



KAMALA HARRIS AND 'RECLAIMING NARRATIVES' Anna (10 JGB)

Kamala Harris is an American politician and attorney, currently serving as the 49th vice president of the United States, as well as running as the 2024 presidential candidate for the Democrats. Harris has both Indian and Jamaican heritage, making her the first female, South Asian and African American vice president, and the highest-ranking female official in American History. She has broken down many racist and misogynistic barriers in the fields of law and politics, creating paths for and inspiring the next generation of leaders, specifically women of colour.

The theme of Black History Month 2024 is 'Reclaiming Narratives', empowering people to embrace and celebrate heritage, acknowledge experiences, ensure all voices are heard and take control over their own narratives, and the way in which they are told and perceived. Unfortunately, in our modern society, the history of Black people and their communities has been misrepresented, overlooked and manipulated. Kamala Harris's ethnic origin being weaponised and exploited, to damage her public image and weaken her campaign, is a contemporary example of narratives being told through a distorted lens, emphasising the importance of this theme and the imperative change that needs to be implemented into our society.

"My Mother would look at me and she would say 'Kamala, you may be the first to do things, but make sure you are not the last.' That's why breaking those barriers is worth it. As much as anything else, it's also to create the path for those who come after us" - Kamala Harris



MATTHEW HENSON AND THE NORTH POLE Mr F Shannon

Matthew Henson was born to sharecropper parents in Maryland in 1886. Destined for a life of little money, and facing constant harassment from locals as well as the KKK.

He escaped his rural agricultural future and went to work around the busy ports of Baltimore. He managed to join a crew as a cabin boy, and they set sail for Nicaragua. After impressing his captain on the voyage Matthew was promoted to first mate. His skills as a craftsman made him an integral part of expeditions, and soon the crew were aspiring to be the first to reach the North Pole.

The crew hired Inuit men and sleds to help them reach the pole, over time Matthew became a talented sled driver, igloo builder and mastered the Inuit language.

Matthew's team reached the North Pole with his captain taken ill and carried on one of the sleds. After all their hard work they had achieved what they had set out to do and sat on top of the world.

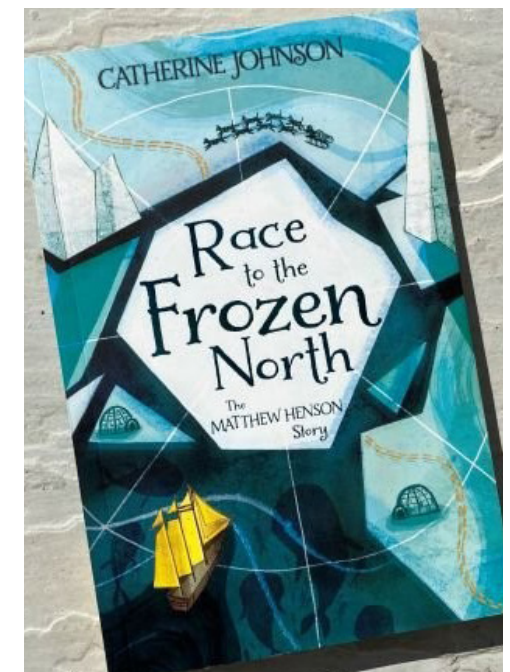
The winner of the race to the North Pole is still debated, many claimed the honour but proving it has been a difficult matter.

Matthew returned to America after his adventures hoping to be hailed as a hero along with his crew. Another ship had returned already, and claimed to have beaten them to the Pole. Very few strangers believed Matthew's story. His relationship with his captain had soured after his illness had stolen the glory of standing at the north pole on his own two feet. His captain never contacted Matthew again, and Matthew never returned to his adventure.

Eventually he worked as a clerk, leading a somewhat ordinary mundane life. Many people didn't believe Matthew and his Inuit team were the first to reach the Pole, perhaps with real reservations, perhaps out of racial prejudice.

I find Matthew's story intriguing. Growing up experiencing poverty and prejudice, then exploring the world and possibly being the first human to reach the North Pole. The end of his story is melancholic. He was accepted by the Inuits, even started a family with them (his only descendant was an Inuit son). Yet he returned to America and got a fraction of the respect white explorers and adventurers were given. In his later life he was received his laurels but it took two world wars and many years for his achievements to be recognised.

To learn more about Matthew Henson explore the book 'Race to the Frozen North' available in the library.



BLACK MPS IN THE UK: CELEBRATING THEIR IMPACT AND LEGACY

Farhan (IISJM)

Black History Month in the UK, celebrated every October, is a time to honour the wonderful contributions, resilience, and achievements of Black individuals in British society. One crucial area of recognition is the growing presence and impact of Black Members of Parliament (MPs). Despite historical under-representation, Black MPs have fought tirelessly to influence policy, address inequalities, and represent the voices of the Black community. Their stories are a testament to persistence and the ongoing fight for racial equality and social justice in Britain.

A Brief History: Early Breakthroughs

For many years, the House of Commons was dominated by White politicians. However, the 1987 General Election marked a significant breakthrough in British political history when four Black MPs were elected for the first time. They were Diane Abbott, Paul Boateng and Bernie Grant. Their achievements and positions are mentioned below:

Diane Abbott made history as the first Black woman to be elected to the House of Commons, representing Hackney North and Stoke Newington. Since her election, she has championed numerous causes, including education, health care, and racial justice, becoming one of the most recognized figures in British politics.

Paul Boateng, the son of a Ghanaian politician, would go on to break another barrier in 2002 when he became the first Black cabinet minister in British history, serving as Chief Secretary to the Treasury under Prime Minister Tony Blair.

Bernie Grant, representing Tottenham, became known for his fierce advocacy for racial equality, police reform, and the empowerment of Black Britons.

Growing Representation

Since 1987, the number of Black MPs has steadily grown, although Black representation still lags behind the overall population demographics. The 2019 General Election marked a high point for Black MPs, with 65 MPs from minority ethnic backgrounds elected — the most in UK history. Of these, a notable portion were of African or Caribbean heritage.

The growing presence of Black MPs reflects not only the increasing diversity of British society but also a recognition of the importance of having political representatives who can address the specific needs and challenges faced by Black communities in the UK. The impact of these MPs can be seen in the work they do on issues ranging from racial inequality, immigration reform, education, and criminal justice, to name a few.

Key Figures in Contemporary Politics

Several Black MPs have risen to prominence in recent years, shaping debates and policies that directly impact the future of Britain. Their leadership has helped centre discussions around race, inclusion, and equality in national politics.

David Lammy, the Labour MP for Tottenham, is one of the most high-profile Black MPs in the UK. Known for his passionate advocacy for social justice, Lammy has consistently fought against systemic racism, particularly in the criminal justice system. His 2017 Lammy Review highlighted racial disparities in the UK's justice system and has been widely praised for driving forward much-needed reform.

Dawn Butler, representing Brent Central, made headlines in 2020 for calling out racism within the UK government and police. She became a vocal advocate for the Black Lives Matter movement, calling for more comprehensive action to address institutional racism.

Kemi Badenoch, a Conservative MP and former Secretary of State for Business and Trade, represents a newer wave of Black politicians who have taken prominent roles within government. Badenoch, of Nigerian heritage, has been influential in debates around social mobility, economic reform, and diversity of thought within the Conservative Party.

Clive Lewis, Labour MP for Norwich South, has been an outspoken advocate for environmental justice and the intersection between racial and economic inequalities. His work highlights the growing recognition of the role that climate change and environmental policy play in disproportionately affecting marginalized communities.

Challenges and Future Outlook

While the progress in Black political representation in the UK is commendable, there are still significant challenges ahead. Black MPs continue to face discrimination, both within Parliament and from the public, particularly in the form of racist abuse online and in the media. Furthermore, Black politicians often encounter resistance when raising issues of race and inequality, with their concerns sometimes dismissed or marginalized. The journey toward true representation and equality in British politics is ongoing. However, the growing presence of Black MPs, and their increasing influence in policy-making, provides hope that the voices of Black Britons will continue to shape the nation's future.

Conclusion

This Black History Month, it is vital to recognize the achievements of Black MPs in the UK, not just for their individual accomplishments but for their collective contribution to creating a more just and equal society.

Their presence in Parliament is a powerful reminder of the importance of representation, diversity, and the ongoing fight against racial inequality. As the number of Black MPs continues to rise, they will undoubtedly play an essential role in shaping the future of the UK for generations to come.

By honouring the past and present achievements of Black MPs, we not only celebrate their successes but also reaffirm our commitment to a more inclusive and representative democracy in Britain.



THE REAL 'BLACK PHARAOHS' OF ANCIENT EGYPT

Ms Aitken-Burt

Last year, Netflix caused a furore in their four part docu-drama 'Queen Cleopatra' by publicising it as 'a show to represent Black women'. Adele James was cast in the lead role and Jada Pinkett Smith narrated the voiceover. The problem is, Cleopatra VII was definitely not a Black woman. She was part of the notoriously incestuous Ptolemaic dynasty from Macedonia in northern Greece, and therefore part of a foreign imperial family who had come to rule Egypt after the death of Alexander the Great back in the 4th century BCE.

However, the debate did highlight two important issues – firstly, that Black actors have had limited roles in historical dramas and secondly that there is an important call for stories of Black characters with agency to be unearthed from historical records.

But instead of trying to create unnecessary controversy and historical inaccuracy about Cleopatra VII, why don't we tell the stories of the actual 'Black Pharaohs' from the Kingdom of Kush in modern Sudan?

The 25th dynasty was established by Taharqa in 690BCE. The Kingdom of Kush had always been a rival to the Egyptians based further north and conflicts were common between the two, often with minimal gains. But Taharqa broke through to install himself as ruler of the biggest area since the great Ramesses II and Thutmose III. He made additions to the impressive temples at Karnak and also fought the Assyrians, with looted statues of Taharqa being found in palaces as far away as Nineveh.

In fact for 3000 years the Kushite kingdoms often had female rulers known as a 'kandake'.

The Lion Temple at Naga shows Kandake Amanirenas with her arm raised to smite a bound group of enemies in a traditional artistic representation of pharaonic power dating back to the first pharaoh Narmer portrayed on the Narmer palette in 3200BCE. The enemies she is smiting here are no less than Romans under Augustus who tried to push into her kingdom after the overthrow of Cleopatra VII and Mark Antony. Kandake Amanirenas successfully held off Augustus from 25-21BCE, and he was forced to negotiate a peace treaty to avoid further losses.

In fact, in the British Museum you can even see a reminder of Kandake Amanirenas' resistance with the famous Meroe head of Augustus. One of the rare surviving examples of bronze statuary to survive from antiquity and with the inlaid eyes still intact, it has often been looked at from an art history point of view. Kandake Amanirenas' name is not on the museum label, but the decapitated head was clearly cut off and buried as a defiant sign against Augustus' rule.

So powerful Black female stories do exist from ancient Egypt and we should explore them – but Cleopatra VII is not one of them.



WHO IS JOYCE?

Keza (L6AMB)

We all know Joyce who runs the Sixth Form Cafe, but do you really know Joyce. Did you know that Joyce was born in Uganda, a small landlocked country in eastern Africa? Many believe the Garden of Eden may have been located here because it is so lush and green. Uganda is a very diverse country with 36 ethnic groups and a multitude of languages where most people speak their mother tongue and English and often also speak Swahili. Joyce is

from the Northern ethnic group Luo which is also found in Kenya. An interesting fact is that Barack Obama's father was also Luo. Every ethnic group has different types of dances, cuisines, cultures and ceremonies and especially different local brews. Joyce's favourite food is Okra, a green vegetable native to east Africa, which she enjoys with meat as well as yellow bean stew. Joyce has been living in London for 33 years after she left Uganda in 1989. Next time you see Joyce why don't you greet her in Luo – Okinyi (Oh-kee-nyee) which is good morning.



Joyce with Levi Roots – a famous Jamaican chef who created Reggae Reggae sauce, which he successfully pitched on BBC's Dragons' Den.