



NORTHAMPTONSHIRE
Black History
ASSOCIATION

Newsletter

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2007— Slave Trade Debate

The system of slavery is a particularly horrendous system of treatment of human beings by other human beings. Should we still talk about slavery in the 21st century?

2007 heralds the bicentenary of the 1807 Abolition Act by the British government. Many people question if a date, and this date in particular, should be commemorated at all. Debates range from whether slavery was as horrific as it was made out to be and does it compare to the Jewish Holocaust which is commemorated on 27 January, the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, by the Holocaust Memorial Day.

The Jewish people received an apology from the Church and some governments for the Holocaust but to date people of African descent have not received an apology or reparations from the governments and institutions that perpetrated the profitable slave trade in human beings.



Caesar Shaw courtesy of Althorp House

1807 was the legal end of British official involvement in the trade of enslaved African people but as recently as 1926 British legislation was still being enacted to abolish slavery in one of the British African colonies. Between 1807 and 1926 British institutions made vast amounts of money out of the 'legally' abolished African slave trade.

Some debates suggest that maybe it is best to forget the pain and disruption that was inflicted by slavery so many years ago. Forgetting could be considered the best solution except for the major problem that slavery still exists in the 21st century in many forms and countries worldwide. Slavery has not ended. The dreadful system of trading in human beings continues today.

2007 Debate continued

The Northamptonshire Black History Association (NBHA) continues to work to promote the equality of all human beings. There are a number of projects and exhibitions taking place in 2007 to highlight the bicentenary of the first step towards ending involvement of the British government in the Atlantic slave trade. Some of the events the NBHA is involved in include collaboration with the Kettering Museum, the Northampton Quakers, a national Black and Asian studies conference for young people and University-led Black History drama project and also an Ira Aldridge drama project based in London.

Two hundred years after the 1807 Abolition Act is an opportunity for us to remember the past and change the present and the future. **If you would like to share your opinions on the 2007 debate with NBHA please drop us a line, our contact details at the Doddridge Centre are on the back page.**

NBHA in Bristol – 1 April 2006



Our day trip to Bristol was a 'first' for the Northamptonshire Black History Association. Twenty-nine people had a good day out, and enjoyed learning about Black History in a new environment. We started at the British Museum of the Empire and Commonwealth: a lively, crowded display from around the world, including interactive and electronic exhibits and film and audio recordings to bring history up to date. After a dockside visit we enjoyed exploring Bristol's historic city centre. Bristol's streets, harbour, buildings and monuments reflect its past history as a leading British slave port. The city is only now beginning to come to terms with that legacy: in 2007 there will be a major slavery exhibition, and the main Bristol museum is being redesigned to place the Slave Trade at the centre of the city's recorded history.



Early memories by Shirley Brownbill taken from work originally submitted for Black History Course run jointly by NBHA and the University of Northampton

When West Indian immigrants came to England in the 1960s they came with their dignity and respectability in their grips' (suitcases), dressed in their Sunday best. The plan was not to come and stay for many families,

but it is very evident many have remained for a number of reasons. The home was a very important place and this could be a room in a house or for the lucky ones, their own property.

As a first generation child of West Indian descent, looking back I can identify with the impact that the WIFR had on the family. Growing up in the 1960s this room was out of bounds to children, access was given only to clean it or to be shown off to people of importance (such as a visiting elderly relative or the pastor); this was the norm and was never questioned. The front room would be a haven as it gave a sense of belonging, ownership and safety.

The WIFR tells the story of achievements, history, culture, religion and the pain many families had to endure living away from their homeland. Here are some symbolic examples:

cultural items - such as the ornamental pineapple bucket symbolised the tropical fruit from 'home', it represented the sunshine.

religious artefact - such as the picture of Last Supper, these religious items were there as Black people were not always welcome into the churches, so prayers were done in the front room on a Sunday with all the family.

pictures, ornaments, certain items of furniture such as the display cabinet, and cushions; these were signs of achievement and status. The radiogram was also a very important piece of furniture in the front room. As families were isolated socially they had to create their own entertainment and music was an essential medium. Many songs carried messages of overcoming hardship (this would be artistes such as Jim Reeves), to love songs and religious songs. Weddings, christening and wakes took place in the front room.

Black History takes centre-stage in Northampton

The histories of Black people in Northampton and surrounding districts are about to take centre-stage in a community theatre performance in Northampton, Wellingborough and Kettering in **October** and **November 2006**.

The play takes a sometimes laconic, sometimes disturbing excursion into the depths of Black people's common experiences; it explores the haunting depths of the characters' frustrations and triumphs in a culture that is usually cold and occasionally warm. Maizie's reminiscence goes behind the stereotypes in order to give an evocative voice to collective histories and memories that have been silent for far too long. Using the traditional storytelling format of the *griot* of African and Black Diaspora theatres and their combination of different art forms, the play engages the audience in a candid exploration of the dreams and struggles of the characters.

The play is about the present as it is about the future. The pages of history are turned as narrators bring back to life colourful characters that, although isolated from loved ones and from familiar settings by a combination of factors, still manage to find strength and draw warmth from each other as they struggle to realise their different dreams. This is compelling, celebratory storytelling in which the lives of Black people past, present and future are given an evocative voice that mirrors the diversity of Black cultures and experiences.

The play is the culmination of a two years collaborative performance research project on the histories of Black people in Northamptonshire. The project is a joint venture funded by the University of Northampton Widening Participation Office and the Northampton Black History Association. It is led by two performance practitioners and drama lecturers, Dr Victor Ukaegbu and Dr Jumai Ewu and involves students of the University of Northampton, community and youth groups and performance artists working in and around Northampton.

Current Plans for performances and tours

The project leaders will be applying to Arts Council England for additional funds to execute the project to a very good standard and for future performances.

Dr Victor Ukaegbu
Dr Jumai Ewu
School of the Arts
University of Northampton

Community Outreach

BLACK OR WHITE Who Cares... It's Just a Colour

A performance celebrating 100 years of diversity in Northamptonshire comes to Cripps Hall, Northampton School for Boys on **Saturday 1 July 2006**.

NBHP in partnership with Northampton Town Football Club have been working with students from two Northampton secondary schools (Unity College and Kingsthorpe Community College). The resultant Race 2 Score project combines football, Black history to explore issues of racism, prejudice and identity and has spanned an academic year resulting in a performance at the end of the third term. The young people have participated in a range of activities including; football coaching, drama and dance workshops, video training, trips to heritage organisations and many more. The performance has been created by the students and has a very local flavour. It spans 100 years of Northampton local history and tells the stories of Walter Tull, Precious McKenzie and heavyweight boxer Larry Gains among others.

Venue: Cripps Hall, Northampton School for Boys, Billing Road, Northampton

Time: 7:30pm **Cost:** £3.00 (£1.50 concessions)

For further information and / or to book tickets contact:

Nikki Taylor on 01604 590 967 or

email research@northants-black-history.org.uk

English Heritage reaches Out!

English Heritage (EH) aims to reach out to new and existing audiences and help everyone enjoy and participate in their historic environment through education, events and outreach programmes.

As part of the forthcoming 200th anniversary since the 1807 Abolition Act leading to the ending of the slave trade in the British Empire, the EH Outreach team are looking for individuals and / or groups who would like to partner them with projects inspired by this bicentenary. Projects could be related to any issues around slavery or the abolition and can take a variety of forms - including arts projects which could include creating an exhibition, a book, a performance or a trail. The form and content of the project would be decided by the participants in discussions with Norma Pearson, the Outreach officer for the East Midlands but could include workshops, visits to national sites of interest, anything that is inspired by the 2007 anniversary.

Projects can be started in 2006 but must be completed in 2007. (continued on page 6)

Community Outreach continued

The EH Outreach team are particularly interested in working with individuals and / or groups who do not normally engage with heritage.

This could be your chance to bring your idea into life. If you have an idea for a project or concept and would like to work in partnership with English Heritage please contact Norma Pearson, for an informal discussion on 07990 787 906 or email norma.pearson@english-heritage.org.uk . Please submit your ideas by week ending **4 August 2006**.



Murphy Brown introduces... The Council for Ethnic Minority Communities (CEMC) is a specialist Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) infrastructure support organisation, working with groups across Northamptonshire.

As an infrastructure support organisation, we have a completely different function to that of frontline groups who deliver services to the community. CEMC sees itself as underpinning BME organisations that are making the real changes in terms of community development, community cohesion and supporting mainstream organisations and agencies as they fulfil their objectives.

Frontline organisations, in one way or another, deliver services that complement the aims and objectives of local authorities and grant making trusts. At some point, these frontline organisations will require support to help in their service delivery. The organisation may require capacity building to maintain, sustain and strengthen their work. This might include help with resources, manpower, finance/grant funding, assets, partnership working, sharing of resources and facilities, knowledge, skills and ideas. Frontline organisations need to be freed up to do what they do best and that is to deliver the services that they have been set up to deliver.

I am pleased to be working in partnership with the Northamptonshire Black History Association. An organisation that has worked at the frontline of delivery and has raised the profile of Northamptonshire at national level (and probably internationally).

I would like to wish the Northamptonshire Black History Association team further success on top of what they have already achieved, and extend my support to this project.

NOTE: NBHA thanks CEMC for recent support in obtaining extra IT equipment.

Future Plans

Black History Book

Plans are underway for the Northamptonshire Black History Association to produce a general history book aimed at introducing a wide range of readers to Northamptonshire Black History.

The book will give coverage to aspects of history where we have good local evidence, largely gained from NBHP research and oral history, but it will also briefly 'set the scene' in terms of national and world history. It is proposed that there will be approximately nine thematic / chronological chapters with around three or four more general thematic chapters on different aspects of local life in the 19th and 20th centuries. Proposed chapters include:

Peter the Saracen: in the beginning...
Northamptonshire and the East India Company
Black Servants and Slaves in Northamptonshire
The Anti-Slavery Movement
The Boot and Shoe Industry and the World
Two World Wars
Local Black History (including: Sport, Music, Public Services)
Settlers from East Africa and the Indian Sub-Continent

We are aiming for a publication date of **November 2007** and greatly welcome contributions from individuals and groups who have experiences to share or who would be interested in getting involved in writing a chapter. There will be a set of editorial guidelines and advice to assist authors who may choose to work in pairs or groups, if preferred. We would like to encourage first time authors to be involved and will be making mentor support available if required.

Please get in touch with us if you would be interested in contributing to the book or would like more information.

Phone: 01604 590967, or email: admin@northants-black-history.org.uk



NBHA Website officially launched

This event was hosted at Northampton Central Library on 30 March 2006 when attendees had the opportunity to become familiar with the various features of the completed website. You can visit the site at www.northants-black-history.org.uk

1 July - Race 2 Score Black History Performance, Cripps Theatre, Northampton

7 July - 10.00am - 2.00pm Parkinson's Disease Society Information Day, The Pravasi Mandal Centre, 65 Elsdon Road, Wellingborough. Admission and refreshments are free.

Contact Vina Shah on 0116 241 8012. For local branch information please contact Pauleen Parriss on 01933 225438

8 July - Local History Day School, Lower Mounts, Northampton, organised through the NBHA / University of Northampton Partnership

Northamptonshire Black History Association

Annual General Meeting

Thursday 13 July 2006 at 7.00pm

Doddridge Centre, 109 St James Road, Northampton

Refreshments will be available from 6.30pm. The AGM will be followed by a short performance by members of the Race 2 Score Black History drama project.

Where can you find us?

Northamptonshire Black History Association is based at

Doddridge Centre, 109 St James Road, Northampton NN5 5LD

Phone: 01604 590967

Email: admin@northants-black-history.org.uk

Please contact us at this address for further information on all NBHA's plans and activities, and please come and join in!
