

Lenny Henry talks to MOBO awards founder Kanya King; Young Vic Artistic Director Kwame Kwei-Armah on 'colour blind casting'; Nadine White's newspaper reporting of Coronavirus, the Sewell Report, Harry, Meghan & Oprah; Sound Special featuring Dane Baptiste, Marcus Ryder & Judi Lee-Headman; Exclusive Investigation into the Entertainment Unions by Riaz Meer & Jack Newsinger; Samir Jeraj on media reparations to communities of colour; plus cultural highlights from BFI Flare Festival & New Beacon Books

PRESENT OLOGY

**The Journal
of Media and
Diversity**

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REPRESENTOLOGY

The Journal of Media and Diversity

Editorial Mission Statement

Welcome to Representology, a journal dedicated to research and best-practice perspectives on how to make the media more representative of all sections of society.

A starting point for effective representation are the “protected characteristics” defined by the Equality Act 2010 including, but not limited to, race, gender, sexuality, and disability, as well as their intersections. We recognise that definitions of diversity and representation are dynamic and constantly evolving and our content will aim to reflect this.

Representology is a forum where academic researchers and media industry professionals can come together to pool expertise and experience. We seek to create a better understanding of the current barriers to media participation as well as examine and promote the most effective ways to overcome such barriers. We hope the journal will influence policy and practice in the media industry through a rigorous, evidence-based approach.

Our belief is that a more representative media workforce will enrich and improve media output, enabling media organisations to better serve their audiences, and encourage a more pluralistic and inclusive public discourse. This is vital for a healthy society and well-functioning democracy. We look forward to working with everyone who shares this vision.

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to Issue Three of *Representology - The Journal of Media and Diversity*. In this issue - the first of 2022 - we take a deep dive into structural discrepancies at the heart of the entertainment industry, with contributions from hugely influential names in comedy, music and theatre and in-depth research from leading academics making the case for profound reform.

In the spirit of starting new conversations, the journal has commissioned a groundbreaking essay on the viability of the press offering reparations to communities of colour in Britain, while we pass the mic to courageous outsiders making a big impact on mainstream coverage around issues of identity.

We’ve gathered experienced audio enthusiasts - those dedicated to breaking sound barriers - to offer insights into their industry’s developments, while, as ever, our culture pages make recommendations to readers to extensively explore media in all its diversity.

If you are interested in contributing, or wish to send your views and suggestions for future issues, please write to us: Representology@bcu.ac.uk

K Biswas
Editor

BLACK ORIGIN

Sir Lenny Henry talks to **Kanya King** the founder of the **MOBO (Music Of Black Origin) Awards**. The annual ceremony, established in 1996, has been at the forefront of efforts to improve representation and the recognition of Black talent in the music industry.



Lenny (LH):

Hi Kanya, we've known each other for years. Tell me, what led you to the media? Because what you do is pretty unique, and it's almost like you said, "The job that I want to do doesn't exist, so I'm going to invent it".

Kanya King (KK):

I grew up surrounded by creative people. I was very creative myself. I was living near the Tricycle Theatre [in North West London, renamed the Kiln Theatre in 2018]. I was into drama, TV, music, and I grew up surrounded by talented people and, one by one, I was seeing them getting frustrated, giving up on their dreams, getting into trouble with the police, because they could not access opportunities in a sector which was very much about who you knew. I became a parent at a young age, and I left school with no qualifications. All this meant, in a way, that

little was expected of me, right? I was expected to be a young, single parent, a person of colour, living on benefits, and I kind of refused to fit that stereotype. I thought, that's not going to be my life.

LH: So, how did you dig your way out of that, and then what led you to create the MOBOs?

KK: Most of the jobs or opportunities I've had in the creative industry sector, I've created myself. I was very fortunate in that I got an opportunity to work on The Chrystal Rose Show [a topical talk show, produced by Carlton TV, and first broadcast in 1993]. It was meant to be Britain's equivalent of Oprah, and I was part of the original team.

LH: How did you get the job on The Chrystal Rose Show?

KK: I bumped into Chrystal Rose on a film set, and she told me what she was planning to do, and I had some ideas, and she said, well, why don't you come on board and help out? When I first was working with Chrystal, I was just helping, right? She hadn't even got the commission from Carlton, so I was just helping out. We were doing whatever we could to support her vision and her dream, and then later on when Carlton commissioned, I had to formally apply for a job and I got turned down! Funnily enough, because Carlton felt Chrystal was a new talent, and needed more experienced people around her. But, you know what? I didn't give up, I kept on applying and applying and

applying, and eventually they thought: you know what? She's not going to give up - let's give her a try, and see what happens.

LH: So, if that is how you broke into television, how did you invent the MOBOs.

KK: AI felt there was a huge void, really, in the music industry's representation of popular music, and I felt like something needed to be done about it. There was so much phenomenal talent that I was surrounded by, who were just very frustrated.

And the next thing you need to know about me is that my father was from Ghana, West Africa. And I'd watch films like Zulu, and it was confusing for me, as a young person. It was confusing. It wasn't cool to be African at the time, and my father had a strong African accent. You know, there were no books in school about people like me. Princesses and heroines all had straight hair, they were all white, all of that. So, in my class at school, you weren't pretty or popular unless you were white.

And my older siblings had ended up in care and had been bullied. I had one sister with a lot of ill health, because she was bullied, and she didn't feel comfortable in her own skin.

Now, I know this seems like a slight detour from answering your question, but it all came together in that it made me want to create something that could be very visible and make people proud to be who they are.

I wanted to celebrate popular culture - Black culture. I wanted to celebrate being Black, being African.

LH: So, you really felt that award ceremonies could be a thing for promoting diversity and inclusion in the creative industries?

KK: Yes, I mean, I think ... definitely, award ceremonies ... they celebrate innovation, achievements and, I guess, they're a significant platform to allow people or talent to springboard off. I think, sometimes, the recognition you get from an awards ceremony, it can gain you esteem - whether it's in your sector, with your peers, amongst the public. How do you know what you're doing is working? You don't know what you don't know, right? And, sometimes, awards, they give you that validation. I've seen it with the MOBO Awards, where a lot of artists were going to give up, were just about to give up, because it's hard, it's tough. It's a tough industry, but when they got that MOBO Award recognition, it kind of gave them that drive and determination to not only keep going, but also to seek sponsorship, or funding from others.

Also, there's a lot of research out there, by the likes of McKinsey, and others, that shows you're less likely, if you are a person of colour, to have bosses who promote your work and help you navigate that organisation's politics, and so the validation that awards give to talent is kind of crucial.

LH: How important was the backing of broadcasters for the MOBOs, and do you think the broadcasters could have ever done something like the MOBOs without you?

KK: Visibility is very important, and it's that the broadcasters provide. You can't downplay that much-needed visibility. I think, in theory, ITV or Channel Four could have done it without somebody like me, but I think you never can underestimate the power of purpose and lived experiences, and I had a huge vision. I could see the additional benefits beyond the TV ratings, you know? And I was prepared to make all the sacrifices necessary, that a lot of other people would not have been prepared to make.

The first broadcaster we worked with was Carlton, as part of the ITV network, and they were doing a lot of research into their audiences at the time, and they realised that the diversity in London was changing, yet, they didn't have enough programmes that reflected that - I mean, it sounds familiar, right?

LH: So, Carlton realised they had a diversity problem, they commissioned the MOBOs, and it was all plain sailing from there?

KK: I remember sitting with the head of entertainment, and them saying: we've got good news and bad news for you. The good news is we're going to give you a TV slot, the bad news is we want you to put on a show in six weeks, and we've got almost no budget.

But, for me, it was not every day I would get a chance like that, so it wasn't a question of whether I was going to do it, it was: how was I going to make this happen? And my overwhelming desire to succeed eventually led me to remortgage my home and not tell my mum.

LH: You were so involved in the MOBOs, and setting them up, that you remortgaged your house!? That's extraordinary, Kenya. People don't do that. But you were so driven by it.

KK: Well, you know, Lenny, my Plan B was my Plan A, right?.

LH: You didn't have a Plan B.

KK: Exactly, it wasn't like: let me try, I'm dabbling here - I was going for it, right? When you put your own money into things, that sharpens your focus somewhat. Everything gets real. But the problem is not just money. While I think a lot of innovation comes from Black culture, the problem is that we often don't have the social capital, we don't have the networks, we don't have the support. I didn't have any business mentors in my family. I've never had a mentor. I've mentored myself, and been inspired.

So, when you don't have that, you just have to learn from your mistakes - you take the plunge, and you kind of get on with it, really.

LH: I'm really interested in your use of the word "Black" in the MOBOs. The Centre [Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity] recently did a report on the use of the word "urban" instead of "Black" [see Nina

Robinson's piece in Representology, Issue Two]. I suspect if you had listened to a few so-called "mentors", they would have advised you to change the name to the "Urban Music Awards".

KK: Well, we offended a lot of people by having Black in the name, you know? MOBO is only four letters, and we were a bit blatant, and our logo was very bold, if you know what I mean? So, we were like, yes, this is music of Black origin, right? And the idea for us, we just wanted to honour the past, and inspire the future, so to speak. And I think, you know, with regards to the term "urban", I think a marketing person has come up with the term, because when you have the word "Black", they think it offends, right?

LH: It doesn't offend me.

KK: No, well, they were trying to make it more marketable, because, unfortunately, being seen as Black has been seen as 'risky', and all the negative stereotypes attached with that.

. . . with regards to the term "urban", I think a marketing person has come up with the term, because when you have the word "Black", they think it offends, right?



LH: For me, “urban” is ghettoising, whereas it seems to me that the importance of Black music is clear to virtually everybody in the world. We are the mainstream.

KK: Absolutely, absolutely.

need to look beyond the diversity of their own workforce, which they need to improve, but also look at their suppliers. I would advise companies to just do an audit of your company’s suppliers - to work with more Black companies and

And I think one of the things that came out of 2020 - with the whole resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement - was the recognition that companies need to look beyond the diversity of their own workforce . . .

LH: Now, one of the purposes of Representology is for the rest of the industry to learn from people like you - your insights, experience and wisdom. So, if you could wave a magic wand over the people that govern us, what policy would you want executives to follow to increase diversity and inclusion in our industry?

KK: I mean, I think I’m starting to see a lot of organisations do it more, obviously, appoint a DEI [Diversity, equity and inclusion] manager, or a team whose sole focus is to increase diversity and inclusion. I think that sole focus, having those allies, makes all the difference, and making sure that whatever DEI commitments that are made are tangible, achievable and measurable. And I think one of the things that came out of 2020 - with the whole resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement - was the recognition that companies

suppliers, I think that’s really, really important.

LH: Annually? I think you’re right. If you open the door and look at your staff - if you’re the governor, and you look at your staff, and you see that there aren’t very many women, or there aren’t very many Black or Asian people, you’ve got work to do

KK: We know what matters gets measured, right? And we’ve seen where targets have been set before, but they’re put in a drawer and no one looks at it again. It is also the motivation behind something we’ve got called the MOBOLISE mission, and it’s basically having it front and centre of the platform, so people can include what it is they are doing with a due date, and be held accountable for it.

LH: So tell us about MOBOLISE

KK: So, MOBOLISE is a career networking platform that’s been built by Accenture and, basically, we’re getting ready to launch and roll that out. It’s jobs and opportunities with leading companies dedicated to improving racial equality - an exclusive tribe of like-minded people ready to support and do business with each other, expert advice and insight from a cross-section of leaders and allies. So, it’s a phenomenal platform. MOBOLISE is what it says on the tin - it’s about mobilising for growth. In many ways it is providing the mentoring and networking that I didn’t have. The idea with MOBOLISE is to grow that network of peers and mentors that will enrich their chosen career path. That’s the ‘connect’ part of the platform. We’ve also got to, basically, learn from those like Marcus [Ryder] and Lenny [Henry], the best tips that you have to get to where you are today - the inspirational stories, the power of inspiration is so crucial. We know visibility is important, and representation is key. MOBOLISE is kind of about that action, so that’s what we’re trying to do, because I understand how challenging it can be as a young person - feeling very different in an organisation, and not feeling like they’ve got the support to reach their full potential.

LH: Kanya, thank you so much for your insights today. And ending on looking to the future is a beautiful way to end. I am very interested in MOBOLISE, and I am sure the Centre would be too. Keep us in the loop and let’s do a follow up talk to see how you are getting on.

KK: Thank you so much, Lenny.

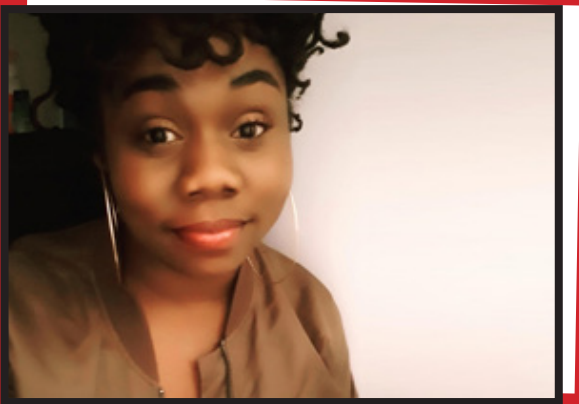
Kanya King is the founder of the MOBO Awards.

Representology takeaways

- Always continue to make connections within your chosen industry - persistence is key to getting in and getting on
- Be confident in using correct terminology - “Black” not “Urban”
- To help improve diversity, audit not only your own company, but those you do business with.



THE RACE AGENDA



Meghan Markle, the Sewell Report and stories from the pandemic dominated Nadine White's opening year as Race Correspondent at *The Independent*.

Three events helped to set the tone of my first year at The Independent as the first dedicated Race Correspondent in UK journalism: a famous television interview, the Covid-19 pandemic, and one of the most accursed government-backed pieces of literature to be published in modern history.

I'll start with the first.

On my first day, Harry and Meghan's now-famous interview with Oprah Winfrey aired on UK television, an interview in which they shared concerns that there was racism at the heart of the Royal Family, and it sent the world into a frenzy.

And, well, that gave me plenty to crack on with! I hit the ground running, speaking to various political figures, equalities' organisations, all and sundry, so as to journalise their thoughts on the matter across a string of news reports and features.

My coverage included calls for the Royal household to be brought into line with the Race Equality Act - from which it's always been exempt - and the Society of Editors debacle, which saw the industry body's chief deny the existence of systemic racism in the UK media, and then having to eat his words amidst a sensational, deserved backlash, before resigning from his post.

Conveniently overlooking the fact that Prince Andrew has been embroiled in a sex scandal since 2014, some commentators went as far as to describe the Sussexes' interview as the "greatest scandal since the Abdication".

Granted, though, it's the first scandal to hit the Royal family in which racism is at the core. It may be the first time that racism has been called out in the uppermost echelons of British society on international television. What a thing.

As such, this time last year, reporting on race was all underpinned with a sense of heightened importance and celebrity across all news platforms, in a way that I've never seen before.

There's an African proverb which says: "Until the lion learns how to write, every story will glorify the hunter".

I could relate to it, though, because I've always approached reporting on race - a grossly underreported matter - in this way, even if few others have.

The momentum around reporting on race has predictably died down across most of the press since then, though.

A few weeks after this interview, the Government-appointed Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities (CRED) published a highly-anticipated report - after almost a year of work and inexplicable delays - which concluded that institutional racism doesn't exist in Britain.

The Commission was established in 2020, in the wake of Black Lives Matter protests following the murder of George Floyd in the US at the hands of a white police officer, Derek Chauvin.

...and this was the best that Britain had to offer in response to its own problems around race. Imagine.

Interestingly, the government only sent previews of the report to a select group of

journalists prior to its publication. Guess who wasn't on the list, despite being the only national news correspondent in the country to specialise in race? I later learned from a Government spokesperson that this had been intentionally specified by the Commission.

CRED was headed by Tony Sewell, a long-time associate of the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, and involved a number of individuals who were described by Lord Simon Woolley as a "motley crew of racism deniers". It is also worth noting that every member of the Commission is on the same side of the political spectrum.

The backlash against the report was immense, I tell you: outraged members of the public slammed the probe as the insult that it was. Campaigners and charities were in uproar. Experts who were named as "stakeholders" pushed back against claims that they had provided official evidence. Even the United Nations had a go.

Downing Street's most senior Black advisor, Samuel Kasumu, resigned from his role following the report's publication - though his departure was perhaps related to the way that the Equalities Minister, Kemi Badenoch, targeted me on Twitter some weeks prior, for asking her a question that she didn't like as part of my research for a story.

The dangerous CRED report dismisses the claim by many people up and down the country, that the UK is institutionally racist as "idealism", insisting that it is "not borne out by the evidence". But this flies in the face of the lived experiences of many.

So, taking stock of this debacle and reporting on the fall-out reminded me of the importance of highlighting perspectives from within racialised communities and bearing witness to our realities.

There's an African proverb which says: "Until the lion learns how to write, every story will glorify the hunter". It effectively expresses the importance of those marginalised groups who face oppression telling their own stories, lest their truths be distorted and misrepresented.

The problem with the media is that the lions know how to write, but they're rarely granted access to newsrooms, and to journalists, in order to express their narratives through these platforms and on their own terms.

Hence, the diversity deficit which sees Black people, for example, account for just 0.2% of working journalists in this country, and Muslim reporters accounting for 0.4%, at a time when anti-Black racism and Islamophobia are as rife as ever. Let that sink in.

So, in undertaking my role as Race Correspondent, I remain mindful of the responsibility I have to speak to people who do not have the luxury of seeing themselves reflected in national discussions and on newsstands, outside of one-off events, such as the Sussexes' Oprah interview, the resurgence of the BLM movement and the release of that disgraceful Sewell report.

I approach my role by being extremely mindful of the fact that it's impossible to be everything to everyone, each and every time. But I do what I can in the good faith that I'm trying my hand at being a part of the change that I want to see: a playing field that's more balanced today than it was the day before.

For example, there are certain stories in which race is central, and on which I've been the only journalist to report, and this absolutely should not be the case. But it is what it is, and we are where we are.

With that said, there's more to the experiences of people within racialised communities than trauma. Don't get me wrong - the struggle is real, and if we don't keep those conversations going, then how can we hope for improvement?

However, it's also essential to make room for more reporting about joy, innovation, inspiration, aspiration, and even mediocrity, because those aspects of our stories also exist in all of its colours and tangibility.

Of course, the Covid-19 pandemic is disproportionately affecting Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, and it's never been more important to speak truth to power. That has certainly moulded my reporting and given it an elevated sense of purpose.

As the Race Correspondent, I feel a sense of duty to represent those on the fringes of society, who come from places like where I come from, who share my fatigue and alarm.

Sadly, I'm not sure that journalists who look like me have the luxury of comfortably navigating these white-dominated spaces, just for the hell of it. Not if you're cognisant of the state of affairs. Change is required, and, personally, I embarked on a journalism career with the sole intention of reporting around race and helping to engineer change.

There are plenty of stories to be told, and many voices to raise. One year in, and I'm more sure of that now than I've ever been before.

Nadine White is Race Correspondent and columnist at The Independent

Representology takeaways

- Journalism needs to update its figures regarding representation in the profession, and urgently address the glaring lack of people of colour in the industry
- The lack of journalists of colour in the industry is not just an issue of head count, but one of seniority.

Colour & Cast



Representology spoke to the Artistic Director of the Young Vic, Kwame Kwei-Armah, about the practices of “colour blind casting” and “casting against race”, and their utility in furthering diversity in theatre.

REPRESENTOLOGY (REP): We are seeing examples of “colour blind casting” across the dramatic arts and, in your recent production of *Best of Enemies*, the Black actor David Harewood plays the white figure of William F. Buckley Jr. Have we reached a point where race has become irrelevant to theatrical performance, or does an actor always bring their race to a role?

Kwame Kwei-Armah (KKA): I think you can never leave behind the essence of you, period. However, it’s then up to the audience to say: “Okay, I accept this”.

I like to reference Shakespeare, and how audiences sometimes receive ‘The Bard’. If you’re not really used to the language of Shakespeare, it takes you five minutes or so to tune your ear in, and go, “Okay, that’s what’s happening”. And if it’s a good production, then you forget about language and are immersed in the play. And I think that’s the job of good casting: casting whoever it is that you want to cast. An actor will bring their ethnicity - they will bring their race - to any role they play, but unless it is pertinent to the role, we should let audience members be able to tune it out after a moment. A good production, and good actors, should be able to achieve that.

REP: So, do you want the audience to ‘tune out’ an actor’s race?

KKA: Depending on what the role is, depending on what the piece is: yes. At the same time, I don’t ever want an audience member to be “colour blind”.

An audience should be able to adapt to accept any actor playing any part - after all, that is what acting is. They are representing characters who are not themselves, and so long as an actor does it well, and unless their physical characteristics are pertinent to the plot, the audience should be able to just accept this for what it is.

REP: Now, we are obviously having this conversation because of the Young Vic’s production of the *Best of Enemies*.

KKA: Of course.

REP: So, we’ve been discussing “colour blind casting”, but there’s also – what is loosely termed – “casting against race”. Do you recognise that term, and what do you think of that?

KKA: Yeah. I mean, to be very specific, with *Best of Enemies*, I said to the director, “I think it would be really fun if one of the two of the leads was not of type”. That wasn’t saying that they should be Black, we were just going with “not of type”. And then I said; “Yo, I think David Harewood would be brilliant”. Now, of course, that is “against race”. I recognise that because Buckley was a white American.

We recognise that this character is white, and we’ve cast a Black actor in this role - a brilliant Black actor in this role - and so I want you [the audience] to make that mental adjustment within the first five minutes of the play.

REP: But, what does that casting say? Because I would have thought part of Buckley’s identity - the fact that he’s right-wing, and holding a certain set of values within a right-wing framework - his whiteness is relevant, isn’t it? Or is it not?

KKA: Yes and no. I mean, we know, don’t we, that in Black majority countries, there are [Black] people who are extremely right-of-centre, and conservative. And, though that is not my position, it is the right of everyone, wherever they come from to hold these views. So, actually, his whiteness is pertinent to a degree, but it also isn’t.

There are Black right-wingers, and I can name a hundred that share Buckley’s political persuasion.

REP: Okay, so with that in mind, do you think that the audience should - or would you like the audience to - forget the fact that David Harewood is Black in the first five minutes, as you said? Or is the audience getting something different

with David being cast in the role, than if a white person had been cast in the role?

KKA: Again, I’m going to have my cake and eat it too. I want both. I want them to go, “That’s interesting”. I think we are at that point in our evolution where a Black actor who’s playing a famous white character can do it without us having to go: “Oh, my God, that’s wrong!”

Also we can look at the value added. The value added is the debate that we’re having right now. The value added is, what extra does it bring? And the extra that it brings is this debate. There are Black conservatives. Could a Black conservative have existed at that time? Well, yes, they did. Sure, they weren’t William Buckley, but they were around. So, the value added is actually widening our perception of what being Black in the West is, or could be, or was.

REP: What do you say to people who might criticise the casting of something like *Best of Enemies* for reasons related to historical

accuracy?

KKA: To them, I would say, “I don’t know what historical accuracy means”, because we’re acting. Again, I’m not trying to be mad liberal, but I am trying to say, we simply need to know that it is being viewed in the third decade of the 21st century, so we need to make it relevant. There are no rules other than that. And we have to take these casting decisions production by production.

REP: So, from the experience of *Best of Enemies*, what lessons would you want to give casting agents or directors now – one production at a time, obviously?

KKA: I think casting directors know that their job is to provoke the director to think. In the broadest possible sense, that’s their gig. And, in the old days, it may have been, you know, you’ve seen the brief, and then you give them a wide choice. Now, it is choice plus provocation

REP: Okay, and in that provocation, would you ever cast [Shakespeare’s] Julius Caesar as a woman? Because in it, Julius Caesar’s wife is pregnant, which is pertinent to the role, and you could easily have a same-sex relationship, but I am curious if your views on casting “against race” hold for gender, or other types of characteristics?

KKA: Again, it depends on what you want your Caesar to say, where you’ve set your Caesar. Have you set your Caesar in modern dress? Have you set it in a contemporary world as a metaphor? Are you going back to a more traditional

interpretation, and set them in Roman togas? It would all depend on what the director is trying to say. What are the thematic points that are being amplified? And, from there, you would cast in a way that is adventurous, but doesn’t bastardise your vision, or the play. So, I think you’ve said it, that a woman playing Caesar, and her wife being pregnant, just isn’t a problem for me, depending on what you want to say.

REP: As always, Kwame, you have been very positive, but do you think there are ever any problems with “colour blind casting”, or “casting against race”?

KKA: I do not particularly like the term “colour blind casting”, because I think my race is relevant in everything I do. To understand why, you have to understand my frame of reference.

I am a Black postmodernist, which means we can do anything we want, any time we want, with anything we want, and that Black never leaves. It’s always one’s essence, but it isn’t in any way a box - it is a liberator and an amplifier.

So, when it comes to colour blind casting - people using that term - for me, it has been a stepping stone, getting us to a place where we can go; “Okay, now that’s served its purpose, let’s just cast in a way that feels fit for the third decade of the 21st century.”

REP: Can you expand on that a little?

KKA: No problem. My Blackness never leaves me, and so, therefore, I’m always going to ask – especially when I am playing a role – “how would my Blackness impact a decision that’s being made?”

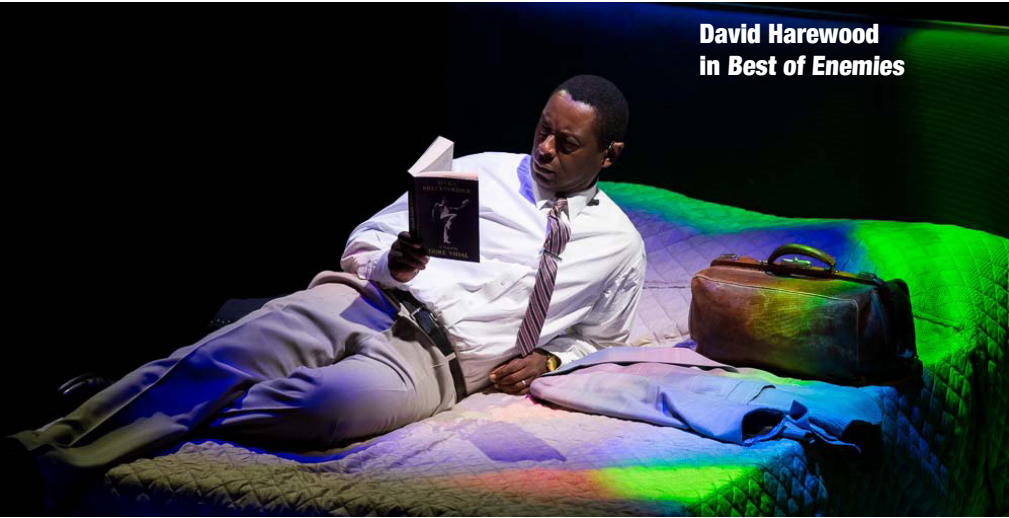
At the same time, I might go, “I don’t know how my Blackness would impact my decision”, for a futuristic piece set in the year 2457. And so, actually, I might just want to use my humanity as

the thing that gets me through, because I don’t know. And, therefore, I guess I am advocating a kind of liberalism without prescription - something that sits with whatever is specific for the here and now, because I also know that today’s prescription will not be next year’s, or the year after’s. We are in a fluid state of evolution, revolution, and reclamation of yesterday and tomorrow. So, I kind of don’t want to get too stuck in the here and now, with set positions. I just want to keep my mind open to this evolutionary state that we’re in.

Kwame Kwei-Armah is the Artistic Director of the Young Vic

Representology takeaways

- Good actors and a good production will lead to audiences accepting any premise - as they have done for centuries with the works of Shakespeare
- ‘Colour blind casting’ is redundant as a way of thinking about how to cast. A person’s race is always a key part of them - they will use their experience to interpret their role, but it is not always the dominant part of that interpretation.



The entertainment industry and the toll of institutional racism

Dr Jami Rogers

In August 2021, the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity published *Race Between the Lines*, the results of a survey of nearly 1300 practitioners about working conditions in the entertainment industry.

The revelations of institutional racism within the sector were stark. Key findings of the report include:

79%

of respondents feel roles continue to stereotype their ethnicities

64%

of respondents have experienced racist stereotyping in an audition

55%

of respondents have experienced racism in the workplace

Multiple previous studies have revealed long-term inequalities in the live and recorded arts, but what made this report much more striking than its data-focused counterparts was the anecdotal information provided by the respondents. The comments made by many respondents paint a picture of an industry that continues to marginalise its workers from global majority heritages at its root levels.

Race Between the Lines draws a clear picture of how stereotypes of the global majority underpin their representation on stage, film and television – and fuel the inequality of the creative industries. The problems start within the scripts and roles that continue to specify the ethnicity of the characters, which not only inherently limits the parts for which performers of colour will be auditioned, but they are also frequently stereotypes. As stereotypes, these characters lack the depth and complexity – *the humanity* – of the characters that are written with white actors in mind. The audition process was revealed by *Race Between the Lines* to also be replete with stereotypes and microaggressions, seemingly driven by the lack of humanity of the parts themselves. The disturbing accounts of overt racism and microaggressions on the set complete the trifecta of an industry steeped in an institutional racism it has done little to address. The issues in the industry are deeper than has yet been acknowledged, a situation which *Race Between the Lines* lays out.

Over half of survey respondents – 55% – have encountered racist language in the workplace: at auditions, in the rehearsal rooms and on set. What the testimony of nearly 1300 participants clearly illustrates in the report is the depth of the institutional racism that occurs at all stages in the creative process. It starts with the character stereotypes that are embedded in scripts, which an overwhelming majority of respondents (79%) has said they have encountered in their own careers.

That stereotypes continue to damage careers across the spectrum is clearly laid out in the full report. From writing, to the audition process, to the final product, stereotypes limit people from all backgrounds that are the subject of stereotyping. What makes the stereotypes of recent years more egregious is how the stereotype became embedded in the era of post-Windrush immigration. As Darrell M. Newton shows, in his monograph *Paving the Empire Road: BBC Television and Black Britons* (Manchester University Press, 2011), the BBC's Head of Drama, Television, Michael Barry, in the late 1950s had "noted" that performers of African-Caribbean heritage were included in scripted television, "but only when the programme offered 'suitable roles'.



REPRESENTATION & CONFLICT:



Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Workers in the Entertainment Trade Unions

Riaz Meer and Jack Newsinger

Introduction

The UK's entertainment trade unions should be at the forefront of struggles for racial equality in the creative industries. However, BAME workers, in film, television, radio, theatre and games, too often face an uphill struggle in getting their specific interests, as minority workers, addressed. What are the barriers to better anti-racism work in the entertainment sector unions? And what areas of good practice can be adopted more widely?

With support from a Practitioner Investigating Media Industry Diversity (PIMID) grant from the LHC, in 2021, we conducted 15 interviews with industry professionals, who were drawn from across the five trade unions responsible for representing workers in the entertainment sectors (Bectu, Equity, Musicians Union, Writers Guild of Great Britain and the National Union of Journalists). The aim was to investigate the experiences of Black, Asian and minority ethnic trade union members, and the role that these unions played in their anti-racism work.

The findings from our research show that the majority of interviewees faced significant obstacles in their trade union activity, especially with regard to their anti-racism work. Union structure, bureaucracy and leadership were all identified as barriers to advancing an anti-racist agenda across the unions. The story that is told by many of these union members is, in effect, of a two-fold struggle. There is a fight against discrimination in their work, and a fight to get their interests properly understood and defended by their majority white trade unions.

The full report, with our detailed recommendations, can be downloaded here.

<https://bcuassets.blob.core.windows.net/docs/cs2021322-lhc-report--meerhigh-res011121-13280319623773642.pdf>

Here, we offer a brief summary and conclude with nine specific recommendations that can be adopted so as to improve the capacity for the entertainment sector unions to be progressive forces in the struggle for racial equality in the entertainment industry.

Union bureaucracy

Union structures are very significant in determining the extent and character of the participation of ordinary members, and in the ways in which members' interests are represented. All the unions in the entertainment sector have representative bodies set up for BAME members, but each has different structures and they vary, in terms of the ways in which these respective representative bodies are selected, the power they exert, and their place within the wider union.

The NUJ's Black Members' Council and Equity's Race Equality Committee stand out, in a number of ways, as being more effective examples of those structures that enable Black, Asian and minority ethnic participation and representation. In particular, they are both elected by the Black, Asian and minority ethnic members themselves, and they both have the power to bring motions to conference. The NUJ's BMC, however, is alone in having its own self-administered budget (no other equivalent body has a Treasurer).

The organisational structures of the NUJ's BMC and Equity's REC are alone, amongst the UK's entertainment unions, in having guaranteed representation on their unions' ruling bodies.

Issues around labyrinthine and confusing trade union bureaucratic structures and rules were repeatedly highlighted as being barriers to the better representation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic members (seven of the respondents made explicit reference to it). What emerges from our interviews, is a picture of an often conservative bureaucracy that can be unwilling to engage with anything that is perceived to be a challenge, which issues around race and discrimination frequently are. For example, Respondent 5 put it in the following terms:

“... to a lot of – especially young Black, Asian and minority ethnic people - I think it looks obscure, dull, bureaucratic and quite forbidding, in many ways. I don't think it's attractive enough [...] I just don't think it's really something that people want to get involved in at the moment.”

Equality Monitoring

The collection of equality monitoring data is a vital prerequisite to the improvement of workforce diversity in the creative industries. Indeed, struggles over the collection and dissemination of diversity data have been an important, if secondary, element to the overall picture of struggles for equality and the greater representation of marginalised groups within the industry (see, Eikhof, Newsinger, Luchinskaya & Aidley, 2019; Cobb, 2020). This is shown most clearly in the boycott, by all five entertainment unions, of the screen industry's flagship, but deeply flawed, attempt at self-regulation, the diversity monitoring scheme

Project Diamond, which has been in place since 2017. How successful is equality monitoring within the unions themselves, and what does it tell us about their demographic composition, both in terms of their membership and their staffing?

The information we obtained shows a mixed picture. At the top end of the scale is BECTU, which has collected equality monitoring data from 75% of its 33,145 members. 2,001 members, approximately 6% of the total membership, identify as Black, Asian and minority ethnic.

Equity has approximately 50,000 members. The percentage of members who had completed an equality monitoring form was not given. 1,963 members, representing 4% of the total membership, identified as Black, Asian and minority ethnic, although the true figure is likely to be higher.

The Musicians' Union has approximately 30,000 members. It has collected equality monitoring data from only 5% of its members. Of these, 222 members, representing 0.75% of the total membership, identified as black or minority ethnic.

The NUJ has approximately 38,000 members. Information from its website states that 7% of its members define themselves as Black, Asian and minority ethnic. This would represent 2,660 members.

A lack of Black, Asian and minority ethnic union officials was highlighted as being a problem across our interviews. In particular, it was seen as being a barrier to recruiting new members, and to representing existing Black, Asian and minority ethnic members. For example, Respondent 7 said:

“It's something that's come up in events I've held with other members, who've said, if they are current members, they say that they will never go to the union for any help with anything that they think might be race related, because there's nobody there that looks like them, and that they feel has the knowledge or the experience to speak about a race related incident. And people are not joining for that reason as well.”

There is a point regarding union staffing that relates to the effectiveness of the unions' own campaigns to increase diversity within the industries of those workers that they represent. The unions' justified case against racism and the lack of equality in the industry is undermined if their own staffing levels are unrepresentative, and their calls for the greater transparency of industry diversity data loses its power when it is not adopted as a practice within the unions themselves.

From marginalisation to conflict

Ten of our fifteen respondents reported having feelings of marginalisation (feeling insignificant or peripheral). Examples of overt racism within unions were rare, but some respondents saw their marginalisation as stemming from racist attitudes from other members. One respondent recalled an attempt to prevent their representative body from presenting to Conference:

“It genuinely felt like the reason we weren't being allowed to make that presentation in the proper manner was because we were black. So, yes, that felt like overt racism.”

Respondent 13 went so far as to say that Black, Asian and minority ethnic members were effectively looked on as second-class citizens within their union, mirroring their experience in the industry:

“Marginalisation is really wide in the industry, as well as in the union itself, because people who really run the unions are not interested in those issues. They really - kind of - sometimes look at you, when you're black, or from an ethnic minority; if you're not white, you're not competent, you don't have the skills, you can't be trusted, and you're not in our clan, and why waste money and resources on you?”

Conclusion

Our report is for a wide audience. We hope it will prove useful to Black, Asian and minority ethnic workers in the cultural sector who are not currently part of trade unions, and although the report is challenging, we hope that the voices in the report will inspire them to join in the important work that the unions seek to do.

We also hope the report will be welcomed by the leaderships of the five entertainment unions. This is a constructive critique. We believe that, as well as offering recommendations, it highlights just how important union leadership is in enabling and encouraging an anti-racist agenda that is led by Black, Asian and minority ethnic trade union members.

We have put together nine recommendations for the entertainment sector trade unions. These are:

1. BECTU, the Musicians' Union and the Writers' Guild of Great Britain should review the constitutive rules of the respective representative bodies that serve their Black, Asian and minority ethnic members. Drawing on the examples of Equity and the NUJ they should:
 - a. Institute a method by which Black, Asian and minority ethnic members select the majority of members to their representative bodies. There is a strong argument for ensuring that all sections of the membership are represented on the body, and rules for this can be drawn up or retained. However, a failure to have a direct way for Black, Asian and minority ethnic members to select their representatives calls into question the very representation that these bodies seek to provide.

- b. Empower the representative bodies by allowing them to bring propositions and rule changes to Conference.
- c. Reserve places on the ruling executive bodies for members of the representative bodies.
2. BECTU, Equity, the Musicians' Union and the Writers' Guild of Great Britain should increase the autonomy of, and resourcing for, their representative bodies, by allocating to them an annual budget which is to be administered by the representative bodies.
4. All unions should implement a policy of capturing equality monitoring data for their paid officials. This data should be published annually, in line with the unions' own recommendations for the publication of TV industry data at programme/production level. Unions should also provide information on the number of Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff that are employed in the higher levels of the unions' leadership structures.

Union leaderships must provide a mechanism whereby conflicts can be mediated, whilst ensuring that the autonomy of their representative bodies is retained.

3. Greater effort must be given to the equality monitoring of members. Given the low response rate across the unions (with the exception of BECTU), efforts must be made to capture equality monitoring data from existing members, as well as from new applicants.
5. Unions should try to ensure that Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff are available to support those members who believe they are being discriminated against. This service must be properly resourced, and information about it widely disseminated to all staff and members.
6. Unions should look at the way new members are welcomed, and the ways in which information is given to them. All new members would benefit from a more rigorous induction programme. This should include information on union bureaucracy. Unions should look at their bureaucracy and ensure rules, processes and terminology are as clear, concise and accessible as possible.
7. For new Black, Asian and minority ethnic members, an induction programme should set out clearly how their union is relevant to them, which services relating to anti-racism are on offer, and how to access them; how they are represented (as Black, Asian and minority ethnic members) within their union, and how, as individual members, they can effect change.
8. The unions' leaderships must accept that providing Black, Asian and minority ethnic members' representative bodies with greater autonomy opens up the possibility of conflict between those representative bodies and the unions' wider purposes, ideologies and strategies. Union leaderships must provide a mechanism whereby conflicts can be mediated, whilst ensuring that the autonomy of their representative bodies is retained. For example, regular communication between union leaderships and the representative bodies of their Black, Asian and minority ethnic members is a necessary (but not sufficient) element of this.
9. Organising by Black, Asian and minority ethnic members across the entertainment unions should be encouraged. Unions should provide the space and resourcing for this to happen, but this should not be done using a top-down approach, and organising should be led by Black, Asian and minority ethnic members.

References

- Cobb, Shelley (2020) *What about the Men? Gender Inequality Data and the Rhetoric of Inclusion in the US and UK Film Industries*. *Journal of British Cinema and Television*. 17(1): pp. 112-135.
- Eikhof, Doris, Newsinger, Jack, Luchinskaya, Daria & Aidley, Daniela (2019). *And... Action? Gender, Knowledge and Inequalities in the UK Screen Industries*. *Gender, Work and Organisation*. 26(6): 840-859.

Sir Lenny Henry Centre Industry Fellowships 2022

For the second year, the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity (LHC) is offering 5 grants of up to £3K each to support short turnaround research by industry practitioners.

The purpose of these research grants is to better inform policy and practice that will address diversity deficits across different sectors of the media industry.

They are open to media practitioners with a minimum of 5 years professional experience who wish to look more closely at the challenges and opportunities in their own sector.

Each successful applicant will be teamed with an academic mentor and the research will need to be completed ideally by **1 July 2022**.

We would expect the research to take 4 weeks full time or the equivalent part-time. You must be available to do the work at this time.

Completed research will be published on the LHC website and considered for publication in the journal *Representology*.

Industry Fellowships were previously known as 'PIMID' grants, and were offered to Emma Butt, Kate Ansell, Riaz Meer, Nina Robinson and Cherish Oteka. Their research can be found on the LHC website.

To apply, please email **Professor Diane Kemp**, Director of the Centre (diane.kemp@bcu.ac.uk) with a brief outline of:

1. The central question you would like to address and evidence of why it is important now.
2. The aim and methodology of your proposed research.
3. Your current role, your qualifications and experience relevant to the proposal.

4. How you hope your research might inform wider and more effective participation in particular roles and sectors of the media industry.
5. Two professional referees who may be contacted in relation to your application.

The closing date for applications is **11 April 2022** and you can expect a response within three weeks of the closing date.

ORIGINAL PHOTOGRAPH: JANE TURNER/COMIC RELIEF

MEDIA REPARATIONS

an idea
whose time
has come?

Should traditional media institutions make reparations to communities of colour for their behaviour during Empire's heyday?

Samir Jeraj gives his view.

On the 30th December 1700, an advert appeared in the London Gazette. A 16 year-old called Quoshey had run away on Christmas Day, perhaps taking advantage of the festivities to slip away from Bell-Wharf by the Thames.

He was wearing "a Plush Cap with black Fur, a dark Wastcoat, a speckled Shirt, old Callamanca Breeches." The description continues "shaved round his head" and "branded on his left Breast with E. A." - the name of the man who owned him, Captain Edward Archer. Readers were informed they would be rewarded with a guinea for returning the child to his enslaver.

This was one of at least 800 adverts we know of about runaway slaves that were placed in British newspapers. They ranged from The London Gazette, a semi-official newsletter that has been in continuous publication in the UK since 1665, to local newspapers, such as The Bath Chronicle and Gazette. Bath is still served by a local paper called The Bath Chronicle,

and on its website, Somerset Live, throughout October, was a banner for Black History Month that said, "Black History is our history."

Racism has been a fundamental part of the media from its creation to the present day. British and colonial newspapers were used to trade in human beings, they were used to champion the cause of the plantation-owners in London, to promote colonialism, and to entrench and promote (white) European power in British colonies. British journalists and editors were also personally involved with both slavery and colonialism. The Legacies of British Slave-ownership project has information on nine journalists and their families who owned slaves, including editors of The Times, The Glasgow Courier and the Australian newspaper The Age. Flora Shaw, the Colonial Editor of The Times, was described as "chief propagandist, ally and confidante of Cecil Rhodes" in a 2021 article in her former paper. George Orwell's father worked for the Civil Service in India, supplying opium to China, while his aristocratic great-grandmother's wealth came from plantations in Jamaica, long before his own stint as a police officer in

Burma. Many British journalists had, and still have, their roots and fortunes in the Empire - particularly since the media is dominated by people who have passed through the same private schools and Oxbridge colleges as their ancestors.

In the United States, journalists and activists have come together to call for “media reparations,” a process of reconciliation that acknowledges both the historic and more recent harms that have been caused by the media. Since the colonisation of the US, and in particular the creation of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, they say, the media has been part of the system of extraction of Black communities, perpetuating slavery, segregation and racial inequality, and draining money out of present-day communities into the hands of white-owned and run corporations. The group, Media 2070, imagines media reparations to be a fifty-year process, resulting in a media in which “Black people were able to create and control the distribution of our own stories and narratives,” including reforms to media ownership that mean Black people have “equitable ownership” of national and local outlets. It also means supporting autonomy, with “an abundance” of Black-led media organisations, narratives that humanise Black communities, and stories being covered by journalists who are “part of our communities.”

The media in 2022 still perpetuates white supremacy in the UK. Print, broadcast and digital media are woefully unrepresentative of Britain’s diverse communities. Despite the media being concentrated in London and other large cities, which are more racially diverse than the UK as a whole, journalists are 94 per cent white. In a 2020 study for the Reuters Institute, researchers found that of the top ten online and top ten offline news outlets in the UK, none of them had a person of colour as their top editor.

The experiences of the relatively small number of journalists of colour who have managed to carve out a career are often scarred by experiences of racism. There are numerous personal accounts that have been published that recount the isolation journalists of colour have suffered in the workplace, particularly Black journalists, who are just 0.2 percent of the media workforce. Others, when writing about their communities, have had their work edited by white colleagues to promote a particular narrative, such as division within the community. Even successful and high-profile journalists, such as Channel 4’s Fatima Manji, have been the subject of personal attack by fellow journalists, with The Sun’s Kelvin Mackenzie writing in a column that Manji should not have been allowed to report on a terrorist attack because she wears a hijab – the UK’s press regulator, IPSO, said Mackenzie was “entitled to express” his opinions. Such incidents add to the daily racist and misogynistic abuse that journalists who are women of colour experience on social media.

Media coverage of communities of colour, of race, and even of celebrities, such as Raheem Sterling or Meghan Markle, is still marked by the racist assumptions and narratives established centuries earlier. When Black British communities marched through London in 1981 in protest at the death of 13 young people, and were met by police violence, The Sun ran a front page headline “Black day at Blackfriars” saying that the overwhelmingly black marchers had “run wild” with “riots and looting.” The Express ran with the headline “Rampage of a mob.”

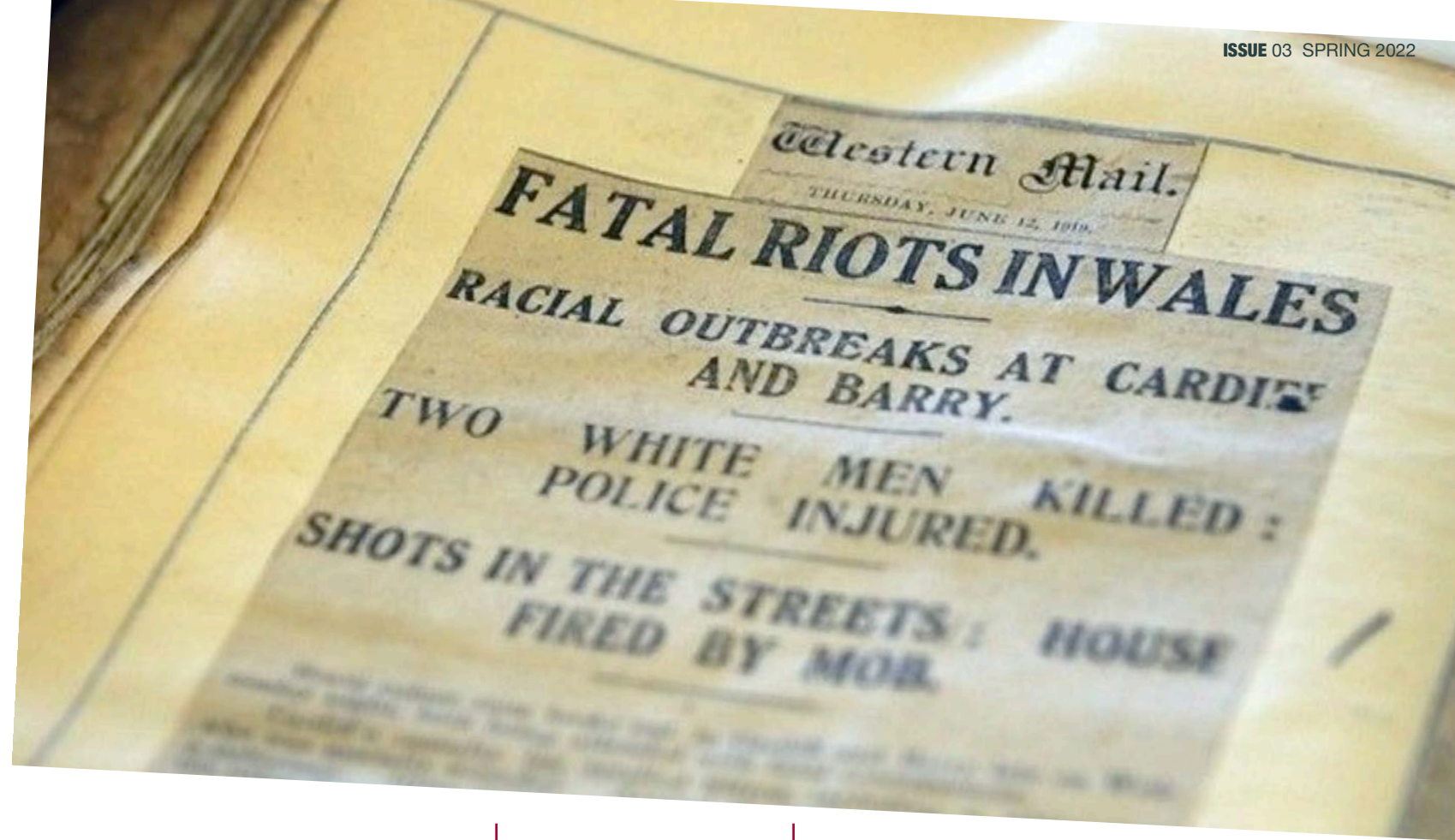
Over sixty years earlier in 1919, “race riots” rocked port cities in the UK. Returning demobilised white soldiers struggled to find work, and blamed “foreigners”, including local communities of colour. Cardiff, home to one of the oldest Black communities in the UK, was at the centre of the riots. Press coverage at the time both fed the racism behind the violence and blamed the victims of it. Mohammed Abdullah, a 21 year-old sailor, was killed in the rioting in Cardiff after being hit by a police baton, according to a witness at the time. The medical examiner claimed that Mohammed’s skull, as a person of colour, was thinner than a white man’s, which would

... The Sun’s Kelvin Mackenzie writing in a column that (Fatima) Manji should not have been allowed to report on a terrorist attack because she wears a hijab ...

have withstood the hit from a “leg of a table.” The Western Mail reported the deaths of “two white men”, together with police injuries in their headline, while ignoring the death of Mohammed.

The Abergavenny Chronicle noted “Trouble between whites and blacks is occurring far too frequently,” in its coverage of riots in Cardiff. It reports that the reason for the death of one man “is not clearly known”, before speculating that “he met his death in one of the melées in the district or in a solitary encounter with the negroes.” The article finished by noting that the Lord Mayor of Liverpool had appealed to the Colonial Office for “repatriation of the negroes” and had interned them in the meantime. The Chronicle is still in publication today.

The press were also key to promoting colonialism and maintaining it when it was challenged. The New Imperialism of the late 19th century, when European powers occupied the continent of Africa, was also the period of innovation in British journalism inspired by developments in the United States. Newspapers, such as The Daily Mail, The Graphic and The Illustrated London News, endorsed British imperial actions, while publishing exoticised pictures and accounts from occupied territories. Wherever British armies went, the correspondents went with them to report on their “civilising mission” for the audience back home. The historian, Ben Shepard, said that late Victorian journalism was in a parasitic



relationship with imperialism, describing it “as the tick bird is to the rhino”.

Newspapers argued for repression in British colonies when European power was under threat. In September 1952, The Manchester Guardian (now The Guardian) published a leader in response to anti-imperialist violence in Kenya by Mau Mau rebels. The leader described them as a “terrorist conspiracy”, before adding: “if force enough can be concentrated on the area most concerned in the next few weeks, the back of the conspiracy may be broken.” The authorities officially executed more than a thousand people, and killed an estimated 20,000 Mau Mau, with tens of thousands more, mainly civilians and children, dying from conflict-related starvation. In 2020, as part of their response to the Black Lives Matter movements around the world, the Scott Trust – owners of The Guardian - commissioned independent research to investigate any links that the founder of The

Manchester Guardian, John Edward Taylor, had to the slave trade.

In the 21st century, the media is decidedly moving away from print and towards being “digital first,” including a whole new set of platforms that do not have the baggage of the “legacy media.” However, they are still part of the legacy of an institution that is fundamentally tied to racism and colonialism. In an era when controversy and click-bait sells, digital platforms have every incentive to pander to extremist views that drive traffic and views, and they have not been able to address the issues of representation or ownership either.

Over three centuries on from that advert requesting the capture and re-enslavement of Quoshey, the press still use and exploit people of colour for profit, while providing little in return. The British media has often denied, deflected or dismissed the historic and

present harms that they are a part of. Acknowledging, accepting and making repair for those harms could be the start of a new and better relationship between communities of colour and the media.

Further reading:

<https://www.niemanlab.org/2020/10/the-media-2070-project-asks-what-media-reparations-would-look-like/>

<https://mediareparations.org/essay/>

<https://qz.com/1301918/researchers-discovered-hundreds-of-ads-for-runaway-slaves-in-18th-century-britain/>

<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/advertisement-in-the-london-daily-post-any-persons-disposed-to-buy-a-negro-1740>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/retropolis/wp/2018/07/03/ads-for-runaway-slaves-in-british-newspapers-show-the-cruelty-of-the-genteel/>

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SONIC SIGNAL

Side 1

- 1. **The Trouble with Diversity**
Dane Baptiste
- 2. **The Audio Content Fund**
Mukti Jain Campion

DANE BAPTISTE: THE TROUBLE WITH DIVERSITY



On his podcast ‘Dane Baptiste Questions Everything’, the comedian talks to Marcus Ryder about the language of diversity and its relationship to meaningful structural change.

Dane Baptiste (DB): I think, if you were to really scratch the surface of any of the diversity and inclusion initiatives we’ve seen over the last two years, I’d say the primary motivating factor has been money. I think one of the reasons why we’ve for so long not seen a change in the makeup of a lot of corporate structures, and other social structures, is because of the fact that, speaking for Black people - obviously being over-represented below the poverty line - we’ve not really had the financial sway in order to have our needs met, which has allowed for our marginalisation. However, I think some companies have now become aware of the purchasing power of the Black community, pandering to them, to an extent. But I think it’s all on a very superficial level. And I think that’s the problem: that diversity will tend to only be a reflection of those who have the resources and power to voice their desires for inclusion.

I mean, we could come up with new words other than ‘diversity’. Now, that might just be down to the fact that, you know, this word has now been co-opted, and therefore has lost its effect. But, personally, the issue really is, maybe, that we continue to use less accusatory words or less incendiary words, like ‘diversity’, for the sake of etiquette.

I think the issue is that lack of autonomy and lack of access to resources means that diversity still only happens to the extent that the powers that be allow it to. Because, unless there is a group that can galvanise themselves and vocalise their dissent - and then also have the resources in order to affect that - then not much is going to change. It’s much harder for everyone to be galvanised for the greater good, because you can always employ somebody who appears, at least superficially, ‘diverse’, but still represents the establishment. In the same way, now we have human resources - every company has human resources. But every person who works in HR within that company is being paid by the company. So they’re being incentivised by the same company to do their job. So they’re not going to do it at the detriment of that company, because that’s the people that employ them.

Marcus Ryder (MR): Yeah, it’s like years ago - and I really mean decades ago - I remember having discussions about “wouldn’t it be great if there was a Black president in America?” So, decades before Obama, obviously. And a lot of my more radical friends were like, “Not really, because America is still a capitalist country, which works through the extraction of capital from less developed

countries.” So, if you had a Black person in charge of that, he might, or she might, be able to alleviate some of the worst excesses of some of the more extreme policies, but the actual structure is one which is fundamentally working against equality. Now, I don’t entirely buy that model, and it definitely wouldn’t be an argument for me to have not voted for somebody like Obama - not that I was given the vote in an American election - but I can see the validity in that argument.

DB: It’s the difference between diversity and representation. Corporate structures tend to confuse those as well, because seeing someone that represents you has very different implications to someone who’s placed within a structure to affect changes that can benefit you.

I think that people need to make sure they understand, in the same way, that racism of an institutional and structural nature is very different to racial rhetoric or prejudices.

Because, you know, a lot of the time people would make accusations against Black people of ‘reverse racism’, not understanding that I can say, “I think white guys are racist, and I don’t trust them”, and that’s racial rhetoric or prejudice.

But if I say that they can’t work at this company because this is how I feel, that’s racism, because I’m impeding their ability to realise their potential as citizens - or their civil or human rights are being impeded because of my beliefs. And I want people to understand that difference.

This is the reason why when people say, “Oh, it’s ‘reverse racism’”, it’s not, because I cannot stop any white guy from getting a job based on my prejudices about him. And so we can never have a discussion about ‘reverse racism’ until there is an instance whereby you can be denied a job or you can be denied access to a water fountain or a toilet, or, you know, freedom of religion on who you marry, based on your race as a white person, which has never happened.

And I think until we understand these terms, then you’re never going to have effective conversations about diversity.

Dane Baptiste talked to Marcus Ryder for episode 147 of the podcast ‘Dane Baptiste Questions Everything’.

Representology takeaways

- Terminology matters, and the essence of the term ‘diversity’ has been diluted over time
- Organisations need spaces where people can be critical of their operations, and not have their livelihoods threatened.

The Audio Content Fund

Mukti Jain Campion

The Audio Content Fund was launched in 2019, with a £3m grant from the UK government to facilitate new and distinctive public service content on commercial and community radio stations. As the pilot phase draws to a close, ACF panellist Mukti Jain Campion reflects on its achievements.

Three years ago, I joined a bold new experiment in radio. I was one of four panellists selected to assess the bids submitted to the Audio Content Fund – a new contestable fund for independent production companies seeking to create original public service content for UK commercial and community radio stations. Indie companies first had to partner with Ofcom-licensed radio stations that guaranteed to broadcast their projects. All bids also had to demonstrate how they met a range of public service criteria, including quality, diversity and new talent. The panel's job was to select the best.

So how did we do? By the end of the 3 year pilot phase, the ACF will have distributed £3.3m to more than 80 independent production companies for more than 150 projects broadcast on more than 340 different radio stations, reaching tens of millions of listeners, and winning multiple awards.

A relatively modest outlay has had a big impact. Commercial radio stations have opened up their schedules to new types of content they would not otherwise have the resources, nor the expertise, to produce themselves. Indie producers have found new markets and new audiences for their creativity and skill. As a former indie producer myself, it's been exciting to see the growing confidence of a range of new and established indies who have been taking advantage of these opportunities.

Panel members have each brought their knowledge of different sectors of radio. We considered each bid carefully, not just for the merits of the programme ideas, but also for the diversity and experience of the people who would be involved in making them. The radio industry's track record on diversity is dire, both in the workforce and in terms of content. My hope was that the ACF would make a real difference to the diversity of stories and perspectives that audiences get to hear.

And the results have been gratifying. The ACF has funded documentaries and dramas, comedy and current affairs, history and popular culture. We've supported innovative children's programmes, health awareness campaigns, and a wide range of stories from LGBTQIA+, disabled and ethnic minority communities, as well as from those which focused on specific rural and regional identities. The emphasis on new voices and new collaborations has helped to open up access to those who are most under-represented in the media.

During the pandemic, the ACF received extra funding from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS), in recognition of the unique role that radio played during lockdown. Indies rose to the challenge of working out new ways of making programmes remotely and safely, producing fast turnaround, but brilliant content, during such an extraordinary and difficult time.

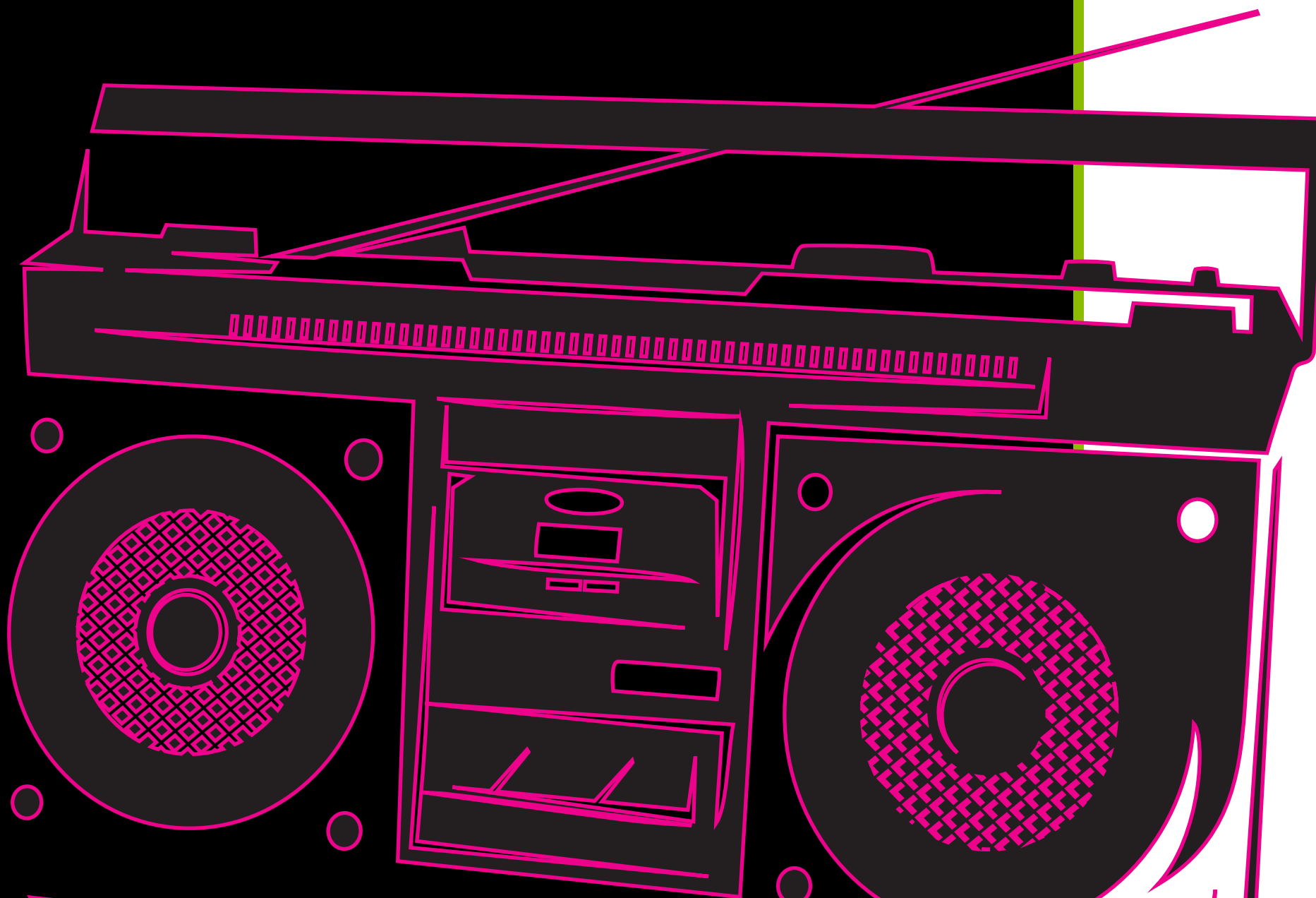
The ACF has been an incredible force for good in the radio industry. I am proud of what it has achieved but, to have a truly lasting impact on the culture and workforce of the sector, it is vital that funding can be secured for it to continue.

Mukti Jain Campion is founder of Culture Wise Productions and Chair of The Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity. You can find out more about the ACF and the projects it has funded at www.audiocontentfund.org.uk

Representology takeaways

The Audio Content Fund pilot has demonstrated there are certain levers which can be really effective in widening representation, both in the workforce and in output:

- Clear funding criteria that incentivise diversity and inclusion
- A selection panel which brings a wide range of life experiences to its decision making
- A sustained commitment to prioritising under-represented voices





Side 2

1. **"You just had to put your big-girl pants on and get on with it."**
Judi Lee-Headman and
Dr. Vanessa Jackson
2. **Breaking the Sound Barrier**
Emma Butt
3. **Audio-Describing Diversity**
Jonathan Perry

“You just had to put your big-girl pants on and get on with it.”

Production Sound Mixer

Judi Lee-Headman, interviewed by Dr. Vanessa Jackson

Judi Lee-Headman is one of only a handful of women at the very top of production sound mixing. She is hugely experienced, award-winning, and works on high-profile US and UK television dramas, like *Homeland*. Her role involves recording and mixing the sound on set. What makes her even more unusual, is that she is a Black woman from Birmingham. Her extensive production credits include, *Intergalactic* (Sky, 2021), *Black Power: A British Story of Resistance* (Amazon, 2021), *The Capture* (BBC, 2019), *Britannia* (Sky, 2019), *Homeland* (Showtime, 2017), *Holby City* (BBC, 2002-17), and *Chef!* (BBC, 1993-4).

In the early 1980s, you would have found Judi working in a law centre in Birmingham, but, after a change of direction, she secured a job as a researcher for a film production company. Although very good at it, research was not her passion – sound was. The question is: how could a young Black woman enter that profession?

“In those days, women didn’t do that stuff. Now there are courses you can go and do, Media courses. There weren’t those sorts of technical courses then. I didn’t have a clear idea that I could do this job. It was only when I started working as a researcher, and then going out on the shoots with the crew, that I saw a way into it. I started talking with the sound recordist, saying, tell me a bit about what you’re doing, and why you’re doing it. And he was quite unique, because he took the time to explain, because, at that time, a lot of that stuff was very much men’s domain.

The only question a researcher on location would usually ask was: did you want tea, and how many sugars? You didn’t really want to ask them what they were doing, and why they were doing it, because that wasn’t really your area.”

“Once I started talking to him, I realised it was something I was interested in, and I went back to the office and told my manager that this was something I’d really like to do, but there was no support at all, because it was such a ludicrous thing to suggest. “

“I was very good at answering the phone, very good at getting contributors from A to B, so why was I interested in this technical stuff? Well, I was really smitten by it. I loved all the kit. I loved all the gadgets, and Alan, that was the mixer’s name, explained all the things, and I thought, I really want to do this. Then it was a matter of trying to find courses that I could go on as a Black woman, in Birmingham, in the 1980s. There was no support towards it, because it wasn’t something I was supposed to be doing.”

Discrimination

Judi encountered discrimination in trying to pursue her dream of a career in Sound. She was doubly

disadvantaged, because of the intersectional factors of both ethnicity and gender. However, that prejudice was never overt, and it was therefore more insidious and difficult to counter. Reasons were pointed out to her why someone, who did not look like her, had been given a particular opportunity. It might have been because they had gone to a particular school; had completed a particular course, or knew certain people. It was never explained as racism or sexism directed towards her. It was frustrating and demoralising, “I’d see someone, who wasn’t me, and didn’t have these things, sail straight past. It was obvious, but you could never directly name it in that way.”

Despite the challenges she faced, Judi was determined to move into Sound. “I did some short courses with Visnews, and then I applied to the National Film and Television School (NFTS), and I got a place, but Birmingham Local Education Authority would not fund it. So, I got in touch with the visiting lecturers, and said, “I’ve got a place here, but I can’t afford to stay here”. The NFS had grants and bursaries, but the £400 they were offering wasn’t going to do it. I was also a mum, I had a young daughter at this time, so I needed childcare, I needed transport to get to Beaconsfield, as I was living in Haringey at that time. So, I asked the lecturers if I could train on the job, and get paid as I trained, as otherwise I’d have to give it up. They were very kind, and agreed to do that. So, I got my training in tandem with those lecturers.”

“It was a time that you were certainly made aware of your difference every day. There wasn’t a set that I walked on that someone didn’t feel the need to let you know.

“You just had to put your big-girl pants on and get on with it, because if you really took it all to heart, you’d just leave, and you’d never set foot on the set again. You had to really focus on the end place that you wanted to get to, and say: “this is where I want to end up, I want to be a recordist, I want to end up mixing shows, so I have got to endure this”. The things that happened to me, I make sure don’t happen to my assistants, or the people on my watch. The bullying, the sexism, the racism, I’ve got very little tolerance for it on set. If I’m on set and I see it happening in another department, I will speak to my opposite number and say: “this is happening, stop it.”

Early in her professional career, Judi felt there was no point in talking to the recordists she was working with about how badly she was being treated, because they colluded in the sexist and racist behaviour. She had to develop a thicker skin.

When asked about how different attitudes are in the industry today, Judi replied:

“Night and day. I think there is much more awareness now. There are courses, even, that address certain issues, lack of sensitivity to people, and understanding that people are people, and there will be days when things are not going so well in their lives. In the olden days, you did not mention stuff like that, you just cracked on.”

Motherhood was another thing. Judi worked for a company for two and half years, when her daughter was very young, before she even told them she had a child. As the only woman in the department, she was worried that this would cause them to doubt her commitment. It meant that childcare was organised like a military campaign. Even now, she sees discrimination against pregnant women. “In some fields, like documentaries, once you start showing, you’re off. You might be able to carry the equipment, but Production doesn’t want to take the risk. With drama, it might be different, because you’re seated a lot, and they wouldn’t see the bump.”

Diversity in the crew

Frequently, Judi was the only woman, and the only Black member of the crew. Sometimes, there were Black artists in front of the camera, but seldom behind it: “I can count on the fingers of one hand the number of black guys I’ve seen on set alongside myself, in all the years I’ve been doing it.”

When asked if the diversity of television crews was improving, her answer was depressingly familiar.

“Still the same. But in terms of the atmosphere on set, it is infinitely better than it was. People are much more ...I want to say grown up ... now. Every now and then, there will be a technician from those days who will come on set, with the attitudes that they had from those days, and the crew around them will be absolutely horrified. They can’t believe that people talk like that and have those attitudes. And I just let them get on with it. They can see with their own eyes how this person views the crew, the world, the make-up of the crew. They can decide for themselves whether they think this is an acceptable way to speak to people, or an unacceptable way. I don’t need to spell out what’s not right about this.”

“Now, the crew is much more balanced between sexes. It is getting better [multiculturally]; people are making conscious decisions. Where I think they need to adjust is the view that [non-white] technicians don’t exist, so a lot of emphasis goes on training people, bringing in trainees, assistants. I know of many people, with twenty-five or thirty years of experience, who are sitting at home because they are not known about. The view is that these people do not exist, so we need to train them to be in the industry. That’s not true. We are here. We have that experience. Give us an opportunity to show you. I’ve been incredibly lucky, but I know amazing camera people, amazing directors, who are incredibly talented, and they are channelled into training initiatives and they refuse, as they’ve got the experience of lighting for twenty years, or directing for twenty-five years.”

“I get tired of this diversity thing, because each decade we get rebranded. At the moment it’s BAME, before that it was ‘ethnic minority’. There are all these acronyms set up to let the person who is hiring you know that you’re not white. I feel really uneasy about it.”

“Another thing that is around now is unconscious bias. So, people will approach you on issues of race and sex, but they won’t approach you for anything else, because, by definition of who you are, you can’t comment on those aspects.”

“I don’t want new clients to wait until they have something that they think will suit me [e.g. something to do with race]. When I’ve had meetings with people who haven’t worked with me

before, they realise I know what I’m talking about. If, in the interview, which is a two-way process, I feel my opinion will be valued and listened to, I can work with you.”

On occasions, crew members think that Judi has been given a job in order to tick a diversity box - as a case of affirmative action, rather than because of her expertise. Fortunately, this does not happen so much now, because they check her experience out on the IMDB website, and see her long list of credits.

Sponsorship / Allyship

Due to the short-term contract / freelance nature of sound recordists’ work, being put forward for jobs by someone who knows you and your work is crucial. Appointments are often made via word-of-mouth recommendation, rather than through a formal application. People, especially those from Black, Asian or working-class backgrounds, often lack networks in positions of power, and therefore frequently miss out on opportunities which would have suited them.

“There are times when you know that you were extremely well qualified for a position, but because you do not have those connections, you do not have that sponsorship. Some people would rather give it to the person who was their assistant, even though that person hasn’t got the equivalent experience. They will support that person, so that they get that experience. They may be ten or fifteen years behind me in terms of credits, but they are ahead of me, because they are sponsored by their mixer,

and my progress has been a lot slower because I’ve had to do those things on my own, without that sponsorship.”

The informal nature of employment in film and television production is problematic, especially given the attempts of broadcasters in diversifying the make-up of the crew. The way that sponsorship currently works exacerbates the disadvantages facing people of colour who are pursuing careers in media industries. Judi has had to develop her own networks, through

“ . . . So, people will approach you on issues of race and sex, but they won’t approach you for anything else, because, by definition of who you are, you can’t comment on those aspects.”

proving herself to those in positions of power, so that they hire her on their next show.

“I’ve been very lucky, and what I feel particularly proud of is working with producers, and they’ve called me for the next thing, and the next thing, and the next thing. I was unhappy at one stage with the sponsorship, because I know my peers. There are very few women at this level - male recordists know me, and know of me, and they could have stepped in and recommended me, and they never did.”

Ratio of men to women

Sound recording and mixing is still predominantly the domain of white men. There are very few women in senior roles.

“At my level, there’s me, and maybe three other women coming up, and those women behind me have probably got ten years less experience than me.”

Judi has observed a slowly improving picture of female representation across technical television crafts.

The future

Given Judi’s senior position, she now has the influence to support those without connections who are trying to enter the industry.

“When I get CVs, I will try to use people who don’t necessarily have those networks. Sometimes it’s successful, and sometimes it’s not. It’s quite tough, because routes into the industry are very limited. It’s been extraordinarily difficult to get trainees from diverse backgrounds, because they feel intimidated by the industry. It’s quite an elitist industry.

I’ve watched people absorb this imposter syndrome and you see them shrink, and they won’t develop that hard shell that you need.”

Encouraging and supporting diverse entrants is difficult. The challenges are exacerbated by the freelance culture of the industry, which results in limited training opportunities. Judi feels that this is an area which would benefit from some strategic organisation.

“I think there are various initiatives and groups that run small courses, but we need to tie those groups together a bit more, and get them in touch with people like me. Sometimes, trainees can’t see the bigger picture, and they are Instagramming

the star next to them. They don’t know the set etiquette, and you can’t then recommend them to another person.”

Understanding the professional culture - what is, and what is not, acceptable - is not always self-evident, especially for young ‘digital natives’ trying to enter the industry. Training needs to include professionalism, as well as technical skills.

When asked to sum up how the television production industry has changed since the 1980s in relation to the position of, and opportunities for, women and people of colour, Judi says, “there is still some work to be done, but we’ve come a long way.” In part, this success is due to the tenacity of pioneers like Judi. She is not ready to hang up her microphone and mixer any time soon, “I still have some mountains I want to climb.”

Representology takeaways

- The industry must invest in getting a broader range of people with different life experiences into the technical professions
- To ensure fair access to senior jobs for people from marginalised backgrounds, mentoring and in-house training should be offered where appropriate.

Breaking the Sound Barrier

Emma Butt

As Dr Vanessa Jackson's interview highlights, Judi Lee-Headman is a rarity in the location sound industry. She was one of the first women to be voted onto the council for The Association of Motion Picture Sound Engineers in the UK. She is a Women in Film and TV award winner, for her contributions to the industry, and is top of her field in a very male dominated industry, and yet she still faces sexism and racism. Her experience is a common thread that is seen all the way through to Post Production sound, as my research study for The Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity showed last year.

I examined 36 top rated shows across 6 broadcasters (BBC1, BBC2, ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5, Sky One) from the Autumn of 2019. In total there were 60 available sound roles across these shows, and these were undertaken by a total of 55 people. Of these 55 people:

Only one man identified as mixed-race, the other 46 men identified as white.

6 out of 55 people identified as women. There was only one Re-Recording mixer who identified as a woman, and they worked only in factual TV. No women were working as Re-Recording mixers in Drama.

There are issues with intersectional aspects of identity – in this sample, there were no women of colour working in the 60 available sound roles.

In the sample of 55 people, only 3 people self-identified as having a disability (none of the identified disabilities required physical adjustments to the workplace).

As a result of the inflexibility of existing hiring practices, people from Black, Asian and ethnic minority backgrounds have felt the need to create their own companies in order to progress within the industry.

There are no opportunities or schemes currently available for the training or progression of post-production sound freelancers, especially for those moving between short form, or factual, and into drama.

So has anything changed? Have the barriers started to lift in order to create a more inclusive industry? Or, are those in hiring positions in sound departments still practicing a risk averse culture that results in the hiring of the same sound teams, without opportunities for new entrants or, later, for mid-career professionals moving between genres?

One of the barriers identified in my research was the lack of training schemes and opportunities. Well, enter Audible, who have launched a series of workshops which offer training on a wide range of topics relating to various off-mic roles, such as directing, producing, editing, sound design and podcast production. These workshops are free, with applicants needing to apply online and provide a short paragraph about why they are interested in taking part. No previous experience will be required for many of these workshops. They will be both online and in person, and some take place across Britain's regions. Not only will these workshops provide training and education to those wishing to pursue a career in audio production, but some mentoring opportunities will also be available after the sessions, so as to provide further support to those taking part.

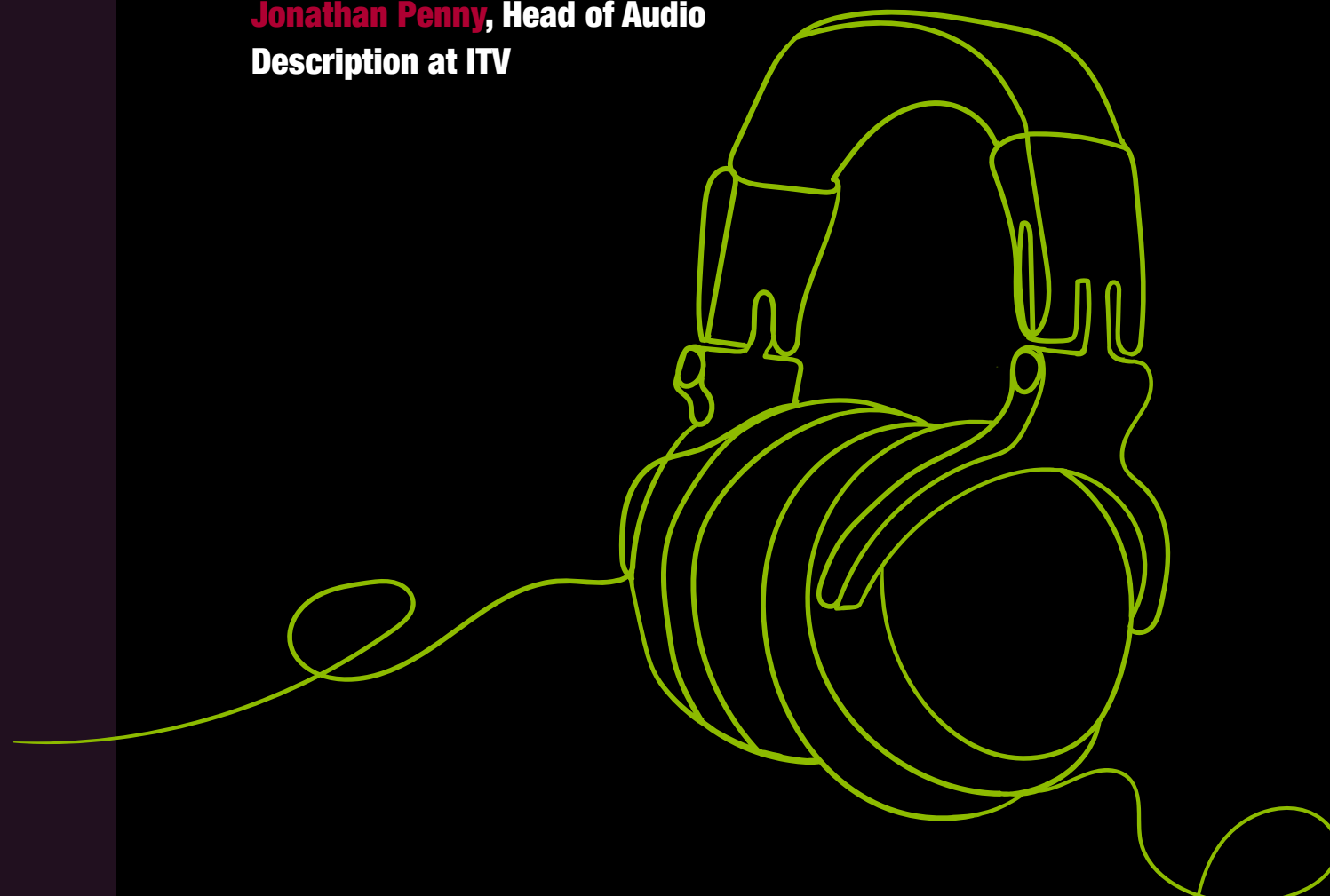
Although audio can make up 50% or more of the content we consume, it is the department that is constantly overlooked for investment into training and development, and conversations around diversity and inclusion rarely shine a light our way. We are massively falling behind other departments when it comes to gender, race and disability inclusion.

So, to see a company like Audible not only recognise this, but also invest in helping to address the issue, is encouraging. Having worked with them, in a very small way, on these workshops during these last few months gives me great hope that the facts and figures in my research paper will soon become outdated – but only time will tell.

Emma Butt's research into diversity in post production sound was featured in the first issue of Representology. The Audible workshops will launch in 2022.

AUDIO-DESCRIBING DIVERSITY: ADDRESSING THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

Jonathan Penny, Head of Audio Description at ITV



Diversity in the TV industry is now in the spotlight, but how do we communicate progress to viewers with visual impairments? ITV’s Head of Audio Description, Jonathan Penny, writes about the history of audio-describing diversity and what the broadcaster is doing to give its blind audiences a fuller picture.

Audio Description (AD) is a spoken narration which conveys the visual information on television by describing on-screen elements, including action and interaction, the visual appearance of characters and locations, and the on-screen text. Put simply, the role of the AD practitioner—or audio describer—is to determine the relevance of this wealth of visual information, and then to decide what to include and how best to express it in words. AD audiences are primarily blind and visually impaired people, though the service is also accessed by users who have a temporary or situational requirement, and people with a wide range of additional support needs.

One of the many challenging areas that audio describers need to consider when writing their descriptions is how the people featured in a programme are described physically. What assumptions are made? What is taken for granted? And, most importantly, when weighing up which physical features to squeeze into the short space afforded by the gaps in the programme’s dialogue, what is going to be most relevant to the audience?

There’s that word again, ‘relevance’. AD has been a part of the UK’s TV landscape for over 20 years now, and one of the ways describers have often made these decisions around the level of physical description to include has prioritised its relevance to a programme’s plot. In recent years, it’s become clear that this approach can have unintended and problematic consequences when considering which visual diversity cues are included in the AD.

In delivering this vital access service, the describers become the gatekeepers of visual information, a single lens through which a programme’s whole visual landscape is refracted. It’s not just the fast-paced action sequence, or the contemplative walk along a misty riverbank, it’s the subtle glance that might indicate that two characters are more than just friends; the expression that conveys a flicker of doubt undermining a confidently articulated opinion; and the meaning imbued in the colour of someone’s skin. Only mentioning race when it’s relevant to a programme’s plot risks censorship or erasure, and it can create an unspoken assumption of a norm (such as that characters are White, unless something else is stated). It also fails to provide AD users with any indication of the diversity of a programme’s cast or contributors, which means neither these blind audiences, nor the people being described, can feel represented.

This topic has bubbled away as a problematic area for a long time. There was an understanding that if race were ‘relevant’, then describers should strive to include the racial backgrounds of all of the characters, so as not to single out those who are ‘other’. But this approach still falls short when considering the bigger picture and the breadth of the diverse needs of the AD audiences.

At ITV, we carried out research with our team of AD practitioners, colleagues from ITV Embrace (our Black, Asian and minority ethnic network) and, most importantly, with a focus group made up of AD users themselves (people with different levels of vision and the lived experience of blindness). This consultation process took place in 2020, inspired by a larger-scale project exploring this topic in relation to theatre AD, which was run by Royal Holloway and VocalEyes. The research process, and the subsequent reception of its findings, have demonstrated enormous support for a change to the status quo. The principal questions to be solved included how to prioritise information around physical descriptions, and how to avoid a sense of imbalance (i.e. describing one character’s race, yet not another’s). Describers expressed feeling self-conscious about drawing attention to visual characteristics, which are often understood, or noticed implicitly, by the non-blind audience, but which stand out much more sharply in the mind of an AD listener because they are verbalised. Lastly, we wanted to explore the option of an additional space in which this information could be presented beyond the confines of the programme. The research process showed us that there was an appetite for this information in at least some of the audience, and it was our job to work out how to convey that information.

Two important changes came from this consultation. First, ITV implemented a new editorial policy encouraging all our describers to include physical descriptions, including diversity information, wherever possible. Some of the key messages of those guidelines include not presuming a default, because silence or ambiguity do not give an AD user an equivalent experience to that of a non-blind viewer; not letting a desire for absolute balance preclude us from mentioning skin colour; and remembering that we are primarily describing the visual appearance of a character (not that of an actor), with the aim of achieving parity for a non-blind viewer.

Crucially, we wanted to encourage our describers to embrace a strategy of continuous improvement. AD has few hard and fast rules: trainees of mine wring their hands at my invariable response: “It depends.” But so much of what we say does depend on the context. A list of approved terminology would be useless here. Our policy encourages describers to choose between broad labels, such as Black and White; broad ethnic descriptions, such as ‘South Asian origin’, and more specific country-based terms, if this is evident from the programme’s context or other visual cues. There are many objects that carry cultural significance—hair, clothes, other props—and these should be described so as to enhance diverse descriptions, rather than as a substitute or euphemism for them. As describers, we need to keep talking about this challenge, and other editorial questions, such as

those around disability, body shape, and gender. Increasing our awareness of our own biases, and increasing our cultural competency, are as important as maintaining diversity among the teams that are doing the describing.

The second development to come from the research process pointed towards creating extra audiovisual content, as a place in which to provide fuller physical descriptions of all of the main characters for those users who want them. This is an extra service to enhance the in-programme AD — not a substitute for it. This solution is based on a common practice in theatre and live event AD, where an ‘audio introduction’ provides an overview of the characters, the locations and the visual context, before the show starts.

January 2022 saw ITV release its first public ‘character descriptions’ — a short marketing video in which five main actors from the new thriller Trigger Point read out physical and characterful descriptions of their aliases. Using the actors’ voices and basic slideshow images mean that the users can form aural and visual recognition, in addition to the content, thus fulfilling our commitment to better describe diversity. The feedback from audiences has been fantastic, praising the usefulness of the content and thanking us for going to such lengths so as to include more of our audience.

Blind and visually impaired audiences can only appreciate improvement in onscreen diversity if it’s included in the AD. As describers, we owe it to our audiences to include them in

There are many objects that carry cultural significance—hair, clothes, other props—and these should be described so as to enhance diverse descriptions, rather than as a substitute or euphemism for them.

diversity conversations so that they can appreciate progress, criticise inertia, better understand the context of the characters and the programmes, and feel represented by those who are featured on their screens. I hope this area of AD continues to grow and the different modes of AD can learn from each other. Another area to explore is the involvement of actors in crafting their own descriptions, so that they can be equitable and accurate with regard to how people identify, as sometimes happens now in theatre. Here’s to a future where more broadcasters begin paying attention to how people are described.

Representology takeaways

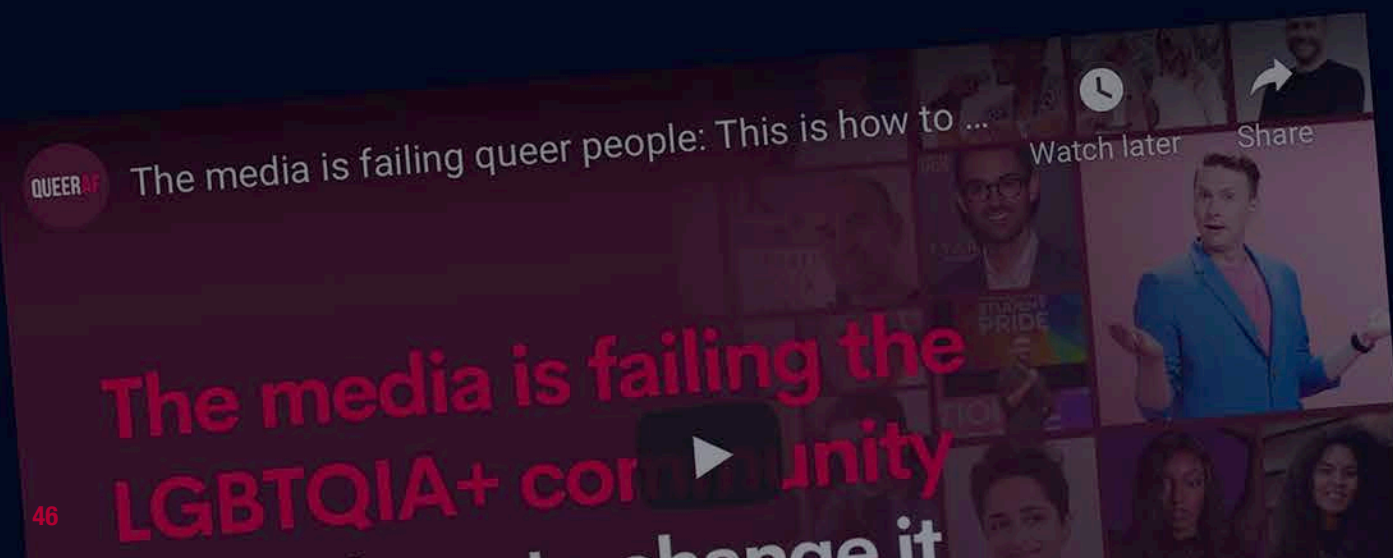
- Audio description matters, and user groups should be consulted regularly to identify their needs
- To avoid describing race or disability could be troubling - the key is to include aspects of characters, not actors, relevant to the story
- Audio describers (ADs) should receive training and support to understand and increase their cultural competencies.

WHY AN EDITOR TOLD ME TO STOP PITCHING 'GAY STORIES'

QUEERAF

Our Mission Podcast Newsletter Subscribe Members FAQs

What is QueerAF?



Jamie Wareham recently launched QueerAF, a new free and ad-free LGBTQIA+ online platform, in response to the failure of traditional media to adequately reflect queer experiences. Here he explains why.

An editor once told me to stop pitching 'gay stories'. They said there was no 'money', nor was there an 'audience', for them.

As a young, budding journalist, this was hard to hear. And its impact was huge. It made me think that pursuing a career with LGBTQIA+ lives in mind was worthless.

No one should be told their lives aren't worth telling a story about.

I didn't understand this at the time, but newsrooms can create awful experiences, like the ones I faced, because they are locked into a system.

To boil it down, it's all about adverts. Often journalism is less about acting as the vital fourth estate, and more about encouraging enough advertising to keep the lights on.

This is creating enormous pressure on journalists and their editors who, by and large, want to make a difference with their reporting.

But because many are judged, not by the quality of their journalism, but by the number of clicks that result from it, some are left with no choice but to chase stories that social media algorithms will lap up.

Social media, also an ad-funded space, rewards content that draws lots of engagement. The trouble is, nothing turns us into keyboard warriors more than an argument.

So, it's little surprise that many parts of the media, whether intentionally or not, drop daily content inflaming, rather than calming, conversations about important policy discussions. Papers are creating these 'culture wars' - for clicks.

Take the rise in the amount of content about transgender people. Barely a day goes by in which the lives of this marginalised community aren't in the news. The headlines are reminiscent of the 'gay panic' that was pushed by the papers in the 1980s.

While the conversation rages in the papers, the real-world effect is a rising tide of LGBTQIA+ hate crimes. They're up 210% since 2015, with over 20,000 attacks in 2020. And the world is watching. The Council of Europe recently grouped the UK with Russia, Hungary and Turkey as a place where 'virulent' attacks against LGBTQIA+ people are rising.

We're seeing a rise in independent media outlets that are looking beyond adverts in order to fund journalism. Substack, Patreon and certain non-profit media in America are examples of popular new platforms challenging traditional press models. In the UK, there is certainly potential in Tortoise's 'slower wiser' approach to news gathering, while Byline Times has a loyal membership which pays for content - even though it's free to readers - because of the editorial values it promises.

This is an exciting time for journalism, if only we can harness and recognise what the audience needs. They are growing weary of clickbait, and they are exhausted by doom-scrolling for news. A return to the journalistic values with which the fourth estate should champion is overdue, wanted, and, crucially, needed.

Jamie Wareham is the founder of QueerAF - sign up to the [free weekly newsletter](#)



THE KID, THE FIGHT, THE QUEEN:

Penny Pepper

1:

Handicapped Kid 1974

Us kids we can't find our words that easy
 When grown-ups give us loads we don't want
 we know they always come from somewhere bad
 so many as the boring days go on . . .
 Mum's kisses and smiles pull me up from bed:
special school bus always on time, she says.
 Marge, the driver's help, bad breath and moaning –
 My friend in Class 3 says she killed a girl,
 Dropped from her wheelchair, though Marge won't be blamed.
 George the driver, grabs her bum and sometimes
 Marge laughs with swear words but once she looked scared.
 George likes us on his lap too, trousers dirty.
 School is miles and miles away and I'm first on,
 Off to the grey stone box for handicapped kids.
 Miss Rosen with big hair my favourite teacher,
 she tells me I'm a *brain box*, I will go far
 but be careful - sometimes they might kill us,
 like her sister in the war though her wheelchair
 was cheap. The second cousin too was deaf
 and taken by enemies. I wonder where?
 Miss Rosen never says and goes all sad.
 Break time and the care nurse comes to shove us
 on the toilet whether we need to or not.
 I always want to wee when I'm not allowed,
 when there's no one there because that's the rules.
 And the vicar, who comes on Wednesdays,
 Pats his fingers down, smells my hair, says I
 must say that I am *truly grateful amen*.
 Rough care staff back at three, smack on our coats
 put plasters on scratches, tuck scarfs over bruises -
 Now we must say: *we love our school and care staff*.
 Dream of my brother, one day at his school?
 That helps me through to home, the bus and George,
 As Marge pulls my hair, says I stink like all spazzas.
 It's fine 'cause at home Mum gives big cuddles
 then cooks shepherd's pie with her best rice pud.

2:

When I went out once,
 We were so few
 Stuck inside no reasons
 No shops, movies, school.

When I went out then
 There were stares
 From hard watchful faces
 By the pub and park

When I went out once
 There were times
 They spat at us, punches too
 Bad names and hatreds

. . . When I went out once
 There she was!
 Slick wheels and brazen
 Swearing for fun.

When I went out once
 He was there!
 A revelation of wisdom,
 Prejudice broke down!

When I went out next
 There they were
 Crips block damnéd streets!
 WE GOT NOTICED.

When I go out now
 There we are
 Eating fruits of hard labour
 Changes we own.

We go out now -
 There is more
 Freedom to win. Yet still,
 Now I get on the bus . . .



3:

I dream in fury to be Queen a while
 Swap hateful eyes for deep adoring gazes
 Ban building only stairs, statutes for lifts,
 Free care, BSL and large print proclamations
 Refurbish asylums to places of sanctuary!
 Break the big greedy charities to give
 Back money made in our neglected names.
 Crips might thrive across bold ageless rainbows
 Multi-sectionality woke awoken.

There are the dead, more dying, prisons made
 By more than concrete and bluffing charters.
 Statistics won't obey my queenly hopes.
 Commonplace evil scarcely in tabloids.
 Yet to ruling foes I'll show compassion.
 Find a chilly land, let them labour hard,
 Spite can keep them warm, malice feeds so well.

Queens must reflect – sadly no utopia.
 Yet behold! I've talked my talk, wheeled my spiel.
 Constitutional is not especially me.

I will reign with strict kind benevolence –
 Make the castles accessible, available –
 First to me and my loyal minions next –
 Because, my final order as your Queen
 Is to, forthwith, dismantle monarchy.

Penny Pepper is a poet, author and activist
<https://linktr.ee/penpep16>

Grace Barber-Plentie's BFI Flare Festival Picks

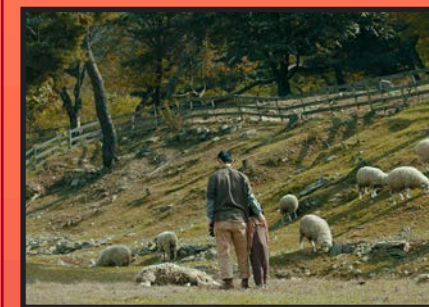


BFI Flare: London LGBTQIA+ Film Festival is the UK's longest running queer film event. It began in 1986 as Gay's Own Pictures, and it is now in its 36th year. Programmer, **Grace Barber-Plentie, picks five highlights from this year's festival.**



It Runs in the Family

In this rich and creative documentary, a filmmaker discovers that she's distantly related to one of the pioneers of Dominican cinema, Oscar Torres, who was forced to leave for Cuba during Trujillo's dictatorship. But he's been completely removed from her family photo albums – why?



A Distant Place

If there's one film in the festival that deserves to be seen on the big screen (although you can also see it from the comfort of your own home on BFI Player throughout Flare) it's A Distant Place. Set in a rural Korean town, its director, Park Kun-young, creates a stunning and intimate picture of the life of a young shepherd raising his niece, whose life changes when his college sweetheart and estranged sister both return to his life.



Out Here Livin'

A huge shout-out to my fellow programmer, Jay Bernard, for putting together this programme of shorts all about Black queer lives, which I'm so excited to watch. There are films about Black queer lives from across the world here, and they are sure to appeal to everyone.



Nico

Nico is a joyous (and, sadly, still rare) example of a film where intersectionality exists at its forefront and not as a box-ticking exercise. Nico is an exuberant and fun-loving fat, queer, Iranian woman, whose life comes tumbling down after she's the victim of a xenophobic attack. In an effort to rebuild her life and never be a victim again, she begins training in karate.



Besties

In this sweet remix of Romeo and Juliet for the Instagram generation, two young French-Middle-Eastern girls experience summer love – but have to hide this, due to the fact that they're from two different girl gangs that are currently warring over the best bench in the park on which to spend their summer daydreaming.

Grace Barber-Plentie is a programmer at BFI Flare: London LGBTQIA+ Film Festival. Grace is a writer and one third of the Reel Good Film Club, a film club focused on promoting the work of people of colour in film through non-profit and inclusive screenings and events.

REPRESENTOLOGY RECOMMENDS



New Beacon Books

Francesca Gilbert



In December 2021, I worked with New Beacon Books to organise a crowdfunding campaign to save the Finsbury Park-based bookshop from the threat of closure, successfully raising over £80,000 in just eight days.

The incredible outpouring of support from communities worldwide highlights just how many lives it has touched since its opening in 1966. I believe that New Beacon Books exists as far more than just a bookshop and has always done. It is a revolutionary organisation rich with the affirmation, validation and celebration of Black literature, uplifting Black voices and stories. Within its walls, it carries nothing less than the heartbeat of a diaspora, and a profound legacy of activism that must be protected now and in the years to come.

Back To Black: Retelling Black Radicalism for the 21st Century

Kehinde Andrews

Back to Black traces the long and eminent history of Black radical politics.

Don't Call Us Dead

Danez Smith

A striking collection of poetry exploring resistance, struggle and race in 21st century America.

Brit (ish)

Afua Hirsch

An exploration of a very British crisis of identity, "We believe we are the nation of abolition, but forget we are the nation of slavery."

Don't Touch My Hair

Emma Dabiri

Emma Dabiri takes us from pre-colonial Africa, through the Harlem Renaissance, Black Power, and on to today's Natural Hair Movement, proving that hairstyling culture can be understood as an allegory for Black oppression and, ultimately, liberation.

White Fragility: Why It's So Hard For White People To Talk About Racism

Robin Diangelo

A profound framework exploring the dynamic of whiteness, denial and guilt in upholding the institutions of white supremacy.

Maya Angelou: The Complete Poetry

Maya Angelou

From her reflections on African American life and hardship, in *Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'fore I Die*, to her revolutionary celebrations of womanhood in *Phenomenal Woman* and *Still I Rise*, every inspiring word of Maya Angelou's poetry is included in the pages of this volume.

When I Dare To Be Powerful; Women So Empowered Are Dangerous

Audre Lorde

Audre Lorde shares a celebration of female strength and solidarity, and a cry to speak out against those who seek to silence anyone they see as 'other'.

Small Island

Andrea Levy

Small Island is a courageous novel of love across oceans, of crossings taken and passages lost, of shattering compassion, and of reckless optimism in the face of insurmountable barriers.

Post-Colonial Love Poem

Natalie Diaz

Postcolonial Love Poem is an anthem of desire against erasure, demanding that every body carried in its pages - bodies of language, land, suffering brothers, enemies and lovers - be touched and held.

The Measure Of A Man: A Memoir

Sydney Poitier

In this candid memoir, the legendary actor, Sidney Poitier, reveals the spiritual depth, passion and intellectual fervour that has driven his remarkable life.

Francesca Gilbert is a poet, performer, and academic, who trains at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama

To discover more, the history of New Beacon Books can be found at newbeaconbooks.com

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SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Representology is a hybrid journal at the intersection of industry practices, academic research and policy making.

We welcome both non-academic and academic authors who would like to contribute thoughts, perspectives, analyses and research findings that help to foster diversity in the media and strengthen the media in diversity.

All ideas, abstracts and full manuscripts should be sent to **Representology@bcu.ac.uk**

The journal accepts contributions in two strands: journalistic and academic, each with a different review and decision-making process. Please understand the differences between the two strands when preparing and submitting your pitches, abstracts and manuscripts.

Journalistic articles

Journalistic articles should be between 1,000 and 3,000 words, and can take one of the following forms

- feature stories
- reflective essays
- issue reviews/analyses
- commentaries
- expert Q&As
- multimedia artefacts (for online publishing only).

Potential contributors must pitch their ideas to the journal in the first instance. Please include a two-line biography, including relevant links to past published work.

Commission decisions will be based on evaluation by the editor in consultation with the editorial board.

If we are interested in your pitch, we will contact to commission your piece. As our editorial team is small, it may take you up to a month to receive a reply.

Full articles will then be assessed by members of the editorial board. All articles will be read on the understanding that they are solely submitted to **Representology**, and published articles will receive a modest honorarium.

Academic papers

Academic articles can take one of the following forms:

- research notes of around 3,000-4,000 words (discussion notes that seek to advance a new idea, concept, theory or method)
- research perspectives of around 3,000-4,000 words (short research-based analyses that aim to provide new, unique viewpoints on established issues)
- reviews and commentaries of around 2,000 words on recent research publications
- full-length studies of around 6,000-7,000 words.

The lengths specified above are inclusive of everything (abstracts, texts and references).

All academic submissions will go through a two-stage submission process:

In the first instance, please send us an abstract of no more than 500 words, outlining the topic, its background, rationale, theoretical and methodological approaches and key findings.

The abstract should make clear which of the above academic paper forms the article belongs to.

Abstracts should be sent, together with biographies of no more than 100 words per author, to **Representology@bcu.ac.uk**

Our academic editors will consider whether your intended paper falls within the remit of the journal. We will respond to you within a month of submission.

All full manuscripts developed from accepted abstracts will go through a rigorous peer review process by at least two relevant experts in the field.

Final acceptance or rejection will be made by the editors in consideration of peer reviewers' recommendations.

For transparency purposes, each peer-reviewed article will be published with meta data regarding the peer-review process and editorial decision (e.g. date of submission, date of revision if any, and date of acceptance) at the foot, to help readers distinguish them from non peer-reviewed pieces.

All articles will be read on the understanding that they are solely submitted to **Representology**, and published articles will receive a modest honorarium.

Five Guiding Principles For Contributions

1. **Clear language**
Making content as widely accessible as possible, writing should be clear, concise and engaging.
2. **Expertise**
Contributors are expected to write on subjects for which they have proven expertise.
3. **Evidence**
Articles should be supported by verifiable facts and research findings.
4. **Refresh debate**
Submissions should seek to enrich current debates or create new ones.
5. **Diversity of perspectives**
Preference will be given to writers seeking to widen representation and outline new perspectives.

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