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RE 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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Representology is a collaboration between Birmingham City University and Cardiff University

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Welcome to Issue Nine of Representology: The Journal of Media and Diversity.

In February, I hosted an event at the BFI Southbank reflecting on Professor Stuart Hall's cultural impact as part of the Constructed, Told, Spoken season on the history of multicultural television (p64). Two short films were screened, the first being 'It Ain't Half Racist Mum' (Representology Issue One, p56), an in-depth critique of BBC news and entertainment programming helmed by Hall and produced by the Corporation's Community Programme Unit, which was established in the 70s and disbanded just over twenty years ago. In the run-up to Charter renewal next year, and in the spirit of acting as a critical friend to public broadcasting, we feature some radical proposals for the BBC's future from the Media Reform Coalition (p16), alongside an interview with DJ Trevor Nelson (p4) who celebrates his thirtieth year on BBC Radio, and Dr Alison Wilde's view on the portrayal of disability in its flagship Saturday night television show, 'Strictly Come Dancing' (p48).

The second film screened in February at the BFI was 'Language is The Key' - directed by Yugesh Walia and produced for the Commission for Racial Equality, which was established in the 70s and disbanded just under twenty years ago. The film focused on multilingual education in England and Wales, and ends with a live performance from poet Benjamin Zephaniah, recently memorialised by the City of Birmingham (p31). We highlight the importance of memory and memorialisation by marking both the tragic passing of BBC executive Danielle Scott-Haughton (p22) and the legacy of living legend Linton Kwesi Johnson (p26), while Sophia Siddiqui considers the power of the 70s radical Black press (p60), and Ashley Clark maps the greatest hits of global Black cinema (p32).

If you have any ideas for our tenth issue and beyond, please send us an email:
representologyjournal@gmail.com

K Biswas
Editor

Lenny Henry meets Trevor Nelson

Rare Groove

Emerging from London pirate station Kiss FM in the 1980s, Trevor Nelson has been a mainstay across BBC Radio for three decades. He talks to Lenny Henry about his early days putting on club nights in Hackney, sourcing vinyl, and helping to provide the soundtrack to multicultural Britain.

Lenny:
Now, you grew up in Hackney, Trev, and your parents are from St Lucia, is that right?

Trevor:
Yes, they are.

Lenny:
What was growing up in Hackney like for you?

Trevor:
I don't want to keep referring to you, but you were obviously the barometer telling people what it's like being, you know, a descendant of immigrants that came over and keeping your culture intact. It was, for me, fantastic – in the sense that I felt at home. I realised everywhere isn't like Hackney. Hackney was the most diverse community. It was wonderful. I'll give you an example, my next neighbour was Greek Cypriot, on one side. Bajan, Barbados, on the other side. I had Africans, Irish - we had this beautiful multicultural street on one side. Then, on the other side of the road, it was really strange. Everybody was white - it was some sort of housing association on the other side of the road. My primary school was on my road, opposite my house. So, can you imagine, it took me ten seconds to get to my school?

Lenny:
Result! Were you late every day?

Trevor:
I was not late, because my mum was a childminder, so she was at home all day looking out of the window.

Lenny:
[Carribean accent] You better get your backside to school!

Trevor:
Exactly. And it overlooked the girls' playground, which meant I could never climb over the wall, because she even sat there at lunchtime having a look. Then, on top of it, Lenny, my mum got a job as a nursery assistant in the school.

Lenny:
Oh, my gosh, there was no goofing off for you ever.

Trevor:
Ever, but outside of that, I wouldn't say we were 'poor'. We realised we were working class, that was always in your face. It was very obvious. This was evident from the day I was born.

Lenny:
Was it a struggle growing up there? I mean, you weren't poor, but Caribbean parents seem to find a way to put food on the table and clothes on your back without telling anybody that you're poor. You knew it, but you didn't know it, somehow.

Trevor:
Yeah, my dad was a bus conductor. My mum looked after people's kids in our house. I think you were allowed to look after four kids. I think there was a law. I had three sisters. I came home for my lunch.

Lenny:
You literally crossed the street. You jammy swine.

Trevor:
I don't know if I was jammy, mate. I did look forward to that.

Lenny:
You'd have looked forward to going uptown and getting chips, would you? That's what we did.

Trevor:
I would prefer to have had school dinners and sit down, you know what I mean? But it was interesting, because I found that I was a very weird kid, I think, for my age. I presume you were similar. I just have a feeling you were so observant. So, I feel quite similar in that way. I watched my dad, who I found to be quite an intelligent man, working on the buses.

Lenny:
And you wondered why?

Trevor:
Yeah, he came in a uniform that looked smart - he took me to his workplace a few times. I was really excited to go and see all the buses and play snooker, but it dawned on me that he was better than that. I did realise it early.

Lenny:
A lot of people came to Britain and were overqualified for the jobs they were doing.

Trevor:
Absolutely. My dad was a supervisor back home. I learned that later. On… the word is going to shock a lot of people – but what they still called a plantation.

Lenny:
What do you mean 'plantation'?

Trevor:
A banana plantation.

Lenny:
Really?

Trevor:
Yeah, bananas were the number one product. He came over in '62, I think. He supervised people in some way, shape or form. Then he came to the UK where he had no real agency.

Lenny:
So his status was lowered when he got to this country.

Trevor:
Yes. Don't get me wrong. It wasn't 'Roots' - him on a horse going "I'm getting the big house and tying you up". No, it wasn't like that. It was just obvious to me that my dad was doing something that he could do with his eyes closed, and could have done something better. He did better himself a little later on. I grew up quite a happy kid. Quite bored, actually, with the simplicity of life.

Lenny:
The interest in music, was it in your house? Was it outside your house? Where did the music come from?

Trevor:
My dad was an incredible music fan. He loved Nat King Cole. He loved all the crooners. He had Frank Sinatra, Country and Western. He had a record player. He had 78s, he had 45s. He built a shelving system, and I used to secretly go in there and have a look at the stuff. It was so cool, but his music wasn't my music.

Lenny:
Well, it was when you were little, but as you got older, you start to think, why are we listening to dad's music?

Trevor:
He wouldn't let me touch the stereo, anyway. So, on a Sunday, he'd come down singing Nat King Cole. He thought he was Nat King Cole.

Lenny:
Did you have a front room?

Trevor:
Yep, we had the front room and my dad pulled out all the fireplaces and did the modern thing, in the 70s, of knocking the two rooms in, and then we had an open plan room.

Lenny:
What was your dad's name?

Trevor:
Andrew Nelson. He was very much part of the St Lucian Association Committee. He ran a football team on a Sunday. He was very much a man who liked to be in charge.

Lenny:
Was he strict with you?

Trevor:
Very. I was petrified of my dad. Petrified. He was my superhero when I was probably seven, eight, nine. I thought he was about ten foot tall. He was only five foot eight, but I thought he was about ten foot tall. My dad was a classic West Indian parent: "It's my house. I make the rules, if you don't like it…", that kind of thing. So strict. You had two types of parents, in the main. Strict West Indian parents, or a dad who'd like to go down to the pub, and chill, and just watch the football or the cricket, or something. My dad used to say "ask me how much money I've got in my pockets right now."

Lenny:
Why would you do that? My dad never said that.

Trevor:
My dad always said that and I'd say, "how much money have you got in your pocket?" Before we looked at it. "I've got £2 and 5 shillings" and he'd have it to a tee. He bought our house when he was a bus conductor.

Lenny:
Cash?

Trevor:
No, no, no, no, no!

Lenny:
Readies?

Trevor:
He prided himself on being really frugal. He was a penny pincher, but he taught me something very young. We grew up in that environment of 'save ten percent of what you earn'. It was about saving money for a rainy day. Thank God he did. Without that strictness ingrained in me, I don't know if I would be where I am today. I genuinely don't. Even though I absolutely loathed him at times for doing that to me.

Lenny:
I had quite a different family set-up to yours. The dad that raised me isn't the dad that birthed me. So, I lived in a house where there was trouble all the time. The parents were always arguing and I never knew why for ages. My stepdad was very, very strict and he wanted things to be right. It sounds like your dad loved you, but wanted to be strict with you. Whereas, in my house, my dad… I didn't feel like my dad loved me. Never hugged me, never said, "I love you. Come here, son, let me teach you to play cricket." Never did any of that stuff.

Trevor:
Exactly the same. The word 'love' was not used in my house.

Lenny:
I want to know the moment you spent your own money on a record. Was it Woolworths? Was it a specific shop?

Trevor:
I can't remember the name of the shop, but I can tell you exactly the moment. I do remember the moment and it's not what people think.

Lenny:
Is it Slade?

Trevor:
No, it's not what you'd think. You'd be very surprised. My first record - my godfather bought the Jackson Five's greatest hits.

Lenny:
That's good.

Trevor:
To this day, I've still got that album. He bought it in 1972 for us. We had a little portable turntable, on which we played that record literally every day after school for, like, two years. I then went and decided that when I got some pocket money, I needed to experience buying a record. There was a reggae record shop on Stoke Newington High Street, and I used to walk past, and all these dreads were always in there, and they were always blasting reggae music out. There was a counter and it was high, and I just wanted to know what it felt like buying a record.

Lenny:
Was it one of those record shops where people, predominantly Black people, are holding up £5 notes and listening to records? Because the first time I went into a Black record shop, it was like, "go and play a tune" - then he'd play it and we'd all be there waving £5 notes at him. Then, the records would just sell out.

Trevor:
It would be similar to that. I can't remember the name of the shop. It didn't last too long. I had no place going in there, this little runt, but I walked in and I bought a 7 inch single, right? It was by Jah Stitch, and it was called Militant Man. I didn't even love the record. I just wanted to buy a record. I think I heard it on the radio. I don't even have it anymore. I wish I did, but I bought it. It might have been 50p, for all I know. I can't remember, but I walked out of that shop ten foot tall. "I've got a record! I've got a record, man!" I went back home and I put it on the turntable. I just wanted that feeling.

Lenny:
And you didn't really like it?

Trevor:
It was okay.

Lenny:
Haha! First thing I ever bought was Skin Tight by the Ohio Players.

Trevor:
Oh, you're cool, aren't you?

Lenny:
No, not at all. I think we had lots of Elvis and Beatles and Fats Domino in the house, but the first record I ever bought - it was because of the picture on the cover. It was a naked woman. The Ohio Players had naughty covers and I went, "I'm buying that". I spent my own money on an Ohio Players record. That kind of southern swamp funk, I'm not sure it was my thing, but I played it and the bass on it - I just thought, this is a bit of me. I liked it. It was different to the music we danced to at the disco. It was different to that music we listened to - Four on the Floor, Motown, or Northern Soul - this was kind of funk, and it was a precursor to my love of Parliament, Funkadelic, Bootsy Collins, James Brown.

Now, I want to know about playing tunes. By the time you were sixteen, did you have a collection? Did you play the school disco? Did you start hanging out with people? What did you do to get you into a slipstream of: actually, I could play and entertain people, because DJs were entertainers back then. They didn't just play records and mix records. They played records and people danced to him. What was the slipstream to get you into where you are now?

Trevor:
I was a shy kid.

Lenny:
No!

Trevor:
I was a shy kid, honestly. You know, like, if you don't fancy yourself? I was only a small kid. I didn't think I was a good looking boy. I liked playing chess. I liked anything that took up my time. I went to a grammar school, which was a very small grammar school, and it was a boys' school, and I was a collector of records. I started buying records at thirteen. I got obsessed with records. I liked all types of Black music, but I didn't have enough money to buy all types of Black music. So, my preference was soul music. That was my priority. I would scour secondhand record shops, try and pick up bargains. By the age of sixteen, seventeen, we're at school, and our head teacher says, right, you can have a school disco, and I'm like, okay. By this point, I'd seen Kool and the Gang and Shalimar perform, and I said, well, we've got no girls in our school.

I liked all types of Black music, but I didn't have enough money to buy all types of Black music. So, my preference was soul music.

Lenny:
Hang on, rewind, rewind. How old are you? How come you're going to see Kool and the Gang and Shalimar, and how come you can afford it?

Trevor:
Sacrifice. You saved up. I had a Saturday job at the age of fifteen. The only thing that gave you respect in our house was if you're working, if you're responsible. I said to my mum, I don't need any school dinner money. I want to be independent. Independence was the only way of me getting ultimate respect, I think, in my house. From fifteen, I bought my own clothes. I never asked my parents for a penny after the age of fifteen. Never.

Lenny:
If I was with you, I'd punch your fist with my fist. That's extraordinary. I didn't get a job, a Saturday job, until I was about fifteen and a half. I worked at Dudley Zoo, and I got the thing from my mum of, you contribute to this house, and I didn't really understand it, but when I did give her the money, I think you're right, there was a kind of seven-league-jumping respect for me as a young boy. It prepared me for when I won New Faces, because I'd see my dad giving her his wage packet, and I'd go, "why is he giving her his wage package? That's his money!" But it was very clear that it was our money. It sounds to me like you had that in you from before.

Trevor:
Yeah, because I knew my parents. I knew that, you know, there are four kids, and I never liked asking them for anything.

Lenny:
That's amazing.

Trevor:
This is a true story, Lenny. absolutely true. I loved it. I loved the fact I felt like a big man. I felt independent and it just made me feel special. So, anyway, I had this record collection and, all of a sudden, we had to go to girls' schools, and try and invite them to our school disco. Now, we're painfully shy. I didn't go to a mixed school. I've gone into my sister's school, which was a convent, and we've gone like a delegation. "Hello, we've got a disco". Add to that, three girls' schools. I'm like, "oh, this is a nightmare", and we said, "who's gonna DJ?" I went, "I've got a lot of records", and then another guy said he's got records. So we decided that we're going to be the DJs. Never played music before.

Lenny:
Oh my gosh.

Trevor:
I have pictures of the very disco to this day - packed floor, girls and guys all dancing. I played Earth, WInd and Fire, I played Shalimar, I played Kool and the Gang, Level 42, and everybody was dancing.

Then I played some slow jams and all the boys and girls started getting together and that was the day I got the bug. That's the day I got the bug. I stood there and I went, this is great.

Lenny:
Seeing a crowd react to your music choice.

Trevor:
Yes, it was great, man. It was still, for me, one of my best gigs ever. It probably wasn't as good as I'm telling you, but it felt good.

Lenny:
And tell me about the politics of that. I mean, were you the only Black kid at your school?

Trevor:
It was a grammar school that you had to do an interview to get into. One in three kids got into that school. It was two and a half miles up the road from where I lived. I really didn't want anything to do with it. I wanted to go to the local school where my mates were going. Like I said, Hackney was a bit of a lovely bubble for me, in that I didn't like leaving Hackney. I was a homeboy.

Lenny:
It's a melting pot.

Trevor:
Yeah, it was a melting pot and I was comfortable. I felt comfortable and, all of a sudden, I'm getting a bus for this school. Three of us in my primary school got one-one-one in the eleven-plus. You get a one-one-one - in maths, media, and something. I remember it was me, a Mauritian kid and a Jewish kid - and I'm the only one who got in. I remember the interview, Lenny, like it was yesterday. I remember some of the questions that were asked of me.

Lenny:
What are the ones that stick out for you?

Trevor:
Do you know who John Stonehouse is? I said, "Yeah, he's an MP who's run off with his secretary to Australia". I used to read the newspapers. Who won the Grand National? "Red Rum". I remember I had to read some text and then answer questions. Obviously, there were other questions and I thought, what's the relevance of these? But I got in.

Lenny:
Was it a university feeder? Did it go to Oxford or something?

Trevor:
No, no, no, no. I didn't go to Uni. The thing about this school - I went, I got in, there were three Black kids in my class out of thirty, which was unusual for me, but that school was the best thing that ever happened to me, because it was a snapshot of what my future was going to be. I'd never been out of my comfort zone. I was eating different food. My mates were coming in, they were going skiing, some of them. You know what I mean? They were eating brown bread. I was used to white bread. "What is that stuff in your sandwich?" It was like doing this cultural exchange. I've got some really good friends. We used to go around each other's houses. I remember a guy called Tim, a guy called Joe. But this is the thing, Lenny. I remember a guy called Fergus was a good friend of mine. He gave me his punk album, so I gave him some Linton Kwesi Johnson, some Bob Marley. We could borrow each other's albums. I do remember race was still a big thing in the 70s, and I remember Joe. I loved this kid. He was just wacky and he was like a rude boy. He dressed like a rude boy to school. I was a soul boy. We kept the uniform, but you wore cotton trousers or you wore drills or something. He had a pork pie hat and loafers, and he said, "come around mine". I went round to his house, and then he went, "Hang on. No, you can't come in. "Why?" "So, my dad's in, he doesn't like Black people."

Lenny:
He just said that?

Trevor:
Yeah, and I stood outside his house, and that was very sobering for me. I'm actually getting a bit emotional.

Lenny:
It was a difficult time. It's interesting, you know? I mean, there's a lot of talk about wokery and fluffery these days and sort of subtextual racism, but actually, back in the day, it was almost better. People literally told you to your face. I went to a pub with my mates once, I used to do underage drinking when I was fifteen and, apparently, when I walked in, everybody else, all these white people, would walk out of the pub. So, me and my mates were on our own in this pub. I used to like it, because it meant we were in charge of the jukebox. We could play the records we wanted to play. Just one Black kid, you know. I was like a weapon of mass destruction in baggy trousers.

Now, you being a DJ is extraordinary, because when I was in Dudley, I never saw any Black DJs, except for this one time. There was this one time, Trev, where there was a sound clash at Queen Mary Ballroom, and there were the white guys down at one end who played there every week - Northern Soul, Disco, Funk. Then this system showed up and put their speakers up on the other end, and I'm telling you, there were all these white kids going, "What are they doing?" Live massive wardrobe speakers. Two turnables, microphone, geezers with the big woolly hats and dreadlocks. I was like, "who are these guys?" When they played, it was so loud. The guys down the other end, they turned their thing up and suddenly they understood the meaning of sound clash. It was one of the liveliest, most extraordinary nights, and there was no fighting, there was no violence. It was like a proper life-changing, culturally affecting thing.

Trevor:
I was initially just a record collector. That's my first life. I never thought I'd be a legal DJ or anything like that. It was a hobby. My first job was importing records for a record shop. So that's how the record thing started. I got asked to be an importer. So I ordered all the new records that you would buy in a store.

Lenny:
What did they ask you for? I'm imagining you're seventeen years old.

Trevor:
When I worked in a shoe shop, at lunchtime, I would go to the record shop and spend my whole lunchtime in the local record shop. The guy who worked in the record shop said, "this guy knows more about that specific style of music than I do", and he had a catalogue of rare groove records, and he didn't know what to order. Then he offered me a job importing new records. So I was one of the importers. I'd phone America, import Public Enemy.

Lenny:
Are you kidding?

Trevor:
Yeah, you didn't know this, did you? I raced to Heathrow every day, every other day, go to Bluebird Records, go to Groove Records, deliver these records and sell them new imports. It was amazing for me. It was the best job in the world, tiring. I was supplying all these shops with records, and then I had my sound system at the same time, throwing little parties, then I got a call from somebody who used to come into the shop, and he said, "Do you want to be on this new station, called Kiss FM, pirate?" I'd never been on a microphone in my life.

I was a different Black kid. I just wasn't a sheep. I was determined to be me. Even though I was talking to Jazzy and I'd heard of him, I was shocked he'd heard of me. He said, "I heard you got tunes". That's all he said. That meant everything to me.

Lenny:
Did anybody ever tell you that your voice was very radio friendly?

Trevor:
Lenny, if you heard my original recording, you would not agree. I'm telling you, I was awful. I tried to be so cool, I actually sounded disinterested. We wanted to be anti-commercial. So there was a community of us. I met Jazzy B, I'll never forget. We were double booked at a nightclub in Hackney. I was promoting this gig, and I rocked up on a Friday. It was week four of my promotion, and the guy said, "No, your night's not on tonight". I said, "what do you mean?" This is my crucial week. It's the fourth week. I saw all these guys with funky dreads bringing speakers in there. "No, we've got a fashion show". Typical. It was a Black-run nightclub as well, 'Trends' it was called. Jazzy pulls up in his Honda. I remember I was in an orange Mini. He was in a Honda, like, a burgundy Honda, and he went, "Yo!". He called me over, and I went, "What's going on here then?" He went, "Are you Mad Hatter?" I replied, "Who are you"? He answered, "I'm Jazzy B - Soul 2 Soul, Funki Dred".

Lenny:
And you were Trevor 'Mad Hatter' Nelson. Why were you the 'Mad Hatter?'

Trevor:
I just called my sound 'Mad Hatter' because I wanted it not to sound like a reggae sound. I just wanted it to be different.

Lenny:
Why was that important for you? You didn't want to be pigeonholed?

Trevor:
Yes. Lenny, our brains are not dissimilar. I was a different Black kid. I just wasn't a sheep. I was determined to be me. Even though I was talking to Jazzy and I'd heard of him, I was shocked he'd heard of me. He said, "I heard you got tunes". That's all he said. That meant everything to me. He's from a different part of London. "I've heard you did some big warehouse parties". He said, "Yeah, come to my office". We met up, we threw a gig in Dalston, and that was the start of everything, in a

sense, for me, because I left my sound system a little bit, because I became Trevor 'Mad Hatter', the DJ. We had a great party. It was called a 'Jeans Jam'. I came up with this concept, right? Hear me out. So, 'Jeans Jam'. We called it 'Jeans Jam', right? So it was £5 to get in. For every item of denim you wore, you've got a pound off.

Lenny:
Ha!

Trevor:
Yeah, laugh you may, sir! So, people were coming to this gig. Denim shirt. Denim tie, Denim belt, and you pay a pound to get in. If only we had filmed it. It looked great.

Lenny:
That sounds hilarious.

Trevor:
Me and Jazzy struck up a bit of a mutual friendship, in terms of respect.

Lenny:
You're still friends now?

Trevor:
Yeah, he's godfather to my daughter. Right, so have you ever heard of a sound system man having an office?

Lenny:
No.

Trevor:
I went up there, it was in Camden. How can he have an office in Camden? It was behind a shop, and it was just a lockup where they had the sound system. He had second-hand furniture in this room. He was eating Marks and Spencer's Chinese chicken. Cold.

Lenny:
That's amazing.

Trevor:
I took everything in and I was like, "How? What?" I said, "How'd you get this space"? He said, "The Prince's Trust".

Lenny:
He got sponsorship?

Trevor:
He got a little help with his rent. Bernie Grant - the MP Bernie Grant - told me about this, and a lot of people from our community don't understand what's available to them. That's why I became an ambassador for the Prince's Trust years later, because I'd seen it in action.

Lenny:
That's like Yvonne Brewster, when they were starting Channel 4, she said Black people need to be part of this. It's really important for us to know where the money comes from, and how to get it, and how to appeal for it. You have to write up paperwork, you have to go and talk to people. You're absolutely right. There's a sense of – if you want to be part of something, you've got to figure out what the game is. Jazzy and Yvonne Brewster, God rest her soul, really understood the game.

I want to ask you about your musical taste. You had a feeling about what was going to move people. Now, was this through a Black lens? I'm talking about the way you grew up, and the people that you knew, and the people you played records for. Was it just all intuition?

Trevor:
No, no, no, there were two me-s. There was the collector, we would have everything from Coltrane to Thelonius Monk to Herbie Hancock. Then there was a 'party' me, who would go out and know what I wanted to dance to. I was your worst nightmare if I was in a club, because I'd been looking at you, and thinking, "why are you playing this crap?" I was that guy, Lenny.

Lenny:
I'm a civilian, right? So I would literally stand by Graham at Gulliver's and go, "Everybody's left the floor, man. What are you doing? You should play this next". I was that guy. It must have been so annoying.

Trevor:
Annoying is the word. In me, it was that sense of 'you've got to do your own thing'. Stop being miserable. You've got to put stuff on and, hopefully, people like what you do. My first gig ever, I got booked in a club called 'Dougies', which was a famous club in Hackney. Thursday night, this club held about 500 people. Famously, I love telling this story, thirty people turned up. Wait for it, Lenny. Twenty seven on the guest list.

Lenny:
Oh God.

Trevor:
So, I'm standing there. There were probably more staff than people there. I knew I was never going to get another night in there. My mate I DJed with said, "Do you think we need to be a bit more commercial?" I said, "Look, they're dancing. Three people paid, and the next time I do a gig four people will pay". That was truly my mindset.

Lenny:
And was there a word-of-mouth about you after a while?

Trevor:
Yeah. Because I'd rather die playing to people who love what I'm doing than broaden it out and hate what I'm doing.

Lenny:
You're probably one of the first Black DJs to broadcast on Radio Two.

Trevor:
I'm the first on Radio Two, yeah.

Lenny:
And for Spoony to be sitting in for Sara Cox. For the people upstairs to go, "yeah, yeah, Trevor should do that". This is big stuff. This is not doing a specialist funk show for an hour and a half at midnight. This is for the people.

Trevor:
I'm at an age now where I wanna just be a broadcaster and have fun. I'm happy to play Fleetwood Mac and even Taylor Swift, in order to get to Kool and the Gang or Steely Dan or someone else I like. I'm happy to compromise because, in my head, I've listened to BBC radio all my life and that audience on Radio Two is massive. It's the biggest station in the country and the simple reason is you can't go on there and say, "Well, I don't want to play any of these", because this is what people love. If you can sprinkle your thing on there, brilliant.

The show that I interviewed you on - Rhythm Nation - we did a lovely little interview. It was the first time I'd been offered anything on my terms. They said to me, "We'd like you to do your Rhythm Nation show that you do on Saturday". I had one show a week on Radio Two, on a Saturday and it was really popping. It was great. I felt good. They said, "We want you four nights a week". I said, "only if I can playlist it". It killed me, Lenny, because I'm very funny about repetition and that. So, I was indoors every day for three hours doing this playlist, getting this playlist together, then going to the show. I didn't have a life in a way, but I knew the importance of it because I felt Radio Two was the biggest station in the country. Our music hasn't been absorbed on that station properly. I did that show, and then they offered me daytime and I scratched my head a lot. It was more of a lifestyle choice, and also broadening our appeal. As long as Spoony got my show, which meant we still have four nights a week and then I'm on daytime, I've made that difference that I want to make.

Lenny:
Absolutely. I think that's really to be applauded, because we stand on the shoulders of those that went before. What I've always prayed for is this thing where you can have a Black family on television and they just appeal to everyone. It's about humanity. When I went on Radio One in the Eighties, sitting in for Noel Edmonds over many weeks for a show called 'The Sunday Hoot', 'Delbert' would play three funk records. It was a kind of an R&B show, but 'Delbert' would play three club records, then the rest of it was Steely Dan, Van Morrison and Elton John. I tried to make it so that it was soul and funk influenced. I played a lot of broad 'mainstream' because I just thought, well, this is not my house. I'm not playing tunes in my bed, and getting up and turning the record over. I'm broadcasting and I'm going to listen to what they say.

I got booked in a club called 'Dougies', which was a famous club in Hackney. Thursday night, this club held about 500 people. Famously, I love telling this story, thirty people turned up. Wait for it, Lenny. Twenty seven on the guest list.

Trevor:
But, what's important is that I heard it. I heard it. I heard you doing it. I remember you on Radio One. I remember you doing that. You put your print on it.

Lenny:
When you went on the radio, Trev, do you think broadcasting diverse sounds had a wider impact on multicultural Britain in the 90s? Do you think that just presenting this beautiful, diverse music had an impact on the kids coming up?

Trevor:
I think so. I think music was the healer for us. I think that the kids in this country are unique. We had a unique opportunity in this country. I looked at America, although all my musical heroes were American, the American separatist nature of their music was galling to me. Whereas, if you played something that someone liked in this country, they could come and enjoy it. I thought that was wonderful.

I always said we needed more television and we needed more radio for Black music to thrive. The reason you and I spent so much money on imports, Lenny, is because no one was backing this music. That's why we had to pay for it on import and pay inflated prices.

Lenny:
When they launched 1Xtra and the Asian Network in the early 2000s, did you think that urban music became more marginalised, or did it provide a new route for artists towards more mainstream success?

Trevor:
100%, and a total validation of the stuff I've done on Radio One. I had a similar situation on MTV. I did a show called The Lick, and within a year they had a 24-hour channel called Base, because of the popularity of The Lick.

I'm doing my stuff on Radio One and the unmentionable Tim Westwood was as well. You know, let's be fair, he was doing his hip hop thing. I was doing my thing. Fab and Groove were doing their drum and bass thing. We were making Black music mainstream, popular for the first time ever. Radio One had proper dedicated Black music shows. Then, within a couple of years, they launched a 24/7 all Black music station.

Lenny:
Were you part of that? Did they consult with you?

Trevor:
No, and that is the only thing that I'm a little bit disappointed about, that we could have made that station even bigger. I think they should have hired us straight away on that station. We should have done both stations. I think that was a mistake. I will say that out loud publicly right now. In fact, you're the first person I've said it to publicly. They wanted to give everybody the opportunity around the country - pirate radio DJs, community DJs - to be on this network. It's funded by the BBC. Why not? So, I was all for it. I'm telling you now, the Stormzys of this world - their careers got accelerated beyond belief. They had a platform, finally - the Tinchy Stryders, the Tinie Tempahs, the Chips, all of them, even Ed Sheeran. Ed Sheeran was born on 1Xtra. We launched a lot of careers on that station. It was really important. The BBC are also always chasing the young market and it's the hardest market to capture.

Lenny:
It's kids making their own stuff now. Did you think at the time there should be a Radio 2Xtra when Radio 1Xtra came out?

Trevor:
I was very happy at the time. We had a 1Xtra, we had an MTV Base. I always said we needed more television and we needed more radio for Black music to thrive. The reason you and I spent so much money on imports, Lenny, is because no one was backing this music. That's why we had to pay for it on import and pay inflated prices. That's what used to really pee me off. I ain't got much money anyway, and you're telling me my favourite album - I have to be spending ten pounds on it when I can see something for £3.99 released in a shop.

Lenny:
You hosted a concert around Bob Marley's music, marking the 60th anniversary of Jamaican independence.

Trevor:
In Brum!

Lenny:
How was that?

Trevor:
It was lovely.

Lenny:
What's the impact of Jamaica on the global cultural stage?

Trevor:
Where do we start? It's abnormal for the size of the island. If you don't like a form of reggae music, you must be...

Lenny:
Dead.

Trevor:
Right? There's got to be something in there for you, right? I'm not asking you to like ragga, dancehall or whatever. It's like if you like folk music, you'll like reggae music. If you like soul music, you're going to like reggae music. If you like blues, you'll like reggae music. If you like anything with melody, you must like reggae music. If you have any chill in you at all. The only person on this planet I think that probably doesn't like reggae music is Donald Trump.

Lenny:
Reggae had such a big effect. When I went to the reggae section, in HMV or Bluebird, I was astounded - astounded by the sheer tonnage of artists coming out of Jamaica making music. Amazing. It wasn't just Bob Marley - there were so many other bands and so many great singers who could handle a tune, who could croon like Nat King Cole or Marvin Gaye.

Trevor:
But the beautiful thing about Jamaican culture was not just the music. The attitude, the fashion, the coolness, the vibe, the style - it spread its tentacles so wide. Drum and bass over here, jungle, garage. The sound system culture comes from Jamaica, you know, and that is where I come from. Sound system culture, that is a Jamaican thing, all the islands. There are kids I know - their parents are Antiguan or whatever, but the Jamaican culture seeped into them. We had inter-island battles all the time.

Lenny:
In your three decades at the BBC as a broadcaster and also with pirate, there have been so many different genres of Black British music - jungle, garage, grime, drill. What's been very interesting is the fork in the road moving away from American R&B to Afrobeat, dancehall, bashment, which have all influenced our homegrown market. What do you think the future is for Black British music in the twenty first century?

Trevor:
We have never been like the Americans. We have been patient. We like to move things forward quicker. We don't stick to the same vibe. They'll stick on something for a decade.

Lenny:
We're early adapters. I think that's one of the things about British audiences. I told you this story about going to Chuck D's house, and I went in and he had a massive shed in the back of his garden and he looked at all the territories where Public Enemy could still sell out a thing. He went, "You London people. You like something for five minutes and then it's gone".

Trevor:
We make music that you can't define. We make music, then we have to make up a name for what it is. When you ask me, "Where's it going?" I don't quite frankly know. The way people make music now after COVID, so many artists became introverted bedroom artists, right? You can make an album on a laptop, Lenny, literally in your bedroom. When I worked at a record label, we had to book a studio for seven hundred and fifty pounds a day just for an artist to write. That was 30 years ago. Now you can make an album for the price of demos.

I think it's always exciting being a musician in this country because anything goes. I think they're strangled in the States a lot more. I think over here, anything goes. We are very creative. Anyone who tells you they know what's coming is lying.

Trevor Nelson hosts a daily show on BBC Radio Two

BBC Charter Review - The Alternative Green Paper

On March 3rd 2026, an event was organised by the Media Reform Coalition to propose radical ideas for the future of the BBC. Short presentations were given and here are some of the highlights.

Media Reform Coalition

Last year, the highest-grossing theatrical documentary in America wasn't an urgent climate change exposé or a vérité portrait of a community in struggle. It was 'Am I Racist?', an 'anti-DEI', alt-right polemic designed to inflame rather than inform

Lee Edwards Chair of the Media Reform Coalition

The current review of the BBC's charter is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for the British public to debate and decide the future of the BBC.

The public consultation about the new charter should then be an exercise in democratic engagement, rather than simply information gathering. However, as those of you who've looked at the Government Green Paper will know, the current consultation falls short in many respects and it limits, rather than facilitates, public involvement with decisions about the BBC's future.

In response, the Alternative Green Paper was designed as a collaborative project to put the public at the centre of BBC Charter Review. It's a collection of ideas for reforming the BBC featuring contributions from media experts, audience groups, campaign organisations and individual members of the public. The ideas are concisely expressed, just two pages, in straightforward language and offer open questions for the public to respond to.

Perhaps, most importantly, they illustrate the imagination and innovation that the public and civil society want to share with the Government about the future of our most important public service broadcaster.

Dan Hind, Media Reform Coalition

The BBC was constituted as a chartered corporation in December 1926. It will be 100 years as a chartered corporation this December, and I think 100 years is just about enough to have our public media organised as a chartered corporation, which, bear in mind, is the same institutional form as the East India Company.

We recommend reconstituting the BBC as a public service cooperative in December 2027 and it would begin operations as such in January 2028. So we don't have long. The new Charter, essentially, will be a cooperative Charter.

Now, a cooperative is run for the benefit of its members, and its members are actively and directly involved in both its governance and its operations. We propose that everyone who pays for this cooperative BBC will be a member of the BBC, and membership will confer new rights that are sufficient to secure active and direct participation in the BBC. This doesn't just mean voting.

In particular, we think it needs two rights. First, the right to allocate a fraction of the BBC's budget to journalistic, educational and cultural projects of which we approve as individuals. Second, the right to sit on randomly selected panels, which will be integrated into the operations and governance of the BBC.

These panels will be paid and they will be engaged in a structured dialogue with the BBC's permanent employees, with politicians, with experts, academics and with the public, crucially, with the public broadly defined. Broad and shallow, deep and narrow.

This broad and shallow power means that we'll have some small amount of individual power over the media space and that we can exercise quite casually.

It's a bit like subscribing to something on Patreon. It doesn't take a lot of time or thought, and it doesn't really matter hugely what any individual one of us does with that little bit of the BBC's budget. But the sum total of our decisions is going to be crucially important because it becomes a moving picture of our collective curiosity, our collective appetite for transparency, for new information, for connection.

The deep and narrow power means that some of us are chosen at random, not because we're rich or highly educated or privileged or desperate to be important. Some of us will have a power that reaches deep into the means through which we understand the world, each other and ourselves. Again, crucially, as members of those panels, we'll be engaged in a dialogue with all the members, all the other members of the BBC.

So, we start to have a national conversation which is governed and informed by the interests and appetites of all of us, rather than of a select elite. I cannot stress how tightly controlled things like editorial commissioning decisions are. These new powers, I think, will transform the BBC.

It means that high status but politically vulnerable employees at the BBC will no longer have a monopoly on commissioning decisions. Their professional skills and knowledge will be supplemented by bodies that can meaningfully stand in for the membership as a whole. Politicians will no longer be able to bully the BBC behind closed doors.

The relationship with government will take place in plain view. All of us as members will have insight into the production and reproduction of our society's common sense. If we want to understand the core of what it is to be powerful, it's to have insight into that process.

We're talking about democracy. That's the heart of it, to understand how common sense is being created and recreated. Now we have a year or slightly more to refine the details.

Crucially, it must stay in the public sector. I'm not saying that anything other than it remains a public sector institution, but it is a public sector institution built on cooperative values. The principle is clear.

We rely on public media. We all pay for it. We must all take our place as its owners and operators.

Pip Eldridge, Voice of the Listener and the Viewer

We have a vision of creating a Public Media Commission, and this vision is to enable a BBC that is stronger, more trusted, and genuinely accountable to the public it serves. This will prevent crucial decisions about the BBC's future being made behind closed doors. The BBC is unlike any other media organisation in the UK.

It's publicly owned, publicly funded, guided by a public mission, and free at the point of use. That unique combination makes it one of the most important institutions in our national life. However, one of the big issues facing the BBC is the perception that it lacks independence from government, which then risks reducing public engagement and erodes consent for its continued public funding.

Furthermore, the seeming willingness of governments to cut the BBC's licence fee funding makes the BBC institutionally cautious, when it should have the confidence to take risks, make bold choices, and trust its programme makers with the editorial and creative autonomy needed to make high quality, innovative, and important programming. This Public Media Commission would determine and recommend the level of public funding for the BBC, including any future replacement for the licence fee. It would publish its recommendations openly, ensuring transparency.

It would rigorously assess how well the BBC is fulfilling its public mission, and use these to inform funding recommendations and decisions. It would also apply the public interest test, not only when new services are launched, but also when existing ones are closed. It would oversee independent, transparent appointments to key leadership roles, free from day-to-day political control.

We're not talking about a new behemoth organisation, but a small, lean one that is fleet of foot, enabling decisions to be made quickly. We believe that the people who pay for the BBC should have confidence that decisions about its funding and governance are fair, transparent, and accountable. We've seen what happens when they're not, like the 2015 funding settlement imposed after secret negotiations.

A Public Media Commission would really assist with renewing public trust. It's about strengthening democratic legitimacy and, most importantly, it's about ensuring that the BBC remains a truly public broadcaster, protected from political pressure and shaped by the citizens that it exists to serve.

Sameer Padania, Demos

The cycle of Charter renewal was designed to allow evolution, but it was never really supposed to admit the idea of the abolition or dissolution of the BBC, although it technically did. Nobody really thought it should do that.

Now we're moving into a period where that's a live political possibility and it's not a theoretical one. What we have proposed is an idea called the public lock. As part of the broader proposals, we've proposed a standing citizens' panel that is a counterweight to the Board.

. . . any proposal that is made to fundamentally alter or abolish the BBC - that means its existence, its independence, the principle of universality - should be subject to public consent of a kind.

However, this is a different body formed to defend the existence of the BBC, essentially to ensure that any proposal that is made to fundamentally alter or abolish the BBC - that means its existence, its independence, the principle of universality - should be subject to public consent of a kind. Not overriding parliamentary sovereignty, but as a prelude to it. Not just the decision of whichever government happens to hold office when these decisions are due. We're arguing, as many others are, that the BBC is not just a broadcaster, it is critical national infrastructure, it underpins our democratic discourse, it's the only bit of technology infrastructure and our national technology stack that we actually own, and that we haven't invited various foreign-owned and foreign-directed technology corporations into. Since it's free of surveillance and data harvesting and commercial capture, it's particularly valued, cherished and unique.

What would the public lock actually do? Any proposal triggering the threshold - abolition, removal of independence, changes to the public purposes - would require a citizens' assembly. This would constitute something like 150 members selected by civic lottery, stratified to reflect the UK population, and they would deliberate. This would be constituted by an independent third-party body that was contracted through a public tender. There are lots of expert bodies that do this sort of work - the Sortition Foundation and others - and they would deliberate over a minimum of, say, four weekends. They'd hear evidence, and they'd publish their recommendations on this particular proposal.

This would then be tabled before Parliament, but then a second assembly would need to be convened a minimum of three years later, to allow a bit of a buffer and ensure that it wasn't just a political moment. A second assembly with discrete members would then do the same thing, and these reports would again be tabled before Parliament. The House of Commons would need to debate this and consider the government's proposal in light of what these two citizens' assemblies have said, and then the other legislatures of the UK - the devolved legislatures - would also need to vote.

The threshold for approving any changes required would be supermajorities so, just as in the 2013 Press Recognition Panel Charter and in the accompanying legislation, you'd need a supermajority of two-thirds in each of these legislatures to pass that. This is to ensure that Westminster doesn't have primacy, in that sense, over other parts of the UK, because this is a UK-wide institution, and it's one that serves, through universality, all parts of the UK - all citizens and all residents of the UK. There should, therefore, be representative voting across all of those legislatures, because of the existential nature of that service that is proposed to be changed, reduced or taken away.

This, finally, isn't about making the BBC unreformable, unchangeable. It's, ultimately, the principle that this is supposed to be a public institution, and for any changes to be made, you need the public's informed consent. At the moment, we don't have that because all of the methods of interaction ultimately flow back to the government.

Having a direct possibility of the direct public voice expressing what it feels as a constituted deliberative body, provides a clear counterweight to any political or other kind of influence over the BBC's existence.

Watch 'BBC Charter Review - The Alternative Green Paper' in full:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ugqBPMZZBMo

Read the Media Reform Coalition's Alternative Green Paper:
mediareform.org.uk/bbc-alternative-green-paper

Remembering **Danielle Scott-Haughton**

Cassandra Johnson-Bekoe, **Thara Popoola** and **Madeline Addy**, co-founders of Black Women In Scripted

Danielle Scott-Haughton was one of those rare people who didn't just believe in others - she actively made space for them to be seen, heard, and taken seriously.

She was a true champion of people. Not in a performative way, but in the quiet, consistent, deeply felt way that actually changes lives. Danielle showed up. She followed through. She backed people when it mattered, and she did so with generosity, integrity, and care.

As Black women working in this industry, we know how rare that is.

Danielle understood the importance of access, of advocacy, of opening doors and then holding them open for others. She was not only on the path to becoming one of the most significant Black producers of her generation, she was already shaping the industry through the way she worked, the people she uplifted, and the standards she held.

She gave everything to her work but, more importantly, she gave everything to people. She was an ally, a sister, a supporter, and a friend.

There is a real sense of absence in the industry now. It is being felt already, and it will continue to be felt. Alongside that loss, Danielle leaves behind something powerful: a blueprint. A way of working that centres generosity, accountability, and collective progress. A reminder that success is not just about what you build for yourself, but also what you build for others.

We will miss her deeply.

And we will continue to honour her by carrying that work forward.

Daniellé Abena Scott-Haughton (1989–2026)

"Kind but formidable, creative but egoless, confident but collaborative. Danielle had the most powerful combination of skills and traits, making her one of a kind. A rare talent who would have continued to achieve so much."

Lindsay Salt,
Director of BBC Drama

To say that in her 36 years on earth Daniellé Abena Scott-Haughton made an impact would be an understatement. A champion of writers and an extraordinary storyteller in her own right, our Dani - as she was known to friends and family - was a generational talent whose absence feels impossible to comprehend.

Born at 7pm on Tuesday, 2nd May 1989 in Croydon, her middle name, *Abena*, meaning Tuesday, in Ghanaian tradition, marked the day she arrived, and would later find its way into her moniker, Danielle DASH (Daniellé Abena Scott-Haughton) - a name many will remember from her time as a sharp, incisive, cultural commentator on Twitter.

Her early years were shaped across continents. At just two years old, she moved to Harare, Zimbabwe, where she was raised for several formative years by her grandparents, both educators. In that environment, her curiosity was nurtured and her creativity encouraged. She took part in tennis, piano, and violin lessons, while also stepping into fashion shows at school. These were early glimpses of a child already comfortable with expression, performance, and visibility, a legacy that continued throughout her life and, when she returned to London in 1995, she brought that with her.

Returning to South London, Dani continued her education at Mary Magdalene Primary School in Peckham, before moving on to Aylwin Girls' School in Bermondsey and, later, to Richmond upon Thames Sixth Form. It was at Aylwin that something clicked. As part of the *Aylwin Storytellers*, Dani travelled across the country, performing stories with energy, rhythm, and conviction. In 2005, she was named Young Storyteller of the Year, a recognition not only of her talent, but also of her instinct.

This passion continued at Richmond upon Thames Sixth Form, where Dani's love of English was deepened through her A-level studies. She was recognised by her English Literature teacher for her intelligence and articulation. Her flair for performance also led her to join the dance group *Random*, a role she embraced with camaraderie and flair. Even then, storytelling was, for Dani, never just about performance; it was about connection, community, and expression. A creative in every sense of the word, she was already developing another language: fashion.

Dani's approach to fashion was instinctive, playful, and completely her own. She mixed colours and patterns without apology, stepping outside in outfits that felt less like statements and more like extensions of her inner world. She created her own label, *Cut and Swallow*, a mirror of her style, and attended the London College of Fashion, where she explored design more formally. However, she continued with her love of performance, attending the Identity Drama School.

Graduating in 2010 into the aftermath of a global financial crisis, Dani faced an industry that wasn't immediately open to her, but where there were no clear paths, she made her own. She worked as a video editor for *SUPERSUPER* magazine, gaining experience before the publication folded. A brief role at William Hill followed, one which she left quickly, unwilling to compromise her values.

At the same time, Dani was building a presence as a cultural writer. She contributed to *Black Ballad*, *Metro*, *Grazia*, *The Huffington Post* and *Stylist*, and wrote as a columnist for *Trench Magazine*. Her short story *The Row*, published by the late Sareeta Domingo, stands out as a particularly personal piece - inspired by South East London and her time working at William Hill. It explored queer love, Black womanhood, and the quiet complexities of everyday life. It was, in many ways, Dani on the page: observant, honest, and deeply human.

In 2016, Dani joined Balloon Entertainment marking a new chapter. There, her trajectory was clear. She rose from Development Assistant to Executive Producer, not through chance, but through clarity of vision and strength of voice. She understood stories, and worked with countless first time writers, offering guidance, mentorship and a listening ear. That instinct for opening doors would become one of her defining qualities. She championed emerging writers. She mentored new voices. She advocated for stories that might otherwise have been overlooked. One of her many achievements at Balloon was developing and serving as Executive Producer on *Champion*, a series that landed with cultural significance and energy.

She championed emerging writers. She mentored new voices. She advocated for stories that might otherwise have been overlooked.

Then came a return to something more grounded: working at her aunt's West Indian takeaway in Hither Green. It was there that she created *Dear Jesus*. The self-made YouTube series was where Dani's voice began to fully land. Running for four seasons and winning Favourite Web Series at the Screen Nation Awards in 2015, she expanded its world with *The Alexis Show*, building a creative universe rooted in authenticity and perspective - blending her faith, her instinctive storytelling, and her skill as a filmmaker, all deeply embedded in the Jamaican British South London culture she loved.

In 2023, Dani reached a major milestone when she joined the BBC as a Commissioning Editor, writer, and producer. In that role, she contributed to some of the UK's most beloved programmes, including *EastEnders*, *Death in Paradise*, and *Beyond Paradise* – establishing herself as one of the most influential and powerful Black women in British Television.

Yet for all her professional achievements, Dani's impact cannot be measured by credits alone.

She made friends everywhere she went and, more importantly, she kept them. Her friendships were deep, sustained and rooted in care. She checked in. She showed up. She held space.

Her laughter was infectious. Her presence, grounding.

She didn't just enter rooms. She shifted them.

Dani lived with intention. She created with purpose. She loved actively.

There were still plans unfolding - travel with friends, new creative projects, stories waiting to be told. A house with a garden in Ladywell. A quieter life, one day, as a secondary school teacher. Writing novels.

Dani was in motion, always building, always imagining what came next. And that's what makes her loss so difficult to hold.

Daniellé Abena Scott-Haughton leaves behind more than a body of work. She leaves a blueprint for creativity without ego, for confidence without exclusion, for storytelling that centres people, not just narratives. She is deeply missed, but her legacy lives on in the stories, in the people, and in the spaces she made possible.

MARKING LINTON'S LEGACY.

Dr Omega Douglas

Goldsmiths honoured dub poet, New Cross Fire activist, and celebrated alumnus Linton Kwesi Johnson by naming a university lecture theatre after him.

On a dark evening in mid-January, the time of year, in Britain, when the weather and seasonal fatigue compels most people to stay at home, an extraordinary man arrives in an ordinary area - New Cross, south-east of central London. As the poet, activist and father of reggae poetry, Linton Kwesi Johnson, steps out of an Uber - dapper in a blue suit, bright tie and trademark trilby - his presence is eagerly awaited by several hundred people who have journeyed across the UK's cold capital to celebrate his legacy. They occupy every seat in the largest lecture theatre in Goldsmiths, located in the Professor Stuart Hall Building. My colleagues and I teach media, communications and cultural studies to students from all over Britain and the world here. We're gathered tonight to recognise the powerful ways in which Linton has used culture to illuminate the world and to call attention to colonially-moored injustice, by naming our biggest lecture theatre after him.

When we decided to rename our main media lecture theatres to celebrate culturally and politically significant people and symbolise the critical approach to creativity we stand for, Linton was the obvious choice from a carefully curated list of esteemed figures. A former Goldsmiths sociology student, Linton has been instrumental in helping to make and sustain calls for racial justice for decades by using his art to bear witness to issues ignored and delegitimised by powerful people and institutions. This includes demands for justice for the victims of the New Cross Fire notably, via his poem New Crass Massahkah, a tragedy which occurred down the road from Goldsmiths. We dedicate our biggest teaching space to Linton during the week of the 45th anniversary of the fire. The blaze raged through a house in New Cross on January 18th 1981, when a group of Black teenagers were celebrating Yvonne Ruddock's and Angela Jackson's birthdays. The fire was started deliberately. Many people believe fascists were the perpetrators. Fascist groups were long part of the far right racist terror inflicted on communities of colour in Britain in multi-pronged ways: state neglect, police brutality, and street violence, including, in the 70's and 80's, petrol-bombing people's homes. The hell that unfurled in the terrace on New Cross Road killed thirteen teenagers, including 16-year-old Yvonne, injured more than 50 and led to the death of another guest, Anthony Berbeck, two years later. It is believed Anthony took his own life due to the trauma he and his friends endured that night. Almost five decades on, the tragedy remains unsolved.

Linton's poetry, often written in Jamaican, his mother tongue, drew attention to the lives and experiences of Black Britons at a time when Black and British were viewed as mutually exclusive words, and our voices were marginalised at best, and erased at worst by the political and cultural elite. This erasure extended to the victims and families of the New Cross Fire. Some family members join us to honour the way Linton's unapologetic use of words and reggae music helped ensure that their struggle against injustice, alongside many others, was named and not forgotten.

. . . Linton's unapologetic use of words and reggae music helped ensure that their struggle against injustice, alongside many others, was named and not forgotten.

The audience and contributors to the evening are testament to the way Linton's work is passed, baton-like, from generation to generation. As I walk Linton into the packed theatre, he is met by a warm wave of applause and cheers. Almost every age demographic is represented – from teens to pensioners. On the floor, invited to speak to Linton's legacy, is the professor, journalist and author Gary Younge; Professor of Sociology, Les Back; Emeritus Professor of Caribbean Literature and Culture, Joan Anim-Addo and some of our fantastic students, who have bravely volunteered to read the master's work in front of him.

A 2018 conversation between Linton and the cultural and social theorist, Paul Gilroy, highlighted how Linton's poetry and its political foundations are nurtured by inter-generational and transatlantic relationships. Gilroy himself was influenced by Linton's work. He drew on it, as Les says during his testimony about Linton, to characterise reggae and the art of the DJs who played it, including the legendary Saxon Studio, "as a kind of kinetic orality".

In my experience, Linton Kwesi Johnson's poetry isn't just nurtured by inter-generational, transatlantic relationships. His nuanced rhymes, rhythms and music also helped nurture these relationships. They continue to do so. This includes via his use of Jamaican - connecting those of us in the diaspora to 'back home'. Jamaican was so heavily spoken and imitated by young people in Britain during the 70s and 80s, whether their heritage lay in Jamaica, other Caribbean nations, African countries or white communities, that it's been woven through British English, creating a rich new lexicon.

I first encountered Linton and his work in St Paul's, Bristol, when I was a big-afroed, leg warmer-wearing primary school kid. It was the early 80s, around the time of the uprisings happening across England against racism and police brutality, including in St Pauls, where my family and I lived. We were inadvertently caught in the uprising as my mum rushed through the streets of our neighbourhood with my little sister strapped in her pram, my hand gripping one of the handles, small body almost taking flight, as bottles whistled though the air, sirens blared and shouts of protest bellowed from people long oppressed and unheard. The crowd made way for us, helping mum with the pram up a flight of concrete steps so we could get home safely. My little sister went to nursery in a community centre in St Pauls, called the Inkworks. The Inkworks was also the leading Black arts centre in the Southwest, and it ran cultural, educational and artistic events and workshops which reflected the heritage of African and African-Caribbean people. After the noise, blue lights, smoke, fire and confusion of the uprising, Linton visited the Inkworks to speak. My mum took me and my sisters. I didn't understand why we were going to listen to this man who I didn't know. In retrospect, I realise mum took us to help us make sense, not just of the confusion of the uprisings, but of the conditions of the area, society and world we were growing up in. That, as Gary Younge says when he stands to honour Linton, is a critical part of his legacy. Linton, Gary exclaims, "has sought no validation from the literary establishment, using his voice to speak truth about power, rather than to it. He's not devoted his considerable talents to explaining the working class Black experience in verse to white middle class poetry lovers. Instead, he chose to articulate the working class Black condition in one of his many vernaculars, patois, and explained England to itself. In his work, Black Britons are not objects of anthropology, but protagonists in their own resistance and potential liberation." And that, I recall, is the sense I came away with from the Inkworks that day. I don't remember what Linton said, but I do remember the positive energy in the space. There was a feeling of collective empowerment rooted in seeds of resistance, which held the promise of growth and the potential to bear fruits of liberation. Linton's work has undoubtedly helped bear fruits for Black people in Britain.

Arriving here from Jamaica in 1963 aged 11, he grew up in Brixton and began a degree in sociology at Goldsmiths in 1973. At university, as Les, also once a Goldsmiths student, tells the audience, with Linton listening and nodding gently in agreement, Linton encountered the same racism he experienced beyond the walls of the institution. This includes once being refused entry to the library. Linton has described his time at Goldsmiths as a formative "laid back… friendly learning environment" that helped nurture his voice. But it was also, and remains, a place that reflected Britain's social ills, including racism, as much as it sought to challenge them. That tension can be productive, including the productivity of change-makers like Linton. After the New Cross Fire, when Les arrived at Goldsmiths as a 19-year-old undergraduate in 1981, he recalls Linton being "very much at the centre of what I think now was a kind of Black cultural renaissance of politics, art and music. If you were open to moving across the checkerboard with respect and humility,

there was an education on offer in the record shops, community centres, the book fairs, the dances, in every part of this corner of London."

Les was one of those who moved across the checkerboard, becoming a white ally to Black communities speaking out against racism, grieving the lives lost to the New Cross Fire and bearing witness to, as he says, "the contempt of the white world I witnessed at close quarters. And it wasn't just the newspaper headlines, but the racist jokes told inside the Metropolitan Police and the stand-up comedians who performed at the Montague

The power, pain and the beauty threaded through Linton's art, and the fact that it continues to resonate, lies in the way, as Gary (Younge) says, Linton's words "connect with his audience through time".

Arms, just half a mile from here. Even the Warden of Goldsmiths College was sceptical. Richard Hoggart wrote in his memoir that racist motivation was unproven and quite unlikely. He dismissed accusations of police racism and the suggestion that they had dragged their heels, which Steve McQueen's documentary has shown they most certainly did. I walked past 439 New Cross Road every day on my way to college, and the burnt-out house with the names of the young people who were killed, in the doorway. It was like an open wound and a scar burned into the city. The murderous stench of the fire endured hauntingly for months. The victims had their futures stolen from them that night. They were very close to my own age. In so many ways, similar, except for the accident of being born on either side of the colour line."

The power, pain and the beauty threaded through Linton's art, and the fact that it continues to resonate, lies in the way, as Gary says, Linton's words "connect with his audience through time". This is because, Gary continues, "while much has changed, so much has remained the same". The shape-shifting circular nature of racism and its ability, like the most virulent virus, to sustain itself, is conveyed powerfully when our student volunteers read a selection of Linton's poems alongside Professor Joan Anim-Addo. From Seyi Keyamo's reading of *Sonny's Lettah* (1979), which draws attention to the ongoing tragic consequences of police abuse of their powers to stop and search, to Rofeda Bougaga's reading of *Inglan is a Bitch* (1980) and its commentary on Britain's exploitation of Black working class labour, each poem remains as relevant today as when Linton crafted it.

The enduring resonance of Linton's work is also captured beautifully when audience members raise their hands for the mic at the end of the evening to offer their testimonies. They include a woman who was part of the Race Today Collective, both a journal and movement that were critical in uplifting Black British communities; and a man who began his career as a police constable in Lewisham when Linton was a Goldsmiths student. The man lists the discriminatory laws systematically formulated by the British justice system, which mean, as he says, "we still have to hold the authorities to account, and we still have to look out for our young people who are subjected to these unjust laws." Before he speaks, a much younger man stands. Beaming, he's clearly in awe of Linton. He takes the mic and captures what I sense everyone in the lecture theatre is feeling. "I found so much inspiration in your journey, and I can relate to it so much," he says. "I'm always encountering my heroes after they've passed and so I just wanted to say thank you for being alive and showing that us 'man from Brixton' can survive. Thank you so much for being here". This young man's sentiment summates, with honesty, why honouring Linton in the way we have, on this cold January evening in New Cross - a seemingly ordinary area, criss-crossed with extraordinary history - is so fitting and deserved.

Dr Omega Douglas is a writer and academic based at Goldsmiths, where she is Head of Journalism and Strategic Communications. Her most recent book, The Racial Dynamics of Reporting Africa: Colonial and Decolonial Practices in Mainstream Western Newsrooms, is published by Routledge).

Birmingham honoured the life and legacy of poet Benjamin Zephaniah in March by naming him the first-ever recipient of the City of Birmingham Medal.

The award was accepted posthumously by his widow, Qian Zephaniah, and his brother, Tippa Naphtali, at Birmingham City University's Benjamin Zephaniah Building.

"Birmingham shaped Benjamin's voice, his politics, and his poetry and he always said his words belonged to everyone," said Qian.

Visit the free poetry trail featuring winners of Birmingham City University's Benjamin Zephaniah Future Writers competition at Birmingham Botanical Gardens until May 17th: https://birminghambotanicalgardens.org.uk/bbg-event/bcu-future-writers-trail-26/

Pictured below are: **Professor David Mba** (Vice-Chancellor of Birmingham City University); **Fangjing Hu** (School of Jewellery graduate and designer of the medal); **The Lord Mayor of Birmingham, Councillor Zafar Iqbal MBE; Qian Zephaniah; Councillor Sharon Thompson** (Deputy Leader of Birmingham City Council); and **Councillor Robert Alden**.

WHY I WRITE ABOUT BLACK FILM

In Ashley Clark's new book, *The World of Black Film*, the writer picks 100 essential and eclectic movies showcasing the history of Black cinema.

Ashley Clark

Since entering the film industry professionally in 2009, I have been deeply invested in amplifying, contextualizing, and sharing my enthusiasm for international Black film in my various roles as a critic, broadcaster, and programmer.

Black film is often underfunded, overlooked, and marginalised in mainstream film discourse, and I've long been motivated to counteract these prevailing narratives. As a writer and moderator, I've been fortunate to interview some of my filmmaking heroes, from Spike Lee to Julie Dash and Mahamat-Saleh Haroun, and I've authored monographs on Lee's film *Bamboozled* (2000) and the trailblazing work of the British outfit, Black Audio Film Collective.

As a public programmer, I've organized retrospectives at venues including the BFI Southbank, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Brooklyn Academy of Music, on themes ranging from Afrofuturism to cinema in the age of Black Power and the Black film boom in 1990s America. In my present role as the curatorial director of the Criterion Collection—a New York-based publisher of home video editions of classic and contemporary films—I am proud to have overseen a marked rise in the number of international Black films included in its prestigious catalogue and on its streaming service, the Criterion Channel.

You might be wondering: how am I defining the term "Black"? After all, race is a complicated and charged subject, memorably described by the Jamaican-British sociologist Stuart Hall as a "floating signifier…one of those major concepts which organize the great classificatory systems of difference, which operate in human societies."[1]

Definitions and terminologies of Blackness—not to mention the myriad ways in which people self-identify—have varied dramatically from place to place and throughout history, and continue to change. In my four decades on Earth, I have identified—or been identified—as Black, mixed-race, "Mixed: White and Black Caribbean," biracial, Jamaican-British, and a light-skinned Black man. (I was also, in 1998, cast as the luckless Egyptian child king Ptolemy in a Hallmark Channel remake of *Cleopatra*. But that's another story.)

For utilitarian purposes, I have used Black as a catch-all term to describe African American people born on American soil and living in America and elsewhere, people from sub-Saharan Africa (unless otherwise noted; for example, white South Africans), and members of the sub-Saharan African diaspora in the Americas, Europe, and the Caribbean. I hope not to be too guilty of identifying people in ways they would not wish. I have not included people from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in my definition of Black, but this region has played an important role in the history of Pan-African cinema. To give just one example, Tunisia's Carthage Film Festival, founded in 1966, has been a crucial platform for cultural exchange and collaboration for filmmakers across the African diaspora and the Arab region.

With that established, there follows a natural follow-up question: how am I defining a "Black film"? Put simply, I have chosen to write about films that genuinely centre the experiences of Black characters and, in the case of documentaries, real Black people around the world, as opposed to films ostensibly about Black identity that feature Black people in marginal roles, or—a frustratingly common issue in much Western cinema—define them in opposition or relation to white characters.

I made the decision to write about one hundred films, a punishing but necessary task if this survey were to achieve my desired breadth. My chosen films reflect my subjective tastes, and are works I feel to be artistically, culturally, technically, and historically significant, as well as often in dialogue with one another. I make no claim for these films to be the "greatest" or "best" Black films of all time. (Readers may be angry, upset, or confused by certain omissions. Rest assured: I am too. My apologies to the films and filmmakers that didn't make the final cut.)

I flirted briefly with thematic and geographical frameworks before settling on arranging the films in chronological order. This felt like the most organic way to map certain developments—for example, you'll notice a dramatic uptick in rebellious, urgent films made by empowered Black filmmakers across the diaspora from the 1960s through the 1980s, following a wave of successful national decolonisation movements. This approach also had the effect of revealing to me—as I read, researched, watched, and wrote—how things have changed regarding the representation, participation, and reception of Black people in film and, in some disturbing ways, how they have remained the same.

Regarding form and genre, I have made no distinctions. Studio, independent, feature, short, mid-length, narrative fiction, documentary, and hybrid films are all fair game, and I've even included one web series. It gives me a little kick to see the 201-minute behemoth Malcolm X occupy the same real estate on the page as *Integration Report 1* (1960), a scorching twenty-minute short by the unfairly overlooked Black documentary pioneer Madeline Anderson.

In my four decades on Earth, I have identified – or been identified – as Black, mixed-race, "Mixed: White and Black Caribbean," biracial, Jamaican-British, and a light-skinned Black man.

And while there are moments of serendipitous synergy—my favorite being the unofficial "cane trilogy" comprising three films from different countries in quick succession: *Cane River* (1982), *Sugar Cane Alley* (1983), and *Bitter Cane* (1983)—my "big tent" approach to film selection obviously has limits. If you approached me on the street and asked me to explain an authentic connection between Sarah Maldoror's ferocious anticolonial classic *Sambizanga* (1972) and, say, Tyler Perry's preposterous drag fandango *Madea Goes to Jail* (2009), I would point behind you, and sprint in the opposite direction while your head was turned.

As much as I want people to be able to see the films I'm writing about, I could not solely base my choices around their wide, public availability, which varies wildly from region to region, and will continue to change over time. One film, Chadian filmmaker Mahamat-Saleh Haroun's *Bye Bye Africa* (1999), is explicitly about the difficulty that African people experience trying to see African films in their own countries. Although some films are only available to view through academic and research institutions, or lurk online in various states of quality and legality, I'm happy to say that many are readily accessible, at least for some Western audiences. In fact, *The World of Black Film* can be read as a fortuitously timed record of a miniature golden age of restorations and rediscoveries of Black film. Thanks to the essential work of foundations, archivists, preservation and restoration artists, distributors, publishers, exhibitors, and curators, an encouraging number of unfairly underseen Black films have returned to circulation in recent years. But there is a long, long way to go.

Ashley Clark is a writer and programmer. This is an excerpt from the introduction to his new book, *The World of Black Film: A Journey Through Cinematic Blackness in 100 Films* (Laurence King).

Reference

1. Hall, Stuart. "*Race, the Floating Signifier: What More Is There to Say About 'Race'?*" (1997) in Selected Writings on Race Difference by Stuart Hall, edited by Paul Gilroy and Ruth Wilson Gilmore. Durham: Duke University Press, 2021, p. 359.

LONELY BOY

The incoming Director of the Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity, a former producer at the BBC and Channel 4 News who has joined from The Bristol Cable, offers an insight into the motivations behind his decision to take a new role.

Jaldeep Katwala

It began with an article tucked away deep inside a broadsheet paper, maybe The Guardian or The Independent. It was short, no more than a few lines, about how a Black man had been misdiagnosed with mental illness. He had lost his mother, his wife and his daughter to old age, a tragic accident and an illness the same year. Understandably, he had not been able to cope. Displaying worrying outward signs of mental disturbance, he had been seen acting strangely, wandering the streets at night in a confused state.

The Police were called, he had been arrested and, finding nothing to pin on him, he had been sectioned and languished in an institution for a while. He had withdrawn into himself and the first diagnosis was of severe depression. Prescribed with heavy medication, he was eventually seen by a second psychiatrist, who had been able to get him to open up about what had happened. This one diagnosed PTSD, post-traumatic stress disorder, and he was eventually discharged, off the medication and able to start rebuilding his shattered dreams.

This set me thinking about a whole range of questions. Why was it that this man had been sectioned so readily? Did his colour or race play any part in his treatment? How often were minority communities misdiagnosed? The man's first psychiatrist was an Asian. What was absent from his training that meant he saw cultural expressions of grief as manifestations of mental illness?

My editors at Channel 4 News agreed and together with Victoria Macdonald, then a Health and Social Affairs Reporter, we began digging further into the story. We concluded after many interviews that large parts of the mental health service in the United Kingdom were institutionally racist, they were ignoring the needs of minority communities because of a kind of institutional ignorance, a lack of awareness of how people lived their daily lives, and how they were sometimes overwhelmed by circumstances and situations.

What I didn't tell Victoria at the time, because I feared it would be career-ending 25 years ago, was that, as a teenager, I too had struggled with mental health. It was a combination of living apart from an Asian community, behind bars and grilled windows in what felt like a prison, and fearful of being attacked on the way to school and back.

At the age of 13, I was in Rotherhithe, a tough gritty part of Bermondsey in South East London. A few years earlier, striking dockers had marched past our corner shop shouting for "Pakis" to "go home", and for an end to immigration. Our shop windows had been smashed seventeen times in two and a half years, to the point that insurance companies insisted on metal grilles. We had lit rags shoved through the letterbox on the side door leading upstairs to where we lived. One day, sitting on the top deck of the bus coming back home from school, a teenage boy had stubbed his cigarette out on my hand.

School was a whole other issue. My brother and I were the only non-white children in our private, fee-paying, 'minor' public school. Our parents believed in the value of private education but hadn't appreciated that most children there came from families with a higher standard of living than we had.

Inviting friends back was rare and embarrassing. The carpet on the stairs leading up from the shop was threadbare. We had only recently had a bathroom fitted in our box bedroom. Before then, we had had to wash in the kitchen in a bath that was under the wooden kitchen worktop, and the toilet was out in the back garden. When the other boys came back to school after Christmas, they spoke about skiing holidays in the Alps. We could only talk about selling batteries in the shop on Christmas Day to fathers who had forgotten to buy them for toy robots.

Then there was my father. He was unable to show much by way of emotion.

A few years earlier, striking dockers had marched past our corner shop shouting for "Pakis" to "go home", and for an end to immigration. Our shop windows had been smashed seventeen times in two and a half years, to the point that insurance companies insisted on metal grilles.

I do not ever remember my father giving me a hug or words of praise. Never any encouragement or advice about life. There was an intense sense of negativity and gloom.

There was never any logic to his insecurities. We were not allowed to bite into apples in his presence, as he hated the noise of the crunch. I took to eating apples surreptitiously under the bedcovers. He believed, according to his interpretation of Hindu teaching, that every mouthful of food had to be chewed thirty-three times, and occasionally he would pass that wisdom onto me.

Outside the house, he was sociable, affable and charming. Inside, he was a terrifying bully. In the Post Office, a sort of halfway house, he could not help but show his disdain for the customers, many of whom he considered to be racist, illiterate and ignorant. He was sacked from his job as a sub-postmaster. Unable to find a buyer for the now post office-less shop, we struggled. Eventually my parents bought a shop in Belvedere on the outer edge of London.

We had to keep the existing shop in Rotherhithe, with its dwindling income, because no-one wanted to buy it.

There then began a tortuous period for me. Every morning, my father and I would drive from Belvedere to Rotherhithe. The shop would open at 7 a.m. At 8, I would catch the bus to school in Catford. I would then return to Rotherhithe after school and then, at 6.30 p.m., we would drive from Rotherhithe back to Belvedere. We would eat around 9 p.m., my mother having spent the day working in the shop in Belvedere. There was hardly any time for homework, which had to be fitted in in the time I could find along the way.

I had a butterfly mind and found it difficult to pay attention for long enough for much of it to stick. My headmaster's report conclusions alternated term to term from "He has it in him to do well" to "Must try harder".

The school is now a much-changed, tolerant, open, caring, and diverse community. Back then, my brother and I were the only non-white children in it for most of our school life. Its Latin motto, then as now, is Albam Exorna - "Adorn the White".

By the time I got to my O-Level year at the age of 16, I was struggling. My brother, who by then was in the second year of A-Levels, focused on his studies and did well enough to go on to University to read Law.

One day, after my sixteenth birthday, it all fell apart. I don't remember exactly what led to it, but my brother found me rocking backwards and forwards on the bed, not talking, not eating, in a catatonic stupor. All I had going through my head were the lyrics of a song by Andrew Gold, *Oh, what a Lonely Boy*, and another by Supertramp, *The Logical Song*:

But at night, when all the world's asleep
The questions run so deep
For such a simple man
Won't you please (Won't you tell me)
Please tell me what we've learned?
(Can you hear me?)
I know it sounds absurd
(Won't you help me?)
But please, tell me who I am.

From then, the descent to absolute rock bottom was swift and terrifying. I was sectioned and, at a mental hospital in Bexley, found myself in a ward surrounded by much older patients wandering around in their own worlds. I particularly remember the smell, a mix of shepherd's pie and bleach. The psychiatrist who had admitted me had stressed it was voluntary. A few hours later, I was pleading with her to get me out of there. The hospital agreed but insisted on heavy medication, Largactil included, which left me feeling both dizzy and restless.

Completing my O-Levels was now out of the question. Slowly, I began to rebuild the shattered, fragile glass of my life. My mum, who was also suffering with physical health issues, decided it would be a good idea to escape from it all. We went to India for three months. I met my grandfather for the only conscious time in my life. I rebuilt myself, fragile but somehow stronger.

I left school with 5 O-Levels and 2 A-Levels, found my way into Trent Polytechnic to read Communication Studies, and eventually found a way into journalism.

Many years later, Victoria and I were shortlisted for the Best Broadcast Media item at the Mental Health Media Awards in London. We won for our report for Channel 4: News on Institutional Racism in Mental Health. Victoria gave a short speech and then it was my turn. I wanted to say so much. I said nothing. All I could think at that moment was "*Oh What a Lonely Boy*".

Jaldeep Katwala is the incoming Director of the Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity.

BREAKING

The experience of racially minoritised people working in UK TV Newsrooms

Rohit Kachroo and Ellie Tomsett

Executive Summary

Five years of sustained focus on racial diversity in British television news has not delivered the structural change promised. Instead, racially minoritised staff describe a system in which diversity has been performed rather than embedded—visible in rhetoric, tokenistic recruitment, and superficial interventions, but largely absent from the mechanisms that determine editorial power and career progression. For many, the result has been stagnation, frustration, and in some cases exit from the industry. Yet even as racially minoritised staff report only limited progress, many are now experiencing a backlash from some White colleagues who believe they have lost out because of diversity, expressed through resentment, resistance, and attempts to roll back these efforts.

Perceptions of Failure and Tokenism

The diversity efforts in British television news that followed the murder of George Floyd in 2020 are perceived to have been reactive and reputational—a response to events rather than a serious attempt to understand and remedy racial inequity. Words like "box ticking" and "optics" were heard frequently during our interviews. The survey data aligns with this sentiment: 60% (n=48) disagreed or strongly disagreed that diversity schemes in their workplaces were working well; only 9% (n=7) believed they were. Two-thirds, 66% (n=53), said the initiatives of the last five years had made no meaningful impact at all.

"The same managers who wanted to propel us five years ago have now gone silent."
Respondent 4

Resentment, Backlash, and Unequal Burdens

Surface-level interventions were felt to have produced parallel dynamics: resentment from some White colleagues—who perceived diversity as conferring unearned racial advantage or lowering standards—and exhaustion among racially minoritised staff who reported experiencing little of this supposed advantage, but remained at the receiving end of such commentary. Respondents described editorial leaders as largely blind to these dynamics and insufficiently attentive to the new forms of backlash emerging in the wake of diversity discourse. Racially minoritised staff also said they were expected to perform additional, invisible labour to protect their organisations from reputational harm, correcting colleagues in an age of heightened racial awareness.

Racism, Marginalisation, and Coverage

63% (n=50) of respondents reported experiencing racism while working in a television news environment. These experiences were tied not only to interpersonal prejudice but to the institutional architecture of news production—what one respondent called "an apartheid newsroom". Many respondents observed that even as newsrooms became more visibly diverse, authority did not shift: racially minoritised staff were concentrated in junior roles. The roles perceived to be the most prestigious—executive producer positions, senior roles in coverage of politics and international news - remained overwhelmingly White—racially minoritised staff feel excluded from these areas. This imbalance was said to shape coverage, particularly of Westminster and the world. Racially inflected stories, including stories about migration, were often described as poorly handled, with diversity in newsroom staffing not translating into diversity in editorial judgement.

Progression, Stalling, and Exit

Many respondents felt that diversity interventions were focused on getting racially minoritised staff through the door—and then leaving them there. The crunch point was felt to be mid-career, where opportunities narrowed sharply and where many perceived White colleagues of equal talent more easily progressed. Only 18% (n=14) believed there were enough opportunities to progress; 70% (n=56) felt opportunities were insufficient. Racially minoritised staff described three problematic routes to advancement: conforming to majority-White editorial perspectives; becoming uncritical ambassadors for diversity schemes; or advancing through tokenistic pathways. Several respondents spoke of colleagues who had left the industry entirely.

Intersectional Harms and Working-Class Women of Colour

Women of colour—particularly those from working-class backgrounds—faced the most severe obstacles, where racial, gender, and class inequalities combined. Survey responses showed 67% (n=31) of women had experienced bullying in their workplaces compared to 40% (n=15) of male respondents. Respondents also argued that the limited space created by diversity policies was disproportionately taken up by men of colour, leaving women feeling blocked once a single seat at the table was occupied.

A Perpetual Work in Progress

Broadly, respondents believed diversity had become a perpetual work in progress: ever present in language and publicity, but with few mechanisms capable of redistributing opportunity, voice, or editorial authority. The result, as one respondent noted, is diversity "without change"—high visibility at the surface, low impact at the structural level, and a continued belief among racially minoritised journalists that their experiences remain markedly different from those of their White peers.

Introduction and research context

This report investigates the current context of UK national television newsrooms, and the experiences of racially minoritised people within them. The report builds on existing studies of diversity initiatives within media and journalism, to contribute new knowledge about diversity issues in the national television news context. This research was undertaken to assess the impact of recent diversity schemes and initiatives introduced by broadcasters over the last 5 years.

In 2020, in the wake of the murder of George Floyd and the global movement for greater racial equality epitomised in Black Lives Matter protests, television news organisations in the UK professed a commitment to ensuring their content and workforce reflected the diversity of the regions and nations they serve (e.g. BBC 2020, ITN 2020, Sky 2020). In the following years alongside increased social awareness of racial injustice, a backlash to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) initiatives, and a rise of political populism has occurred (Gillborn, 2024). Nationally and internationally "the symbolism of historical greatness" has often been contrasted to "a present where the history and culture are under attack from others" (Lilleker and Weidhase, 2022: 103). The complex resistance to diversity has been evident on the international stage, for example with Donald Trump's demands for international trading partners to roll back EDI policies (Kassam, 2025), and in national 'anti-immigration' protests. In television newsrooms where decisions are made about how these events and underlying social issues are described and depicted, several diversity initiatives have played out and (as this report will demonstrate) been met with varying degrees of resistance.

Whilst representation across all media forms (both on and off-screen) remains important, television journalism, as a space where cultural significance and meaning is negotiated, works under additional expectations and parameters. News reporting is a key marker of democracy and as Martin Moore has observed "The diminution of public service media worldwide, alongside the erosion of independent media, has paralleled the fraying of democracy, the resurgence of autocracy and the rise of populism" (Moore, 2024: 109).

The UK cultural industries, within which careers in both journalism and television production fall, remain a highly unequal space of employment. As Orian Brook, David O'Brien and Mark Taylor observed in their updated edition of Culture is Bad for You (2025), whereas the Covid-19 pandemic might have been an opportunity to reset cultural spaces as more equitable "We know now, based on a range of research, that inequalities in the cultural industries not only continued through the pandemic, but were exacerbated" (Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2025: xi). They also note that journalism and television production are industries where a high number of workers know and socialise with people already in their industries, highlighting that "respondents seem to know other creatives, rather than knowing factory workers, bus drivers, or solicitors. This is one way these jobs are

"I worry about all the young Black and Asian people who are brought into our newsroom so the optics look good at times, but not enough is done to keep them, train them, and nurture them." **Respondent 6**

'socially closed', meaning it is difficult to enter without these sorts of networks" (2025: 76). The importance of knowing someone already in the industry you are trying to enter (or having a family member in the profession) has been repeatedly foregrounded as problematic along various intersectional lines, and due to the existing Whiteness of cultural occupations is a key issue for diversity (Friedman and Laurison, 2019).

Inequities in television, especially factual television, have an impact precisely because "who makes culture has consequences for the way individuals and communities are represented" (Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2025:78) especially when those representations purport to be based in fact. This is significant when we consider both what happens on-screen (who reports the stories, conducts the interviews) and off-screen (who decides what gets covered, what language or images are used etc.). Michael Schudson writing in the late 1990s put things bluntly:

> **Journalists write the words that turn up in the papers or on the screen as stories. Not government officials, not cultural forces, not 'reality' magically transforming itself into alphabetic signs, but flesh and blood journalists literally compose the stories we call news.**
> (Schudson, 1997: 8)

Whilst this sentiment, that journalists *make the news* rather than simply report the facts, in Schudson's context was met with resistance from news professionals, in the current moment, this idea does not seem revolutionary. The mainstream uptake of social media, the political rhetoric of 'fake news' and the impact this has had on public trust of established news sources, has resulted in increased awareness that news (and therefore the way we understand the world around us) is mediated. In the contemporary context, established, well-regulated news organisations become even more central to functioning democracies: "As our digital spaces become epistemological junkyards, cluttered with bot-inflated, AI-generated text and clickbait content, so the public need for stable, grounded, and verified content intensifies" (Moore, 2024:110). Thus, who gets to be the mediators of our realities, the gatekeepers or "knowledge brokers" (Gesualdo et. al., 2020) of our society, especially in the ever-expanding space of media culture, remains a significant issue.

The most recent Creative Diversity Network Diamond Report (2025) tells us that in terms of racial and ethnic diversity in television production there are still inequalities at play:

> **Latest figures (August–December 2024) show off-screen representation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups falls below the UK workforce estimate (17.0%) across all genres. Factual programmes (11.8%) are currently the least representative of people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups.**
> (Creative Diversity Network, 2025: 13)

"When roles are advertised hiring managers often have 'someone in mind' already."
Respondent 18

Broadcasters are aware of these enduring issues for racial equality as evidenced in their most recent public facing diversity reports and websites, where all key players expressed a desire to tackle these issues (BBC 2025; Channel 4 2024; ITN 2025; ITV 2024; Sky 2025).

Additionally, David Lee's research into the attitudes of White UK television professionals towards current diversity and inclusion agendas, highlights that not everyone is on board with attempts to make the television industry more diverse. Through interviewing television professionals from the dominant group (i.e. Non-disabled, White, cisgender men from middle- and upper-class backgrounds) he found that there was a "disturbing disjuncture between the official values of EDI in the British television industry, and the attitudes of pockets of disaffected and/or privileged actors within it" (Lee, 2025: 675). This was evidenced through "an antipathy to diversity talk, policy and practices within a particular privileged milieu of British television production" (Ibid.). Thus, the backlash to EDI, seen more broadly in the political climate of populism, is also reflected in the industry.

Notably, this context for television production crosses over with journalism, a profession which a recent study by Neil Thurman et al. has concluded employs an alarmingly homogenous workforce:

> **Some 90% of journalists are White, 91% are university educated, and 71% are from a privileged background based on their parents' occupation. Only 12% grew up in a working-class household. Female and ethnic minority journalists decline in numbers after the age of 50, while men generally earn higher average salaries and are more likely to be permanently employed and hold a top management role.**
> (Thurman et al. 2025: 1)

Significant research exists into diversity issues for UK journalism (Al-Kaisy 2023; Douglas 2022; Saha 2018; Thurman et. al. 2025) and UK television production (Henry and Ryder 2021; Lee 2025; Mullen et al. 2025). To date, however, little work has been done to triangulate if any diversity issues are specific to national television newsrooms – at the intersection of both professional contexts. Our work is, therefore, specific to television national newsrooms. Our decision to focus on national rather than regional contexts was due both to the way regional demographics vary significantly, and the way that national news is central to representing ideas of national identity. This focus also enabled us to consider disparities between national and international coverage as it relates to race.

Methodology

This research was undertaken to address the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of racially minoritised people working in UK television newsrooms?
2. How have diversity initiatives implemented by UK television newsrooms since 2020 impacted racially minoritised people working in these contexts?
3. What can be done to make UK TV newsrooms more inclusive workplaces for racially minoritised people?

"The reality of being from a racially minoritised group makes career progression difficult anyway, the current financial dynamic exacerbates this struggle." **Respondent 19**

Conclusions and recommendations

Five years after the murder of George Floyd—and the wave of diversity measures that followed in British television newsrooms—our research finds that many of the people these initiatives were meant to support now see these measures as superficial efforts, driven more by reputational anxiety than conviction. Newsroom diversity policies are viewed as treating the symptoms of inequality while leaving its causes—the biases beneath them—largely untouched. Rather than dismantling injustice, they have bred new hostilities that threaten even the modest progress achieved so far. There is a broad sense that enthusiasm for diversity has faded and has been replaced by resentment from colleagues.

Both our interview and survey data demonstrate that racially minoritised journalists sought fairness from the initiatives deployed since 2020, not favours—a genuine meritocracy in which talent alone could carry them into senior roles. Instead, today, 67% (n=54) of respondents believe they are held to higher standards than their White peers. Yesterday's good intentions are being repurposed by workplaces as a form of defence against criticism: proof of past actions is being used to excuse present stagnation, deflect scrutiny, and protect the status quo. From the perspective of our respondents, recent measures have simply replaced one unfair system with another, with box-ticking and tokenism at the heart of both. A fixation on outcomes—targets and quotas—rather than the processes behind them has produced some changes but without reflection: new initiatives built to show progress, not to think differently.

Across the industry, systems and cultures are often blamed for diversity failures (and these are of course central to sustainable change), yet the individuals making editorial or casting decisions are rarely asked to examine their own assumptions—why they reach certain judgments, whose standards they apply, and what those standards rest on. What makes Journalist A seem more promising than Journalist B? Why does Story X feel more appealing than Story Y? As a result, the mental habits driving these choices remain largely unexamined, and the supposed universality of a White, male worldview goes unchallenged. The self-scrutiny long required of racially minoritised journalists—constantly reflecting on how their perspectives are shaped by cultural and social experience—has never been expected of those whose subjectivities continue to define newsroom norms.

Many interviewees described experiences they found draining and distressing. For some, taking part in this research was emotionally challenging - evidence of how raw and unresolved these issues remain. Many reported that raising concerns about racism was fraught, requiring them to navigate the sensitivities of White managers and fears of professional retaliation.

While barriers exist at every career stage, they are felt most acutely mid-career, with only 18% (n=14) of survey respondents believing enough opportunities exist to progress their careers, and many reporting feeling like they have stalled. Career progression often seems to depend on problematic routes—conforming to majority White views on contentious issues, serving as uncritical ambassadors for diversity initiatives, or advancing through tokenistic pathways. Far from fostering inclusion, these patterns reinforce inequity. Racially minoritised staff also describe performing heavy, invisible labour—especially during periods of reputational anxiety—shielding managers from criticism, monitoring language, and anticipating cultural sensitivities.

"20 years on and I am still trying to prove myself and my worth. It is exhausting." Respondent 25

Our research found that women of colour, particularly those from working-class backgrounds, face the greatest obstacles, as racial, gendered, and class inequalities intersect and reinforce one another. It was felt that too often, the limited space created by new diversity measures was absorbed by men of colour, leaving women feeling that their own progress had stalled once a single seat at the table had been filled. Survey responses also showed that women reported having more direct experiences of bullying in their workplaces than their male racially minoritised colleagues: 67% (n=31) of women said they had experienced some form of bullying across their careers, compared to 40% (n=15) of male respondents.

We found that perspectives on race are now more openly welcomed than five years ago—but in confined ways. Many participants feel pigeonholed: invited to comment on identity issues yet excluded from broader editorial debates. As such respondents reported feeling valued more as symbols than professionals, confined to second-tier roles. They felt further demoralised by the departure of high-profile colleagues of colour, which reinforced the sense that advancement to the top remains out of reach. Staff networks and group chats offer some solidarity, but others argue that these can seem limiting or monolithic.

Participants frequently described a backlash to the reforms of 2020. Some White colleagues were described to us as perceiving diversity efforts in line with populist rhetoric about EDI as 'woke culture', which have lowered standards and paved the way for "diversity hires". The negative impact of this behaviour on colleagues of colour has not been recognised by their workplaces. A lack of clarity from leadership about the purpose and value of diversity has given prejudice a space to grow.

Many believe that the most prestigious newsroom roles—senior leadership, political reporting, foreign postings, and special projects—remain too closely guarded. Within these areas, a White lens is still seen as synonymous with objectivity. While White colleagues are felt to be rewarded for their social and cultural proximity in Westminster—their ability to "talk the talk" with those they cover—their racially minoritised colleagues often feel penalised, or sidelined abroad, for demonstrating the same familiarity with other contexts. Authority is still assumed to look and sound a certain way, and those who do not fit that template are, too often, shuffled into safer, less visible spaces. Editorial decision-making is seen as having escaped the scrutiny applied to recruitment. To progress in newsgathering positions, our respondents felt that they were compelled, in certain instances, to suppress their own lived experiences and adopt the worldview of a hypothetical White man. When choosing who should fill prestigious roles, prestige itself, many say, remains coded as White. As such entrenched biases continue to shape judgments about who is trusted, promoted, and heard; which issues are considered newsworthy; and what is deemed important, interesting, or appealing to the audience.

These failures in diversity policies unfold amid falling public trust, rising misinformation, and a growing resistance to EDI. Respondents point to coverage of the 2024 summer riots as evidence that racism is still minimised rather than named. Economic pressures in television news, combined with shifting political priorities, now threaten to make diversity a fair-weather concern—vulnerable to budget cuts rather than embedded as a core principle of good journalism.

Despite widespread frustration, there is also recognition that the path forward is not simple. The solutions demanded by participants in our research require a fundamental shift in the collective mindset of editorial leaders. The challenge is no longer awareness but accountability: translating good intentions into sustained, cultural change. To address the challenges—identified through survey data from 80 newsroom professionals and 10 follow-up interviews—we make the following recommendations to broadcasters.

1. Rigorously review the internal diversity measures and targets of the past five years, assess whether they delivered real change, and ensure staff of colour are central to that evaluation. Where necessary, broadcasters should update the diversity commitments in news, with an equal focus on the editorial purpose. These updates should articulate clearly the editorial value newsrooms attach to equality, diversity, and inclusion. Diversity should be framed not as a reputational exercise but as a journalistic principle that strengthens accuracy, fairness, and audience trust.

2. The concern of many of our respondents was less on the diversity schemes/initiatives or traineeships themselves, than on the wider negative response to these initiatives by colleagues. This evidences that bringing in an initiative to address diversity, needs to engage everyone at every level - awareness and commitment from White staff is vital to successful inclusion – as is honesty about past failures. Without this attentiveness resentment builds and the entire project is undermined. In any future measures to addressing workforce diversity, as much focus and effort should be on placed on ensuring workplace cohesion and addressing issues with wider work culture, rather than simply boosting the numbers from any minoritised background. Adding another scheme/initiative into the mix will not address the significant wider issues of workplace culture identified in this report. Systemic change is what is required.

3. Address the harmful impact that the backlash against EDI in newsrooms can have on racially minoritised staff. This should include the adoption of clear explicit policies to challenge and prevent the mockery of the objectives behind diversity efforts—whether expressed seriously or as humour, and irrespective of seniority of those involved. Language or behaviour that trivialises or undermines colleagues in relation to EDI (for example, references to "diversity hires" or "making up the brown count") corrodes newsroom culture and directly harms racially minoritised colleagues. Employers should make clear that such behaviour is unacceptable and inconsistent with the organisations' stated editorial and ethical standards. Whilst there should be a space for constructive criticism of any workplace initiative, in relation to EDI initiatives this should not be done in a manner that undermines the contributions of racially minoritised colleagues or ignores the reasons why such initiatives exist.

4. Establish safe and independent listening mechanisms—such as structured listening circles—where racially minoritised staff can speak candidly about how racial bias has affected their careers, with full assurance that doing so will not lead to negative repercussions.

5. Create a clear and protected mechanism for raising concerns about racial bias in coverage, ensuring that staff can challenge editorial decisions, patterns, or framing without jeopardising their careers. This mechanism should be transparent, taken seriously at senior editorial levels, and distinct from HR processes.

"Always feel that I have to work harder and mistakes are judged more harshly." Respondent 82

6. Managers should hold one-to-one meetings with staff of colour, modelled on the research process used for this report, to create a structured space for honest dialogue. These conversations should take place in an environment free from defensiveness and focus on four key areas: how racial bias is perceived to shape newsroom culture, editorial coverage, content decisions, and individual career progression. This approach would help managers understand lived experiences directly, identify patterns of exclusion, and avoid treating staff of colour as a single, uniform group.

7. Ensure that any attempt at training a workforce in EDI is not reliant upon the unacknowledged labour of minoritised colleagues and does not retraumatise participants or inadvertently make them feel responsible for White colleagues' emotional responses to reports of racism. External providers with experience and awareness of the dangers of badly executed training should be commissioned to undertake any workplace culture training required. Changing a work culture requires investment, it cannot be facilitated by well-meaning, but untrained, colleagues in-house as the potential for additional harm for racially minoritised staff members is significant.

This report builds on existing media diversity research to set out vital new information about how racially minoritised people experience working in national television news contexts. We hope this report provides newsrooms with the insight they need to understand the problems with their current practices, and inspiration to make the changes required to enable more inclusive workplaces, where colleagues of all racial backgrounds are equally valued and respected.

Read the full report 'Breaking: The experience of racially minoritised people working in UK TV newsrooms':
https://bcuassets.blob.core.windows.net/docs/csu2026065-lhc-report-breakingv720-2-26-134169395168165495.pdf

Inspiring Images? Disability and 'Strictly'

Dr Alison Wilde

Alison Wilde delves into the treatment of disabled contestants on the BBC's flagship Saturday night dance competition.

At the start of his reality TV 'journey' as a celebrity in Strictly Come Dancing 2024, Chris McClausland seemed to have doubts about his capacities as a dancer and believed he would be eliminated quickly. As a comedian, he regularly made jokes about this throughout the show, usually referring to reduced capacities for understanding dance, due to his lack of vision.

Although he was the first and, so far, only, blind contestant, he was not the first disabled person to compete in the competition. Strictly began to introduce disabled people in 2017, with sprinter Jonnie Peacock as the first (clearly) disabled celebrity dance partner (his impairment is a knee-down amputation of his right leg). Like one of the next disabled celebrities featured on the show, Lauren Steadman, his celebrity status is due to being a successful, medal-winning Paralympian, perhaps the safest introductions to a show where audiences have come to expect conventionally 'ideal' human bodies, as discussed in the next section.

Paralympians and disabled award-winning athletes became rather a Strictly staple; there were six between 2017 and 2023. Moreover, the evolution of disabled people as dance celebrities suggests a growing audience 'acceptance' of non-normative bodies on Strictly, and a greater confidence in casting people with a range of (visually obvious) impairments. These have included athletes with congenital impairments, e.g., Lauren Steadman, a Paralympian athlete in 2018, who has no lower right forearm/hand, and Ellie Simmonds, a Paralympian swimmer with dwarfism, in 2022. In terms of committing to progress in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), this gradual introduction of different impairments can be seen as a valuable strategy. For me, this resembles the practices of filmmakers such as the Farrelly Brothers, who use incremental (almost imperceptible) moves to gradually reshape cultural imagery and expectations of disabled people from 'freak-phobic' to 'freak-centric' (LeBesco, 2004; Wilde, 2018). These developed from their first 'disability film' Dumb and Dumber (1994) to Dumb and Dumber Too (2014) but reached their overtly political zenith with Stuck on You in 2003, perhaps testing the limits of industry tolerance by turning the audience firmly towards the ignorance of disablist attitudes.

Like the Farrelly films, Strictly's evolving integration of disabled people and the seemingly cautious introduction of new impairments to the show seem to have taken measured risks with audience approval of fewer non-normative bodies. That is, while disabled athletes may remain a regular 'safe' choice, there have been none cast since 2023. Additionally, the early introduction of facial difference, through Katie Piper, was also a secure casting choice, especially as she had already achieved considerable celebrity on eighteen previous TV shows, receiving considerable acclaim for her awareness-raising charity work.

With this ongoing variety of disabled celebrities, audiences are progressively re-positioned in relation to forms of embodiment, though it is notable that all the disabled celebrities so far have been white, a predictable pattern which is observable in other media, e.g., film representations. However, these slow introductions perhaps encourage the audience to question dis/ableist conventions of normality and may even have even pushed the audience and the industry into confronting conventional attitudes to disability, with understandings of impairment stretched further each year.

Strictly values and the conditions of possibility for disability representation

Although viewers might now reasonably expect at least one disabled celebrity on every series, their integration within the cast has not been without dissent from the so-called 'anti-woke brigade', something which was probably anticipated in shaping the rather conservative approach to who gets chosen as a disabled celebrity. Some journalists have expressed their dismay and annoyance at more diverse casting, imagining the audience to consist of (white, non-disabled) 'middle-age bores' like themselves (in Allison Pearson's words, 2022). Hostile attitudes to disabled celebrities, alongside other forms of diverse casting (especially casting relating to ethnicity and sexuality) have circulated widely, creating much division between audience 'tribes', especially on social media. Kevin O'Sullivan warned the BBC about Strictly's moves towards inclusion: "Go woke and you go broke." (2022).

O'Sullivan's provocation is likely to play into any broadcaster's worst fears, publicly funded or not. Considering the media industries' aversion to taking economic risks, it is probable that the first disabled celebrities - award winning athletes - were seen as coming from one of the safest demographic choices for public approval, having gained a much-increased popularity since the success of the 2012 London Paralympics. Disabled athletes' increased visibility in popular culture, and the improved status and respect they have in the public consciousness, can be linked to their growing reputations as 'superheroes', gaining a new prestige which was catalysed by the 2012 advertising campaign 'Meet the Superhumans'. To most people, such ideas would seem to be positive representations of the best type, explicitly showing non-normative bodies to represent courage and ambition, impressing and inspiring others, disabled and non-disabled folk alike.

As a group of people who have been traditionally marginalised or pathologised in culture and media (with disabled women rarely on our screens until the 21st century), such 'triumph against adversity' narratives may seem like a seductive representational route to take. However, Strictly's progress in increasing disability representations needs to be seen within both the context of the continuing under-representation of disabled people in all areas of broadcasting (TV and radio), and film. I am arguing that representation still needs to be considered in terms of the discourses it promotes, and the potential effects on public attitudes to disability. Confronting some of these issues on Strictly seems especially important to popular media understandings of disability in the UK, especially as the show can be seen as a pioneer of more inclusive casting across most axes of inequality, e.g., ethnicity, sexuality, age, and body size. After all, Strictly plays a fundamental role in reflecting who we believe ourselves to be, being regarded as the heart of idealised perceptions of Britishness, echoing the ideological role of the BBC in the national imaginary, as problematic and conflict-ridden as these perceptions may be. It has been claimed that the distinct Britishness of the UK version of the show has 'cracked the code' of 'Happy TV' for British viewers (Rutkowski, 2023). As such, one might reasonably expect that the heightened experiences of emotional wellbeing linked to such shows would work in favour of fostering greater social bonds, empathy and understanding across perceived social and cultural differences. Equality of opportunity in participation can easily be interpreted as groundbreaking in terms of representational innovation. Shifts away from deficit-led portrayals of disabled people towards ostensibly equal competition against others is also something to be welcomed. Contrariwise, the ways in which this competition proceeds are of great significance, however affirmative this growing involvement may be seen to be.

Specifically, alongside the expectation of improvements in dance technique, or judgements of 'natural' dance talent, values of inspiration, self-improvement, valorisation of work/effort, and spectacular imagery are at the show's very core (Bonner, 2013; Harasser, 2017; Wilde; 2026). Much of this we have come to expect of the ever-growing genre of competitive reality television. As fair as these seem in most talent- or skill-based competitions, there are big prices to be paid for those whose bodies do not correspond to the expected norms. Inspiration, self-improvement, and spectacular images have often been seen to lie at the heart of disabled people's oppression, as reformulated tropes which the disability movement have opposed for decades.

Even if disabled people's involvement in narratives of self-improvement within reality genres is now established, few, if any of them, have developed strategies to challenge what this means for reinforcing disability stereotypes, especially with the ideas of the 'journey' that remain foundational to the narrative arcs of such shows. Other key features we have come to expect are the long-, or short-term emotional backstories. Although most marginalised groups are likely to have distressing stories of this type relating to oppression, disabled people have a long history of being regarded as 'tragic', almost by definition, a trope which stems from public attitudes rather than from impairments.

It has been claimed that the distinct Britishness of the UK version of the show has 'cracked the code' of 'Happy TV' for British viewers.

From most Disability Studies' points of view – which conceptualise disability as a form of social oppression, rather than a so-called deviation from a medical norm, according to variants of the (activist-informed) social model of disability - these assumptions are regarded as a deeply wounding 'tragedy model', as pity-porn. Opposition to ideas that disabled people live tragic lives resulted in slogans such as 'piss on pity', which became popular in the early 1990s in the 'Block Telethon' protests, successfully ending Telethon, even though similar charity-tainment shows still exist.

As suggested, narratives of self-improvement can be equally oppressive; this, and ideals of courage alongside pity, are often mired in a bio-psychosocial approach to disability where self-improvement and work are deigned to liberate disabled people from their own crippling mindsets, leaving discrimination, inequalities, and barriers to inclusion intact, resulting in blaming people for their own predicaments. Discourses of superhumanity, or Super Crippledom (Kriegel, 1987) are seen as deeply problematic. Key disabled activists (Young, 2024) and academics (e.g., Grue, 2016) have analysed such portrayals as key examples of 'inspiration porn', not least where praise is uncritically heaped upon disabled people, across media, sport and even activism, regardless of talent or improvements in skill, the usual benchmark for competition in Strictly, especially for non-disabled celebrities.

Taking a closer look at recent disabled celebrities on Strictly

There has been an undoubted widening of disability representation on the show to the point where there may be several disabled celebrities cast in one season. Indeed, two 2024 finalists had impairments, Chris McClausland, and Tasha Ghouri, a deaf model and influencer with a cochlear implant. This was at a time when the disabled casting was progressing with comparatively 'risky' bodies, e.g., Ellie Simmonds' dwarfism, and an extended range of impairments, including celebrities with sensory impairments. Rose Ayling-Ellis was the first Deaf celebrity to take part and she won in 2021, perhaps setting a precedent for more audacious casting.

Despite a bigger and more extensive presence, conventional disability and impairment tropes remain. Somewhat paradoxically, they are writ large in the recent involvement and successes of disabled celebrities on Strictly. In some ways, celebrities such as Chris McClausland and Ellie Goldstein, a model and actress with Down Syndrome, can be seen as a continuation of Strictly's practice of casting 'sore thumbs'. Sore thumb figures can be conceptualised as those with presumed bodily or functional limitations which render them as figures who are likely to be incapable of mainstream dancing skills. Bonner (2013) has argued that the employment of celebrities who are assumed to be 'incompetent' in terms of conventional dance abilities are often used to highlight the moral worth of those who are judged to set high standards of talent or effort and who are, typically, eliminated in the first half of the series. Perhaps the epitome of this was Ann Widdecombe in 2010, an older woman who is a right-wing former Conservative MP (as of 2026 a Reform Party supporter), arguably being voted for in relation to her comedy value. Even some of the judges bought into body-shaming her comparative bodily excess, easily seen to be at odds with the glamour of the show, including comments about her 'dumpiness' and ungainly movements: Craig Revel Horwood described her as a 'dancing hippo' and a 'dalek in drag.'

Notably, despite any remaining expectations that disabled people will be 'sore thumbs', disabled celebrities have not received such condemnatory comments on the show itself, although the judges' comments have generally become much kinder over time. At times, the opposite seems to be true, with disabled people often being amongst those receiving schmaltzy feedback. Revel Horwood read out a poem he had written for Chris McLausland, which included the line: 'A heart that dances, pure and free / Is worth much more than a 10 from me'. As amusing as this poem was, as something that was out of character, it tends to reinforce the 'special' status afforded to some disabled celebrities.

Conversely, Revel Horwood has also been praised for offering constructive feedback to Ellie Goldstein, whereas the other judges have received criticism from commentators for being over-protective or patronising. This includes their reluctance to give her critical feedback on her performance, often clashing with the mid-range marks awarded, whilst commenting on her capacities for bringing joy, a long-standing stereotype imposed on people with Down Syndrome. This overall judging of Ellie Goldstein is at odds with the judging on the show which usually focuses on the fundamentally normatively defined individual performance of dance techniques, even though some of it aligns with other key values; ongoing improvement, trajectories of the self, and audience affect/effects. Isabel Canto has argued that this discrepancy can be seen as iniquitous, as a form 'of benevolent ableism', which reinforces damaging ideas of helplessness and dependency for people with learning disabilities.

Regardless of how worthy the performances or efforts of Rose Ayling-Ellis, Chris McClausland, and Ellie Goldstein were (and I personally loved them all), there was a tendency to celebrate them for their emotional impact, and for their inspirational value, thus amplifying ideas of human difference. Moreover, the performances of Rose Ayling-Ellis and Chris McClausland which were afforded the greatest critical acclaim centred specifically on their impairments. The first of these was an unanticipated segment of the dance, performed in silence, and the latter was walking alone in darkness, in a straight line, as You'll Never Walk Alone was being sung. Both 'moments' were designed, in part, to emulate and communicate something about their impairments, deafness and blindness, respectively.

As many disabled people will tell you, thirty seconds of simulation will communicate little or nothing about the social experience of disablement in a world replete with disabling barriers. Worse still, these are seen by many to be primary moments of inspiration porn, notwithstanding any ambivalence in the disabled community. Despite my delight at seeing him win Strictly, I was personally dismayed when Chris McClausland's walk was nominated for the BAFTA's memorable moment award, which he won. In direct contrast to the sentimentality attached to this moment, and based on my experiences of watching the show and the significant role that humour plays in it, I believe it was his skills as a comedian which resulted in his success on the show. His comedy persona was probably one of the most significant aspects of viewers' emotional engagement with celebrities (see Wood's audience research on this (2010). This is not to denigrate the considerable efforts and progress he made. On one side, we had the valorising of his efforts and self-improvement by the judges, mired in the meritocratic, neoliberalist values of the show. On the other side, the regular audience have the knowledge that the significance of the viewers' votes means that Strictly is, to some extent, a popularity contest, and that 'moral evaluations of selfhood are core to audience popularity' (Wilde, forthcoming).

Conversely, Craig Revel Horwood has also been praised for offering constructive feedback to Ellie Goldstein, whereas the other judges have received criticism from commentators for being over-protective or patronising.

Hence, while I am glad to see the Strictly production team broadening their inclusion goals and welcoming people with many impairments, recent inspiration-heavy content, such as judges' comments and the increasing turn to heavy emotional backstories in adjacent discussions with the celebrities, is returning disabled people to the spectre of tragedy, dependency, and inspiration narratives, not least because the show continues to reach a wide audience, with the ability to contribute to the shaping of social and cultural values. If shows such as this are to continue casting a broader range of people with impairments, it is essential that broadcasters who set the criteria and tone of the show set coherent rules for judgement, whatever these are. The show also needs to engage properly with the basics of the disability movement's agendas for change, to meet the needs of those on, behind, and off the screen, including the audience. Ideally, this would include employing a greater number of disabled people across media roles, and consulting with user-led organisations, such as People First (Self Advocacy).

The conservatism of the screen industries cannot be underestimated when it comes to understanding the slow and, sometimes, unsteady progress of improving the presence and representations of disabled people and other under-represented groups, whether this is in talent, comedy or other shows. Why haven't we had a Black or Asian disabled athlete competing, for example? Despite the clear efforts made by Strictly, the ethnocentrism of the middle-class white, cis, non-disabled males who still tend to dominate in many areas of culture remains, mitigating many potential effects of EDI initiatives, perhaps mitigating the show's commitments to inclusion. As I have argued elsewhere, if EDI in the screen industries is evolving, it largely seems to be making the biggest improvements in terms of the increased numbers of disabled people in some areas, but I mostly retain a more cynical view: that the biggest growth area is that of reputation management for broadcasters and film-makers alike.

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Why Media Diversity Still isn't Delivering for Disabled People

Johny Cassidy Journalist and co-chair of BBC Ability

Joy, humour, activism and everyday life. Just a few of the things missing from the current representation of disabled people in the media industry, according to a report which also found that race and class face similar issues, each shaped by their own nuances: 'Authentic Portrayal in UK Media: Insights from Expert Panels on Race, Disability, and Class'.

For years, the media industry has claimed that it's getting more diverse, and in many ways it is. There are more people of colour on screen, more disabled characters, and more working class stories being told, but the report makes a sharp distinction that the industry often overlooks. Visibility isn't the same as meaningful representation. Stories might feature marginalised communities, but they are still rarely shaped by them or created with them.

What really stands out across the report, published by the Slr Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity, is the persistence of deficit-based storytelling. Characters from racialised backgrounds are still most visible in trauma or conflict. Disabled people are still framed through pity or inspiration. Working class communities are still offered up through a narrow lens of struggle or decline. These patterns aren't accidental. They're the product of an industry where the people most affected by these portrayals remain excluded from the rooms where decisions are made. Until those structural imbalances shift, the stories will too often default to stereotype.

The report also highlights something else. Intersectionality is almost entirely missing from mainstream output. Media tends to treat race, disability and class as separate categories, rather than overlapping realities that shape each other. As a working class, disabled man from Northern Ireland, who is working in the majority middle class journalism industry, I've seen this first hand. It's obvious to me how a lack of diversity at editorial decision-making levels can distort the narrative. When

They're the product of an industry where the people most affected by these portrayals remain excluded from the rooms where decisions are made.

representation doesn't reflect the complexity of who we are and those of us who sit at multiple margins, it doesn't just exclude. It actively narrows the public's understanding of our lives.

Behind the camera, the barriers are just as entrenched. Racialised, disabled and working class creatives describe commissioning cultures that are defined by gatekeeping, informal networks of privilege and an unwillingness to share narrative power. Even when marginalised creatives are invited into a project, it's often after the key creative decisions have been made. As one panel member put it, there's a difference between being invited into the room and being allowed to shape the room.

The report also called out the frustration with guidance and diversity strategies that exist more as paperwork than as practice. Many were described as too generic, too compliance-focused and too disconnected from lived experience. Without genuine accountability, there's a danger that these documents risk reinforcing the very problems they claim to fix.

It's important to say that the findings weren't just critical. The panels outlined clear steps that the industry could take to make things better. Co-producing content with communities is an obvious way to be more inclusive. Commissioning stories that reflect joy, creativity and complexity could also have a real impact. Designing guidelines that are community-led and tailored to different formats, as well as reforming commissioning structures so that marginalised creatives can lead, not just advise, are all valuable suggestions.

The report makes one thing absolutely clear - the media industry doesn't just need to broaden its casting. It needs to redistribute power. Until marginalised communities can not only appear in stories but also define and shape them, produce them, commission and critique them, representation will remain partial and conditional. If we want authentic representation in our media industry, we must be ready to admit that the industry is well overdue a rewrite.

Read the full report, Authentic Portrayal in UK Media: Insights from Expert Panels on Race, Disability, and Class by Sarah Bristol-Abbott, Panayiota Tsatsou and Ngozi Marion Emmanuel, here: https://www.bcu.ac.uk/research/media-and-journalism/sir-lenny-henry-centre-for-media-diversity/research

BEHIND THE BAR: HOSPITALITY AND CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

Joshua Jones

Sefyll ar drothwy drws sydd ddim yn agor

Standing at the threshold of a door that won't open

Datblygu –
Cyn Symud i Ddim

This opening line to one of Datblygu's most gothic and foreboding tracks perfectly sums up my recent year of unemployment. A year when my freelance work as a writer and "creative professional" completely dried up. Universal Credit just about covered my rent and bills, weekly explanations to my work coach about what "creative professional" actually means and applying for any and whatever jobs I came across.

Since graduating from university over a decade ago, I'd mostly survived off creative internships and freelance gigs, benefits, and the odd hospitality job here or there. There's been a number of cash-in-hand jobs. I'd mainly avoided the dreaded "office job", but for the first time in my life I was desperate for a salaried job; I longed for the stability and safety that a salaried job would surely bring me. However, after months of rejections, I swallowed my pride and began applying for hospitality and retail jobs — after saying I'd never work in these fields again — to the same effect. Rejection from arts jobs for not having enough experience, rejection from restaurants and various entertainment venues for being too educated, too artistic, too flighty (this is what I told myself to soften the blow, anyway). I was standing on the threshold, banging on the door and asking to be let in.

At the age of sixteen, like most working-class kids, I entered the workforce. After work experience at my hometown's local newspaper, The Llanelli Star - which no longer has physical premises and was subsumed into Wales Online, like many other local papers in Wales - there was a brief stint at Debenhams in Carmarthen, which closed for good shortly afterwards. Then I pulled pints at a pub called 'The Halfway'. The owner of the pub also had a catering company and I, along with a small army of greasy teenagers between the ages of 15 and 17, would be sent to cater events all over Carmarthenshire.

I was young, I hadn't yet begun my A-Levels, but I was already gaining class consciousness. I'd heard Billy Bragg and The Clash and songs such as The Enemy's *Away From Here* - a cut of suburban angst which spoke about working dead-end jobs, hating your hometown, and being "a slave to the modern wage". At that age, most of my education in politics came from music. I would mature in my understanding of class and politics as I got older, went to university in England, met middle-class and rich people for the first time, worked various kitchen jobs in new and unfamiliar cities.

Before all that, I have a vivid memory of sitting down to eat a full-cooked breakfast that my mother had made for the four of us one Sunday morning, out of a Chinese takeaway container in the back of someone's car. I was sitting at the table with my parents when my phone rang. I was asked if I could work a shift, starting immediately. A car would be pulling up to get me in ten minutes. I threw on my uniform — black trousers, white shirt, company waistcoat and red tie — almost too hot to touch from the tumble dryer, while my mother scraped my plate into the plastic container. I ate my scrambled eggs and baked beans while the car sped off to the north of the county, on the left flank of Bannau Brycheiniog, for Minimum Wage which, at the time, was approximately £3.68 an hour for 16–17-year-olds. This is my first memory of being exploited as a worker.

According to *UK Hospitality's Manifesto for Growth*, the hospitality sector employs 165,000 people, making it the second largest employer in Wales and responsible for 11% of jobs. Approximately 1 in 10 jobs in Wales are in hospitality, generating £5 billion in economic activity, and yet I struggle to remember, or come across, much representation of Welsh workers in contemporary, twenty-first century work experience. Yes, there's Nessa from *Gavin and Stacey* working the slots, and all the various jobs she alludes to (Roadie, HGV Driver, Bar Staff, Bouncer) but is that it? "Nowhere" jobs and the anxiety of redundancy are now commonplace but there are nowhere near as many as just thirty years ago, young people's uphill battle to secure safe housing and stable work, the number of people still living with their parents well into their thirties and beyond. This is all ripe for expression in music and media but I can't find it. I feel like I'm missing something.

After being unemployed for a year, I finally got a job at a fancy cinema chain (you can guess which one) taking orders, running food & drink to seats, potwashing, general 'customer experience' work. I began working there the week leading up to Valentines Day: *Wuthering Heights* opening weekend. I've been a sous chef in a chain of sushi bars, I've washed pots in burrito bars and high-end steak restaurants, I've served cocktails at a Venetian bàcaro-inspired bar in the city centre. None of that could have prepared me for the intense busyness of working in what was essentially a restaurant with cinema screens, but also for the mess and ferality of middle-class cinemagoers.

In the time I've written this essay I've held three different jobs: the cinema job, an internship in circus & outdoor arts production, (rigging, lighting, electrics, etc) and pulling pints in my local social club in Pontypridd. 'Clwb y Bont' has been a social club/community & arts centre/political venue since it was founded in 1983, to promote the Welsh language in the area, and it was once a brewery and blacksmiths. One night, I was serving Grecanico or Tempranillo directly to a customer's cinema seat on a tray, the main dining area a glass and velvet cathedral; in the other job, Hoffech chi win coch neu gwyn? across a sticky bar top.

In one environment, I felt in service. I counted the hours by how much money I earned (£12.21 an hour with the first half hour of a shift worked to cover my commute into the city). The other, I stumbled through the little Welsh I know, gently encouraged by the regulars who were just as eager as I was for me to learn to speak Cymraeg. Directly opposite the bar is a mural replica of 'Cofiwch Dryweryn', I experienced a sense of whiplash from serving pizza and prosecco to the middle-classes while employed by a corporate entity, to then working in a venue rooted in local community, history and language.

As always, I turn to music for answers, which comes more naturally to me than TV and film. In his song *Nothing For Ye*, the Belfast-based folk singer Joshua Burnside sings:

My mother before she died told me, son

If you must be a singer, well you ought to run

Down to the dole office, and sign on today

For that's where you'll be, collecting your pay.

The first time I heard this song I had the biggest grin on my face, then laughing out loud when this verse played, listening to the music in my headphones. The song paints a dreary picture of what it's like to be a singer (or any type of artist); of having no money to bring home, worrying your partner will leave you for someone with a better paid job. I've felt the same anxieties, being off and on the dole since I left university, and living hand to mouth. There's times I wished I'd learned a trade or did a degree in something with actual employment prospects; times where I've spent my pay packet on drinking and cigarettes, and times more I've felt alive in the graft.

There are plenty of songs from Wales, as there are in Ireland, about being working-class — but they are predominantly in the folk tradition of miners and unions and hard physical labour. Dafydd Iwan's *Yma O Hyd* comes to mind, for example. There are many songs about drinking pints but not pulling them — The Bug Club's *Quality Pints*, released in 2024 via Sub Pop, is literally about drinking "quality pints" and nothing else — and I am hard-pressed to find songs that detail contemporary working life.

Sosban Fach, my hometown's unofficial anthem, says Mary-Anne went to market to buy a new tea set, but she ended up in a ditch after drinking too much "tea". *Cwrw Da*'/ 'Good Beer' (also known as *Cwrw Melyn* – 'Yellow Beer') is about loving beer. Traditional Welsh songs glorify the act of drinking, of the worker's respite after a long hard day of work, but not the worker who's made or served the beer. Why is it that hospitality workers are always the ones least remembered or celebrated, despite — alongside retail and service workers —being the backbone of society and the British economy?

One of Datblygu's most well-known songs, *Cân i Gymru*, satirises the Welsh-language middle class, who go on "enough holidays to maintain a suntan" (Digon o wyliau i gynnal lliw haul), who only go on holiday to Brittany and the Basque Country instead of France or Spain (a symbol of their wealth and self-righteousness), who live their perfect lives in the city and their BBC jobs. Released in 1993, this song speaks to the alienation one feels in contemporary working life in Wales. Children placed in Welsh-language schools so that they can then work jobs with the BBC and the Arts Council later on in life; essentially given a pass through the doorway, while the bar staff and the potwashers, the catering staff and the shop assistants, stand and wait at the threshold.

I'm not asking for songs that are about loving working in Lidl for slightly-above Minimum Wage, or about working in hospitality, but some acknowledgement that customer service and hospitality work are hard and poorly paid. If there had been more songs on these themes, or more representation within Welsh film and TV, I'd perhaps have felt less shame and anxiety about my labour and the industry I work in, that I didn't train to become a doctor or a teacher like my parents would perhaps have liked me to. I'd like to pass through the door or, failing that, more songs about wanting to be let in.

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image by FireDragonValo

LEARNING FROM THE 1970S BLACK RADICAL PRESS

Sophia Siddiqui

from the Institute of Race Relations asks, what can the struggles of the past teach us in the present day?

At a time of escalating violence across the world, with the rampant brutality of imperial powers and settler colonialism laid bare, what role can radical publishing play today in order to make sense of our current moment, situate it historically whilst bringing communities together in solidarity to confront pressing issues?

. . . community newspapers were a place for recording instances of police brutality and racist treatment which helped to establish patterns of systemic racism at the hands of the British state.

In asking this question, histories of anti-racist struggles in Britain, recorded in the many journals, pamphlets and newspapers, such movements that self-published (loosely termed in this piece as 'the Black radical press') are a powerful source of strength.[1] Returning to our archives, and seeing how communities mobilised and fought against many similar iterations of state violence that we face today, can be a compass to help orientate us in the present moment.

The Black Radical Press in the 1970s

Community resistance led by Black communities in the 1970s was militant and imaginative – including parents fighting against the miseducation of their children, the setting up of supplementary schools, neighbourhood law centres, and youth projects.[2] Politicised by the British Black Power, which was inspired by its US counterpart but rooted in anti-colonialism and the experiences of commonwealth immigrants in Britain, groups responded to the needs of communities which were being neglected by the racist state or caused by it.

Along with the establishment of grassroots groups was the self-publishing of regular newspapers, journals and pamphlets that spoke directly to communities and amplified their concerns. This included publications by Black political parties such as *Black Voice* (produced by the Black Unity and Freedom party) and *Freedom News* (produced by the Black Panthers); by radical Left parties where members felt racism was not being addressed, such as *Samaj in' a Babylon* and *Flame*, and when the Black women's movement emerged in the late 70s, they created their own publications such as *FOWAAD* and *Speak Out*. These materials, plus many more, can be viewed in the Institute of Race Relation's Black History Collection, held at the London Archives, which is comprised of materials from the anti-racist struggle from the 1950s-1980s and includes over 160 journals.

Such materials were critical sites of knowledge production that portrayed visions for a liberated world. Revisiting this historical archive today not only gives us an insight into the political issues of at the time – such as the use of 'SUS' laws by police to prosecute black people, the mobilisations of the National Front, and the introduction of racist immigration laws – but it records how communities responded with collective resistance, which is important, since we face continuations of the same issues today.

The Black People's News Service: recording state racism

At a time when social media did not exist, *The Black People's News Service* was one of the British Black Panther movement's newspapers which aimed to record Black people's experiences in Britain and serve as a corrective to the absence of their histories and stories in the mainstream media. As the March 1970 issue states:

'*The Black People's News Service* is meant to serve Black people because the racist capitalist establishment in Britain has distorted Black people's history, has refused to give the true reason why Black people are here in Britain, and are suppressing the day-to-day struggle of Black people here and all over the world'.

In the context of a lack of information about Black people's lives in the mainstream, and particularly the suppression of information on the racism experienced in post-war Britain, community newspapers were a place for recording instances of police brutality and racist treatment which helped to establish patterns of systemic racism at the hands of the British state.

FOWAAD: building community and a collective voice

In the late 1970s, the Black women's movement emerged in response to the Black Liberation movement, which neglected issues around sexism, and the Women's Liberation Movement, who did not see racism as part of their remit. Black women needed their own organising spaces to address their needs as well as those of the wider communities, built on an understanding that race, class and gender were inseparable. The Organisation of Women of African and Asian Descent (OWAAD) was established as an umbrella movement which campaigned on issues including immigration, education, domestic violence and health.

It published the newsletter *FOWAAD*, which shared information on the issues impacting women of colour and the wider community, and mobilised support for campaigns such as calls to 'Scrap SUS' (referring to the 'sus law' used by police to stop, search and arrest Black people based on suspicion), and shed light on the misdiagnosis of Black schoolchildren, especially from the Caribbean, as 'educationally subnormal'.

Key to *FOWAAD* was providing women with a space to share their views, to pass on information and to call for support in their struggles. The phrase 'OWAAD is all of us! *FOWAAD* belongs to all of us! Make it your mouthpiece sister!', which signs off their editorials, reflects the collective politics the group enacted. *FOWAAD* was practical and accessible – it provided information on how to get involved with working groups and women's groups across the country, and functioned as an organising tool to build relationships and bring people together.

Samaj in'a Babylon: the importance of transnational solidarity

As well as building support for local campaigns, the Black radical press was a key vehicle for linking racism in Britain with imperialism and forging a radical internationalist politics that transcended borders.

Samaj in'a Babylon was an anti-racist and anti-imperialist paper that covered issues impacting people from the Caribbean and South Asia. News of local self-defence campaigns against the National Front in Blackburn, Nottingham and Newcastle features alongside reporting from liberatory struggles in Angola, Mozambique and South Africa. Its transnational ethos was also demonstrated by the paper being published in both English and Urdu.

The movement between the local and the global in the pages of *Samaj in'a Babylon* enacts the understanding that racism in Britian is inseparable from the role of imperialism – a perspective that remains crucial today in the context of multiple genocides upheld by the global circuits of capitalism.

Tracing lineages to the present day

Our conditions have changed significantly since the 1970s. The rise of social media means that people are no longer reliant on print materials to access information, and can connect directly with others across the world. As a result, we now have an alternative media eco-sphere, comprised of blogs, podcasts, radio shows, zines and creative projects that have forged new ways of connecting people and expressing ideas.

However, the contradictions of organising on platforms controlled by billionaires are more apparent than ever, epitomised by the 'systemic online censorship' of Palestine content on Instagram and Facebook, as well as the spread of misinformation.[3] Neoliberalism has brought drastic shifts – whilst many of the publications published in the 1970s were written anonymously, this feels unrealistic now when promoting yourself online is paramount for survival in a precarious economy.

However, whilst our conditions have changed significantly, many of the same political issues persist. In the 1976 issue of *Samaj in'a Babylon*, published after 18-year-old Gurdip Singh Chaggar was stabbed to death in a racist attack in Southall, the opening paragraph reads as follows:

'Resistance has been the keynote of events in Britain this summer. Black people, for long targets of racialist attack and abuse, have stood up for their rights and dignity…Asian youth…have begun to take up the urgent task of organising the defence of their own neighbourhoods against fascist attacks. The Labour government has taken no positive steps to stem the tide of racialism… following the murder of Gurdev Singh (sic), Home Sec Jenkins… came out firmly for stricter immigration control thus underlining the common, racist assumption that immigrants are a problem.'

Reading this fifty years later, the parallels with the 'tide of racialism' of 1976 and the present moment are stark. The last two summers have been marked with far-right orchestrated racist riots, driven by anti-Muslim and anti-migrant racism. The response of the Labour government has been to impose stricter immigration controls, which emboldens far-right organising and blames migrants for the issue.[4]

However, we have also seen a return to community self-defence in response to the far Right– in Whitechapel, east London, where thousands marched in community self-defence in response to UKIP in October 2025, and in February 2026. In response to Britain First calling a march in Manchester, a counter-demo was held, building on the historic slogan 'here to stay, here to fight'. On a global level, in response to ICE raids in the US, campaigns rooted in self-defence have taken action across cities, including neighbourhood patrols, the organising of 'know your rights' training sessions, and neighbours buying food and supplies for those unable to leave their homes.

The ideas, the themes and the visions contained in Black radical press are not contained to a particular historic period or geographic location, but are reactivated in the present day. Resistance today can be considered as part of a long arc of unfinished struggle where people continue to resist state violence by coming out in defence of their communities.

The Black radical press in the 1970s played an important role in this community defence – by sharing information, bringing people together and providing a political consciousness that encouraged many to make connections between the local and the global. Returning to these principles in our media today, in whatever creative form it takes, offers a revolutionary potential for us to build publications, and produce writing on our terms that makes sense of our current moment and provides tools to take us forwards.

Sophia Siddiqui is the joint-editor of Race & Class, the journal of the Institute of Race Relations, and writes on issues related to racism, the far right and community resistance.

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1. This article builds on a talk given at an online workshop organised by the George Padmore Institute and the People's Papers on 'The Black Radical Press in the 1970s'. An online recording is available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=of9E5E-hpqs

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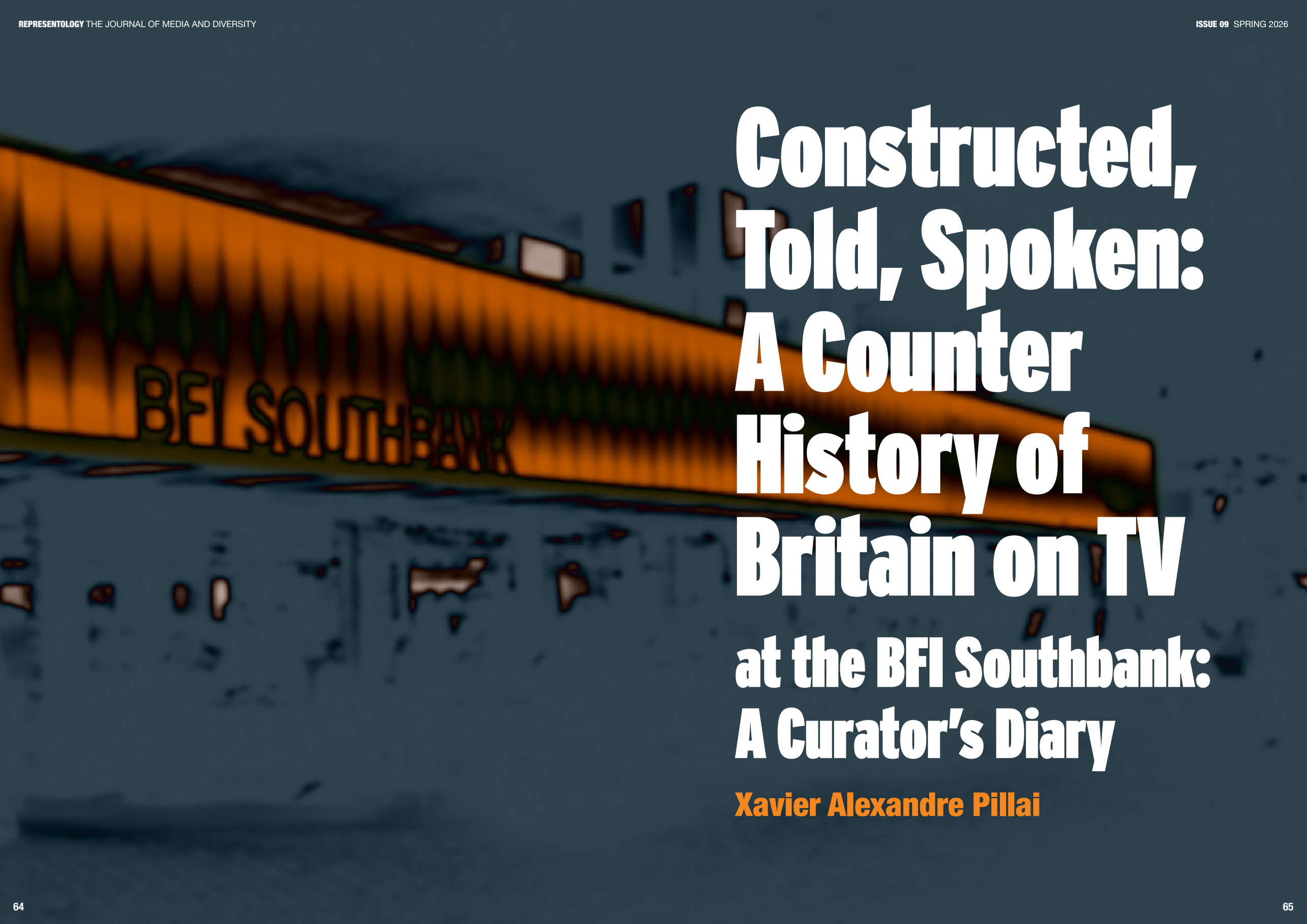

Constructed, Told, Spoken: A Counter History of Britain on TV

at the BFI Southbank: A Curator's Diary

Xavier Alexandre Pillai

Part 1: Gaps in perception

The television season, *Constructed, Told, Spoken: A Counter History of Britain on TV*, which retraced the establishment of Multicultural TV Units at the BBC, ITV, and Channel 4, has just ended at the British Film Institute after six weeks of programming stretching from February to March 2026.

My season told a chronological story of how this unique British phenomenon in television programming came to be, defining this timeline as a movement in television non-fiction.

The timeline is as follows: it began with the emergence of the BBC's immigrant programmes unit in the 1960s. Followed by a period of institutional absence for multicultural policy, during which anti-racist television was developed externally by activists and found a place on our screens through open-access slots in the 1970s. By the 1980s, a defined institutional lane had begun to emerge, peaking in the middle years with a clearly articulated political and social positioning grounded in community perspectives but at times coached in this institutional voice. Ultimately, the season traced the movement's progression toward its eventual decline and the phasing out of multicultural units in the early 2000s.

Programming this season was an act of tying together at times disparate non-fiction shows, an attempt to link and interpret the points of intersection across channels. At times, there was little written history, which meant I had to infer from the historical record through the few interviews and books that exist, knitting a narrative from books, archival sources, old webpages, blogs, and forums. Each provided a limited but useful insight into the experience of making these programmes.

Many of these narratives were correct at the time, but reflections change, as does the pertinence of the material. In my choices, I sought to lean into episodes that remain relevant, focusing on those events and histories that carry afterlives still felt in the present. Programming, which remains salient, is deeply provocative and often at odds with the written record.

We started the season with a deeply thoughtful introduction by Dr Sarita Malik; her invaluable perspective situated the intention behind early assimilationist programming produced by the BBC's immigrant programmes unit.

At the opening of the episode of *Nai Zindagi Naya Jeevan*, the presenter rattles off the names of every politician and public figure who repudiated Enoch Powell from across the political establishment. Even amongst the current rise of the far right in Britain, one of the key assumptions as an audience member is that things were worse, that there would be a raw prejudice, a direct unpleasantness attributable to that bygone era's lack of social progress and integration. The gaps in perception reveal themselves here; the reality is that at this point on television, prejudice is more evident, it's more direct, but that directness also applies in other ways.

Our expectations allow us to assume that these tones, accents, and even positions align with the programming's assimilationist political intent. Instead, the presenters have more political agency: they take a clear position, unlike today. Presenters are not part of an obfuscatory culture of apolitical narrativization like in contemporary media. The institutional stranglehold is less clearly defined; presenters have a clearer position informed by their personal experience and politics. There is no constant hedging of political position; there is direct speech: even though pushing an assimilatory agenda, they understand their duty as presenters to a community, demanding that the political class take a clear moral position, in this case, an anti-racist one. In our contemporary political landscape, can we imagine a BBC presenter leading the political class in a mass rejection of a modern-day equivalent of Powell (for example, Nigel Farage)? It is unimaginable.

Modern audiences find the directness startling and refreshing, with many remarking that it wasn't what they expected. As the season progressed, my impressions and preconceived notions were upended when I met the workers behind these shows.

The next day, I hosted the season introduction. As I detailed the case for classifying this as a movement in television and traced the programming history of the multicultural units through clips throughout the season, it became clear that those who had worked in this field saw their experience as separate. The 1980s, in their view, were the beginning; it sat apart from the earlier period of programme-making by the immigrant programmes unit. For them, this was not a cohesive transformation; it was distinct. Workers on these shows are a tight-knit group who feel strongly about their work; it became increasingly apparent how much overlap there had been across channels, as workers moved between ITN, Channel 4, and the BBC.

In Jim Pines's important book, *Black and White in Colour*, Samir Shah and Trevor Phillips, who both worked on LWT's *Skin*, discussed their work on *Black on Black* and *Eastern Eye*. For them, it was a moment to entertain audiences and to lurch away from what they described as grievance-based programming, leaving behind what Phillips called the "unhappy whining feel" of *Skin*. During the season introduction's Q&A, former Channel 4 commissioner Farrukh Dhondy and former *Eastern Eye* presenter and journalist Shyama Perera concurred, communicating that television at the time needed to offer something more to Black and Asian audiences. They believed that for viewers, it was boring to see oneself always framed in this light of serious documentary, as a victim of discrimination. I accept that in this context, in a time when newspapers predominated, and the media was more formal, in a time before Murdoch's press, that this levity was vital. In the current landscape, where the written record is, to an extent, usurped by visual information, these programmes are invaluable as a record of Black and Asian life in Britain, both in variety programming and in formal documentaries.

there is direct speech: even though pushing an assimilatory agenda, they understand their duty as presenters to a community, demanding that the political class take a clear moral position, in this case, an anti-racist one.

Our feelings on these programmes are a matter of taste and, to some extent, of the media landscape in which they operate.

There is another gap here: a generational one. I, like many of us, exist in a world of overwhelming video footage; we wake up to new images on our screens, with no quality control or accountability to verify their veracity. We cannot necessarily trust the images we see. We scan videos for extra fingers and background distortions, and find ourselves watching almost involuntarily, short videos with robotic narration delivering incorrect information. This mass-produced information is not accountable to a community; it serves an audience pinpointed by an algorithm. Online media has few standards. Part of an assemblage of related topics created by a variety of actors with duplicitous intent and to different standards of research. A jumble, at times. Digital slop.

Context defines reception, and in a landscape where each medium is concurrently grappling for our attention with increasingly simplistic and sensationalist forms of production. For many audience members and for me, this historic multicultural television reporting is challenging, enriching and far from dull.

Part 2: A little bit of grace

Ahead of the season, when searching for the contact details of producers, commissioners and directors, little was available online. Slowly, by writing to directors and workers I had worked with on other projects, we managed to invite some of those involved; other people were enthusiastic and came forward by emailing the box office, and will be interviewed for further writing on the movement and a few I have written back to, and hope to hear more from.

As the season has progressed, more programme makers have come forward, increasingly willing and open to discussing their experiences and those of others.

The day after the introduction, I was blindsided by an article in *The Guardian*. Tariq Ali, longtime editor of the *Bandung File*, claimed he was excluded from the season. The claim was factually incorrect; I welcomed all participants (normally, people just emailed in first). While he participated in the Q&A session at the introduction of the *Bandung File* screening, he remained discontent; it transpired he wanted to programme the slot.

This is not unusual for programmers, and there remains a constant and fundamental gap in perception between how editors, producers and directors want their shows remembered and what programmers sense audiences want to see. These incidents are often about control, a desire not to articulate a position on preserving the programme's legacy but to set the terms on which their programmes' legacy is shown and engaged with. It was not a unique position; early on in an email exchange with a programme editor, he didn't approve of my use of the term "multicultural TV," even though the programming had historically existed within the framework known as the multicultural departments. But in most cases, people are pleased to have their work rediscovered. With over 50 television episodes spanning 40 years, I aimed to cut across and knit together communities and experiences. When you are building bridges, it is important to give a little grace. Whatever the professional or personal motivation for seeking distance from their past or wanting to set the terms for how their work is programmed, I have offered space for that input or denial where possible.

Overwhelmingly, the season has been magical. We collaborated with the Stuart Hall Foundation: a screening centred on Stuart Hall's television interventions on questions of multiculturalism, the role of media, and people's memories of Professor Hall, showed the potential of these interventions. The archive keeps our memories and connections alive. We are bound to these images and the people in them through our shared memory, remaining connected to this movement around institutions and figures that continue this legacy. Careful and respectful participation is vital, especially in discussions about those who are no longer with us, and I'm thankful to K Biswas, Dr Julian Henriques and Dr Sarita Malik for the way they tactfully held that space.

Interactions with memory and community are reanimated in research and through engagement. In the screening on Black Queer Lives in the Archive, which took Jason Okundaye's article about trying to find an episode of the *Black Bag* as its starting point, we rescreened the programmes. As the discussion evolved, we experienced his process; he and Marc Thompson recounted memories, building a terrain of understanding, a bridge to our present reality.

There are difficulties not only in accessing historic multicultural programming but also in consuming programmes that are, at times, to echo Jason's words: "brutal". *Black Out* and *Black Britain* are landmark, unique examples of the development of a Black Queer community in a British context. Still, they also give an exaggerated, prominent place to the homophobic perspectives of the Black church and print media.

These programmes are products of their time; therefore, they function as problematic documents. The later era of multicultural programmes moves beyond the analyses of issues facing Black and Asian communities and instead externalises intraracial dynamics and dramas through broadcast media. They are a little "messy", to borrow a descriptor from Momtaza Mehri's introduction at the start of the Multiculturalism in Europe screening, and make for at times, exploitative and uncomfortable viewing.

Part 3: How we reflect

But we end at a different point, on hopeful reflection. At the very end of the season, Gurinder Chadha, the director of *Bhaji on the Beach* and, perhaps most famously, *Bend It Like Beckham*, joined us for an introductory discussion about *Acting Our Age*, one of her earliest documentaries that aired on the *Birthrights* strand on the BBC.

During the Q&A, alongside giving insight into the process behind the film, Gurinder mentioned that one of her main reasons for coming was to see her parents on the big screen; it was a moment that further crystallised multicultural TV's embeddedness in communities.

For my introduction, I focused on LWT's aforementioned *Skin*, in which I showed a clip featuring my great-uncle, Trevor Carter, from an episode on Multicultural Education. Recounting my memories of him, I made the point that memory is an entry point and a place of intersection between the personal and the wider political community. A person's glimmer on screen, their turn of phrase, and manner draw you emotionally into the political universe they engaged with, their work and legacy. Their image is the jump-off point; these connections build linkages, knitting past, present and possibility.

This is what *Skin* did brilliantly: a series that touched on many facets of excellent multicultural television. It is a historical document, detailed and concise. It addresses the legacies of societies' effects on Black and Asian communities with specificity, while considering the community's impact through the people at its centre. Even amongst these programmes burdened by historical critiques, we must question how we can reappraise our outputs with grace and how time may have rehabilitated programmes once discarded by their own authors.

The legacy of the season is to raise questions about how we maintain visibility of Black and Asian history in Britain.

The legacy, therefore, of the season is to raise questions about how we maintain visibility of Black and Asian history in Britain. And how do we present these histories beyond that gap in our own perceptions, away from the preconceived notion that the past is inert and less radical? How do we highlight the uniqueness of this era of Black and Asian programming, given its political legacy and its importance beyond its role as a form of representation?

When I first came across the clip of my uncle in the archive five years ago, it became my starting point for this season. It prompted me to think about how a community's history forms, refracts, and presents itself through the archive. I hope that, for one audience member in the season, after they saw an episode or a film in *Constructed, Told, Spoken*, a similar story begins to take shape.

Constructed, Told, Spoken: A Counter History of Britain on TV ended on the 17th of March 2026.

Xavier Alexandre Pillai is the season curator of *Constructed, Told, Spoken: A Counter History of Britain on TV* at the British Film Institute.

Review

To Lose a War: The Fall and Rise of the Taliban

by Jon Lee Anderson (Fitzcarraldo Editions)

Sahar Halaimzai

I remember the day Kabul fell, in August 2021, with unusual clarity. For nearly two years, the direction of travel seemed unmistakable; the writing on the wall made clear when Donald Trump promised to end America's "forever wars."

Yet, when the collapse finally came, it still felt sudden. A shock to the system. Jon Lee Anderson's *To Lose a War* shows how this apparent rupture concealed a much longer process of unravelling.

The images that swept across the world that week — crowds gathered at the airport, the frantic departures, the sudden reappearance of the Taliban in the capital — seemed to mark the dramatic ending of a twenty-year conflict. Yet, wars of this scale rarely end as abruptly as they appear to. More often, they erode slowly, through a succession of misjudgements, improvised strategies and shifting priorities whose consequences are pushed aside year after year.

Anderson reconstructs that gradual collapse through the method that has defined his career: patient, immersive reporting. The book collects his dispatches from nearly a quarter century of reporting on Afghanistan for *The New Yorker*. This is not a book written with the benefit of hindsight. It is a record of events as they unfolded, filed from inside a conflict whose outcome Anderson could not yet know: ministers, diplomats, Taliban figures and ordinary Afghans captured in sharply observed conversations. This was the war seen from the ground up, not as strategy but as something people had to live through. That quality of witness, the uncertainty preserved intact, is what makes it valuable.

In what reads now as an early warning, Anderson travels to Kabul in 2005 to profile President Hamid Karzai — the man Western powers had installed to lead post-Taliban Afghanistan, feted abroad and lionised wherever he travelled. What he finds is a government built on uneasy alliances with warlords and corrupt officials, projecting an authority it cannot fully command - a leader entirely dependent on American backing, yet required to govern as though he were not. This is what Anderson does best: showing the gap between what the international community said was happening in Afghanistan and what was actually happening there.

There is a common adage about the conflict: that the United States did not fight a twenty-year war in Afghanistan, but twenty one-year wars, each shaped by shifting strategies, priorities and political timetables, rarely by what was good for the people of Afghanistan. Anderson's book is the most patient documentation of that fact yet assembled.

The early overthrow of the Taliban in 2001 created an atmosphere of triumphalism that proved difficult to sustain. For a brief moment it appeared that the United States and its allies had dismantled the regime and opened the possibility of building a new Afghan political order. As the Taliban regime collapsed, some of its leaders explored the possibility of surrender. Washington dismissed the offer — Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld declaring that "I do not think there will be a negotiated end to the situation, that's unacceptable to the United States." Only a military solution would suffice. It was a confidence that would prove expensive. Anderson was there to record what came next.

The Taliban reorganised — rebuilding networks in rural districts, exploiting grievances against corrupt officials, terrorising those who cooperated with the foreign-backed government, waiting. Amid US night raids, war crimes and drone strikes that killed countless civilians, they offered a brutal alternative order that at least claimed to be Afghan. They understood something their opponents either didn't see or chose to ignore: that the international coalition's will would not hold indefinitely. Over time, Anderson's account of the American war begins to resemble less a coherent campaign than a series of overlapping projects — counter-terrorism trying its hand at state-building, counter-insurgency alternating with negotiation, each phase arriving with a new language of progress and success, each phase leaving the Afghan state more fragile than they found it.

What gives the book much of its force is Anderson's attention to the lives unfolding within this shifting landscape. Officials attempting to sustain the uncertain structures of the post-2001 order. Families adapting to cycles of violence and displacement. Citizens trying to rebuild and make sense of a political future that seemed to change with every decision taken in a distant capital. These are the people who had the least say in what happened and who paid the highest price for it.

To lose a war, Anderson suggests, is rarely the result of a single catastrophic miscalculation. It is more often the outcome of a long process in which strategic confidence gives way to doubt and political ambition gradually exceeds the capacity to sustain it. By the time the final collapse arrives — as it did in Kabul in 2021 — the structures have already been giving way for years.

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In the end, *To Lose a War* offers less a definitive explanation for the Taliban's return than a portrait of how clearly the war's contradictions were visible to those willing to look. Anderson's strength lies in his ability to capture the slow accumulation of decisions, compromises and misjudgements that shaped the conflict over two decades — and to do so without the polishing of hindsight, in dispatches written as it happened.

The book reads today with an unsettling relevance. Anderson spent years watching officials and diplomats speak confidently about political processes whose outcomes they could not control and about people they did not care to understand. Again and again, his reporting shows how international plans for stabilisation collided with the contradictions of the 'War on Terror', realities of local power, corruption and insurgency. What he recorded then is still happening now. His dispatches do not allow the reader to look away.

Anderson does not look away from what the foreign-backed order actually involved. His reporting includes accounts of a CIA-backed warlord imprisoning, shooting, and leaving to die hundreds — likely thousands — of suspected Taliban prisoners (a label the US military applied loosely enough to mean almost anyone), some suffocated in metal shipping containers in the desert, survivors dispatched to Sheberghan Prison. Then there is the scene near Herat, where Anderson stops among a camp of displaced people who have fled drought and violence. A man brings his six-year old son over to show what American bombs did to him the previous year — skin burned and blistered beyond healing. The older son did not survive. This one did. "It itches him," the father says. "He can't sleep at night." Anderson records it and moves on.

That is the violence that was visited on ordinary Afghans in the name of building a new country. It was not incidental. It was part of the system. That so many Afghans came to distrust the foreign-backed order is not difficult to understand when you read what Anderson saw. That after twenty years of war and incalculable loss, the Taliban returned — that too was not a shock. It was a consequence.

Nearly five years after the fall of Kabul, Afghanistan remains under Taliban rule, its economy in freefall, its people hungry, and millions of its citizens — particularly women and girls — once again erased from public life under a system of apartheid. A different violence, no less real.

Reading Anderson today, it is hard not to be struck by how much of the war's eventual outcome was visible long before the final collapse. His book stands not only as a record of the conflict's end, but as a reminder of how clearly its contradictions could be seen — and how little that clarity mattered to those in a position to act on it. Most devastatingly of all, how the same violence is being visited upon other communities, in the same name, as you read this.

Sahar Halaimzai is an Afghan-British writer and human rights advocate. She is an LSE Ideas Fellow and a London Writers Award winner.

REPRESENTOLOGY RECOMMENDS

Hettie O'Brien

Hettie O'Brien is a writer at The Guardian and a regular contributor to The Guardian Long Read. Her first book, *The Asset Class: How Private Equity Turned Capitalism Against Itself* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson), is out this month.

Read

Donna Tartt,
The Goldfinch

After my daughter was born last November, I found myself awake between two and five a.m. most nights. At first, I would obsessively check my phone, aggravating my sleeplessness. However, one night I left the phone in the bathroom and downloaded *The Goldfinch*, Donna Tartt's third book. It's a coming-of-age story about an American boy who loses his mother and finds himself in possession of a Dutch painting. Tartt's descriptions of his waspish New York social world and the hedonistic scenes in suburban Las Vegas are mesmerising and lonely, and the book helped me to enjoy (rather than resent) those wide-awake hours.

Melinda Cooper,
Epstein Family Values
(Equator Magazine)

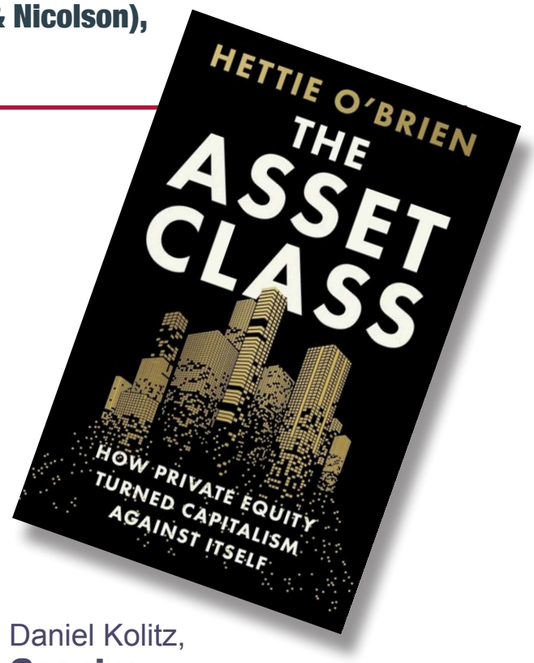
If you want to understand the anti-democratic turn in politics, it's worth looking at how figures on the right run their companies (and their households). This is partly why I wanted to write a book about private equity, a style of ownership that concentrates power. It's also why I find the work of the sociologist Melinda Cooper so generative. Her recent piece for Equator, an exciting new magazine that is publishing writing from the global majority, argued that the Epstein scandal exposed a master-and-servant mindset whereby a small group of exceedingly powerful men have created a world in which they can operate with total impunity.

John le Carré,
The Night Manager

I tend to associate Le Carré with George Smiley and his repressed world of boarding-school men in postwar England but the *Night Manager* is about the glitzy immorality of arms dealers in Nassau and Switzerland. It's claustrophobic and luxurious: reading it, I moved between terror and fascination.

AI predictions

I've been thinking a lot about artificial intelligence, I suppose because so much of my world, while on parental leave, has been mediated by screens (I've spent far too long indoors). I'm sceptical that some of the apocalyptic predictions about AI are feeding the interests of investors who've made speculative bets on the technology's world-consuming power. Advait Arun's recent report, *Bubble or Nothing*, was a useful interrogation of the data centre boom, while a recent Cedric Dúrand piece for *Sidecar* exposed the vulnerabilities of the complex financial arrangements underpinning it.



Daniel Kolitz,
Gooning
(Harpers)

One thing nobody really tells you about giving birth is that before it all kicks off, there will be prolonged moments of boredom where nothing really happens. Thankfully, I brought some magazines to the hospital, including the November 2025 issue of *Harpers*, which included Daniel Kolitz's piece about gooning, or masturbating for such long periods that one reaches a trance-like, hypnotic state. It was the perfect example of how to turn a serious lens on a playful subject without sacrificing humour, and I enjoyed reading, from the clinical setting of an induction ward, about sticky darkened rooms remodelled in the service of porn consumption ("gooncaves").

Watch

The Insider

Michael Mann's films can always be relied on for their winning combination of guns, guys and gearboxes, and I recently watched The Insider, in which Al Pacino plays a hardened investigative journalist attempting to expose the tobacco industry by coaxing a story about corporate espionage out of a whistleblower, Russell Crowe, tracking him down through a noir-ish Los Angeles. The film is based on a true story and, in hindsight, the revelations that Big Tobacco manipulated the nicotine levels in cigarettes to make them more addictive seem slight – perhaps because we've since come to expect nothing less from corporate America.

Sentimental Value

The film maker Joachim Trier manages to make Oslo, a rather grey and unremarkable Scandinavian city, appear shimmering and expansive. I watched his 2021 film, The Worst Person In the World, about a 30 year old woman's career crisis, when I was in my late 20s, so it resonated with me more than his latest, Sentimental Value. But the latter was very good too - it's about an exasperating, ageing director, who is estranged from his two long-suffering daughters. A film about film-making that takes a sardonic swipe at Netflix.

Kind Hearts and Coronets

This 1949 Ealing comedy was recently the subject of a remake, How To Make A Killing, with Glen Powell. I can't bring myself to watch the new version because the original was utterly perfect (Peter Bradshaw correctly called it "history's greatest serial-killer movie"). Louis Mazzini, the penniless and scheming son of a draper's assistant, who is the distant heir to a dukedom, sets out to murder each of the relatives who stand before him in the line of succession. The film is one of my dad's favourites, and makes me nostalgic for my childhood, when we used to watch it together.

Severance

I don't watch much television, not out of some desire to not watch TV but because I find myself paralysed by the fear that any show I commit to will ultimately disappoint. A number of friends recommended Severance (it came out in 2022, so I'm extremely late to this party), about Lumon, an ominous biotechnology company that employs people who voluntarily agree to "sever" their outside self from the person they are at work. There is a real darkness and alienation to its portrayal of Lumon's windowless corporate hell, with its finely tuned retro-futurist aesthetic, inane staff perks, and mind-numbing, seemingly purposeless work.

The Breakdown

The writer Adrienne Buller founded a publishing platform called The Breakdown in 2024. They publish articles about capitalism and the climate crisis from a number of really interesting thinkers, and I've hugely enjoyed their long-form interview series, in which Buller interviews writers and political economists about fossil fuels and the green transition. Technically, the interviews are films, but I often listen to them more like podcasts, playing them in the background when I'm cooking dinner.

Listen

The London Review of Books, *On Politics*

I listen to the LRB politics podcast with James Butler whenever I want an interesting take on British politics. A recent episode dissected the Peter Mandelson affair with the investigative journalists Peter Geoghegan and Ethan Shone- it's still the best thing I've heard on this sordid story.

Yussef Dayes

A number of jazz musicians have come out of South East London, where I grew up (and still live), and one I particularly like is Yussef Dayes. I played his 2019 song, For My Ladies, at the Camberwell Registry Office when I got married last year; it feels like opening a window on a hot day. Recently, I've been listening to the album he recorded in Japan, Live from Mt Fuji, which was released earlier this year.

Know Your Enemy podcast

Matthew Sitman and Sam Adler-Bell's witty, smart, serious commentary on the US right has helped me to understand the horrifying insanity of American politics right now. Their podcast, Know Your Enemy, gives historic context to the ideological roots of the second Trump administration, and I particularly enjoyed the recent episode on Trump's "Big, Beautiful Ballroom" with the architecture critic Kate Wagner.

San Laurentino, Forbidden Fruit

I often reach for this EP by the Hungarian artist San Laurentino: it has a bright yellow jacket, which makes it easy to find in a stack of other records. The pared-back sound is weightless and melancholic, and I like listening to it while I'm working.

The Happy Song, Imogen Heap

I wouldn't advise you to listen to The Happy Song by Imogen Heap – not because it's not good (it's brilliant, for reasons that I'll explain shortly) – but because it wasn't written for you. Heap created the song with a group of psychologists from Goldsmiths, who set out to design a piece of music that would stop babies from crying. The result is a precision-engineered mix of sneezing, animal noises and laughter, which almost always stops my daughter in her tracks. The only problem is I've now listened to it so many times that I can't bear the sound of it.

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