



Black Women of History



liberation campaigns

Black Women of History

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1 - Introduction from NUS Women's & Black Students' Campaigns

Opening Statement from Kelley Temple and Aaron Kiely

In recognition of Black History Month, NUS Women's and the Black Students' Campaigns have produced this briefing as an opportunity to focus on Black Women in history. In this briefing you will find a profile of 10 black women who have made some remarkable and amazing achievements in history that deserve recognition and praise and should be firmly place on the history map.

As well as providing information about some black women who have made history, other sections in this briefing focus on ways in which you can implement this information and encourage your union to participate in celebrating black women of history. We have also included information about other organisations who celebrate black history and women's history that should be able to provide you with more information and possibly materials that you can use when promoting black women of history in your unions.

Whilst we recognise the importance of focusing on black women in history, we have also provided contact information for organisations that are campaigning on current issues that affect black women of today. This gives your union an opportunity to further celebrate and support black women in society today by getting involved with these organisations and promoting their campaigns within your institution. It may also give you and your union the opportunity to think about local campaigns you would like to run on issues that affect black women and provide information to your students about what they can do to participate in campaigns that support and promote equality for black women.

This briefing hopes to give black women the recognition they deserve for their contributions to history and highlight the need to campaign and achieve equality for all. We should all be actively empowering and supporting black women to affirm their place in society.

Please join us in celebrating black women of history and black history month!

In Unity,

Kelley Temple
National Women's Officer

Aaron Kiely
National Black Students' Officer



2 - Black Women of History

Profile of 10 black women who have made history

1. Diane Abbott MP (1953 -)



Diane Abbott is Britain's longest serving Black MP and is the Member of Parliament for London's Hackney North and Stoke Newington. She's been a member of the Labour Party since 1971 and came to prominence during the election campaigns of 1987 where she became the first Black female MP.

Following obtaining a Masters in History at Cambridge, Diane joined the Government as a Home Office Civil Servant. She went on to work for the lobby group the National Council for Civil Liberties, then she became a journalist, before becoming an MP.

Diane founded the London Schools and the Black Child Initiative, which aims to raise educational achievement levels amongst Black children. She hosts an annual conference for educators, children and their parents and an annual academic awards ceremony.

In 2008 Diane was awarded the Spectator/Threadneedle Speech of the Year Award and a Human Rights Award from Liberty.

In May 2010 Diane was re-elected in her constituency of Hackney North and Stoke Newington, and doubled her majority on an increased turn-out. In June 2010, she made the ballot for the Labour Leadership contest and took part in the summer long campaign to elect the next Labour leader.

Diane is currently Shadow Minister for Public Health.



2. Claudia Jones (1915 – 1964)



Claudia Jones was born in 1915 in Trinidad. At 8 years old, she and her family moved to New York. Whilst growing up, Claudia saw how badly Black people were treated and decided she would try and argue for justice for Black working people. She was a great campaigner and was an active member of the American Communist Party, which offered a voice to those fighting for Black Civil Rights. Unfortunately, the American Government did not approve of her activism and, following four spells in prison, Claudia was deported and took exile in England in 1955.

When Claudia came to England, she continued fighting for Human Rights, becoming a leading figure in the emerging Black civil rights movement. She lived in Notting Hill and was a talented writer and journalist and founded the 'The West Indian Gazette'.

Claudia was responsible for launching the Notting Hill Carnival in 1959, in response to the 1958 riots, which happened as a result of racist attacks on the Black community, which created racial tensions in the local community. She wanted to have the Carnival to publicly celebrate the Black community and bring the all local communities together. The Carnival takes place every year during the August bank holiday and is the biggest in Europe.



3. Salma Yaqoob (1971 -)



Salma Yaqoob is the former Leader and Vice-Chair of the Respect Party, a socialist political party in England and Wales. A prominent and influential figure in British politics, Salma was also been a councillor in Birmingham City Council and is the head of Birmingham Stop the War Coalition and a spokesperson for Birmingham Central Mosque.

Salma's parents emigrated to the UK from Pakistan in the 1960s. One of seven children, Salma was born in Bradford in 1971, with the family later moving to Birmingham, where she was raised. Despite some concerns from her family, Salma managed to persuade them to allow her to enrol at university and attended Aston University, studying biochemistry and psychology, eventually becoming a qualified psychotherapist.

Salma's experience of the discrimination against Muslims in Britain, following the 9/11 attacks, where she found herself being spat at in the streets of Birmingham City, led her into politics, with the intention to challenge discrimination and the war. Her political career has ranged from becoming a councillor, to coming second in the election to be the Minister of Parliament for Birmingham Green Hall Constituency in 2010, to becoming a regular commentator and panel member for various current affairs programmes and media.

As well as receiving the Lloyds TSB Asian Jewel Award for Public Service Excellence in 2006, Salma is regularly recognised as a leading figure and has featured in various ranking lists for being a powerful and influential woman in politics. These include Harpers Bazaar's Top Thirty List of British Women (2006), Birmingham Post's 50 Most Influential People in the city (2008 & 2009), The Daily Telegraph's Too 100 Left Wingers (2009), Equality and Human Rights Commission's Muslim Women Power List (2009) and the Guardian newspaper have sited her as "the most prominent Muslim woman in British public life."



4. Tessa Sanderson (1956 -)



Tessa Sanderson is the first Black British woman to win Olympic Gold. In Los Angeles in 1984, Tessa became not only the first British athlete to win an Olympic throwing event, but the first British black woman to win Olympic Gold and the second British woman to return with a Gold Medal.

Tessa competed in six Olympic Games, and has won many other major medals including three times Commonwealth Gold and the last being a World Cup Gold in Cuba in 1990. In the 1992 Barcelona Olympics and competing in her 5th Olympics she finished an incredible 4th place in the final.

During her 26 years competing for Great Britain, Tessa was voted Sports Personality of the Year and Athlete of the Year (3 times) by the Athletics Writers Association. In 1988, Tessa presented the Sports News and continued to do so for 2 ½ years for Sky Television. Her media career involved television presenting for BBC, ITV, Bloomberg, GMTV, where she covered the 1996 Olympics from Atlanta. Other media activities involve working with Talk Sport Radio and other network radio stations in the UK. Tessa was involved with Talksport during the 2008 Olympic Games and fronted Jamaican TV Breakfasts coverage of the 2012 Games.

Tessa served as Vice-Chairman of Sport England from 1999 to 2005. She then went on to support the Newham Sports Academy, before setting up the Tessa Sanderson Foundation and Academy in 2011, which aims to help and assist young people in sport, towards a healthier lifestyle and through physical activity, together with building confidence and a social wellbeing whilst still in education.



5. Cornelia Sorabji (1866 – 1954)



Cornelia Sorabji was born in India in 1866. Cornelia's mother was devoted to the cause of women's education, and made her mark upon Indian society with the establishment of several girls' schools in Puna (then known as Poona). Cornelia was ambitious and clever, and these two characteristics, along with the encouragement of her mother and the contacts she had gained, that led her to begin her studies at Oxford University in 1889 and become the first woman to read Law at Oxford.

Sorabji was an excellent student, who was more than a match for her classmates, who were all men. However, despite being a great student, she was not allowed to take her final exams because women were not allowed to practise law in Britain. As she was not allowed to use her skills, Cornelia decided to return to India, where she became the first woman Graduate at Bombay University and the first woman barrister. Through her work, she helped women and children who did not have anyone to stand up for them.

In 1919, women were finally given the right to be barristers. Cornelia returned to Britain in 1922 and eventually settled in London, visiting India during the winter months. Cornelia also loved to write and one of her most famous books was her autobiography 'India Calling'.



6. Rosa Parks (1913 – 2005)



Rosa Parks was an American Civil Rights Activist. Rosa is most famously known for refusing to obey a bus driver who had ordered her to give up her seat to make room for a white passenger in Montgomery in 1955. Though this was not the first time someone had done this, Rosa's action sparked the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

Rosa's act of defiance later gained her being called the "Mother of the Modern-Day Civil Rights Movement" by U.S. Congress, who recognised her act of bravery and contributions to campaigning on the resistance to racial segregation. She organised and collaborated with civil rights leaders, including boycott leader Martin Luther King, Jr., helping to launch him to national prominence in the civil rights movement.

Rosa continued to work within organisations who promoted civil rights and racial equality. Though she was involved in these organisations when she made her stand against segregation, she always maintained that she took her action as a private citizen "tired of giving in". Rosa was later widely honored for her work and activism to combat racism and segregation in America.

Parks eventually received many honors ranging from the 1979 Spingarn Medal to the Congressional Gold Medal, a posthumous statue in the United States Capitol's National Statuary Hall, and the posthumous honor of lying in state at the Capitol Rotunda.



7. Linda Bellos (1953 -)



Linda Bellos is best known as a gay and political rights activist, and former leader of Lambeth Council. She was born in London to a Jewish Mother and Nigerian Father. Raised in Brixton, Linda later went on to obtain her degree from the University of Sussex.

Linda was the first Black woman to join the Spare Rib feminist collective and was vice-chair of the campaign to select Black candidates in the Labour Party. In 1985, Linda was elected as a Councillor in Lambeth, London and between 1986 and 1988 held the position of Leader of Lambeth Council, becoming the first Black woman to hold such a post.

As chair of London's Strategic Policy Unit in the 1980s, Linda helped introduce Black History Month. Her work on mainstreaming equality within the British Army and Metropolitan Police gave her an insight into some major institutions, which she used to benefit other public authorities and set up her own specialist equality company, Diversity Solutions Consultancy. Linda retains an active involvement in the voluntary and community sector, which keeps her work relevant and valid to grassroots communities.



8. Meera Syal (1961 –)



Meera Syal MBE is a British comedienne, author, playwright, singer, journalist, producer and actress. She rose to prominence as one of the team that created 'Goodness Gracious Me,' later becoming known for portraying, Ummy, Sanjeev's grandmother in 'The Kumars at No. 42'.

Meera's parents came from New Delhi to England. She was born in Wolverhampton, and grew up in Essington, later moving to Bloxwich and spending the rest of her childhood there. Meera went on to study English and Drama at Manchester University.

As well as being part of the team who wrote and starred in Goodness Gracious Me, Meera wrote the screenplay Bhaji on the Beach, with the film being directed by Gurinder Chadha, known for Bend it Like Beckham and other films, and wrote the books Anita and Me and Life isn't all Ha Ha Hee Hee, which went on to become screenplays.

Meera also has an extensive television and stage career, appearing in The Diary of Adrian Mole, Band of Gold, Bad Girls, Holby City, Beautiful People, Who do you Think You Are? and Dr Who, to name a few. More recently, she played the lead role in the one-woman show Shirley Valentine and Beatrice in a contemporary version of Much Ado About Nothing.

Meera was awarded an MBE in 1997 and listed in The Observer as one of the 50 funniest acts in British comedy. Meera has two children and is married to her Goodness Gracious Me and the Kumars at No. 42 co-start, Sanjeev Bhaskar.



9. Sislin Fay Allen (Date of birth and death unknown)



In 1968, **Sislin Fay Allen** made the headlines when she became the Metropolitan Police's first Black female officer. Jamaican-born Sislin had been a nurse at Croydon's Queens Hospital when she saw an advert in the newspaper about recruiting new police officers to the Metropolitan Police Force. It was the unassuming follow-up to the advert that led Sislin to interview and then, to the surprise of her and her family, her selection.

Sislin encountered a backlash from within the Black community for joining the Met, whose reputation of policing the Black community thus far was abundant with racial prejudice. This was followed by abuse from the white British community who refused to be policed by a Black officer. Despite these setbacks, Sislin went on to serve in the Met for 4 years.

Sislin's great courage, in spite of prejudice, to continue in her role as a police officer, was inspirational and encouraged more Black people to join the police, making the force more diverse and trying to bring about a fairer criminal justice system.



10. Jayaben Desai, 1933 - 2010



Jayaben Desai was a staunch trade unionist, whose leadership of the strikers in the Grunwick dispute in London in 1976 gained recognition of the rights of Asian women workers. Married with two children, Jayaben's husband was very proud of her courage and the work she did to fight for women and migrant workers' rights.

Jayaben was born in Gujarat, India in 1933 and moved to Tanzania in 1965. She was expelled from Tanzania and arrived in Britain, quickly taking up low-paid work, first as a sewing machinist, then processing film in the Grunwick factory. Following a dispute regarding orders to work overtime, Jayaben resigned and instigated a strike among the mainly Asian and women workers about working conditions, pay inequality and institutionalised racism in the workplace.

From 1976 – 1978, Jayaben led the strikers in their courageous two-year picket. Famous for her way with words, as she led the walkout, her parting words to the boss were: "What you are running here is not a factory, it is a zoo. But in a zoo there are many types of animals. Some are monkeys who dance on your fingertips, others are lions who can bite your head off. We are the lions, Mr. Manager."

Whilst the strike may not have been successful in gaining workers their initial demands, it was a significant moment in Trade Union history and the labour movement, recognising the overlooked issue of women migrant workers' rights. At one meeting during the strike, where some people had been less supportive of the women striking, Jayaben said: "We, the women, are determined to make a stand and nobody will get in the way of that, including from within our own families." It was with this tenacity that she continued to support women workers' rights throughout her life and encouraged women to join trade unions and be active trade unionists.



3 - Celebrating Black Women of History

Information and tips on how to promote and celebrate black women of history in your union

This section will give you tips as to how you can use this information and encourage your Students' Union to celebrate Black Women of History. This is not just an opportunity for you to share the profiles of the 10 Black Women that feature in this briefing, but also a chance for you to think about other Black Women of History and ways in which you can use and share this information with the students at your institution and your community.

Top 10 tips on how to highlight and profile Black Women of History

- 1 During October (Black History Month) and March (International Women's Day is on 8th March) ask your students' union and/or your institution for some space on a notice/display board so that you can make a display about Black Women, both from History and today.
- 2 Put on a Feminist Histories, Feminist Futures event and invite a Black Woman who has achieved success and acclaim in her career or activism. She could be from the women's movement or someone who has done really well in her career. Ask her to come and speak about her achievements and what needs to be done to ensure all Black Women have equal opportunities to achieve success in their activism and careers.
- 3 Encourage Black Women to participate in the activities that your union's Women's and Black students' campaigns have to offer, such as your women's group or groups that represent black students, such as the Afro-Caribbean Society or the ISOC (Islamic Society).
- 4 Make sure Black Women have access to this briefing and other publications we have produced that encourage Black activism and offer support and guidance to Black Students – Here is a link to the Black Women's Inclusion Guide that NUS have produced:
www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/womens/Black-Womens-Inclusion-Guide/
- 5 Speak to Black Women in your institution about what would they like to see happen during Black History Month/International Women's Day and what they would like to happen in your union, to highlight this important time and Black Women's issues.



- 6** Speak to clubs and societies that represent Black Women about what they are doing during Black History Month and on International Women's Day for Black Women and offer support to them to achieve their chosen activities during this time.
- 7** Put on an event to celebrate Black Women's achievements and successes, both from history and now. Highlight the importance of inclusivity and why Black Women are an integral part of your women's campaign.
- 8** Invite Black Women from your institution to put on an event where they can display some of their own achievements or share their talents with other people from your institution. This could be anything from displaying artwork, to reading poetry to singing, to giving a talk about their academic achievements.
- 9** Contact Local and National groups that support Black Women and find out what sort of activities and information they have available for Black Women and tap into their services. You can do this by encouraging Black Women to attend external events, making sure information from these organisations is available in your union and inviting these organisations to your union to deliver talks and workshops on what they do and how they support Black Women.
- 10** Showcase Black Women Alumni in your institution and/or historical Black Women figures from your area. You could even put together a presentation and/or a workshop to highlight these people and follow it up with a film or reading about or featuring one of the people.



4 - Black Women's History Month

Ideas from Imogen Martin, NUS Women's Committee's Black Women's Rep

Black History Month is perhaps the most important month for Black Students on campus as it allows them to educate and be educated on their own history and the history of other cultures they represent. Black history is very much written out of history in the western world and especially Black Women's history. Representing Black Women throughout Black History Month is essential and can be done in many ways on a range of budgets and offering a range of events, such as workshops, lectures and discussion groups. Here are some ideas:

Lecture ideas

Lectures and information sessions help inspire and educate. You could suggest running lectures and information sessions on the following people:

- **Fatima al-Fihri** (founder of the first university),
- **Laleh Bakhtiar** (Iranian-American Muslim author, translator and clinical psychologist)
- **Daisy Khan** (founder of WISE, The Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality)
- **Mary Seacole** (Jamaican nurse best known for her involvement in the Crimean War)
- **Mary Prince** (Mary's book, The History of Mary Prince, was the first account of the life of a black woman to be published in the United Kingdom)
- **Claudia Jones** (Civil Rights Activist and Founder of Notting Hill Carnival)

You could also run lectures and information sessions on the following issues:

- How Black women are portrayed in the media
- Black women and social injustice
- Black women within a community
- Black women in education



Workshops

Workshops can be an opportunity to offer information and guidance through discussions, activities and sharing information. Workshops can be a particularly attractive option to discuss current affairs and issues that are International and are not hugely portrayed in the media, to bring them to people's attention. You may want to consider running workshops on the following:

- Female refugees and their rights
- Female Genitalia Mutualisation
- Rape as a weapon of war

Most cities will have a local refugee charity which should be able to help by providing information and resources and they may even be able to provide speakers. Contacting them and encouraging students to get involved with supporting their work creates great links within the community. If you look online, you should be able to find out more information about local groups and how you can support them. There may even be some resources available on the workshop you want to run.

Discussion Groups

Discussion groups are always a safe space for women to talk about their own experiences and gain the support and help they need. Holding discussion groups is a strong way to create links between societies and other cultures within the Black student's movement. It's a great chance to bring women together and let them know what support services are available whilst giving you an insight into problems that other women of other cultures face so you can adapt your plans for the year to include them as well. It's impossible to know what all women of all cultures face and how to represent them.

Discussion groups allow women to inform you of the issues they face without having to dedicate time to a committee. It can also open people up in a safe space and bring people to the committee. Because of this, it may be a good idea to keep discussions general such as running a discussion on being Young, Black and a Woman.



5 - Black History Month - Contacts

Contact details of other organisations that celebrate and promote Black Women of History

Here are the contact details for organisations that promote Black Women of history and may be able to provide you with further information and materials to help promote Black Women of history in your union and institution.

The Black Presence in Britain website was set up in 1998 due to a lack of information about the contribution of Black people to British history to be found on the Internet. They have a section specifically dedicated to Black Women: www.blackpresence.co.uk/category/blackwomen/

Women's History Month is an annual event, held from 1-31 March, that aims to raise knowledge and awareness of women's history, to celebrate and promote women's achievements, and to provide women with role models and inspiration. The website offers some information and resources about black women from history: www.womenshistorymonth.wordpress.com/

The Black History Month UK Website offers lots of information and resources about Black History Month and has information available about Black Women of history: www.black-history-month.co.uk/

The Guardian Website has some useful information and a timeline, which documents information about Black Women of history: www.guardian.co.uk/uk/blackhistorymonth

BBC Radio 1Extra Website has a Black History archive covering over four decades of the most important events from music, TV, politics, sport, fashion and more: www.bbc.co.uk/1extra/blackhistory/

Black Cultural Archives was founded in 1981 to collect, preserve and celebrate the contributions Black people have made to the culture, society and heritage of the UK: www.bcaheritage.org.uk

Black History Studies was launched in 2008 to support black communities to learn about their history from an African perspective: www.blackhistorystudies.com

The Women's Library has a large collection of books focusing on Black Women in history: www.londonmet.ac.uk/thewomenslibrary/



6 - Black Women Today - Contacts

Contact details of organisations who work and campaign on promoting and supporting black women of today

Here are some contact details for organisations that run campaigns that promote and support Black women of today and work on current issues that affect Black Women.

The National Black Women's Network

Suite 501, International House
223 Regent Street, London W1R 8QD

t: 020 7544 1010

e: info@nbwn.org

w: www.nbwn.org

Black Information Link – The 1990's Trust's Independent Community Interactive Site for Black Communities

w: <http://blink.org.uk/>

Newham Asian Women's Project

661 Barking Road, Plaistow, London E13 9EX

t: General 020 84720528

t: Advice 020 85525524 f: 020 85035673

e: info@nawp.org

w: www.nawp.org

Southall Black Sisters

21 Avenue Road, Southall, Middlesex UB1 3BL

t: Helpline 020 8571 0800 Mon-Fri 10am-5pm or

t: General enquiries 020 8571 9595 Mon-Fri 9am-4pm

f: 020 8574 6781

e: info@southallblacksisters.co.uk

w: www.southallblacksisters.org.uk

Black Feminists

w: <http://blackfeminists.org/>

Latin American Women's Rights Service

Tindlemanor, 52-54 Featherstone Street, London, EC1Y 8RT

t: +44 020 7336 0888

t: +44 084 4264 0682

f: +44 020 7336 0555

w: <http://www.lawrs.org.uk/>



Black Women's Health and Family Support

First Floor, 82 Russia Lane, London, E2 9LU

t: 0208 980 3503

f: 0208 980 6314

e: bwhafs@btconnect.com

w: <http://www.bwhafs.com>

Jan Trust

8-10 Bedford Road, Wood Green, London, N22 7AU

t: 0208 889 9433

e: info@jantrust.org

w: www.jantrust.org

Southwark Muslim Women's Association

Bellenden Old School, Bellenden Road, London, SE15 4DG

t: 020 7732 8053

f: 020 7277 7320

e: smwasmwa@aol.com

w: www.smwa.org.uk

NUS Women's Campaign

Provide information, guidance, support and resources on what you can do to support Women students in your students' union and institution.

e: women@nus.org.uk

w: www.nusconnect.org.uk/women

NUS Black Students' Campaign

Provide information, guidance, support and resources on what you can do to support all Black students in your students' union and institution.

e: black@nus.org.uk

w: www.nusconnect.org.uk/black

