



Emanuel School

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Monday 3rd - Friday 28th October

FRIDAY



Coping with Adversity

Mr RC Worrell

What can you do when your freedom to communicate is restricted?
What will give you the motivation to continue working in a job you never wanted?
What can you do to make yourself feel more empowered?

The answer is.....have a big party,not just any party a jubilant celebration!
A Bacchanal!
A Carnival!

To many a carnival is a sensory overload combining the vision of brightly coloured and flamboyant costumes that sparkle in the summer sun, with the base tones and melodic sounds of soca, reggae, rap and R&B. However, a carnival is more than an exuberant gathering, it's a statement of culture, pain and vexation.

When Africans were taken from their continent to toil in the plantations of the Caribbean during the 16th century, they were stripped of their names, denied the ability to practice their own culture especially their language, religion and music. They were expected to spend every day in servitude to their European masters for no pay, no holiday and little hope of freedom. Imagine if you were in this

position, you would not be able to contact HR to complain about your working conditions or have the free time to engage in any pastimes or even have an outlet for your pent-up frustration.

However... there was one day every year where you were allowed to sing, dance, express yourself and had the freedom to keep a glimmer of your ancestral culture alive. On some islands this was the end of the harvest or 'crop-over' celebration, which was sponsored by slave owners who supplied food and alcohol as an excuse for the continued enslavement of their labour force. This was common on Islands such as Barbados where enslaved people would engage in singing and dancing accompanied by instruments such as the shak-shak, triangle, fiddle, banjo, guitar, bones and glass bottles of water.

In 17th century Trinidad, they used calypso (music derived from West African Kaiso and canboulay music) to mock the slave masters as a means of showing their exasperation at being in a situation they were powerless to change. They were also reclaiming their right to communicate their thoughts and feelings through music. This desire to cling on to what remained of their African identity forms the foundation of present day carnival culture.

Carnivals can also be a way to pay tribute to the atrocities of the past. In Antigua and Barbuda, the first modern carnival in 1957 was to commemorate the emancipation of slavery since 1843 and to show the gradual positive movement toward a future not dictated by the British Monarchy. The Notting Hill Carnival in West London was directly a product of public dissatisfaction surrounding the racial tension between different ethnic groups during the 1950s. Several black Caribbean men, women and children were verbally assaulted, harassed, beaten and even killed by white residents based on their skin

colour. One of these victims was 32-year-old Kelso Cochrane who was an Antiguan born carpenter and aspiring lawyer, who lived in Notting Hill during a time when racial tensions were at their peak. On 17th May 1959 Kelso was killed in a racially motivated attack on Southam Street, Notting Hill. This sparked a demonstration which evolved into activism as it was felt that the investigation into his murder by the police was too complacent. The case remains unsolved to this day. To honour Kelso's death and to encourage racial cohesion, a small community street fayre was held in the mid 60s that eventually morphed into the Notting Hill Carnival. A blue plaque now marks the spot where Kelso Cochrane perished.

Carnivals by themselves do not inherently solve the issue of racism, discrimination or enslavement. They are a coping mechanism for trauma faced and a tool to express one's culture through music and artistic costumes as well as starting a conversation around difficult topics. It is possible for change to occur but only when those in authority listen to the lyrics of the anguished and make the decision to be proactive rather than merely enforcing the status quo.

Harriet Jacobs

Rebecca Watts - Lower Sixth

Harriet Jacobs (born 1813) was an African-American woman, abolitionist and an author. She was born in 1813 to enslaved parents and was herself enslaved at birth in North Carolina. When she was six years old, her mother died, leaving her to live alone with her owner. She was sexually harassed from a young age by her master, but had no chance of legal protection due to her dark skin. After several years she managed to escape to New York where she found a job as a nanny and came in contact with abolitionist and feminist reformers. During the Civil War she helped to raise money for black refugees and nursed black troops. Immediately after she returned to the South and founded two schools for fugitive slaves, and worked to improve the conditions of recently freed slaves. In 1861 she wrote an autobiography

entitled 'Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl' and became the first woman to author a fugitive slave narrative in the United States. Her account of being sexually abused shocked the American public. In 1875, following her mother's example, she helped to organise meetings of the National Association of Coloured Women.

For much of her life, Harriet Jacobs travelled to various cities, attempting to raise support for emancipation and spent many years as a relief worker. After her death, Jacobs was eulogized as 'a woman of strong individuality and marked character.' She is now well known as one of the most inspiring African-Americans of the Civil War period.



Senior Book Club discussion of *Assembly* by Natasha Brown

Molly Geater Milton (Upper Sixth)

The elegant prose of Natasha Brown's debut novel *Assembly* weaves together memory with reality, questioning the price of success and highlighting the hostility of a Britain still denying its colonial past. The protagonist, an unnamed Black British woman, spends the majority of the novel in preparation for a garden party hosted by the family of her boyfriend, but this preparation is overshadowed by the protagonist's numb disillusionment with her own success and the 'ascent'; she is sick of her own dehumanisation, her lack of choice in her own life. The protagonist is so sick of enduring her own dehumanisation that when she is told she has cancer, she makes the choice to do nothing about it, resolving to die and let her wealth pass down to her younger sister. While only one hundred pages long, Brown's novel starkly portrays the detachment and pain which results from living inside a narrative not your own. Her fluid prose and experimental structure in the novel's latter half effectively portrays the

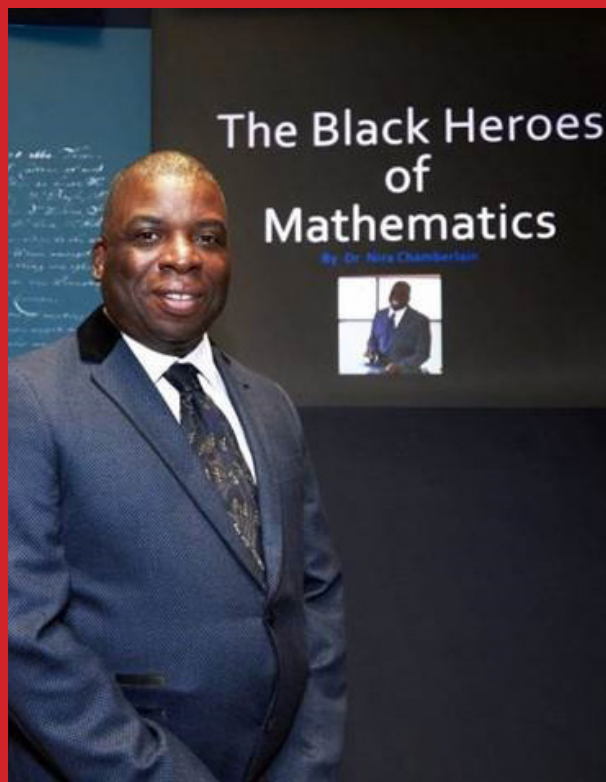
extent to which British colonialism still overshadows modern life, and the danger inherent to its denial.

In the Senior Book Club discussion of *Assembly*, a continued line of conversation was Brown's own style of writing. While opinions varied on the placement of her tangents within the main story, the blend of past and present proved an excellent chance to discuss narrative structure, as well as opening questions into the functionality and necessity of plot in literature. The idea of stereotype and how to write a scene already so popular in modern culture (such as the scene in which the protagonist receives her cancer diagnosis) was also discussed, with the different perspectives of the group's members allowing for an exciting and insightful conversation regarding not only the structure of the novel, but its delicate subject matter.



Nira Chamberlain and *The Black Heroes of Mathematics*

Mr Ashton



Nira Chamberlain OBE is considered one of Britain's leading mathematicians of the present day. He is based in Birmingham, where he was born in 1969 to Jamaican parents, and is the President of the Institute of Mathematics and its Applications (IMA), a Visiting Fellow of Loughborough University Mathematical Sciences Department, and a Principal Consultant at SNC-Lavalin Atkins, a Canadian-British engineering firm.

Chamberlain's contributions and successes in the field of mathematics are numerous. He makes regular appearances in UK media and is a "BBC expert voice", regularly giving lectures and running workshops to highlight the significance of mathematics in human achievements and discussing its relevance in everyday life. He became only the 30th mathematician to feature in the biographical reference book "Who's Who", which contains information on more than 35,000 influential people from around the world. Furthermore, Chamberlain is one of the few British Mathematicians to appear in the Encyclopaedia of Mathematics & Society. The Encyclopaedia highlights two of his mathematical models and their impact on the field of naval engineering.

To add to his list of accolades, Nira is a prominent activist for more diversity within the mathematical sciences. For the charity Speakers for Schools, he frequently gives talks in UK schools, inspiring young people and nurturing the next generation of world-class mathematicians. His

lecture "The Black Heroes of Mathematics" is hugely popular and often shown during Black History Month.

"For Black people, there have always been historical as well as modern obstacles to prevent them from becoming mathematicians: overt racism, prejudice and stereotypical threats," said Chamberlain in 2019. "However, there have been those that have trail-blazed within this field. The problem is that their names remain hidden."

Providing role models and revealing these hidden figures is an important step in encouraging those that find themselves in a minority, and this has been one of the main aims of Nira's campaigning. In 2016 he was asked by the Black Cultural Archives to submit his own mathematical biography, parts of which were published in *Mathematics Today*, relaying some of his own experiences.

Chamberlain was appointed Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in the 2022 New Year Honours for services to mathematical sciences. He has been included in *Powerlist's* Top 100 most influential black people in the UK for the last four years running, largely on account of his social outreach around improving diversity within mathematics. Online versions of both the renowned 'Black Heroes of Mathematics' and his other most notable talk 'The Mathematics that can stop an AI Apocalypse' can be watched on YouTube.

