



# OBV NEWS

ISSUE 3 SUMMER 2008

**OPERATION BLACK VOTE THE HOME OF BLACK POLITICS**



# WHO ARE THEY?

Find out... you could be one of 'them'




**ADVICE FOR MAYOR JOHNSON**  
 "There are those who want to say 'told you so'"



**OBAMA: THE FIRST BLACK US PRESIDENT**  
 EXCLUSIVE!



**SUMMER FAITH FEST**  
 Mela mania and more

**THE OXBRIDGE 'PASSPORT': SHOULD BLACK STUDENTS APPLY?**

# The search for the UK's Barack Obama

Thursday July 17 at 1.30pm  
At The Barton Hill Settlement  
43 Ducie Road, Barton Hill, Bristol BS5 0AX

Operation Black Vote is holding a conference to discuss the political alienation of Black Minority Ethnic (BME) groups, particularly young people and to look at innovative ways of empowerment.

Key note speakers will include:

- Simon Woolley, OBV Director
- Dr. Marie-Annick Gournet, UWE



Tre Azam, The Apprentice star will give a keynote address on how to take control of your political destiny and be the change you want to see.

A panel discussion with leading experts and workshops from youth service providers Rite Direktshon, The DISC agency and others.

Refreshments and a free lunch will be served from 1pm.

This event will be valuable for people who work in youth service provision, young people who are interested in finding out more about empowerment services and people who are interested in finding out more about our Bristol Councillor Shadowing scheme.

**This event is free but we are restricted in the number of available seats so please RSVP [faz@obv.org.uk](mailto:faz@obv.org.uk) or call 020 8983 5474 by Tuesday July 15.**

Credit: Barack Obama by an agent from flickr. [http://www.flickr.com/photos/an\\_agent/400339277/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/an_agent/400339277/)



## Editor's Note

**Helpful advice:** Sadly, race was used as a weapon in May's mayoral elections, and with London growing in cultural diversity let us hope that differences are celebrated rather than used as a divisive political tool. Mayor Johnson has pledged to serve all sections of London's communities, but will he live up to his promises? He will be applauded for his appointment of Ray Lewis as Deputy Mayor, but there will be disappointment at the decision to remove the anti-racist message from the RISE festival. Running London will never be an easy job, so here to offer some helpful advice are Lord Victor Adebowale, Black farmer and Conservative parliamentary candidate Wilfred Emmanuel-Jones, and OBV's Ashok Viswanathan. Party Political Broadcast, page 9

**Trouble in Eden!** Why do we find it difficult to live harmoniously with one another? According to the Bible, the trouble between "Them and Us" started after the seventh day with theft, murder, lying and cover-ups. Was the first murder a jealous act to assert identity? Has anything changed today? Add race, culture, religion and greed and, on the one hand, we witness oppressive acts of violence committed to gain power and assert identity, and on the other the infliction of pain and disadvantage on those fighting for the freedom to express theirs. Farhad Dalal explores the identity crisis, page 22.

**One love:** The Obama love boat has docked. A large slice of Black Britain believes that Barack Obama will become the first Black US President. Among them Ade Sawyerr, who has an electoral premonition and already sees our man in office – and not just one term! Blackening the White House, page 17.

**Getting engaged!** OBV continues its work to engage and empower our communities. We are in partnership with Bristol and Liverpool City Councils to increase the number of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) councillors; with the Welsh Assembly and the Parole Board to improve BME membership; and teamed with the Electoral Commission, we will leave no stone unturned to raise political awareness via our 'Martin Luther King Day' campaign. OBV News, page 8.

Stay tuned  
Winsome-Grace Cornish ([winsome@obv.org.uk](mailto:winsome@obv.org.uk))



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"Our future is in our hands"  
Operation Black Vote is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee.  
**Registered in Cardiff number: 379770**  
Registered Office: 18 Victoria Park Square, London E2 9PB  
[www.obv.org.uk](http://www.obv.org.uk)



# Director's note



Identity is the big theme in this edition of OBV News. Although it is a complex subject, we are often compelled to ask, "who are we?" There is no one simple answer, as Farhad Dalal writes. (See 'Who are They' page 22). For example, depending on where I am or who I am talking to, I might describe myself as Black, Black British, Bajan, Caribbean, African, European, Londoner – or just Simon. This may seem confusing and contradictory, but all these descriptions are equally legitimate. One thing is for sure true identity cannot be imposed; unless you believe it, or feel it, it simply doesn't work.

The eminent scholar Farhad Dalal states – and many politicians would agree – that we should simply all be British, but until we address the gross inequalities perpetrated on the grounds of race, colour and religion, the unequal "them and us" will persist.

Effectively tackling race and religious inequality will ensure that we have the building blocks for a more cohesive and integrated society. We must learn that integration cannot be forced, but is rather something individuals choose for themselves. We should be comfortable with communities that choose to live separate lives as long as it is within the law. Once communities feel less threatened they are less likely to be over protective about their identities.

The persecution of many Muslims in the 'war on terror' does not make them feel more British. On the contrary, an identity under threat will partially retreat before reasserting itself with renewed – and sometimes dangerous – vigour. But a society at ease with itself and its kaleidoscope of cultures would allow individuals to coexist with their many identities and perhaps state that, "being a British citizen affords me the right to be who I want to be".

The above statement may sound a little Utopian, but perhaps it isn't. After all, a year ago who among us would seriously have envisaged that a Black man could become President?

Dreams can come true if we make them happen!

One last point, by the time this edition of the magazine arrives on your desk, OBV will be celebrating its 12th anniversary.

To mark this date, July 16, I would like to pay tribute to the UK's Barack Obama generation. This is a generation who are coming out of the shadows, confident in themselves and ready to lead and inspire a nation.

Simon Woolley - OBV Director

## JPs BREAK THE BARRIERS



Magistrate scheme seminar – London



As part of our Magistrates Shadowing Scheme OBV has been travelling across Britain with a series of awareness-raising seminars that have attracted hundreds interested in becoming JPs. (Justices of the Peace). The roadshow started in Birmingham back in November 2007, when 60 people interested in becoming JPs attended a learning day entitled 'A judiciary for all' organised by OBV and Birmingham Magistrates' Court. Many of those who attended said the under-representation of people from the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) community on the magistrates' benches was one of the key reasons for their interest. Anthony Tang, who is of Chinese origin, said he was not aware of any Chinese magistrates in the city and welcomed the chance to change that. Tang, head of equality and diversity in one of the city council's

departments, plans to apply to become a magistrate. He said: "The seminar was highly informative, especially the mock exercises. I intend to apply; my day-to-day work involves making decisions on equality and I see that the bench needs to be representative of all ethnicities."

Shasta Rashid, a member of the council's Black Workers Group, said: "I want to be a magistrate, and from what I've heard today there is a lack of Asian women coming forward. This is an opportunity for me to break those barriers and to overcome those statistics."

Court Centre Manager Stephen Abbott was full of enthusiasm for the event: "We are continually looking to increase magistrates to the bench particularly from the BME community. It's events like this that help find those suitable candidates."

One of the youngest seminar attendees was Birmingham City Council employee Tasmin Maher, 22. She said: "Today was really interesting and it answered all of my questions. I'm going to apply; I believe I can bring my experience to the role from my time working within the community."

Other seminars were held in Liverpool, Manchester and Cardiff. The OBV and Ministry of Justice Magistrates Shadowing Scheme roadshow returns in 2009 with more regional seminars.

## ME AND MY SHADOW



Right and below: Lib Dem and Labour shadows with their mentors

Liverpool City Council Chief Executive Colin Hilton was joined by the Mayor and councillors from the main political parties to welcome the launch of the Liverpool Councillor Shadowing Scheme at the end of May.

Following the success of the OBV Shadowing Schemes at Bristol City Council and the National Assembly for Wales, Liverpool signed up to the mentoring project to encourage local Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) people to take an interest in local government and consider standing for election as councillors. The scheme will encourage and nurture those who take part to become involved in civic life and party politics. They will help to raise awareness of the issues and concerns of their communities and



Liberal Shadow Nathalie Nicholas with her mentor Councillor Steve Radford

play a role in local social and economic development. Participants are required to join a political party and will become "ambassadors", encouraging others to follow their lead, and become active in OBV campaigns, including voter registration and citizenship empowerment to improve BME representation in national government and public life.

Shadow Nathalie Nicholas said: The scheme provides me with an opportunity to learn about the political system. My goal is to be able to make a positive change in the community."

Speaking at the launch, Councillor Anna Rothery, Liverpool's only BME councillor and a graduate of the OBV MP shadowing scheme, said: "I very much welcome this initiative. It is a sad indictment that I am the only Black representative out of 90 councillors, particularly when the BME community makes up over 8.2 percent of the population and we have one of the oldest Black communities in Europe."

Scheme mentor and Council leader Warren Bradley, said: "The council chamber is dominated by people who are largely from a similar background and culture and we are determined that this will change."



## GIVE WHISPER A SHOUT

Magistrates Scheme graduate Madge Saunders, author and self-publisher, has been congratulated on the publication of *Echoes of a Whisper*. The paperback showcases over 140 poems written in both verse and prose. Madge explains: "*Echoes of a Whisper* is a work of reflection and spiritual growth which offers readers a wide range of social, cultural, emotional and spiritual issues upon which to ponder.

"It incorporates both sacred and secular pieces, with poems written in Jamaican patois and English. "Anyone – all ages, all ethnic groups – can dip in and find a poem that will touch them in some way".

**Echoes of a Whisper:**  
ISBN 978-0-9533448-1-9. £10 plus p&p. Phone 07779140064 or email holy\_trinity@ntlworld.com



Madge Saunders

# ASSEMBLY SCHEME IS A HIT

The 2008 OBV and Welsh Assembly Member (AM) Shadowing Scheme drew to a close with a graduation ceremony in Cardiff last month. The project achieved early success by winning the prestigious Channel 4/Hansard Society political award. Scheme participants each shadowed an AM from one of the four main parties for six months. Mentors included former Welsh Secretary at Westminster Alun Michael and Matthew Lane, Director of the Welsh Conservative Party and Tory leader in the Assembly. Participants learned about how the Assembly works, and two training days examined the route to elected office and the role of the media in politics. Scheme participant Mari Rees has already been selected as prospective parliamentary candidate for Labour in Preseli, Pembrokeshire.

in politics from a very young age. I did a politics degree and gained my Master's [degree] from Cardiff University. I hope that I will be able to become the first female Asian Assembly Member and represent the interests of BME [Black and Minority Ethnic] communities across Wales. "There is a lot of cynicism about politics amongst people my age and I want to encourage young



AM Shadows discuss the route ahead at the scheme's training day



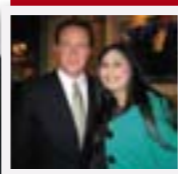
Simon Woolley, Abdool Khodabocus and Mari Rees accept the 2008 Channel 4/Hansard Society political award

Shazia Awan, who was paired with Angela Burns AM, is the much-acclaimed rising star of the Welsh Conservative Party. Shazia commented in her OBV website diary: "I'm lucky enough to have been selected from hundreds of people to get a taste of Assembly life. My family background is East African Asian and I have always had a deep-rooted interest

people to get involved and help them realise the importance of facilitating change through becoming involved in the political system. "I would like to contribute to altering the face of the Welsh Assembly to represent people from all communities and reflect the rich and diverse nature of the different communities in Wales."



Below: Shazia Awan and David Cameron



## Shazia Rising

Welsh Assembly Shadow Shazia Awan has set her sights on Westminster and is steadily moving towards her goal.

Shazia has already been appointed Chairman of the Conservative Muslim Women's Forum by Lord Sheikh, Chairman of the Conservative Ethnic Diversity Council. She has also chaired her first meeting in the House of Lords with guest speaker Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, journalist and commentator.

Earlier this year, Shazia became the first Asian woman to address the Welsh Conservative party conference. And her views were aired to a nationwide audience when she was invited to appear on the BBC's popular *Politics Show*.

She has previously been involved in the South Wales Youth Parliament and is a member of the Welsh Conservative Youth Panel.

Shazia says: "I have been a supporter of the party for a long time and feel that so many of my own values, such as the importance of family and entrepreneurship, the values which I can recognise in the party.

"I've met [party leader] David Cameron a few times and recently went on the campaign trail with him.

"It was great to see how well he was received by the public and I feel that this, combined with Boris's election as Mayor of London, really show how the tide has changed in our favour".

She adds: "I am really lucky to find myself surrounded by incredibly supportive people in the party such as Matt Lane, our party director, Nick Bourne, our party leader in the National Assembly, and Cheryl Gillan MP and Shadow Secretary of State for Wales.

"She is a strong, savvy and inspirational woman and has been a great role model for me and continues to be an invaluable mentor who I have a tremendous amount of respect for."



Parole Board Chief Executive Christine Glenn

# PAROLE ON BOARD

Parole Board reviews determine whether prisoners are released back into society or must remain in jail – last year alone over 25,000 cases were appraised.

The cases are reviewed by panels of up to three members who either undertake "paper reviews" at Parole Board offices or, more typically, carry out oral hearings in jails at which the prisoner is present. Paper reviews consider either the recall of a prisoner or whether to release them on licence. Oral hearings normally consider the release or recall of life-sentence and high-risk prisoners.

Parole Board Panel members include members of the judiciary, psychologists and psychiatrists. But sitting alongside them are independent members, who do not need specific qualifications but should be proficient in analysing and processing large amounts of information. Members receive a fee and are initially appointed to serve for a three-year period.


But among 170 Parole Board members, fewer than 6 percent are from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities.

In a bid to redress the imbalance, the Parole Board, in partnership with OBV, has devised a Civic Leadership Programme, which includes a free one-day 'Leading Justice' seminar.

Delegates will learn about the role of the Board and will also become "ambassadors", sharing their knowledge with others who have an interest in becoming a Board member.

Parole Board Chief Executive Christine Glenn says: "It is important that we raise awareness about the work of the Parole Board in the BME community in order to attract more applications so that membership can more accurately reflect the communities which it serves."

For further information about OBV and the Parole Board Civic Leadership Programme, email [clp@obv.org.uk](mailto:clp@obv.org.uk), phone 020-8983 5431 or visit [www.obv.org.uk](http://www.obv.org.uk)



**Outstanding Son:** Magistrates Shadowing Scheme mentor Dr Patrick Davies has been honoured as an outstanding son of the Ibibio nation. Dr Davies, a JP and Lecturer at Oxford University, was presented with the award at the first Ibibio Summit in Europe, a three-day Manchester event entitled 'Ibibio People and the Niger Delta Question'. The inauguration of the Manchester chapter of Mboho Mkparawa Ibibio also took place and its Education Endowment Fund was launched.

Honoured: Dr Patrick Davies

# Graduation hosted by Lord Chancellor



Improving diversity: Thames court graduate shadows with their mentor magistrates



Grande finale: mentor magistrate Linda Hacker JP, Lord Chancellor Jack Straw and graduate shadow Baljit Rihal

The OBV and Ministry of Justice Magistrates Shadowing Scheme 2007-08 came to a grand finale last month with a prestigious graduation ceremony. Hosted by Secretary of State for Justice and Lord Chancellor Jack Straw, the ceremony was in recognition of the efforts of scheme participants, including over 100 members of the Black and Minority Ethnic community, mentor magistrates and court officials, to improve diversity in the magistracy.

If you would like to receive information about the next Magistrates Shadowing Scheme, email [OBV@obv.org.uk](mailto:OBV@obv.org.uk) or phone 0208 983 5426.

## MLK STILL INSPIRES US ALL



While this year marks the 40th anniversary of the assassination of African-American civil rights leader Dr Martin Luther King (MLK), 2008 also marks the rise of Barack Obama, an African-American who has overcome the obstacles that have impeded the rise of so many Black political leaders in the US. Men like King and Obama are a source of inspiration for Black people all over the world. Many African-American Civil Rights leaders have paved the way in inspiring Black Minority Ethnic (BME) citizens in the UK to participate in the democratic process by dedicating their lives to the cause for an equal, representative society.

OBV believes that democracy can never fully address the concerns of African, Caribbean and Asian people while they are under-represented in places of power and influence: our aim is to redress the imbalance. This is why OBV, with support from the Electoral Commission, will be campaigning throughout the UK in the run-up to the next general election. We want to emulate the US tradition of celebrating MLK Day to galvanise British citizens to support his teachings and philosophy in all our institutions, including schools, colleges, local authorities, faith groups and government organisations.

During the second week of January 2009 we will be hosting an international conference to celebrate the birth of MLK, with speeches from political luminaries from the UK and beyond.

Every British, Commonwealth or Republic of Ireland citizen living in Great Britain is eligible to vote in British elections. All European Union citizens resident here are eligible to vote in European and local elections held in the UK. A revised register of electors is published on 1 December each year and voter registration forms are delivered to every household every autumn. The names of everyone eligible to vote must be entered on the

form as well as the names of any 16 or 17-year-olds who will be 18 by the time of the election. If you move or change your name, or your name has been excluded from the register, you can still get a vote. The register is updated every month from January to September. Get a form from the Electoral Registration Service, by phone, email or by calling in person. Forms can also be downloaded from your local council's website.



OBV will be running a series of workshops and talks to encourage BME communities to register to vote. If you would like OBV to visit your organisation, or you would like information on our road show, phone Faz Hakim on 020-8983-5474 or email faz@obv.org.uk

## BATTLE BUS ON TOUR

In the run up to the Mayoral and GLA elections OBV formed a coalition with London's Black groups and faith organisations to limit the scourge by the far-Right and encourage people to play a full and positive role in the elections. OBV wrote briefings for media, produced a ground breaking 'Banksy style' poster reminding people to register to vote and toured the capital up to Election Day in a battle bus urging a high turnout in key areas of inner and outer London.



# PARTY POLITICAL BROADCAST



*London's new Mayor faces some daunting challenges*  
How should he approach them – and what are his chances of success?

**Ashok Viswanathan:**  
*BORIS HAS JUST ONE CHANCE*



On Thursday 2 May, many Labour activists woke up feeling bruised, battered – and, in some cases, slightly hung over – from the drubbing their party had received in the local election polls the night before. Not long into the afternoon, they were made to suffer the indignity of failure all over again, this time in the results for the London mayoral election. In one of the many peculiarities of our democratic system, the votes cast for the London mayoral and Greater London Authority elections were counted a full 24 hours after the local elections although voters went to the polls on the same day. There is no doubt that Number Ten would have preferred the results to come in on the same day rather than suffering a whole weekend of negative headlines.

London was without doubt the biggest election blow of all, not only because of its status as capital city, but also as host city for the 2012 Olympics. In addition, London had been the jewel in the Labour crown for

over two generations and Mayor Ken had bolstered his leadership credentials during one of his finest moments - the “we shall not be moved” speech after the 7 July bombings. To top it all, some of the media and several Labour politicians did not believe that it would fall to a Tory. So how did this sorry tale come about?

In 2000, Ken Livingstone won office as an independent candidate against the might of New Labour, but was re-elected in 2004 as a reconstituted Labour candidate. By the start of this year, many feared that, having originally been elected as the “anti-politician”, after eight years in office and having acquired a party-political identity he had little to offer when put alongside the free-talking, right-wing Boris. And while Ken was the champion of the Left and showed leadership in a number of areas - congestion, defence of asylum seekers and making anti-racism part of the mainstream agenda - this earned him lifelong enemies in politics and the media.

And throughout the campaign, the long shadow of the Evening Standard and its anti-Ken vendetta led to several resignations from his team and a slow drip of negative publicity leading right up to election day. By the time the real battle started, the Labour campaign had already been knocked for six while Boris was just beginning to fire on all cylinders. Boris and the Tories, while not achieving a landslide win, out-manoeuvred Ken and Labour, snatching up the vote in the suburbs where voters felt that Ken’s policies were directed against them personally.

Boris lacks a natural affinity with Black people, but since his win he has been learning quickly. In the first fortnight, he made key Black and Minority Ethnic appointments to his team, including Munir Mirza and the widely respected Ray Lewis. Boris has opted to continue to support the Rise festival, although he has watered down its anti-racist message. He has made his core policy combating crime, especially anti-social behaviour and knife crime. And although he may not like it, he will have to continue many of the policies that made Ken a strong advocate for the Black communities. These include the defence of migration (the lifeblood of London), support for Black arts, and a close working relationship with the Black voluntary sector.

Many suburbanites came out to vote for the first time in 2008, angry at what they perceived as Ken’s class war; many Black voters stayed at home because they did not believe Ken could lose the election. They may not stay at home in four years’ time, and Boris may not get another chance unless he earns the trust of London’s Black communities.

*Ashok Viswanathan is Assistant Director, OBV.*



**Victor Adebowale:**  
*CHANGE MUST HAVE PURPOSE*

It goes without saying that Boris Johnson has a tough job on his hands. Not only does he have to run London, he is also the embodiment of the ‘new’ Conservatives and he is carrying the flag with the lovely green tree. It also has on it (much harder to read!), “We aren’t the nasty party any more. Honest”. In running London he has to demonstrate that he and the Conservatives are capable of adding value to the lives of everyone in one of the world’s most diverse cities

I can hazard a guess that inner city Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups may not have been his biggest supporters. But we weren’t exactly spoiled for choice and we would have to have had strong stomachs to ignore the 500,000-a-day poster campaign run by the *Evening Standard* on Boris’s behalf.

All this aside, perhaps it was time for a change. People were fed up with the overpowering whiff of the right to rule emanating from Ken’s campaign. But what is the change it is time for? Surely it is not just a change of face or political party (it doesn’t matter who you vote for; the government always gets in). Perhaps Boris could set in place a series of changes that have a lasting effect on the lives of London’s BME communities.

**YOUNG PEOPLE:** not just young people and crime London’s demographics demand a strategy that respects the fact that London’s BME youth population is the fastest growing in the country. London needs a youth plan that addresses youth inclusion, not just youth exclusion. The Mayor

needs to lead an upward sweep of ambition for all our young people. But he must make it directly relevant to those young people who are affected most deeply by our failure to plan and engage with them.

**HOUSING:** the availability of affordable housing - credit crunch or not - is still a major challenge. Without housing for those in need, there is a danger of community breakdown and the creation of a two-tier city. The Mayor’s planning powers need to be fully engaged in the pursuit of affordable housing.

**POVERTY:** as someone who has lived and worked in London virtually all his working life, I have witnessed the increasing gap between rich and poor to the point where we are approaching near-Dickensian differences in access to health, safe communities, education, jobs and voice. London does not have to be a divided city. None of us can build walls high enough to avoid the effects of poverty. The Mayor has the privilege of acting for, and engaging with, all London, and through grappling with the questions of poverty the Mayor adds value to the lives of us all. Boris could start by demanding a better return on the public service investment on behalf of poorest in London, and he could engage the poor in a campaign for One London.

Lord Adebowale is a cross-benchmark peer and Chief Executive of Turning Point, the UK’s leading social care organisation. The views expressed are his personal view.

**THOSE OF US WHO ARE BLACK CONSERVATIVES MORE OFTEN THAN NOT FIND OURSELVES IN THE WILDERNESS, LOOKED UPON BY OUR BLACK COUSINS AS RACE TRAITORS**



**Wilfred Emmanuel-Jones:**  
*MANY BLACK LONDONERS WILL SAY ‘I TOLD YOU SO’*

Boris Johnson has had little time to ease himself into his new job because his detractors are waiting for him to prove himself wholly unsuitable for the role. Among those who want to say “I told you so” are significant numbers of Black Londoners.

During the mayoral race, Boris received a good deal of criticism from Black Londoners closely allied to the Left, suggesting that he was a racist who had no understanding of the plight of Black Londoners. The Left tried to convince Black people that voting for Johnson was akin to betraying their race.

They pointed to articles that Johnson had written several years ago in which he used the words “picanninies” and “water melon smiles” as proof of a racist mind. It wasn’t just the words he chose to use; the other vital ingredient that went into creating an explosive cocktail was the fact that Boris Johnson is a Tory.

Johnson’s enemies were hoping that this toxic mix would be enough to cause repulsion and contempt on the scale of the reaction to Enoch Powell’s notorious “rivers of blood” speech. Thankfully, this tactic didn’t work, but Boris felt so bruised by the racism allegations that one of his first actions as Mayor was the appointment of Ray Lewis, an inspirational Black community leader.

This was a good move, but the Conservative party knows that it has much to do to demonstrate to Black Londoners that the Conservative party is also a party for them.

Being Black and Tory still gets a double-take from many people because they find it difficult to put the two together. Those of us who are Black Conservatives more often than not find ourselves in the wilderness, looked upon by our Black cousins as race traitors.

Black Conservatives are few in number, but it is heartening to see that a lot more Black people are starting to take tentative steps towards the party. But one wrong move - Boris Johnson and the Conservative party showing insensitivity and a lack of understanding of the challenges of being Black in Britain - could send them back to the Left.

There are a number of young Black Conservatives who are excited by this new dawn and are keen to get involved, but there isn’t a mechanism to tap into this talent. If you compare this to the ‘Women to Win’ campaign, well funded and headed by some of the giants of the party, you have a sense that getting more women involved in the party is higher on its list of priorities.

With very few exceptions, Black people still find themselves on the fringes of opportunity, so Boris and the Conservative party need to demonstrate that they are relevant and have an important role to play. The best way to do this is to bring more Black people into the inner circle and, once there, allow them a voice. Without a voice, any Black appointments could be regarded as tokenism.

Black people are sick of being portrayed as victims and non-achievers. They are desperate for the many positive elements of being Black to be communicated rather than replaying the negative stereotypes. The best way to give hope to future generations of Black non-achievers is to give them role models who can demonstrate what is possible. The only way this is going to happen is if the gatekeepers of influence and power are prepared to share their stage with them.

*Wilfred Emmanuel-Jones is the prospective parliamentary candidate for the new constituency of Chippenham, and a Devon farmer. He is owner of The Black Farmer® food brand label.*



*Oxford and Cambridge Universities*

– Oxbridge, as they are collectively known – have an unrivalled international reputation for their teaching and research. But too often the opportunities they offer are perceived to be “off limits” for Black school leavers. Lisa Gregoire reports on attempts to widen access



Keith Vaz and Diane Abbott are both graduates of Cambridge University



# DEGREE

**“Like it or not, a degree from Oxford carries some clout.”**

These are the words of Dr Cheron Byfield, the founding director of the National Black Boys Can Association, an organisation that aims to boost the numbers of Black boys applying to study at Oxford and Cambridge. Byfield, who studied for her doctorate at Oxford in the '90s, set up the association in 2002 to provide practical educational support to young Black boys.

Since then, she and her colleagues have established links with the university, and last November Black Boys Can, together with the university, launched a four-year programme to help break down the barriers that have prevented so many capable Black pupils from applying to study there.

Professor Elizabeth Fallaize, university pro-vice chancellor and an avid supporter of the programme, believes that the future of Oxford depends on its ability to tap into the wealth of talent to be found in minority ethnic groups which have traditionally been absent from the ancient quadrangles of top colleges such as Christ Church and Magdalen.

Speaking at the launch of the programme, she said that Oxford's position as one of the world's leading academic institutions depended on it “finding the very best students, and not necessarily the students that have been the best taught”.

So how will this new-found enthusiasm to attract more pupils from the African-Caribbean community impact on the future face of British politics? Only time will tell, but the prospects for change look good – partly because the situation could not get much worse.

Although Britain is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the western world, its Parliament is still dominated by white, middle-class men. Of the 646 MPs, only 15 are from a Black and Minority Ethnic (BME)



Dr Cheron Byfield (right), is founder of the National Black Boys Can Association (above), which aims to boost the numbers of Black boys applying to study at Oxbridge



background, and only five have African or African-Caribbean antecedents. For the Commons to be representative of wider society, there need to be at least 13 Black MPs.

And the link between making it to the top in politics and your place of education could not be clearer. According to a 2005 survey by the Sutton Trust, which campaigns for educational opportunities for those from non-privileged backgrounds, some 27 percent of MPs are Oxbridge educated. At that date, nearly half of Conservative MPs had attended Oxford or Cambridge, and 23 per cent of Labour government ministers were alumni of one of the two universities.

These statistics show that the establishment is still very much a reality in Britain; an exclusive club made up of public school and Oxbridge-educated men (and a few women) who tend to recruit in their own image. While the Sutton Trust survey showed that Labour MPs were far less likely to have been

**The prospects for change look good – partly because the situation could not get much worse**

# OF CHANGE

educated at Oxbridge than their Tory colleagues, the current Labour government is run by an educational elite.

Prime Minister Gordon Brown famously criticised Oxford when White Tyneside comprehensive school sixth-former Laura Spence was turned down for a place to study medicine despite being predicted (correctly, as it turned out) to achieve 4 grade 'A's at A-level (she subsequently won a scholarship to top US Ivy League university Harvard).

But his own government has no lessons to teach in reaching outside the educational establishment for its membership. David Miliband, Jacqui Smith, John Hutton, Ed Balls, Ruth Kelly, Geoff Hoon, Ed Miliband, Andy Burnham, James Purnell, Shaun Woodward, Yvette Cooper, Sir Mark Malloch-Brown and Paul Murphy are all Oxbridge alumni.

And ironically, among the few high-

**A deeply ingrained belief persists that the best way to “get on” in life is to acquire an Oxbridge “passport”**

profile BME MPs the story is the same. Keith Vaz, whose parents were from Goa and who came to Britain from Aden (now Yemen) and who now holds the post of Chair of the Commons' influential Home Affairs Select Committee, studied at Cambridge. Similarly, Labour backbencher Diane Abbott, the first Black woman MP and whose parents were Jamaican immigrants, is a graduate of the same university

Oxbridge, without doubt, occupies an extremely powerful place in Britain's social structure and in the class-ridden world of British politics. A deeply ingrained belief persists that the best way to “get on” in life is to acquire an Oxbridge “passport”.

So how can Black students get in on

the act? Both Oxford and Cambridge are still struggling to attract even a reasonable number of Black applicants. In 2006, Cambridge received only 191 applicants from Black pupils, accounting for just 2 per cent of its “home” applications – and Oxford fared little better.

Any number of theories have been put forward to explain why applications to Oxbridge from Black pupils remain so low. These range from pupils' fear that they will not “fit in” to the perception of the wider community that when Black people study at elite institutions they become “coconuts”. A lack of encouragement from state school teachers has also been blamed.

It would surely be foolish to expect a revolution any time soon, but it should be noted that the signs of the times show that progress is being made. The first Black president of Oxford's Student

Union (SU) was elected last year. In a fierce battle that makes the Obama-Clinton rivalry seem mild, 21-year-old philosophy, politics and economics student Lewis Iwu thrashed his main rival by a stag-

gering 393 votes to secure a notable victory.

He acknowledges that being SU president sits well on his CV – one of his predecessors is the son of current Lord Chancellor Jack Straw – and could pave the way for a successful career in politics. After all, a relatively unknown student called Barack Obama held student office when he became the first Black president of the *Harvard Law Review* in 1990.



Lewis Iwu, 21, was the first Black president of Oxford's Student Union when he was elected last year.

And look what happened to him! “Of course people draw parallels between the fact that I'm president at college and therefore could be Prime Minister,” says Iwu. “But I'm not thinking about that just yet.

“I can't rule out going into politics in the future, but I'd like to give back to the community that I was brought up in, whether that's through doing *pro bono* [‘for the public good’ – ie, free] work or if it's through politics.”

While the university cannot take credit for Iwu's humility, it may at some point in the future be able to point to its pivotal role in producing yet another political leader. Because, as a wise woman once said, “like it or not, but a degree from Oxford carries some clout”. ✕



Cabinet ministers Ed Balls and Jacqui Smith both went to Oxford



**1 Have your say**

To celebrate this year's People and Politics Day, Labour MP Dawn Butler has launched a new online national consultation, the "mylifemysay" survey, to give young people a chance to voice their concerns about the future. Butler, who is Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Youth Affairs, hopes to use the survey findings to encourage a debate in Parliament and formulate new legislation.

"In media and politics today, people pay lip service to young people and their needs without really listening," said Butler. "Labour wants to show that it doesn't just talk about young people, it listens to them."

For further information, visit [www.mylifemysay.co.uk](http://www.mylifemysay.co.uk)



Picture by Colin Patterson

**2 FUNDS BOOST FOR FATIMA**

The Fatima Women's Association in Oldham has received National Lottery funding of almost £10,000 to help meet the needs of women in the area. The charity was set up in 1991 by local Pakistani women who were concerned about the lack of facilities for minority-ethnic women. The association provides and assists in the provision of training, educational courses, and recreation and leisure activities.



**3 Jah Wobble and the Pagoda Chinese Youth Orchestra**

The Liverpool Culture Company, which is delivering the city's cultural programme during its year as European Capital of Culture, has invited the internationally acclaimed musician Jah Wobble, who has worked with artists such as Bjork and Massive Attack, to collaborate with the Pagoda Chinese Youth Orchestra for a one-off event in Liverpool in July. The project aims to raise awareness of the Chinese community in the city and promote Chinese music to a wider audience. The Pagoda Chinese Youth Orchestra fundraises for various causes and has held three events for the victims of the Sichuan earthquake, which raised nearly £10,000. For further information, visit [www.liverpool08.com](http://www.liverpool08.com)

**4 COUNCILLORS: WHY 18% WON'T DO**

An X-Factor-style search for the capital's future councillors has been launched in an effort to boost the number of candidates from diverse backgrounds. London Councils' Project 2010 will campaign to make the profile of London's councillors more reflective of wider society by generating interest in the role among young people in their twenties and thirties, young mothers and people from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities. Only 18 percent of current councillors are from a BME background although BME people make up 40 percent of London's population. London Councils Chair Councillor Merrick Cockell said: "It is fundamental to the success of local government that the public perceive their councils as something they can be part of and influence, rather than something that just exerts power over them. By inspiring new and talented people from all walks of life, religions, gender and ethnic groups to stand for council we hope to invigorate local democracy with a new fervour." The campaign will run up to the 2010 elections.

[www.bacouncillor.org.uk](http://www.bacouncillor.org.uk)

- Keen cyclist
- Solicitor
- Housing campaigner
- Local councillor



London's local councillors come from all walks of life. Ordinary people doing an extraordinary job. To find out more about how to become a councillor visit [bacouncillor.org.uk](http://bacouncillor.org.uk). Telephone enquiries 020 7934 9906.

[www.bacouncillor.org.uk](http://www.bacouncillor.org.uk)

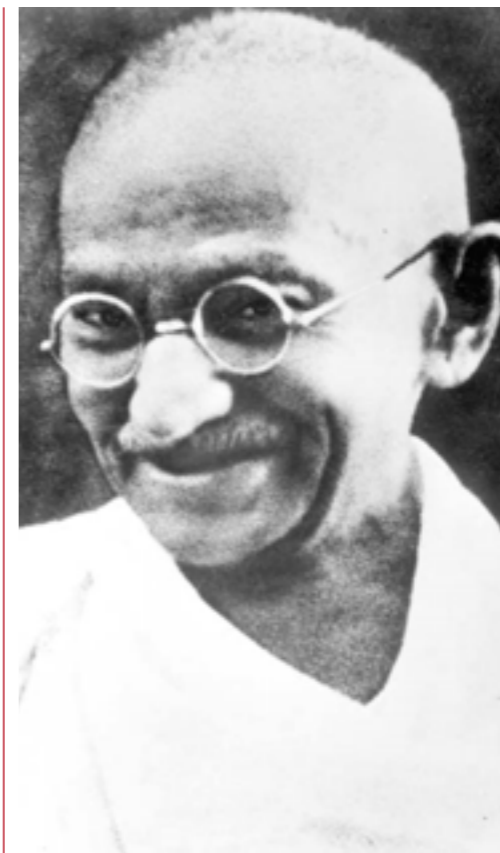


**5 Speak up for migrant workers**

A project to improve the language skills of migrant workers, English@Work in Devon, will ensure that those employed in the county have safe working conditions and are able to communicate in basic English. The project is funded by Devon Renaissance, the Learning Skills Council and the European Social Fund and is being delivered by Productive Skills for Devon. Devon Renaissance senior project development officer Simon Mallet says the initiative has a big contribution to make: "Migrant workers are playing an increasingly important role in the region's workforce and make a substantial contribution to the economy. It is therefore vital that we utilise their skills by ensuring that language barriers are overcome." The project's launch comes as the Government-appointed Commission on Integration and Cohesion proposed to make employers pay for language lessons for migrant workers. For further information, contact John Willis or Wendy Head on 01647 441050 or email [skills4life.admin@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:skills4life.admin@tiscali.co.uk).

**6 MUSLIM CONCERNS HEARD**

Westminster Council has pledged to listen to the concerns of its Muslim residents following a survey of the needs of community organisations in the borough. The evaluation was part of the council's participation in the government-backed Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE) pathfinder project. The council will use the survey results to support community leadership and tackle Islamophobia. Westminster Council Leader Sir Simon Milton explained: "Through this research, we are able to better understand each other and work together to tackle extremism."



**7 Looking up to Gandhi** Plans by a faith charity to erect a statue of Indian nationalist spiritual and political leader Mahatma Gandhi in the Belgrave area of Leicester have been approved by the city council. The charity, Samanvaya Parivar, submitted plans for the bronze statue last year, but the proposal was opposed by some members of the community who felt that it would be more appropriate to commemorate a local figure. The council's decision to grant planning permission was greeted with delight by local MP Keith Vaz. The charity will donate £20,000 to pay for the 7ft statue that will stand on Belgrave Road in the heart of Leicester's Asian community. Samanvaya Parivar spokesman Jitendra Acharya believes the figure of Gandhi is an inspirational one: "We thought this was a very good way to express our appreciation and celebrate the multi-cultural community which exists in Leicester."



**8 Dalston £160m regeneration to include 500 homes** East London's Dalston is to get a massive £160 million boost through the regeneration of its town centre. The ambitious scheme will create more than 500 new homes and improve, and add to, local amenities. At the heart of the development is the construction of Dalston Square, the largest public space to be built in the area for over 100 years. It will house the entrance to the new London Overground station, Dalston Junction, which will open in 2010. Hackney Mayor Jules Pipe said: "This development will bring major investment to the local community, with the borough's first full link to the Tube network offering easier access to jobs across London and encouraging more investment into the area. The new homes, library, open space, shops and restaurants will boost the heart of Dalston."



**9 FAITH AND FUN**

A five-strong squad from Essex's Ilford AC-Athletics Club enjoyed the hospitality of the Sikh community when they took part in the inaugural SRM (Sikh Relay Marathon) in August last year. The extremely well-organised community event attracted 100 runners who formed 16 teams. It brought together skilled club athletes with young and old fun runners. They were men and women of a range of abilities and from a variety of backgrounds and faiths, and from all parts of the country, including the Midlands, Scotland, and west and east London. The relay race was held at Essex's Woodford Bridge, which is also the training route of one of Ilford's most celebrated runners, 97-year-old Fauja Singh. Fauja, the holder of 12 concurrent world age records, was there not just to add glamour to the day – he was a competitor, too. Ilford AC-Athletics Club club members Sukhbinder Jandu and Sulakhan Jandu



SRM competitor Ajit Singh, 78, took part in the Luxembourg marathon earlier this year

also took part in the race. The event raised £1,000 for the Borough of Redbridge Mayor's Victim Support Charity Appeal. This year, the SRM will be held on 24 August when it is hoped that 26 teams will compete on the tough training route used by Fauja Singh. You too can get fit and help to raise money for a good cause by taking part in the SRM. The day's theme, as always, is a peaceful world for all. Join the trailblazing marathon relay team – Sikhs in the City – comprising some of the world's oldest runners, including 97 year old Fauja Singh and Karnail Singh (both from Ilford), Ajit Singh (Huddersfield) and Amrik Singh (Glasgow). Gurbakhsh Singh (Gravesend) is likely to be joined by Buster (Basant Singh) Martin, the 101 year old who completed this year's 2008 London Marathon. The deadline for receipt of entry forms is 27 July.

*For further information, and to obtain an entry form, please contact Harmander Singh on 07958 946868 or email [harmanders@btinternet.com](mailto:harmanders@btinternet.com) or talk2us@sikhs.org.uk*



Carving out a business

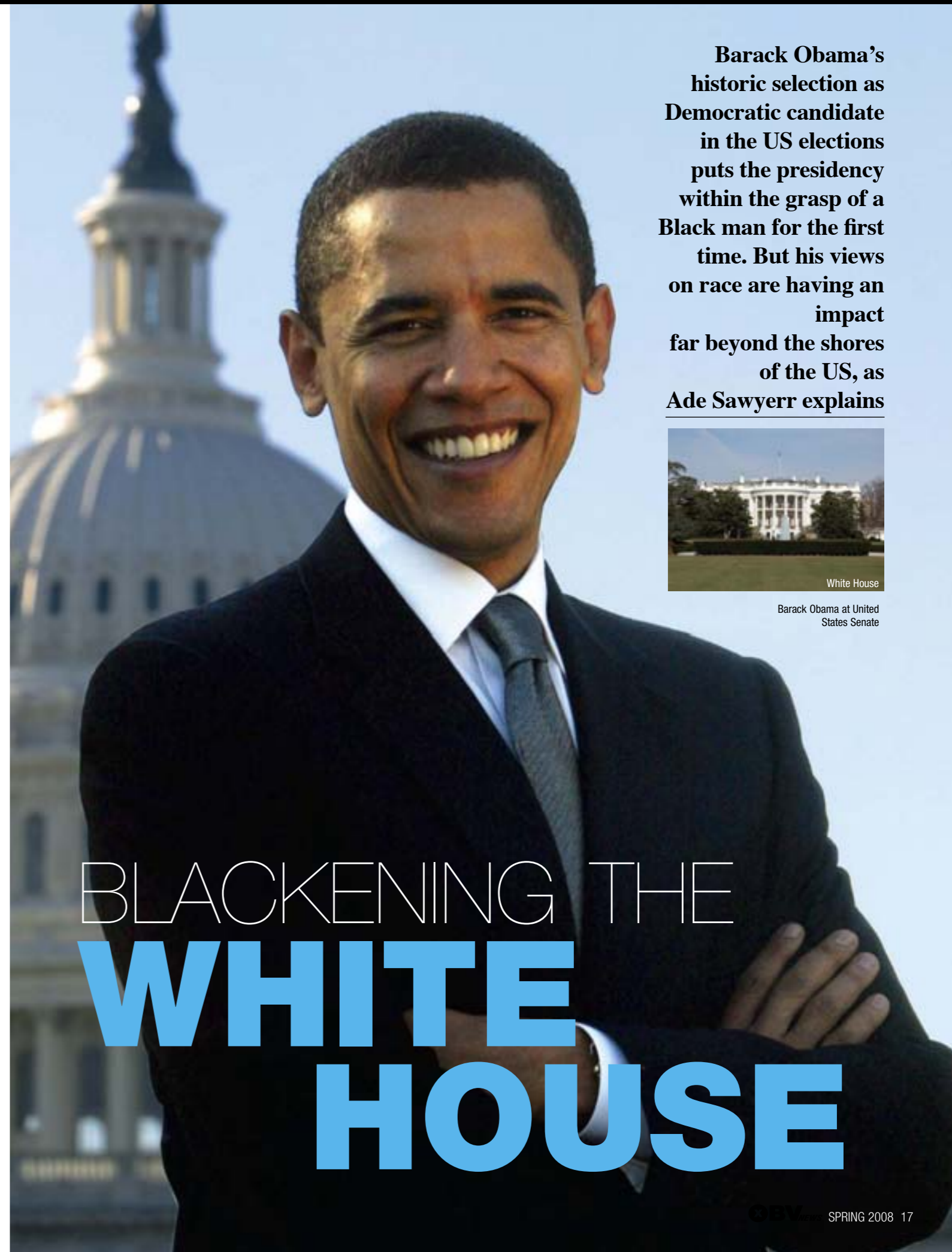
**10 Africa's business champions**

Since its formation in 1994, AFFORD (African Foundation for Development) has gained recognition as a pioneering African development think tank and charity. Its groundbreaking research, advocacy and policy development work have helped highlight diaspora issues and led to international recognition of its contribution. "We have been recognised in particular for our work on remittances, global resource circulation, circular migration and enterprise development," says AFFORD's Onyekachi

Wambu. AFFORD has had direct input into policy development at international bodies such as the UN Economic Commission for Africa, World Bank, International Organisation for Migration and the African Union. In Europe, it has worked with the EU, and in the UK with the Department for International Development. Over the next three years, AFFORD aims to develop a 1,000-strong African diaspora investor community that will actively support 1,000 enterprises in Africa and provide over £1 million in

funding. Its objective is to be recognised as the pre-eminent African diaspora organisation, providing business development support, and becoming the first-choice information source for investment opportunities in small and medium enterprises (SMEs). AFFORD is also determined to ensure that public debate in the West about Africa focuses on the link between poverty reduction and jobs rather than clichéd images of begging bowls. Onyekachi Wambu explains: "Sub-Saharan Africa needs 8 million new jobs annually for sustainable development. Most of these jobs will be created by SMEs, not large corporations, not governments and not NGOs [non-governmental organisations]. This is why AFFORD has piloted effective ways of harnessing African diaspora resources to create and sustain jobs in Africa." Its recent successes include mobilising over 70 diaspora professionals through its flagship SEEDA programme (Supporting Entrepreneurs

and Enterprise Development in Africa), in partnership with VSO, to invest over £200,000 to support over 600 small businesses in Sierra Leone and Ghana. This year, AFFORD has created two business centres in Sierra Leone in partnership with Comic Relief and the university. To date, these have trained 25 business coaches to provide practical support to hundreds of local businesses and entrepreneurs. This year, DFID is funding the creation of another seven centres. Onyekachi explains: "We are working with banks, micro-finance institutions and trade associations in African countries to help small entrepreneurs become more structured and efficient." But while AFFORD works to improve Africa's jobs market, the organisation also needs to generate at least £250,000 a year in non-grant income to sustain its invaluable work. *For more information on how you can support the work of AFFORD, visit [www.afford-uk.org](http://www.afford-uk.org)*



Barack Obama's historic selection as Democratic candidate in the US elections puts the presidency within the grasp of a Black man for the first time. But his views on race are having an impact far beyond the shores of the US, as Ade Sawyerr explains



Barack Obama at United States Senate

BLACKENING THE WHITE HOUSE

On January 20 2017, a new US president will be sworn in to replace Barack Obama, who will have completed two successful terms as elected leader of the most powerful country in the world.

President Obama's successor will be another Democrat because he will have used his presidency to deliver on health, education, jobs and the economy – the concerns of ordinary people all over America. The new president will probably be a woman, and like Obama, a mould-breaker.

Through his historic achievement in becoming Democratic nominee for the US presidential elections, Barack Obama has attained heights that were not achievable for Black men in America just 50 years ago. Then African Americans were, in the main, excluded from politics. They were allowed to vote – but their only option was to vote for white men.

Obama's predecessors, the African Americans who aspired to the highest office in America – Carol Moseley Braun, Al Sharpton, Alan Keyes, Lenora Fulani, Jesse Jackson, Shirley Chisholm, Eldridge Cleaver and Dick Gregory – were not perceived as mainstream or credible candidates. High-flying African American men and women such as Andrew Young, US ambassador to the UN, Secretary of Commerce Ron Brown and Secretaries of State Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice have been appointed to high office to do the bidding of their elected presidents.

Now the situation is very different. Obama leads the field as a new breed of mainstream African American politicians to assert themselves. Men like Governor Deval Patrick of Massachusetts, Adrian Fenty of Washington DC and Cory Booker of Newark have benefited from affirmative action, attended good mainstream universities and graduate schools and see no reason why they must be pigeon-holed as Black politicians unable to rise above issues of race. Like Obama, they reach out to the whole of America.

Many of the old type African American politician cut their teeth campaigning against racial injustices that in many ways left them being perceived as one-dimensional candidates, unable to appeal to a wider audience. The Obama

generation is different. It is a catalyst for change – and for the empowerment of people to demand and implement that change.

In championing this new brand of politics, Obama is helping to change the parameters of politics from adversarial issues of different interest groups to a consensus of the majority. This is refreshing not only for America, but for the world. So when Obama says that there is only one America, what we hear echoing around the world is an assertion that there is no Black world or white world, there is no capitalist or socialist world and there is no poor or rich world. There is only one world!

**THE OBAMA GENERATION IS DIFFERENT. IT IS A CATALYST FOR CHANGE – AND FOR EMPOWERMENT**



Jesse Jackson



Malcolm X

Is this idealism, or perhaps a fairy tale which we should know better than to believe? America needs a message of hope that is devoid of all the cynicism that has consumed it in the wake of the terrorist attacks of 9/11. America must refocus on fixing the ills of America before it can attempt to fix the ills of the world.

If Obama fixes the economy for all America, if Obama is able to fix health care and provide sound education and good jobs, he will also have fixed things for the millions of Black people in America who have waited so long for a messiah. It would mean that he had been true to his word in helping America on its journey towards the 'perfect union' that he spoke about in his groundbreaking speech on race in Philadelphia in March.

"I have asserted a firm conviction," he said, "a conviction rooted in my faith in God and my faith in the American people – that working together we can move beyond some of our old racial wounds, and that in fact we have no choice if we are to continue on the path of a more 'perfect union'."

In that speech he signalled the start of post-racial politics in America and extended the way in which race should be seen. Race, according to Obama, is no longer simply about guilty white people and victimised Black people. It is now about a coming-together to cure the "birth defect" to which Condoleezza Rice referred in her response to the Obama speech.

"Descendants of slaves did not get much of a head start," she said, "and I think you continue to see some of the effects of that. That particular birth defect makes it hard for us to confront it, hard for us to talk about it, and hard for us to realize that it has continuing relevance for who we are today."

It is not only America that needs this message of hope. Obama's message is needed by the whole world and he will be judged by how deftly he is able to build a consensus to deal with its trouble spots. We need a new approach to the problems of poverty, terrorism and the environment.

The earth needs "healing", as Obama puts it, and who better to do that than someone whose message is one of

looking forward into the future with hope and confidence.

Obama has built a movement that will also impact on the way that America looks at, and engages with, foreign policy.

America can lead the world, but it must not take the moral high ground, assert that America is better than other countries and unilaterally determine what is good for the world. This is the mindset that led to the ill-judged invasion of Iraq.

Obama will be embraced by the whole world if he shows that America is a friend to the whole of the world. It is by doing this that he will send a strong signal to all that America is prepared to come down from its lofty heights to discuss with other nations what is good for the whole world. Obama will represent principled leadership. Where coercion has resulted in rejection of American values, persuasion is likely to yield better results as we move towards the one-world concept that Obama embraces.

The Obama effect signals that a newer breed of politicians is needed in the UK, too. Politics in Britain is no longer about protest, campaigning or bargaining, it is not about healing now or "postponement". It is about Black people moving away from the margins and the fringes into the mainstream of politics, prepared to prove that they can bring a mainstream attitude to tackling issues that affect us all – educational underachievement, health inequalities, jobs, housing and crime – so that all can share in the wealth created in this country.

Those who did not live through the battles of Brixton, Toxteth, Handsworth, Moss Side and Broadwater Farm should not be shackled to viewing the future through the eyes of those who struggled so that they will reap the benefits of a better, more equal future for all. They cannot be held back if they start championing all causes; a determination to integrate will reap greater benefits for all.

Obama did not simply follow the route taken by Malcolm X, a protester and campaigner, and Martin Luther-King, a bargainer. He sought to fulfil the legacy of both these men by reshaping their message into one of relevance for these modern times

Obama will be an inspiration to all young people wherever they are white, Black, rich, poor, ideologue, pragmatist,



Condoleezza Rice

**OBAMA DID NOT SIMPLY FOLLOW THE ROUTE TAKEN BY MALCOLM X AND LUTHER-KING... HE HAS RESHAPED THEIR MESSAGE**

they will be able to achieve their dream of engaging in the struggle to make this country a better place. He is charging them to be confident enough to want to represent all. It is in this way that we can implement a new approach to resolving what at one time seemed to be the intractable problems of race inequality.

The effect of Obama on young African, Caribbean and Asian people of this country must not be underestimated. It will propel millions of Britons to think about politics, and that is certainly a good thing for citizenship in this country and the rest of the world.✘

*Ade Sawyerr is partner in Equinox Consulting, a management consultancy providing consultancy, training and research that focuses on strategies for Black and minority ethnic disadvantaged and socially excluded communities. He also comments on political, economic and social, and development issues. Visit [www.equinoxconsulting.net](http://www.equinoxconsulting.net) or email him at [ades@equinoxconsulting.net](mailto:ades@equinoxconsulting.net)*



Left: Bradford Mela and Tunbridge Wells Mela, Sunday 20 July 2008.

Below: Edinburgh Mela Festival, Monday 25 July - Sunday 31 August 2008



Left and below: Desi Masti group will perform at the Peepul Centre Leicester, August 2008 info@peepulcentre.com



## ASIAN DELIGHTS

Every year Asian culture, history and entertainment can be enjoyed at the festivals, exhibitions and fairs which take place around the country. Thousands of people from different Asian cultures come together to enjoy Melas and religious events. They provide the opportunity to celebrate Asian history and culture of all types. Bollywood, bhanga, fashion, food and faith delight and connect people from all communities who share in the festivities.

To find your nearest Mela, exhibition or faith gathering this summer visit: [www.asiancommunity.net/](http://www.asiancommunity.net/) [www.melauk.co.uk](http://www.melauk.co.uk) [www.peepul-centre.com](http://www.peepul-centre.com) / [www.faithintowerhamlets.com](http://www.faithintowerhamlets.com)

## DIWALI LIGHT

One of the biggest events of the Hindu calendar is Deepawali or Diwali, 'Festival of Lights'.

The five-day festival is marked by fireworks and candles, and gifts are exchanged among family and friends. This year, Diwali will be celebrated on 28 October with spectacular events nationwide. Last year, London Mayor Ken Livingstone hosted a Diwali Trafalgar Square Festival of Light and it is hoped that his successor, Boris Johnson, will choose to do the same this year. The Dasher Diwali Mela will take place in Platt Fields Park, Manchester.

Looking forward to the 2008 celebrations, OBV ambassador Sanjay Mistry says: "Diwali is a hugely important event that represents the victory of good over evil. It is a time of year that everyone can come together as it signifies the value of family, co-operation and mutual respect between peoples of differing faiths and backgrounds."



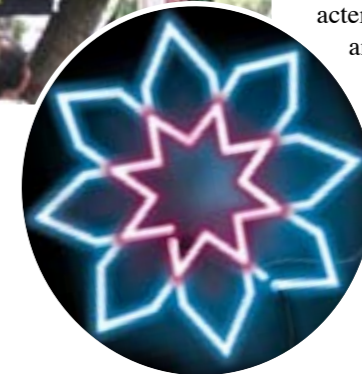
For more information about Diwali events visit: [www.diwalifestival.org/](http://www.diwalifestival.org/)

## ISLAM EXPO: A CELEBRATION OF MUSLIM FAITH AND CULTURE

London's Islam Expo provides an opportunity to explore, discuss and debate the peaceful, sophisticated and innovative face of Islam. While some seek to build walls of separation, Islam Expo provides a platform for dialogue and fosters mutual understanding between Muslims and the rest of British society.

By celebrating Islamic history, culture and civilisation, Expo seeks to provide visitors, both Muslim and those of other faiths and cultures, with an accurate portrayal of the Islamic faith and Muslims as citizens of the world. Ismail Patel, Islam Expo's Executive Director, says: "Islam Expo shows contemporary Muslims and non-Muslims how people of other religions have lived and prospered under Islam."

**Islam Expo takes place London's Olympia, 11-14 July 2008.**



Subject to moon sighting, Ramadan, the next big event of the Muslim calendar, will take place from 31 August to 2 September.

Muslims believe that during the month of Ramadan, Allah revealed the first verses of the *Qur'an*, the holy book of Islam, to the Prophet Muhammad. The focus of Ramadan is self-sacrifice and devotion to Allah (God), and more than a billion Muslims around the world mark the month of Ramadan by prayer, fasting and charity.

Rafiq Maricar, OBV's IT Manager, explains: "The purpose of the fast is to learn self-discipline, to build good characteristics including patience, endurance, generosity and kindness, and above all to become God-aware and God-fearing. The end of Ramadan fast is marked by Eid-ul-Fitr celebrations. Muslims start with prayers first thing in the morning, visit and greet family and friends and enjoy a festive feast – we simply enjoy the day."

## 300 YEARS OF GURUSHIP



Sikh founder Guru Nanak

The Celebration of Guruship (Gurgaddi) of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* (the Sikh holy book) is just one of the important markers of Sikhism. The celebration takes place on 20 October and marks the 300th year of ascension of Guruship. The tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, ended the chain of human Gurus when he endowed the spiritual throne to the Holy Granth Sahib.

Gurdwaras (temples) and Sikhs worldwide will celebrate this important milestone in their history with special events and festivities which are open to all.

This event is of great significance, and some 26 million Sikhs worldwide will attend the commemorations at the main Sikh Gurdwara in Amritsar, Punjab.

The *Guru Granth Sahib* is regarded as the guiding light for Sikhs, who honour his principles of peace, equality, unity and forgiveness.

To find out more about forthcoming Sikh celebrations visit: [www.sgpc.net](http://www.sgpc.net)



Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh holy book



# WHO ARE THEY?

Are “They” intrinsically different from “Us”?

Farhad Dalal reflects on concepts of belonging and apartness and how perceived differences in race, culture and ethnicity all too often end in violence

**A** New Zealand wine maker once described his first impressions of Britain and France. He said of the people he met on either side of the English Channel: “I don’t know why they fought so much with each other, because to me they look so similar; to me they are the same people.”

The vintner is not alone in voicing this taken-for-granted theory of human relations: that animosity and hatred between groups of people are due to, and caused by, the fundamental differences between the groups – specifically, differences in race, culture and ethnicity; these are thought to be

the root causes of wars and atrocities. There has been much evidence to support this view as, over the years, we have witnessed Hutus turning on Tutsis, Serbians decimating Bosnians, and Protestants fighting Catholics in the streets of Northern Ireland.

But we need to note two supposedly obvious characteristics of the human race: that people who are considered to be “the same” are not free of hatred and violence towards each other, and that people who are “the same” in some respects are also “different” in others. We can then see straight away that things are more complicated than first impressions suggest.

We tend to take the varieties of “them” as well as the “us” as natural categories existing as self-evident facts of nature. But consider this: not only are there an infinite number of similarities between any two peoples; there are also an infinite number of differences. And both are true at the same time. So it is always possible to say, truthfully, that X is different from Y, but also, equally truthfully, that X is the same as Y. This is a blindingly obvious observation, but being so obvious we are mostly blind to it. Thus we come to have a very real experience of sameness or difference *per se*. The experience appears to be a self-evident one, that “they” are intrinsically different from “us”.

The question is: how and why is it that at any given moment, you experience me as “different” (and so one of “them”), rather than similar (and so one of “us”)? Given that both are simultaneously true, what has become of our similarities?

A Black British person could legitimately claim to be “the same as” a White British person on any number of counts: profession, nationality, place of birth, gender, number of fingers, and so on. And if you experience me as similar, then what have you done with the differences? The same questions apply to me as well, of course.

This helps us see that “us” and “them” are not found but made. A particular difference comes to dominate the perceptual and experiential field and renders all else invisible and meaningless.

Then we have the situation in which it appears that Protestant is the opposite of Catholic, man the opposite of woman, Muslim the opposite of European, and so on. As is always the way with opposites, once they are generated all else that is between simply disappears, leaving no alternatives between the extremes: you are either with us or against us; you are one of “us” or one of “them”. I am often asked, do I feel myself to be British or Indian? I am invited to choose and inhabit an either/or universe; an invitation I refuse. There are many kinds of “us” that I legitimately and simultaneously lay claim to – many of which are in conflict with one other. It is also the case that I do not freely choose the kind of “us” I belong to. It does not matter that Jean belongs to the category of medical doctor if all that is seen by others is the colour of her skin, her gender or religion

**“US” AND “THEM” ARE NOT FOUND BUT MADE. A PARTICULAR DIFFERENCE COMES TO DOMINATE THE PERCEPTUAL AND EXPERIENTIAL FIELD AND RENDERS ALL ELSE INVISIBLE AND MEANINGLESS**



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[www.obv.org.uk/info/webfeedback.html](http://www.obv.org.uk/info/webfeedback.html)



(whether practising or not) and she is then treated on that basis.

Once “they” are made by some device (colour, orators drawing on ancient historical events, faith, class, whatever...), one then has to work hard to keep the “them” distinct from the “us”. There is a continual danger that they will slip through our barriers, and then – horror of horrors – one might come to experience one of “them” as one of “us”!

Myth, propaganda and gossip all serve in the work of the vilification of “them” in order to keep them a “them”. Sections of the media are particularly potent instruments in this respect.

Once it is the case that a “them” has been established, they fall outside the remit of the usual rules and ethical requirements applicable to the “us”. In this case, the “them” are readily rendered non-human and so devoid of any human rights, to be treated as animal – to be culled, harvested, or obliterated. Acts of horrific violence which one would find abhorrent if they occurred within the bounds of the “us” are no longer acts of shame but reasons for celebration when perpetrated on the “them”.

Differences and histories are not the causes of violence; they are evoked and stoked in order to make differentiations, in order to serve other ends. Ultimately, belonging groups are always interest groups.

The same issues are alive in every-day life whether professional or personal. Office politics are not as bloody as political and cultural outbreaks of violence, but may nevertheless be akin to the grander situations outlined above.

Office politics consist of who talks to whom, and to whom “we” do not talk. Another example is to be found in the cultural injunctions to marry within the tramlines of one’s faith, sect, caste

**DIFFERENCES AND HISTORIES ARE NOT THE CAUSES OF VIOLENCE; THEY ARE EVOKED AND STOKED IN ORDER TO MAKE DIFFERENTIATIONS... TO SERVE THEIR ENDS. BELONGING GROUPS ARE ALWAYS INTEREST GROUPS**

and colour. They, too, serve the same purpose of reinforcing the distinction between a designated “us” and the rest. For many, the fear is the dilution and erosion of their “culture”, but in my view it is a useful counter to the current trend towards preserving cultures in modern ghettos, each distinct from the other, each a “silo” of difference.

But having said that, assimilation is a two-way street – both sides need to shift and change if we are to find ways of living together. But the situation is not symmetrical. The marginalised are easily put in a double bind. First, they are effectively ghettoised, and then they are accused of being aloof and

standoffish. There is often a further dynamic, that when “they” try to participate in the mainstream and find themselves rebuffed by conscious or unconscious institutional dynamics, this can have the effect of throwing them back into the margins – and also radicalising them.

Think about it: if belonging groups are interest groups, then it is human nature to want to belong to groupings that are doing well. And it is when this is made impossible that one comes to think that one’s interests are going to be best served by belonging elsewhere.

In my view, hyphenated identities like Black-British arise out of just such a process. Although they are celebrated, they are badges of defeat. The migrants invited onto these shores in the 1950s wanted to be thought of as British – after all, they were coming to the mother country. But the closest they came was to be allowed into the ante-chamber called Black-British, and not the main enclosure called British.

The fear is that to allow them in will be to change the nature of the main chamber. That is true. But whether or not they are allowed into the main chamber, things are already changing. The only question is, what kinds of changes do we want and how best are we to achieve them? ✕

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October celebration

Black Heritage Today publisher Barbara Campbell explains how the widely celebrated Black History Month crossed the Atlantic from the US to the UK

Black History Month (BHM) is celebrated in Britain every October and has been a cultural high point of the year since the 1970s. Its aims are to promote knowledge of Black history and the Black experience, disseminate information on positive Black contributions to British society – while suggesting solutions for the not so positive – and to heighten confidence and awareness of Black people’s culture,

Over the years, many notable names have been instrumental in ensuring that our story was at last being told: Berry Edwards, and Eric and Jessica Huntley, stalwarts of Caribbean Week; Akyaaba Addai-Sebo, who raised the profile of Black Londoners when he worked at the former Greater London Council; and Alex Pascall’s Black Londoners programme.

However, in the US, an annual recognition of Black history has taken place for considerably longer. Founded in 1926, it was first known as Negro History Week and later as Black History Month.

Although Black people have been in America since colonial times, it was not until the 20th century that they gained a presence in history books. Black History Month emerged from academic study of the history of Black people in the US by historian and campaigner Dr Carter G. Woodson. He began an international debate that has carried on to this day.

Born to parents who were former slaves, Woodson spent his childhood working in coal mines and enrolled in high school at the age of 20. He graduated within two years and went on to get a PhD from Harvard. Woodson was disturbed to discover that history books largely ignored Black Americans, and when they did feature it was generally in ways that reflected their inferior social position.

Woodson decided to take on the challenge



of writing Black Americans into the nation’s history. He established the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (now the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History) in 1915, and a year later founded the Journal of Negro History.

In 1926, he launched Negro History Week to bring national attention to the contributions of Black people throughout American history. He chose the second week of February for Negro History Week because it marked the birthdays of two men who greatly influenced the Black American population, anti-slavery campaigner Frederick Douglass and President Abraham Lincoln. ✕



**HERITAGE HELLO**  
Everything you need to know about the UK’s Black History Month is available in the guide produced by Black Heritage Today Magazine. As well as details on events and venues, it includes features, interviews, historical information and an overview of who is making history today. Published by Barb Wire Enterprises, Black Heritage Today offers a comprehensive list of events – and all are invited to participate and celebrate. **For more information, to subscribe or to find out how to get individual copies or multiple copies for your organisation, email all3mags@yahoo.co.uk or phone 020-7207 2734.**

SWEET SUCCESS

Sugar Media’s magazine guide to Black History Month, now in its 11th year, provides a central focus for the nationwide celebration of Black and Minority Ethnic history, arts and culture. Listings for inclusion on the BHM website and for publication in the magazine are FREE.

Visit the Sugarmedia website at [www.sugarmedia.co.uk](http://www.sugarmedia.co.uk) Send your listings for the magazine and website to [listings@blackhistorymonthuk.co.uk](mailto:listings@blackhistorymonthuk.co.uk) ([www.blackhistorymonthuk.co.uk](http://www.blackhistorymonthuk.co.uk)). Phone Isabel/Paul on: 020-74077747).




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OBV will pay travel and lunch expenses. For further information please contact General Manager: Francine Fernandes on 0208 983 5426 or email your CV to: francine@obv.org.uk.



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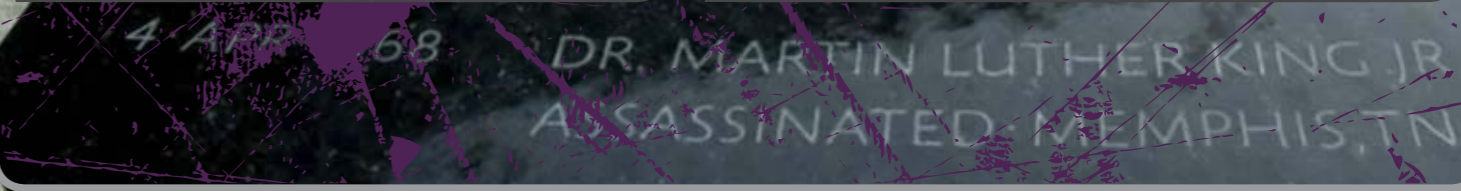
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# what's happening

2008 marks the 40th anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr (MLK), a prominent African-American civil rights leader. This year also marks the rise of Barack Obama, an African-American US presidential hopeful who has defied all the barriers that have eluded many African-Americans from reaching the pinnacles of US democratic institutions.

Leaders like MLK and Barack Obama are a source of inspiration for people throughout the world. We at Operation Black Vote believe that democracy can never fully address the concerns of minorities until this is sufficiently represented in public life. At the moment we are under-represented in places of power and influence. Our mission is to redress the imbalance. OBV will be campaigning actively throughout the UK preceding the next general election.



MLK was one of the pivotal leaders of the American civil rights movement. King was a Baptist minister, one of the few leadership roles available to Black men at the time.

He led the Montgomery Bus Boycott. His efforts led to the 1963 March on Washington, where King delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech. Here he raised public consciousness of the civil rights movement and established himself as one of the greatest orators in U.S. history. On the second week of January 09 we will be hosting an international conference to celebrate the birth of MLK.



this is martin luther king



In 1964, MLK became the youngest person to receive the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to end racial discrimination through civil disobedience and other non-violent means.

one man changed the world



## Apex Trust

Tackling crime and unemployment - together

The Apex Trust **JobCheck** helpline provides vital confidential advice and information about a range of issues that affect ex-offenders seeking employment. The helpline receives thousands of telephone calls and letters each year from ex-offenders, employment services, employers, universities and colleges requesting help and advice on ex-offender employment issues.

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# voter registration

Every British, Commonwealth or Republic of Ireland citizen living in Great Britain is eligible to vote in this country's elections. All other European Union citizens are eligible to vote in European Parliamentary and local elections held here.

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POLLING  
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Voter registration forms are delivered to every household in the country in the autumn each year, and a revised register of electors is published on 1 December.

Find out more and register at:

[www.aboutmyvote.co.uk](http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk)

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