



Emanuel School

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

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GREAT ZIMBABWE HOW RACISM DENIED ARCHAEOLOGICAL FACTS

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In the modern state of Zimbabwe, impressive stone ruins show the existence of a powerful medieval kingdom in southern Africa. However, the insistence of European travellers refusing to believe such a kingdom could exist in sub-Saharan Africa independently of White influence tells us much about the unjustifiable lengths gone to in order to entrench racist beliefs, even when all evidence points to the contrary.

The name Zimbabwe comes from the Shona term 'dzimba dza mabwe', meaning 'houses of stone'. From 1220, the Shona people organised a new southern African kingdom on the site of Great Zimbabwe. This was the largest commercial centre in southern Africa, controlling the trade in ivory, gold, iron and copper from the interior to the Swahili coast. Great Zimbabwe's ruins cover 7.2 square kilometres and are the largest pre-colonial structures in sub-Saharan Africa. The walls reach up to 11 metres high, and over 1 million stones were used in their construction. Even more impressive is the lack of mortar holding the stones in place.

The site of Great Zimbabwe can be divided into three parts: the Hill, the Valley and the Outer City. The steep sides of the Hill dominate the landscape with walls built on the summit around the natural rock. It was here that archaeologists discovered monolithic soapstone pillars with

carved birds on top. The Hill was probably where the leaders of the kingdom lived, overlooking the view across the Valley. The Valley contains at least a dozen settlements with stone walls. The most distinctive element are the walls and solid conical tower known as the Great Enclosure. This large oval space is surrounded by almost 245 metres of stone walls that are over 5-metres thick in places. Narrow passageways run between an inner and outer wall, creating different routes, perhaps used by different social ranks so they didn't see each other. Some have argued that this was a religious compound, a residence for the king's wives or an initiation centre for young women. Finally, the Outer City shows evidence of densely crowded houses, often made of dhaka (soil containing clay and gravel) with thatched roofs. Around 20 000 people may have lived in the city.

Archaeological finds from the Valley enclosures include copper rings, iron gongs, bronze bells, glass beads and twisted wire coils for making jewellery. There were also imported objects, such as Chinese porcelain, Islamic cups and Venetian glass. It is clear that Great Zimbabwe was a wealthy and important kingdom, and was only abandoned in favour of areas further north from around 1430 after a series of droughts affected the area. It is said that a prince from Great Zimbabwe founded the Kingdom of Mutapa, which conquered territories across modern Zimbabwe, Zambia, Mozambique and South Africa. This kingdom lasted until 1760.

In the 19th century, most European archaeologists who visited Great Zimbabwe refused to believe that a Black African civilisation could have made

such impressive stone buildings. Even though Gertrude Caton-Thompson proved in 1929 the ruins were the work of the indigenous Shona people, efforts were made by the White colonial authorities to connect the ruins to cities in the Bible, as well as ancient Egyptians, Greeks or Phoenicians.

When Zimbabwe gained its independence from the British empire in 1980, the country was named after the famous ruins and the national flag shows the Zimbabwe bird found at the site - a reclamation of the impressive indigenous heritage that had been denied to the Shona people for so long.

Adapted from the Collins Knowing World History series, co-authored by Laura Aitken-Burt <https://collins.co.uk/collections/knowning-history>

WHEN DID BLACK PEOPLE ARRIVE IN BRITAIN?

Keza (IIRCW)

The most common misconception is that most black people came to the UK with the Windrush generation in 1948. Although it is true that around 500,000 people arrived in the Windrush Generation there were many black people in Britain before that. In 4th Century Roman Yorkshire, it is thought that around 20% of the population were long-distance migrants of mostly African heritage. Archeologists in the 1901 unearthed multiple Roman graves in York, and the most amazing discovery was of the 'Ivory Bangle Lady' whose skeleton revealed her black ancestry. Perhaps most significantly, the wealth of this black woman was also apparent, which contradicted many long-standing Victorian assumptions. Not only were there wealthy black migrants, but another discovery showed that the Emperor Lucius Septimus Severus was a black emperor from the Roman Libyan city, Leptis Magna.



The site of Great Zimbabwe

DANNY 'THE BRIXTON BOMBER' WILLIAMS

Mr T Jones

I have been a lifelong boxing fan and one of my favourite eras of the 'sweet science' was the early noughties, which featured several top British heavyweights. None were quite good enough to win major world titles, but nevertheless were very tough men who mixed with the best in the business. Around this time I regularly attended the 'big fights' which were usually shown live on ITV1 on Saturday night; heavyweight boxing was big business often featuring the same group of men in exciting dust-ups and rematches.

The top heavyweights in UK were also all black, but thankfully these men did not experience the racism which fighters from the eighties and earlier generations lived through. That is not to say there was not violence and an edge in the volatile partisan crowds, which often had tribal football vibes rather than anything resembling racial undercurrents. The big four rivals were Danny Williams, Audley Harrison, Matt Skelton and Michael Spott; I have vivid memories of watching them all fight, either in Wembley or the Docklands Arena.

I loved Danny Williams, but was also a fan of Skelton and Spott, and started watching Danny in the late nineties. I roared when he won the British and Commonwealth titles and was flabbergasted by his stunning one punch KO of Mark Potter (look this one up on YouTube) after he dislocated his shoulder. He came up short against the vicious Vitali Klitschko (now Mayor of Kiev) when challenging for the WBC Heavyweight Title and was involved in numerous other high-profile fights. Danny is best remembered for his unlikely 2004 victory against a faded Mike Tyson and entering the ring many more times, he hit a downward spiral. I am saddened to write that Danny fought in Estonia as recently as August 2023 (he is almost fifty) and still regularly fights abroad as he no longer holds a British Boxing license, usually losing against boxers he would have swept aside when in his prime. I occasionally check the boxing fight statistics and my heart sinks when I read that Danny is being used as an 'opponent' (there to lose) in a faraway country which will brush aside health concerns when issuing licences and he has another 'L' added to his record.

One day in the near future, I would love to stumble across an autobiography written by Danny in my local Watersones, I can imagine it now; "The Brixton Bomber: the Man Who Stopped Tyson"

and I would be first in the line to buy a copy. Surely, this is a better option than fighting for peanuts where nobody cares for your health or welfare. In boxing, this sad story is very common. Danny fought Tyson and Klitschko, two of the most feared boxers of their eras, and he has a story to tell beyond working in security, which he currently does.

I might be an Aberdonian far from home, but I have lived in south London since 1999 and cheering on the Brixton Bomber is one of the many special moments which connects me to this city. Back in 2005, Danny Williams dished out one of my favourite, ever, sporting moments, defeating much hyped and former Olympic gold medalist Audley Harrison at the Docklands, flooring him in the eleventh round of a brutal encounter. This was sport at its absolute finest and most ferocious. Boxing has always been a sport which gives poor men, and now equally women, the opportunity to escape poverty, and in the troubling days of racism and segregation in the USA, the many black world champions were rays of hope in a troubling world.

Thankfully, for the huge majority of fans boxing has never been about race or colour and you do not have to win a world title to be a hero. Danny 'The Brixton Bomber' Williams is one of mine.

TUSKEGEE EXPERIMENT THE INFAMOUS SYPHILIS STUDY Taiwo (U6HHM)

The Tuskegee experiment began in 1932, at a time when there was no known cure for syphilis, a contagious venereal disease. After being recruited by the promise of free medical care, 600 African American men in Macon County, Alabama were enrolled in the project, which aimed to study the full progression of the disease.

Doctors from the U.S. Public Health Service (PHS), which was running the study, informed the participants—399 men with latent syphilis and a control group of 201 others who were free of the disease—they were being treated for bad blood, a term commonly used in the area at the time to refer to a variety of ailments.

The men were monitored by health workers but only given placebos such as aspirin and mineral supplements, despite the fact that penicillin became the recommended treatment for syphilis in 1947, some 15 years into the study. PHS researchers convinced local physicians in Macon County not to treat the participants, and instead, research was done at the Tuskegee Institute.

In order to track the disease's full progression, researchers provided no effective care as the men died, went blind, insane or experienced other severe health problems due to their untreated syphilis. Black History Month is an important opportunity to highlight such past injustices and try to ensure they are never repeated.



Williams (right) fighting Mike Tyson in 2004.

