takes place,’ says Nic. ‘A good quality unconscious bias programme moves on from raising awareness to focus on specific actions, based on research into what makes a difference. In turn, people leave the session knowing exactly what practical actions they can take.’ Bilal thinks that acknowledging and confronting our unconscious biases is crucially important – and that with the right approach and a willingness to do the work and ask the uncomfortable questions, it can be a powerful tool. ‘It’s about recognising what the ideas are that are held about a group of the people – and where those ideas come from,’ he explains. ‘So, for example, the idea that Black people are criminal. Where does that come from? Where have I consumed that idea? Where have I seen that idea? To what degree might it have affected the way I therefore interact with people? What have I not needed to think about before? What hasn’t been my experience? ‘You have to actually do some self-work to interrogate these ideas, and ask yourself these more reflective questions. And it is everybody’s job to do this. ‘To just blame it on unconscious stuff and ignore it, that just neglects the fact that there is a media that is racist, that there are books that you’ve read, or conversations you’ve been in that have been racist. ‘It’s so important that people don’t neglect these elements – the things that creates these biases – out of fear, or defence, and actually confront them.’ What is the alternative for unconscious bias training? Unconscious bias is just one element of racism, and as such, workplace training to tackle racial inequality needs to dig a lot deeper. ‘Unconscious bias training as a standalone solution is unlikely to tackle all the diversity woes in an organisation,’ says Nic. Nic says monitoring, identifying and tackling adverse impact at key stages such as recruitment and promotion is critical. She also suggests conducting diversity reviews of succession plans to ensure the company is building a diverse pipeline, rather than leaving it to chance. ‘Having senior leaders and board members ask questions of their teams around the diversity of the promotion slate or candidate slate, and inclusion measures for different groups, is another practical step,’ she adds. ‘A leader who cannot tell you the diversity of the high-potential tagged employees in their function, is one who has not got diversity and inclusion on their agenda.’ One of the biggest problems around diversity in the workplace is retention. Even if companies get people from different backgrounds in the door, a failure to build an inclusive culture in which they can progress and succeed, can cause people to leave or feel pushed out.
UK police officer charged over offensive George Floyd meme

Vikram Dodd, The Guardian

A police officer has been charged with a criminal offence for allegedly sending a grossly offensive meme of George Floyd to colleagues in a WhatsApp group.

Sgt Geraint Jones, 47, from the Devon and Cornwall force in south-west England, will appear in court later this month.

The image of Floyd, whose killing by police in the US sparked worldwide protests over racial injustice, was alleged to have been altered and sent to fellow police officers and staff.

The officer is alleged to have shared the image on 30 May, five days after Floyd’s death in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

The Guardian understands a white fellow officer in the same force reported the image within 48 hours of it being sent.

Jones has been suspended from duty since June.

Section 127 of the 2003 Communications Act makes it an offence to send a message that “is grossly offensive or of an indecent, obscene or menacing character”.

The case was investigated by the Independent Office for Police Conduct. The watchdog said: “Sergeant Geraint Jones, aged 47, is charged with sending the image on 30 May last year by means of a public electronic communications network, an offence contrary to section 127 of the Communications Act 2003.

“An altered image of George Floyd’s arrest in Minneapolis was shared within a WhatsApp group that included a number of other police officers and staff.

“Our investigation began in June 2020 following a referral from the force. At its conclusion in October we sent our investigation report to the Crown Prosecution Service, which has authorised the charge.” The officer is scheduled to appear at Newton Abbot magistrates court on 28 January.

The IOPC has also investigated other officers who received the allegedly offensive meme for potential disciplinary offences. It will make those findings public after the conclusion of criminal proceedings, which take precedent. The Guardian revealed in June that an investigation had been launched into the sending of the image.

Jim Nye, a Devon and Cornwall assistant chief constable, said in June: “Devon and Cornwall police wholly appreciate the concern our communities will have regarding an investigation of this kind. I would reassure them that I, and the chief constable, will do everything possible to ensure the matter is dealt with effectively and in a timely manner.”

When the investigation became public, Catrin Evans of the IOPC said: “It will be of considerable public concern that such an image was apparently shared among colleagues by a serving police officer.”

Floyd died after a US officer knelt on his neck in an incident that was caught on video, and which convulsed the US and led to more than 250,000 protesting in the UK against racial injustice.
Black Lives Matter movement nominated for Nobel peace prize

Petter Eide called it "the strongest global force against racial injustice".

By Jack Peat – The London Economic

The Black Lives Matter movement has been nominated for the 2021 Nobel peace prize by Norwegian MP Petter Eide. In nomination papers submitted to the committee Eide credited the movement for forcing countries to grapple with racism and bringing about systematic change across the world.

"I find that one of the key challenges we have seen in America, but also in Europe and Asia, is the kind of increasing conflict based on inequality," he said. "Black Lives Matter has become a very important worldwide movement to fight racial injustice. "They have had a tremendous achievement in raising global awareness and consciousness about racial injustice."

Eide, who has previously nominated human rights activists from Russia and China for the prize, said one other thing that impressed him about the Black Lives Matter movement was the way "they have been able to mobilise people from all groups of society, not just African-Americans, not just oppressed people, it has been a broad movement, in a way which has been different from their predecessors."

"Awarding the peace prize to Black Lives Matter, as the strongest global force against racial injustice, will send a powerful message that peace is founded on equality, solidarity and human rights, and that all countries must respect those basic principles."

Statues in London

Last week it was announced that statues of two politicians in central London will be removed over their links to the slave trade. The City of London Corporation voted on Thursday to re-site monuments to William Beckford and Sir John Cass in Guildhall because they accrued wealth through the slave trade and symbolise "a stain on our history". It came days after Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick said Britain should not try to edit its past, as new legal protections meaning historic statues will be removed only in "the most exceptional circumstances", came into force on Monday.

Under the new legislation, if a council intends to grant permission to remove a statue and Historic England objects, Mr Jenrick will be notified so he can make the final decision. The City Corporation said it will remove and replace the statues in Guildhall, and is considering commissioning a new memorial to the slave trade.

Catherine McGuinness, the City Corporation's policy chairwoman, said the decision was the result of "months of valuable work" by their Tackling Racism Taskforce, which was set up in June following Black Lives Matter protests in central London. "Correct response to a sensitive issue"

She said: "The view of members was that removing and re-siting statues linked to slavery is an important milestone in our journey towards a more inclusive and diverse city." The death of George Floyd while in the custody of police in Minneapolis sparked protests across the world, with the statue of Edward Colston dumped into Bristol Harbour and a memorial to Sir Winston Churchill vandalised with the words "is a racist".

The Tackling Racism Taskforce co-chairwoman Caroline Addy said she is "really pleased" the committee voted for the "correct response to a sensitive issue".
Nic says one of the most powerful things that decision-makers in organisations can do is to take a step back and look at the pattern of results, following appraisals, promotions and recruitment rounds. ‘For example, from our live bias reviews, we know that in calibration meetings it’s easy to justify individual decisions about an employee,’ she says.

‘There is always information to suggest that someone is particularly good, bad, or on the borderline for something. So, step back and look at the trends in how all these decisions stack up for employees from different backgrounds. This will help you to identify and tackle ingrained bias. If the pattern of bias is there, it needs to be dealt with.’ Bilal says that the first step is for organisations to be proactive rather than reactive when it comes to issues of diversity and inclusion. ‘There is often so much fear in organisations to use the word “racist” or “racism” or “antiracism.”

So, it’s important to be bolder in the language used,’ he adds. ‘They also need to actually embed that training. Often, unconscious bias training will be a one-off, and probably only for a select few individuals. Often, the training is not actually holistic – meaning it’s not embedded in the ongoing learning and development of teams, and in the cultures within a team.’ He says that any training like this needs to be a process that is deeply embedded in the systems of an organisation – from the on boarding and induction at a company, to regular monitoring and measurable results. ‘After the training, we need companies to hold themselves to account. Their commitment to antiracism can’t just be the two-hour training session they did. It needs to be an ongoing process.

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**Black Lives Matter changed my life, and my interracial marriage, for the better**

*Tineka Smith*

In a defining year as an African American woman, I realised my white British husband will always be learning about race.

Like some sort of subversive enlightenment, 2020 has revealed a number of unpalatable truths about our world. But perhaps the most uncomfortable moments of the year came when we looked inwardly at ourselves and the relationships we have with others.

I speak from personal experience when I say that 2020 has been defining for me. As an African American woman married to a white British man, the racial unrest that unfolded globally over the summer after the killing of George Floyd at the hands of the police catalysed a number of frank and difficult discussions in my own personal circles that led to great change. The Black Lives Matter movement brought hidden racial biases within many countries to the forefront – countries that vehemently denied racism was ever a problem, just a far-fetched thing that happens “over there in America”. But for me, it also ignited some difficult conversations at home. The racial aspect of my interracial relationship was always in the back of my mind. And while racism wasn’t a central topic at the beginning of our relationship, it certainly became one in 2020. For a long while, my husband couldn’t understand, let alone appreciate, just how different the path I tread is from his own, even as we walk together hand in hand through life as husband and wife.

I think we were so focused on understanding each other’s personalities and quirks in the beginning of our relationship that we didn’t really talk about race – and I’ve come to learn we absolutely should have. Race is a part of our identity, and for any mixed-race relationship to work I think it’s absolutely vital to know each person’s view on all aspects of racism.
Yes, our marriage has love and mutual respect at its core, but the vast disparities in our life experiences could have driven us apart. At times I needed support and empathy but instead my husband assumed I might have played a part in provoking others who I believed targeted me based on the colour of my skin. “Maybe they were having an off day,” he would say, and that sounded like he was defending a complete stranger. And while there have been other white people who doubted my experiences with racism, I expected my husband to be the opposite: the one person who believes I am the most reliable witness to my racial experiences. He did not recognise racism where racism existed, only identifying it when the offence was clear as daylight. Nor could he grasp why I was so affected by the highly publicised deadly moments of racism in the US that led to the widespread protests. Little did he know that, as a Black woman who has been assaulted and spat at simply because of the colour of my skin, I go about life in a constant state of survival.

So how did we move beyond our worldly differences to come back stronger together? It started from accepting that much could be learned if only we actively and fearlessly listened to one another. And we started to explore our racial differences, we found ourselves diving into unfamiliar waters. We analysed our experiences as a mixed-race couple and we found that defensiveness and gas lighting can surreptitiously impinge on the loving space, shutting down empathic listening and meaningful conversations.

I realised that I was asking my husband to suddenly grasp nuances of my experience as a Black woman that I had never required of him before. I had to learn to simply accept that there are some things that he will never totally understand. He realised that he’ll always be coming from a place of learning when it comes to race. We had to both realise and admit our limitations. That’s a hard thing to do. But our relationship became better because of it.

This year was an opportunity for many interracial couples to reaffirm their love and support for one another in the face of intolerances, both overt or otherwise. Or perhaps it was a reality check for a few – a realisation that, in some cases, a difference in lived experiences can be just too much even for love to reconcile.

A fear of change is natural. But for me, the fear of maintaining the status quo is worse. I believe we’ve passed that. This crazy year has changed me. It has catalysed conversations between people. It has challenged my marriage and made it stronger; it has sharpened my sense of purpose in life, and it has helped me see that I must use my voice and speak up.

And as 2020 draws to a close, I take comfort in the signs that times will change. Truly understanding our differences is not supposed to be a short and simple journey. It has the ability to unite us and strengthen relationships – if only we’re able to honestly admit what divides us first.

- Tineka Smith is co-author with Alex Court of Mixed Up: Confessions of an Interracial Couple.
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Amanda Gorman signs modelling contract after star turn at inauguration

Priya Elan

Amanda Gorman, whose performance of her poem The Hill We Climb during Joe Biden’s presidential inauguration drew widespread praise, has signed to IMG Models, the same agency as Gigi and Bella Hadid.

The 22-year-old US national youth poet laureate, has already become a fashion sensation. The red satin Prada headband she wore during the inauguration ceremony led to the item selling out, while her yellow coat (also Prada) caused searches for “yellow coats” to increase 1,328% (according to fashion search engine Lyst) in the wake of her appearance.

“I’m a black woman with a powerful pen and a big heart, and I like my look to reflect that pride,” Gorman told Harper’s Bazaar, speaking about her love of style. She told the magazine she loves “loud, regal-looking dresses embroidered with flowers – a nod, I think, to my Afro-flower-child upbringing in Los Angeles. I’m also a fan of Victor Glemaud’s super stylish and comfy knitwear.”

The signing of Gorman is seen as a shrewd one by fashion insiders. As labels struggle to adapt to the changes in the fashion industry as a result of the pandemic, Generation Z shoppers are disengaging with fashion labels who do not reflect their own social, political and environmental concerns.

Gorman, who founded the charity One Pen, One Page, which supports underprivileged young people through writing, is perfectly poised to be the face of a fashion label that would want to do more than sell a piece of clothing, but to connect on a deeper level with its customers.

Earlier this month tennis player Naomi Osaka, who publicly made a stand against police brutality and racial injustice through her choice of face masks during tennis matches, became the face of Louis Vuitton. “[She] represents her generation and is also a role model for everyone. Her career and convictions are inspiring,” said Vuitton’s creative director, Nicolas Ghesquière, in a statement.

Do you have a story to share?

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**City of London statues removed over 'slavery link'**

Sir John Cass dealt with slave agents in Africa and the Caribbean

**Statues of two politicians with links to the transatlantic slave trade are to be removed from central London.**

William Beckford was a two-time Lord Mayor of London in the late 1700s, who accrued wealth from plantations in Jamaica and held African slaves.

In September, the Sir John Cass’s Foundation Primary school announced it would be renamed the Aldgate School for the new school year. In September, the Sir John Cass’s Foundation Primary School announced it would be renamed the Aldgate School for the new school year. A consultation on statues and other landmarks in the Square Mile linked to slavery held by the corporation last year generated more than 1,500 responses.
Malorie Blackman,  
British Writer

Malorie Blackman has written over seventy books for children and young adults, including the Noughts & Crosses series, Thief and a science-fiction thriller, Chasing the Stars. Many of her books have also been adapted for stage and television, including a BAFTA-award-winning BBC production of Pig-Heart Boy and a Pilot Theatre stage adaptation by Sabrina Mahfouz of Noughts & Crosses. There is also a major BBC production of Noughts & Crosses, with Roc Nation (Jay-Z’s entertainment company) curating the soundtrack as executive music producer.

She has been awarded numerous prizes for her work, including the Red House Children’s Book Award and the Fantastic Fiction Award. Malorie has also been shortlisted for the Carnegie Medal. In 2005 she was honoured with the Eleanor Farjeon Award in recognition of her contribution to children’s books, and in 2008 she received an OBE for her services to children’s literature. She has been described by The Times as ‘a national treasure’ and was the Children’s Laureate between 2013 and 2015.

Most recently Malorie wrote for the Doctor Who series on BBC One, and the fifth novel in her Noughts & Crosses series, Crossfire, was published by Penguin Random House Children’s in summer 2019.

Born in 1962, she qualified in Computer Science and followed a successful career in computing, before becoming a writer at the age of 28. Her first published book was Not So Stupid! (1990), a book of short stories.

Since then she has written many books and scripts, and her popularity has steadily grown. Her scripts for television include several episodes of Byker Grove, Whizzziwig and Pig-Heart Boy, and she has also written original dramas for CITV and BBC Education. Her stage play, The Amazing Birthday, was performed in 2002. She writes for all ages of children. Her picture books include I Want a Cuddle! (2001) and Jessica Strange (2002) and she has written many reader books for early and more confident readers. Her novels include: Hacker (1992); the story of Vicky, who saves her father from being wrongly convicted of stealing from the bank after hacking into the bank’s computer to solve the crime herself; Thief! (1995), about a child who is transported into the future after being accused of a crime she did not commit; and Pig-Heart Boy (1997), the diary of 13-year-old Cameron, who needs a heart transplant. The latter book and its subsequent adaptation as a series for television won several awards, including a BAFTA for best children’s drama in 2000.

In 2007 she collected stories and poems for the book Unheard Voices, commemorating the bicentenary anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade, and in 2009 she contributed to Free?, a book of stories celebrating Human Rights. Recent books include Noble Conflict (2013), a thriller set in a post-revolutionary utopia; Chasing the Stars (2017), a re-telling of Othello set in space, which was shortlisted for the YA Book Prize; and Blueblood (2020), a re-telling of the Bluebeard fairy tale.

In 2019, adult learning institution, City Lit, announced their new Malorie Blackman Scholarships for Unheard Voices. Three annual awards worth up to £1000 each are given, to fund one year’s study within the Creative Writing department at City Lit. The awards seek to support and encourage the creative and professional development of ‘unheard voices’ writing with the final award winners selected by Malorie herself.
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How Black designers were celebrated at the Milan Fashion Week to highlight systemic racism

In an effort to bring to light the lack of diversity in the Italian fashion industry, the Milan Fashion Week – one of the most prestigious annual fashion events – hosted an event exclusively for Black designers for the first time since its inception.

Dubbed *We are Made in Italy*, the event which was digitally held as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, featured five Black designers from the Black Lives Matter in Italian Fashion group and highlighted the country’s diverse fashion aesthetics, Reuters reports.

Held at the Palazzo Clerici in Milan, the event showcased the spring/summer 2021 collections of Black designers including Karim Daoudi, Fabiola Manirakiza, Joy Meribe, Claudia Gisele Ntsama and Mokodu Fall.

“In Italy we have a racial problem and if we don’t start opening the wound in order to heal it, the wound will never heal,” Jean, who also mentored the spotlighted designers, added. Major Italian fashion labels – including Gucci, Dolce & Gabbana and Prada – have been called out in the past for lacking diversity within their ranks and also faced public bashing for releasing racially insensitive clothing and accessories as well as campaigns. Jean, however, wants the country’s fashion industry to accept that change in attitude as well as inclusivity is indispensable.

“The new Italy is multicultural and it cannot permit itself to continue to appear racist in the eyes of the world as a result of the errors of a few, which in turn become a stigma for everyone,” she told The Guardian. “Fashion lives on progressive-ness and it simply cannot fall behind. Even a field like football that could hardly be regarded as avant-garde had the courage to admit that our country has a huge problem with racism …and they bravely implemented severe measures to work against it.”
Marcus Garvey III, the eldest son of iconic nationalist and Jamaica’s first national hero Marcus Mosiah Garvey, passed away on Tuesday in Wellington, Florida, after a long battle with Alzheimer’s disease. He was 90.

A seasoned electrical engineer, physicist, mathematician as well as activist, Garvey III was born in St Andrew, Jamaica. He, however, constantly toured and delivered lectures in the Caribbean, North America, Europe, and Africa, according to The Gleaner. Garvey III also emulated his father as he served as the president general of the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) – an organization the latter founded about a century ago.

“The departure of Marcus Jr, whom I had been married to for over 30 years, will leave a void that cannot be filled, and he will be greatly missed by numerous family, friends, and colleagues from all over the world, in many places where he had left indelible footprints,” the deceased’s wife, Jean Garvey, said.

Upon its establishment, the UNIA, whose aim was to unite the global African diaspora in a repatriation effort, amassed several members. At a certain point, the organization had over 700 chapters in the United States and several others in countries including Cuba, Panama, Mexico, South Africa and Ghana, The Sun Sentinel reported.

Though Garvey III tried to revive the organization and bring it back to its former glory days when it was under his father’s charismatic leadership, he was unsuccessful. “I think that Marcus Jr. did what he could to maintain the organization,” Dale Holness, a Broward County commissioner and Jamaican-American, told the news outlet.

Garvey III is survived by his widow, his brother Dr Julius Garvey, sons Colin and Kyle-Sekou, stepdaughter Michelle Morris, and four grandchildren. Funeral plans are yet to be announced.
Another U-turn? Government announces vaccine passports to travel abroad

"Government finally confirms vaccine passports despite regular denials over last few months."

By Joe Mellor

The UK Government will work with other countries to “help facilitate” coronavirus immunity passports if they are required by destinations abroad, a minister has said. However the Government has denied they will be introduced on a number of occasions. Pippa Crerar Tweeted: “Government finally confirms vaccine passports despite regular denials over last few months to @MirrorPolitics and others that they were afoot.” James Ball Tweeted: “The government have said they were considering vaccine passports about four times already – then said they definitely weren’t another four, so we’re due another round. They were and remain a very bad idea, as illustrated below.” In December vaccines minister Nadhim Zahawi suggested hospitality and other businesses could bar people who have not had a Covid-19 jab. However, Micheal Gove denied they would be brought in. Asked if there would be a vaccine passport, Mr Gove told Sky News: “No, that’s not being planned. “I certainly am not planning to introduce any vaccine passports and I don’t know anyone else in Government (who is).” He added: “I think the most important thing to do is make sure that we vaccinate as many people as possible.” Speaking on BBC Breakfast, Mr Gove said: “Let’s not get ahead of ourselves, that’s not the plan. “What we want to do is to make sure that we can get vaccines effectively rolled out.” He added: “Of course, individual businesses have the capacity to make decisions about who they will admit and why. “But the most important thing that we should be doing at this stage is concentrating on making sure the vaccine is rolled out.”

The Prime Minister’s official spokesman told reporters: “There are no plans to introduce or require immunity passports that would bar people from certain venues who haven’t been vaccinated.” Foreign Office minister James Cleverly said it would be up to the individual countries where holidaymakers are arriving to decide on their own border arrangements.

But he said it was “not an uncommon practice” for countries to require documents on inoculations and that the Government would work with international partners on this. It follows reports in the Times that British officials have started work on an official certification programme after Greece
said it would waive quarantine rules for arrivals who can prove they have been vaccinated against Covid-19. Mr Cleverly told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme on Friday: “The decisions that individual countries make about their own incoming arrangements is obviously up to them. “We are incredibly proud of the speed and the breadth of our vaccination rollout and of course, I think the whole world hopes, that the vaccination programme will be a way of getting back to normality.” Asked if the UK would help in providing certificates, he said: “It is often the case that the entry requirements for countries are for vaccines or inoculations, and that is not an uncommon practice.

“We will work with international partners to help facilitate their border arrangements and their immigration arrangements.” Mr Cleverly told Sky News that at present most countries, including the UK, require a negative test result on arrival. “And we’ll have to see what countries, what the international community, put in place once vaccines around the world are as effectively distributed, as they are here in the UK,” he added. According to the Times, the Foreign Office, Department for Transport and Department of Health and Social Care are working on arrangements should countries require proof of vaccination as a condition of entry.

British tourists may be welcomed to Greece in May provided they can provide proof they have received the coronavirus jab, the newspaper reports.

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- Your full name and designation if you are writing through your organisation that you are representing.
- Each write-up should be as short as possible. You can attach photographs with your write-ups.
- Authors must ensure that permission have been obtained for all photographs submitted with the write-ups.
- It is the authors responsibility to ensure the accuracy of all submissions.
- All submissions must be in Word document and all adverts in Jpeg format.

Please note that the editor reserve the right to edit submissions.

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Food charities on the Covid frontline: ‘Without support, more people would fall through the gaps’

Across the UK, charities that offer food and essential household goods are facing record levels of demand as underlying economic and social issues are laid bare by the pandemic. How are they rising to the growing challenge?

by Stephen Holroyd

“This pandemic has amplified issues of food insecurity that have been around for many years – but it’s also tipped people who were just getting by over the line,” says Alasdair Bennett, chief executive of Bethany Christian Trust, a charity that helps thousands of vulnerable people across Scotland every year. For Bennett, the most visible impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has been an enormous rise in dependency on the services the charity provides. “We’ve been inundated with requests for our help,” he says. “What we’ve seen is more and more people struggling with their personal income and unable to afford the basics like food. This includes people and families who have never needed support in this way before.” Long before the spread of Covid-19, food insecurity across the UK was already reaching crisis level – a 2018 report by the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organisation found it affected 2.2m people in the UK. Fast forward to the pandemic and the early days of lockdown: statistics from The Trussell Trust, the UK’s biggest food bank network, show that 89% more food parcels were handed out compared with April 2019.

For food charities across the UK, record levels of demand have placed them under extraordinary strain. Food insecurity is often the consequence of underlying economic and social issues that have been laid bare by lockdown.

Over recent years, Bethany Christian Trust’s services, including the distribution of emergency supply packs containing food, cleaning products and toiletries, have expanded beyond its native Edinburgh through a network of charitable partners and churches across Scotland. Securing Barclays Covid-19 Community Aid Package funding will enable it to distribute 12,000 emergency packs to people facing financial hardship as a result of the pandemic. “We know this will make a huge difference,” says Bennett.

For Luke Wilson, the trust’s logistics manager, this intervention is critical: “Without support from many different charities, I think you’d find even more people falling through the gaps and into even more serious situations than we see at the moment. I remember back in April, just as we were starting to deliver our packs, one of our recipients told us how they’d been forced to choose between topping up their electricity or buying food.
While the pandemic has undoubtedly exacerbated food insecurity issues, it has also created an opportunity to change the way these issues are tackled and, crucially, perceived by local and national government, according to Lindsay Boswell, CEO of FareShare, a nationwide operation that helps redistribute surplus food gathered from the UK food industry to a network of 11,000 frontline charities.

Boswell says: “Before the pandemic, even though FareShare food reached nearly 2,000 towns and cities across the UK and fed almost 1 million vulnerable people every week, we knew we were only scratching the surface. As we begin to feel the full economic impact of the crisis, we’re going to see many more communities suffering from food insecurity.”

“There’s a lot of good quality food that goes to waste in this country, and by simply enabling the logistics of getting that food from the farm gate or supermarket depot, we can make sure it feeds people in need. The support we’ve received from Barclays means we can get more surplus food to more local charities and feed more people – it’s as simple as that.”

Rachel Ledwith, who oversees FareShare’s London distribution operations, has seen the pandemic reveal sectors of society that could otherwise have gone unnoticed. “It’s brought to light both the issues and the people that were going under the radar,” she says. “But if there’s a positive to come out of this, it’s that the food aid agenda is now a higher priority than ever before. The legacy will be that local authorities and the voluntary sector are now connected in a way that would have previously taken years to establish.”

Both Ledwith and Boswell feel a sense of achievement in FareShare being a catalyst for moving forward the conversation around food waste and food insecurity.

“Food aid is now at the same level as things like benefit advice and regeneration,” says Boswell. “Councils are looking at food insecurity more holistically and realising that if someone needs food then there are other issues at play. This has always been obvious to those of us who work in the food aid sector, but to have it moved up the agenda and seen as a whole-systems approach is really positive.” He adds: “The government doesn’t always see the people on the fringes of society, who rely on the support of charities up and down the country. Charities are at the heart of local communities, triaging a whole range of issues and plugging vulnerable people into essential support services that ensure they don’t fall between the cracks.”

In Tameside, Greater Manchester, Poplar Street primary school is just one of many to receive food from the FareShare network. Headteacher Iain Linsdell has seen all too well how Covid-19 has forced families in his community to seek support when they might never have done so before: “As well as supporting our breakfast club, FareShare food allows us to provide food parcels to vulnerable families. Before the pandemic we would hand out four or five parcels a week, but at the height of lockdown that went up to almost 150.” At a time when the issue of feeding schoolchildren has never been more in the spotlight, Linsdell says that food insecurity among children can have serious implications for future development. “As someone who knows what it’s like to grow up in a disadvantaged household, I want to break the cycle of poverty,” he says. “This is much bigger than food. When you’re a kid and you get used to going hungry, you can feel a sense of shame in knowing that you don’t have as much as someone else.

“Later in life, the lack of self-belief that comes with that can hold otherwise talented kids back from realising their potential.” For both FareShare and the Bethany Christian Trust, tackling the problem of food insecurity goes way beyond putting food on the table. “Our food only treats a symptom,” says Boswell. “Six hours later you’re going to be hungry again. But if by giving someone a meal, we’re sitting them down with people they can talk to about debt counselling, mental health issues, addiction, domestic abuse or whatever help they might need, then that plate of food can work so much harder. Food brings people together – and never more so than during this pandemic.”
Meet the most dangerous black woman of the 1870s whose powerful writings were ‘stolen’ by the FBI

MILDRED EUROPA TAYLOR

“She is more dangerous than a thousand rioters”.

That was the description given to her by local Chicago authorities at the time. Lucy Parsons, one of the most influential people in American history, was a journalist, an anarchist, socialist, and labour organizer who fought for the rights of the poor and disenfranchised in society. Pic credit: Medium

Despite her bravery and outspokenness, Parsons mostly kept things about her background hidden. When asked by a reporter to reveal her background, she replied: “I am not a candidate for office, and the public have no right to my past. I amount to nothing to the world and people care nothing of me. I am battling for a principle.” Thus, not much is known about her early life, apart from the fact that she had an African American, Native American, and Mexican ancestry. Varying accounts state that she was born in Texas around 1853, during the Civil War Era, and it is likely that her parents were slaves. She went under many surnames throughout her life just to disguise her racial origins in a prejudiced society, writes lucyparsons.org. She often used the name Lucy Gonzales, denying her African American roots and claiming that her Mexican heritage was the cause of her dark skin tone.

As a teenager, she married an older, formerly enslaved man, Oliver Benton, otherwise known as Oliver Gathings, and had a child who died as an infant. She later met Albert Parsons, a printer and a former Confederate soldier from Alabama around 1869, who would eventually be her husband.

Their marriage was, however, not legal, since local laws at the time prevented interracial marriages or cohabitation between white people and other races. In 1872, Lucy and her husband, who had become a radical Republican after the Civil War, had to leave Texas for Chicago due to their marriage and anti-segregation activism.
Historians say that Albert had worked assiduously on registering Black voters and was shot in the leg and threatened with lynching. The couple had to leave because they felt threatened. Once in Chicago, they immersed themselves in the labour and anarchist movements while Albert worked as a printer for the Chicago Times.

At the time, the country had fallen into depression, and millions were unemployed. In Chicago, the situation was no different, and authorities were forced to bring wages down. In response to the depression, the Great Strike of 1877 took place, one of the greatest mass strikes in U.S. history. During the strike, rail workers engaged in a battle with the police who had tried to disperse the crowds. Lucy’s husband would be a leading figure in the railroad strike, as he is said to have organized the thousands of railroad workers. As punishment, he was fired from his job at the Chicago Times, and Lucy was forced to open a dress shop while working with the International Ladies’ Garment Workers Union.

Lucy, who had worked in support of African Americans throughout her time in Texas, began to write for many radical publications, including The Socialist and The Alarm, an anarchist weekly published by the International Working People’s Association (IWPA), which she and Albert had helped found in 1883.

Alongside the IWPA, the couple were deeply involved in the labour protest at Haymarket Square in Chicago. The May 3, 1886 protest was in support of eight-hour workdays at the McCormick Harvest Works, but the protest turned violent, and in the process, police officers and others were killed. Lucy’s husband was arrested alongside other men and convicted though no evidence was found. Charged with conspiracy and murder, Albert was executed in 1887, in spite of Lucy’s fight for the release of the prisoners and appeals against an unfair trial.

Her husband’s death did not deter her from continuing her activism, as she continued her struggle for the rights of workers, women, and African-Americans in general. She continued to write for a strong working class movement while working with the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), an organization that was formed out of the labour unrest at the time.

Lucy became the editor of the IWW’s journal, The Liberator and published her own paper, Freedom. Lucy travelled extensively to deliver speeches, “out of both financial necessity and political passion”, according to The Washington Post.

Due to her affiliations with the Socialist Party, Communist Party, and scores of radical newspapers, she became a prime target by the FBI and was constantly harassed and arrested. She, nevertheless, continued her activism until her death at age 89 in a fire on March 7, 1942.

Even though the FBI confiscated all her books and publications just to bury her ideals, her image as a radical crusader has survived, a report by the Chicago Tribune said. A Chicago anti-fascist group called Black Rose uses a drawing of Parsons as its symbol. In Boston, there’s the Lucy Parsons Center, a radical bookstore and meeting place while a Chicago park was named after her in 2004, the report added.

Her legacy also remains valuable for radical groups seeking equality for minorities and the poor.
FROM BRIXTON TO THE BAR

Growing up on one of south London’s most notorious estates, no one believed Dévante Gravesande-Smith could become a barrister. As he celebrates being called to the bar, Dévante shares his story - and how he plans to change the world. “As soon as I wanted to do this, I met barriers. Career advisers suggested “people like me” couldn’t become barristers. I vividly remember teachers making a mockery of me. If I didn’t have my family, I could have ended up in a totally different way. It just takes one or two people to say: “don’t do that” and the trajectory of your life changes.” As Dévante Gravesande-Smith describes his adolescence, you realise the significance of the professional photographs he had taken to mark being called to the bar. The beaming 24-year-old in new legal robes isn't just celebrating the end of his studies – he's triumphing over a lifetime of unfairly stacked odds. The grandson of West Indian migrants and a former resident of Brixton’s notorious Myatts Field Estate, synonymous with gang warfare and deprivation throughout his childhood, Dévante has faced the kind of hurdles all too shamefully common for young people of his background in Britain. And he’s quietly, determinedly skewered them all.

Speaking from his mum’s home just days after being called to the bar – “It’s still surreal!” – the softly spoken south Londoner is grace and charm personified. But doubt this brightspark’s mercurial drive at your peril. “I’ve always preferred people to underestimate me,” he grins. “I take it as a challenge: go ahead that it’s not possible for me to achieve, because it is. If I’d followed the goals other people set for me, I’d be a totally different person. I focused on what I wanted to do, stuck to it and it paid off.”

Unwavering determination comes, Dévante says, from his DNA. “It was tough for people to find their feet in Britain,” he says of his family’s struggle to assimilate, “but my mum and her parents had that tenacity from early on. It’s generational, that grit. Never give up. Never stop trying.” Dévante’s early memories of life on Myatts Field are halcyon – a bubble of supportive community spirit where everyone helped out and mum served up big Caribbean feasts for the neighbours. “But it started changing when people felt left behind and without opportunities,” he reflects. “That’s where you get gang culture: people falling by the wayside and not knowing their place in society. That’s when problems seep in.” The estate’s darker side began to emerge. “I remember next door neighbours getting raided,” Dévante says. “People used to be stabbed. You’d hear doors being kicked down. In some ways it inspired me, because I was aware of the criminal justice system from a young age. As I grew up, I saw the police abuse their powers, too – the bad side of the London Met.”

As his sense of the world took shape, Gordon Brown’s 2010 election loss sparked a crisis for Dévante that would change his life. “I felt like my side of the country, how I viewed Britain and how my family did, was rejected,” he remembers. “And I felt really scared at the prospect of a new Prime Minister – I thought, my gosh, we’re going to be left behind and forgotten about. What can I do? Get into parliament and change the world!”

Realising that David Lammy, Chuka Umunna and Sadiq Khan – “MPs that looked similar to me” – had all been lawyers before becoming politicians, Dévante’s course was set. He joined the Labour party at fourteen, devouring law news and researching cases in his spare time. But bullying became a regular experience. “Whenever people got their chance, it was: ‘Barrister? That’ll never happen!’” Dévante recalls. “I was laughed at. It was drummed into my head that people like me don’t aspire to those things.”

The hurdles didn’t lower after Dévante left school. In the UK, student loans are available to cover law degree fees – but the professional qualification required to practise as a barrister afterwards, which can cost up to £19,000, must be self-funded. The socioeconomic barrier hit Dévante hard.

“It’s horrible,” he says. “You can get good grades, be aspirational, but if you don’t come from a wealthy background the door is closed. Many of my university peers couldn’t pursue the career further because they didn’t have the funds.”
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Dévante and his family worked multiple jobs to raise the money and start his dream career. But once again, an obstacle: the profession’s crushing lack of diversity. According to the Bar Standards Board’s latest report, more than a third of British barristers went to private school. There are fewer black people at the bar than population demographics warrant, and not a single full-time judge from a BAME background sits on the Western Circuit, the geographic bar region covering Britain’s south and south west. “It’s been very uncomfortable at times,” Dévante admits. “But I’m glad I’m here to occupy the space, make a change and make people realise that they can too. I’ve had my fair share of racial undertones, passive aggression, microaggressions. But I love the profession. I’ve had to fight to get where I want to be – a few silly comments and people turning up their nose wouldn’t do much to me. If people like me just hang on in there, it will be a better place in the long run.”

Last year, politics once again made their mark on Dévante’s path. George Floyd’s death and the worldwide Black Lives Matter protests that followed affected him deeply. “But if I’m totally honest,” he says, “it wasn’t a surprise. It’s not new for the black community: these were conversations I had with my parents as a kid in an urban area. I knew very early on that I couldn’t behave in certain ways if I was stopped by the police. I had to not come across aggressive in public, because someone may think you’re going to rob them. “[Floyd’s death] was the straw that broke the camel’s back and made everyone aware of the issues we’ve been screaming about for a very long time. It was upsetting, but the world needed it to wake them up, smell the coffee and realise this is an issue that affects everybody.”

Now the young barrister is on a mission to empower others from non-“traditional” backgrounds to pursue law, using his own experiences as a guide. Since sharing his celebratory posts, he’s been overwhelmed by the response. “I’ve had messages from people from all walks of life; a lot from the black British community,” he explains. “I didn’t think it would have that sort of impact. That’s when I realised: maybe little me, and my story, might actually make a difference to somebody else. It sounds bizarre, because I’m young and it’s happened so fast – but I feel a sense of responsibility to show the next generation that their dreams are achievable.”

That’s the point: Dévante’s journey shouldn’t be a “story”. It shouldn’t be remarkable that a black boy from a south London estate joins one of the most elite professions in this country. But until that trajectory ceases to be newsworthy, Dévante will share his story to inspire others.

Is he a future Prime Minister in the making? “I would hope you can expect big things from me,” he deflects with a chuckle. “I just want to empower others and advocate for the voiceless. Simple as that. If I can, I think I’ve done my job.”

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Racism and homophobia are all too common in the swimming pool

Omie Dale

I once overheard a swimming teacher spout the racist myth that ‘Black people can’t float because they’ve got heavier bones.’ This ignorant misconception has been repeated to me several times, in jokes from my school mates and in genuine questions posed by adults and children both that I’ve taught swimming and those that have been curious about my job role. While it is always something that I refute, the number of times I have had to rubbish this claim shows how ingrained this fallacy remains. But it’s not just racism that makes waves in and out of the pool; homophobia often rears its ugly head, too. I once witnessed a swimming teacher imply that children were effeminate for being anxious about getting in the water – calling them ‘sissies’. Though myself and a few teachers called it out, the gravity of language was not recognised nor appreciated, despite terms such as this having a lasting effect on the one at the receiving end. As someone committed to providing an inclusive and safe environment for those that swim with me, these experiences undoubtedly make me both upset and dismayed. I have a real sense that people are being failed at the school swimming level, and ultimately it motivates me towards continuing to work in making the pool a more inclusive space.

As a swimming teacher for adults, I’m often approached by beginners who haven’t swam since childhood. There are various reasons for this, but it’s often attributable to past experiences of not being made to feel comfortable in the pool. A very common one is that, for many non or weak swimmers, their first experience was school swimming lessons. I’ve heard several stories of children being chucked into the deep end by a teacher and expected to swim to the other side. As someone committed to providing an inclusive and safe environment for those that swim with me, these experiences undoubtedly make me both upset and dismayed.

I also get a lot of questions regarding issues such as hair and skin care that are specific to or amplified for people of colour. Very often, hair products marketed for regular swimmers aren’t designed with ethnic minorities in mind. One example are swimming caps: although they are marketed as one-size-fits all, many won’t fit those who have larger, thicker hair or styles such as locs and braids. While there is a growing market for larger caps, these are often more expensive and usually aren’t available for purchase at pools.
Chlorine shampoo is often far too drying for coarser hair types and can’t be used. What I know now is that it’s important to follow a hair routine that’s focused on hydration and moisturising, but as a young swimmer I knew no one else with hair like mine and had no one to turn to.Consciously or not, we often promote one idea of what a swimmer should be, which doesn’t stray far away from a Michael Phelps-type body – white, lean and muscular.

This is somewhat understandable, given swimming’s representation at the elite level. In England, out of the 73,000 competitive swimmers registered with Swim England, less than 1% identify as Black or mixed-race. We need to ask ourselves why this is the case and what can be done to change it. In order to encourage participation from as many people as possible, the sport needs to celebrate all the bodies and identities that enter the water. Between May 2018 and 2019, over 80% of Black adults did not participate in swimming. Figures from a survey taken by Sport England show that 95% of Black adults and 80% of Black children do not go swimming at all.

Growing up, I never felt celebrated – let alone represented. I faced many issues due to my identity that were either amplified or left unresolved as there was no one like me, both in the pool and on the sidelines. 2020 saw a big boom in open water and wild swimming, with the National Open Water Coaching Association reporting 32% increase in participation as pools were closed during lockdown, which shows how many people are keen to improve their fitness and mental health by swimming.

I volunteer for the Black Swimming Association and Pride in Water, which work to improve participation rates and break down the barriers for ethnic minorities and members of the LGBTQ+ community.

It’s encouraging to see that there is definitely a growing movement towards increasing diversity in swimming, and many grassroots organisations are becoming conscious of representation amongst their members.

Campaigns like Rainbow Laces have also been successful in encouraging better LGBTQ+ acceptance in swimming. But we still need to build on this progress and conduct more research to understand these issues fully. This means creating targeted programmes that reach the demographics least likely to participate. The swimming world – particularly National Governing Bodies such as Swim England and British Swimming and sport charities that have the ability to implement change – need to openly recognise different intersections in society. Among those at the higher level, there is very limited research and therefore limited understanding as to what the next steps should be and the barriers members of the LGBTQ+ and Black community face in the pool environment.
Black Lives Matter Demonstrator Who Rescued Counter-Protester Immortalised With Bronze Sculpture

BY : JULIA BANIM

The sculpture in question depicts the inspiring moment when personal trainer and grandfather Patrick Hutchinson carried a suspected far-right counter-protester to safety over his shoulder. The incident occurred during a Black Lives Matter protest in London in June 2020, with demonstrators publicly calling for police reform following the death of George Floyd just a month before.

Far-right counter protesters also gathered in Parliament Square, with many purporting to be there to ‘protect statues’ and memorials. After clashing with police officers, the counter-protesters proceeded to clash with Black Lives Matter demonstrators in Trafalgar Square and near Waterloo Station. It was then that Hutchinson spotted an attack on a man who was later identified as retired police officer Bryn Male. Deciding he couldn’t just stand by and let the stranger potentially get hurt, Hutchinson and his friends formed a cordon around Male, who was lying injured in a foetal position on the ground. Hutchinson then picked him up and carried him to safety.

A powerful photograph that captured the moment of rescue has since become one the most recognisable of 2020, and in December
People have actually complained that a Black women’s walking group was featured on Countryfile

Rishma Dosani

BBC bosses hit back over a Countryfile segment focusing a Black women’s walking group. Viewers were left unhappy over the feature – which appeared in an episode on Sunday, January 10 – and lodged complaints with the broadcaster. Responding to the complaints, a statement from BBC bosses said: ‘The feature on the walking group was part of a programme where the overall theme was to encourage people to make more of their connection with the British countryside during the coming year, including trying to get outdoors more to exercise where possible. ‘For a variety of reasons, as the presenter explained, it has been the case that historically some groups have felt less able than others to take part in outdoor activities such as hiking or mountain walking, so any initiative which seeks to redress that balance is to be welcomed. ‘The walking group in this programme is one such initiative and is a reminder that not only is the beauty of the British countryside there for everyone to appreciate, but that all are welcome to enjoy it and to safeguard its wildlife, landscape, and traditions for the future.’ However, the statement did not go into detail on what had sparked complaints.

The Countryfile segment, presented by Anita Rani, introduced viewers to Rhiane Fatinikun, founder of the Black Girls Hike group – which provides Black women with a safe space to explore the outdoors. The group was launched in Manchester in 2019, and has spread to the Midlands and London – with members encouraged to try a string of new activities, including climbing and paving. Speaking about their walking sessions, Anita asked why there are so few Black and Asian people in the countryside – sharing a statistic that members of those communities were ‘half as likely’ to take part in hiking and mountain walking.

Anita Rani spoke to Black Girls Hike founder Rhiane Fatinikun (Picture: The Countryfile segment, presented by Anita Rani, introduced viewers to Rhiane Fatinikun, founder of the Black Girls Hike group – which provides Black women with a safe space to explore the outdoors. The group was launched in Manchester in 2019, and has spread to the Midlands and London – with members encouraged to try a string of new activities, including climbing and paving. Speaking about their walking sessions, Anita asked why there are so few Black and Asian people in the countryside – sharing a statistic that members of those communities were ‘half as likely’ to take part in hiking and mountain walking.
Is life with your rare disease making you depressed?

Life with a rare disease isn’t easy. Feeling depressed could make it worse. Learn about the symptoms of depression, and steps you might take to turn things around. 
Pravin Pant, MSN, NP

Think about the last two weeks. Have you lost interest or pleasure in doing things that you usually like? Have you felt down or hopeless? If you answered ‘yes’ to these questions, then you might be depressed.

When you have a rare condition, it can turn your life upside down – especially if symptoms are getting in the way of things you want to do. So it’s probably no surprise that depression is common in this situation. Nobody needs to tell you that being in pain can affect your mood.

Let’s talk about what depression really is, and why it’s important to recognize the signs so you can get help.

What’s the difference between depression and feeling sad?

Emotions are a normal part of life. Almost everybody goes through times where they feel sad or down. But depression is more than feeling blue – it’s a type of mood disorder. That means it changes a person’s mood so much that it gets in the way of everyday life.

What does depression feel like?

When you feel sad, you can usually get into a better mood after a while. But if you’re depressed, sadness can last a lot longer – at least two weeks, but sometimes for months or even years. Depression can make you lose interest in things that you used to enjoy, like hobbies or spending time with friends. You may even have trouble handling basic
activities, like showering or eating. There are many different symptoms of depression, and not everyone who has it will feel the same way.

Some of the main symptoms of depression include:

**Feeling sad or hopeless**

Feeling that you’re worthless, that you don’t deserve to live, or that everyone would be better off without you

Having problems paying attention or concentrating

Feeling fatigued – a deep tiredness that you can’t fix by getting more sleep

Seeing changes in your sleep habits (waking up a lot, for example, or having trouble falling asleep and staying asleep)

Noticing changes in your appetite, like eating less or more, or not caring what you eat

* Gaining or losing a lot of weight
* Having an upset stomach
* Having less interest in sex
* I think I may be depressed. Now what?

You might find it hard to talk about your feelings; it’s normal to feel that way. Don’t be ashamed to bring it up to your doctor. Your doctor’s job is to listen to you without judging you. Depression is a medical condition, and it’s just as much a part of your health as your rare disease.

Your doctor will want to know what symptoms you have and how they’re interfering with your life. You may be asked to fill out a form called a depression screening tool: It’s a set of questions that helps measure how depressed you are. Your doctor may also order blood tests to make sure something else isn’t causing your symptoms.

The good news is that there are many ways to treat depression. For example, you may take medication every day that works in your brain; it might help how you’re feeling. Therapy (sometimes called talk therapy or psychotherapy) is also a very important part of treating depression. A therapist or counselor can teach you how to handle negative thoughts and feelings, so they don’t interfere as much with your life.

Having a mood disorder like depression doesn’t mean you’re being “crazy,” “mental,” or too sensitive or dramatic. As you saw from the long list of symptoms (above), it’s not just in your head!

Depression is a serious medical condition that can be life threatening, but it’s also very treatable. That’s why it’s important to be honest with your doctor about any changes to your health, including your mood.
Mr. Jenrick said he had noticed an attempt to set a narrative which seeks to erase part of the nation’s history, adding this was “at the hand of the flash mob, or by the decree of a ‘cultural committee’ of town hall militants and woke worthies”.

Writing in the paper, he said: “We live in a country that believes in the rule of law, but when it comes to protecting our heritage, due process has been overridden. That can’t be right.

“Local people should have the chance to be consulted whether a monument should stand or not. The death of George Floyd while in the custody of police in Minneapolis sparked protests across the world, with the Colston statue dumped into Bristol Harbour and a memorial to Sir Winston Churchill vandalised with the words “is a racist”.

Speaking last June, Prime Minister Boris Johnson said: “The statue of Winston Churchill in Parliament Square is a permanent reminder of his achievement in saving this country – and the whole of Europe – from a fascist and racist tyranny.

“It is absurd and shameful that this national monument should … be at risk of attack by violent protestors.

“Yes, he sometimes expressed opinions that were and are unacceptable to us today, but he was a hero, and he fully deserves his memorial.”
Oxford student with 3 A*s called unfit for tutoring job because he’s not ‘normal English’

The head of the tutoring company has since said it was a ‘misunderstanding’

Maddy Mussen

A Black Oxford University student who achieved three A*s at A-level was initially described as unfit for a tutoring role teaching overseas students because he is not “normal English”.

Joshua Chima, a first year student at Oxford, was referred to tutoring service Gage International by his friend Izzy. Initially, the head of the tutoring company was interested in Joshua, so asked Izzy to send over his CV.

Upon sending over his CV, Izzy claims the CEO, Grace Zhu, called her and mentioned Josh’s surname, saying: “This is why you need to send me their CV.”

Izzy alleges that Zhu continued to say that she was concerned he would not be an appropriate fit for the role because her Chinese tutees don’t like black tutors or those with dark skin, referencing skin lightening treatments used by Chinese people to prove her point. Zhu has since denied that she said this and said that her conversation with Izzy was a “misunderstanding”, and that she only mentioned his surname because she thought it was “funny”, or that he might be Chinese.

Joshua then called Zhu to ask if his race was a concern. Zhu said that it was only because her tutees preferred “normal English tutors”, reinforcing that she meant “English, English” tutors. Joshua was born in London.

Zhu defended her comments and told The Tab: “Throughout the whole conversation I tried to tell him that he doesn’t have to worry about being black.” She continued: “He misunderstood, he needs to be more understanding. It’s not all about being black.”

Josh told The Tab: “I had a bit of free time so I thought I’d help with some tutoring. It’s so unbelievable. It was quite annoying because it felt clear that my only saving grace was that I go to Oxford.

“The worst thing is that me and Izzy go to the same college [at Oxford], we have the same grades at A-level and similar work experience so it’s not like I’m less qualified – it’s simply because I’m black. I’ve faced racism before but not like this, it’s ridiculous.”

Zhu denied her comments and said the conversations about race were a misunderstanding and that she has since offered Joshua the role. She told The Tab: “We treat everyone the same. I said to him you don’t have to worry that you’re black, but competition is fierce and they pick up the good ones. Once you’re picked up you’re fine. It’s very difficult because I’m matchmaking [tutors and tutees]. I did talk to him and I think it upset him, but that was because of [my concerns about] his GCSE grades and not his race.”

Zhu denied that her actions were racist and said: “The main purpose is to get a student to pick up a good tutor who is kind, understandable and patient.”

Izzy has since quit her role at the tutoring company because of Zhu’s comments.
Barrister Sacked For Branding Mixed Race Teenager 'Stroppy' After Equalities Case

Jon Holbrook branded Ruby Williams, who suffered hair discrimination at school, a "stroppy teenager of colour".

By Arj Singh, HuffPost UK

A barrister who branded a schoolgirl a "stroppy teenager of colour" for pursuing an equalities case after suffering hair discrimination at school has been sacked from his law firm.

Cornerstone Barristers “expelled” Jon Holbrook following his Twitter attack on Ruby Williams, who was repeatedly sent home from school because of her afro hair.

Holbrook shared a video from the Equality and Human Rights Commission about Ruby’s case which cited the Equality Act, and claimed the law “undermines school discipline by empowering the stroppy teenager of colour”.

Cornerstone said the “particularly offensive” tweet was “irreconcilable” with his continued membership of the chambers, which “unequivocally condemn discrimination in all its forms”.

Ruby’s mother, Kate Williams, told HuffPost UK she was “very upset” about the comments, which made her “uncomfortable” in terms of her daughter’s “race, gender and age”.

Williams has reported Holbrook to the Bar Standards Board, which regulates barristers, as she does not “believe he should be in a position of power over people’s lives.” In an article for the Critic, Holbrook claimed a “woke mob” had tried to “cancel” him over his tweet.

He also claimed he resigned four days before his expulsion “having concluded that I no longer wanted to practice as a full-time barrister”.

He went on: “The attempted cancellation prompted the manner and timing of my resignation, but it was not the underlying cause. “The only reason that chambers proceeded to expel me, despite my resignation, was because the salivating attack dogs wanted some red meat to chew.

“Chambers was compliant enough to jump to their barking but it made no difference to me – save to enhance my reputation as a free speech advocate.”
Ian Wright 'disappointed' after racial abuser escapes criminal conviction

* Former footballer critical of judge’s response.
* Southampton’s Alex Jankewitz racially abused online

Ian Wright has expressed disappointment after an Irish teenager who admitted racially abusing him escaped a criminal conviction.

Patrick O’Brien, of Tralee, County Kerry, abused the former Arsenal and England striker in private messages on Instagram last May after he lost a Fifa game on PlayStation.

The 18-year-old pleaded guilty to harassing Wright on 11 May, contrary to the Non-Fatal Offences Against The Person Act 1997, and sending a message by phone that was grossly offensive, obscene and menacing.

At a sentencing hearing at Tralee District Court on Wednesday, Judge David Waters said he “didn’t see anything to be gained” by imposing a criminal conviction, and handed O’Brien probation.

He noted O’Brien had shown genuine remorse for his actions, and had donated €500 (£440) to the Irish Network Against Racism out of his own volition.

The judge said the language used by O’Brien was reprehensible, but was the unthinking behaviour of a “naive young man”. He added that O’Brien had written an apology to Wright, which was accepted by the football pundit, who forgave his abuser.

Wright wrote on Twitter: “I’ve seen today’s judgement and I’m disappointed. This case was never about revenge, it was always about consequences for acts of racism. My forgiveness of this young man was for my own deeply personal need and desire to move forward without further anguish. I’m a 57 year old man that has experienced racism throughout my life. I wasn’t expecting my forgiveness to be an invitation to lighten a sentence.

“Seeing this judgment I can only wonder what deterrent there is for anyone else who spouts this kind of vile racist abuse.

“An individual wished death upon me because of my skin colour. No judge’s claims of ‘naivety’ or ‘immaturity’ will ever be acceptable to us. The supposed immaturity and naivety of our attackers is never any comfort.

“So yeah I am disappointed. I’m tired. We are all tired.”

Judge Waters had earlier said he had received a “very positive” probation report on O’Brien, which said he had co-operated in full, made full and frank admissions of his guilt, and had been in non-stop contact with his probation officer and was very co-operative.

His family are law-abiding, decent people, his solicitor Patrick Mann told the court. Mann said O’Brien was a “very, very good boy” who was getting “great results” at school, adding that he was “still a young lad”, and asked that he be allowed to go forward “without any stain” on his record.

Also on Wednesday Southampton condemned “abhorrent” racist abuse aimed at their midfielder Alex Jankewitz on social media after the 9-0 defeat at Manchester United and said they were liaising with police. The 19-year-old was sent off inside 90 seconds of his first start and has become the latest player subjected to abuse online.

The club said it had “identified a number of posts on social media directing racial abuse” at Jankewitz and added: “Supporters who stoop to such abhorrent and archaic standards are not welcome as Southampton supporters, or anywhere else within football... The club is passing on all abusive messages to Hampshire Police and hope they are able to permanently remove those individuals from our football community.”
Manuscript's Black Boxing Champion

Clayton-born Len Johnson was denied the chance to fight for championships because of the colour of his skin, but not many people know his story.

Clayton-born Len Johnson (22 Oct.1902 – 28 Sept.1974) became one of Britain’s greatest boxers during the interwar years but was denied the chance to fight for championships because of the colour of his skin.

The notorious ‘colour bar’, a government-backed policy which existed in British boxing at the time, meant only boxers with two white parents could compete for titles.

Clayton born Len Johnson was a Mancunian legend with a Sierra Leonian dad and a mum of Irish ancestry who endured vicious racism for marrying a black man.

Not only was he a prize boxer who was on course for the world title was it not for British boxing’s colour bar, Len was mixed race when British boxing only allowed white champions. But Len was a fighter out of the ring too, championing trade unionism, civil rights and advocating throughout his life not just for his Moss Side community but for oppressed people worldwide.

Len founded the New International Society to provide a voice for people of colour in Manchester, in 1945 he was invited to attend the groundbreaking PanAfrican Congress and in 1948 following the framing of 6 African-Americans known as the Trenton Six he sprung to action organising a rally and concert at Belle Vue featuring the famous singer and activist gathering more than 10,000 people in attendance.

Manchester has monuments to Presidents, Prime Ministers, slave profiteers, royalty and even soft drinks but as of 2020 nothing to acknowledge the contribution of Black Mancunians, I can’t think of a better man to honour than our Len to start to rectify that. Len Johnson he fought for us!

Inside a pub on a now-lost estate near Hulme 65 years ago, a boxer took a public stand against racism and bigotry.

Len Johnson walked inside with friends and ordered a round of drinks at the bar.

He was refused because of the colour of his skin.

Police were called to the Old Abbey Taphouse pub on the Greenheys estate between Hulme and Moss Side on September 30, 1953, and they were all thrown out.

As word spread, activist Len channeled his anger to bring about change.

He launched a campaign and enlisted the help of the then Lord Mayor of Manchester, and the Bishop of Manchester, and over the course of the next three days, more than 200 people, black and white, gathered to take part in a demonstration outside, standing together against the licensee’s ban.

Eventually it was overturned and Len - who was teetotal - was invited inside and sat down to share a drink with the publican.

Len’s victory inspired others and fuelled the drive to end the so-called ‘colour bar’ policies of the era, both across Manchester and the country.

The Old Abbey Taphouse Pub (Image: MEN) His story isn't as well known here as it should be.
The moment this adopted African-American woman found out she is a Sierra Leone princess

BY MILDRED EUROPA TAYLOR

Sarah Culberson was born in Morgantown, West Virginia, to an African father and a White mother. She was put into foster care. A year after her first birthday, she was adopted by a White West Virginia couple. Growing up, Culberson did not know much about her ancestry and she had to deal with so many questions about her biracial roots.

Along the way, she got drawn to theater and won an undergrad acting scholarship to West Virginia University. She earned her MFA at The American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco before joining the Los Angeles acting community, her website says. Culberson, now a dancer and an actress, has been on various stages and in films and has even guest performed with the Urban Latin Dance Theater Company CONTRA-TIEMPO.

But in 2004, a 28-year-old Culberson decided to put her dance and acting on hold to enable her to locate her biological parents. Through her search, she found out that she is related to African royalty in Sierra Leone. Culberson discovered she is from the Mende ethnic group in the small town known of Bumpe, Sierra Leone, and that she is a Mahaloi, the granddaughter of a paramount chief. This makes her the princess of the Bumpe village. In 2004 when she first visited Bumpe, Sierra Leone to discover her roots, the West African country had just emerged from a brutal 11-year civil war that wreaked havoc and ended in 2002. The war had claimed lives, burned homes, left many with missing limbs, and ruined the economy. Culberson, arriving in Bumpe, and witnessing the challenges of her people, knew that her title did not mean an inheritance of wealth. Rather, it came with a huge responsibility.

“My only guidance of what a princess was was what I saw in movies,” Culberson told NBC News. “[But] it’s really about responsibility. It’s about walking in my great-grandfather and grandfather’s footsteps and what they’ve done for the country. I realized that’s my role as a princess, to keep moving things forward in the country.”

Thus, in 2006 after the Bumpe community celebrated her during a special ceremony with her adoptive parents, she and her biological brother, Hindo Kposowa, launched the nonprofit, the Kposowa Foundation, now called Sierra Leone Rising, to rebuild Bumpe High School and promote education in the country. The foundation has so far provided nine wells for some 12,000 people across Sierra Leone, and is also looking to provide reusable pads for women, NBC News reported. What’s more, when the coronavirus struck, Culberson and Kposowa launched the “Mask On Africa” campaign to help reduce the spread of the virus in Sierra Leone.

Culberson’s passion to support people is not surprising though, according to her White family in West Virginia. “Sarah was an outgoing, people-meeting, 1-year-old when we adopted her. She is still that same outgoing person who genuinely loves and enjoys almost everyone she meets,” her adoptive father, James Culberson, said. Actor and dancer Culberson, to date, works with her birth father and brother through the foundation to bring support to the people of Bumpe. Also a published author, she wrote about her journey in the book A Princess Found, which will serve as the basis of a new movie produced by Stephanie Allain.

Culberson also has over 10 years of experience creating diversity, inclusion, and equity programs for both corporate and educational groups. Currently living in the U.S., she visits Sierra Leone often and plans of moving to the West African country soon. She, however, has no plans of going back to acting and dancing soon, as her role as a princess has changed her perspective on her life’s path. “And it’s changed it for the better,” she said.
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