

2. *Black History Month*

THE COMMON SENSE NETWORK





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EDITORS
NOTE

@MIKEOMONIYICS

MIKE OMONIYEI

ABOVE

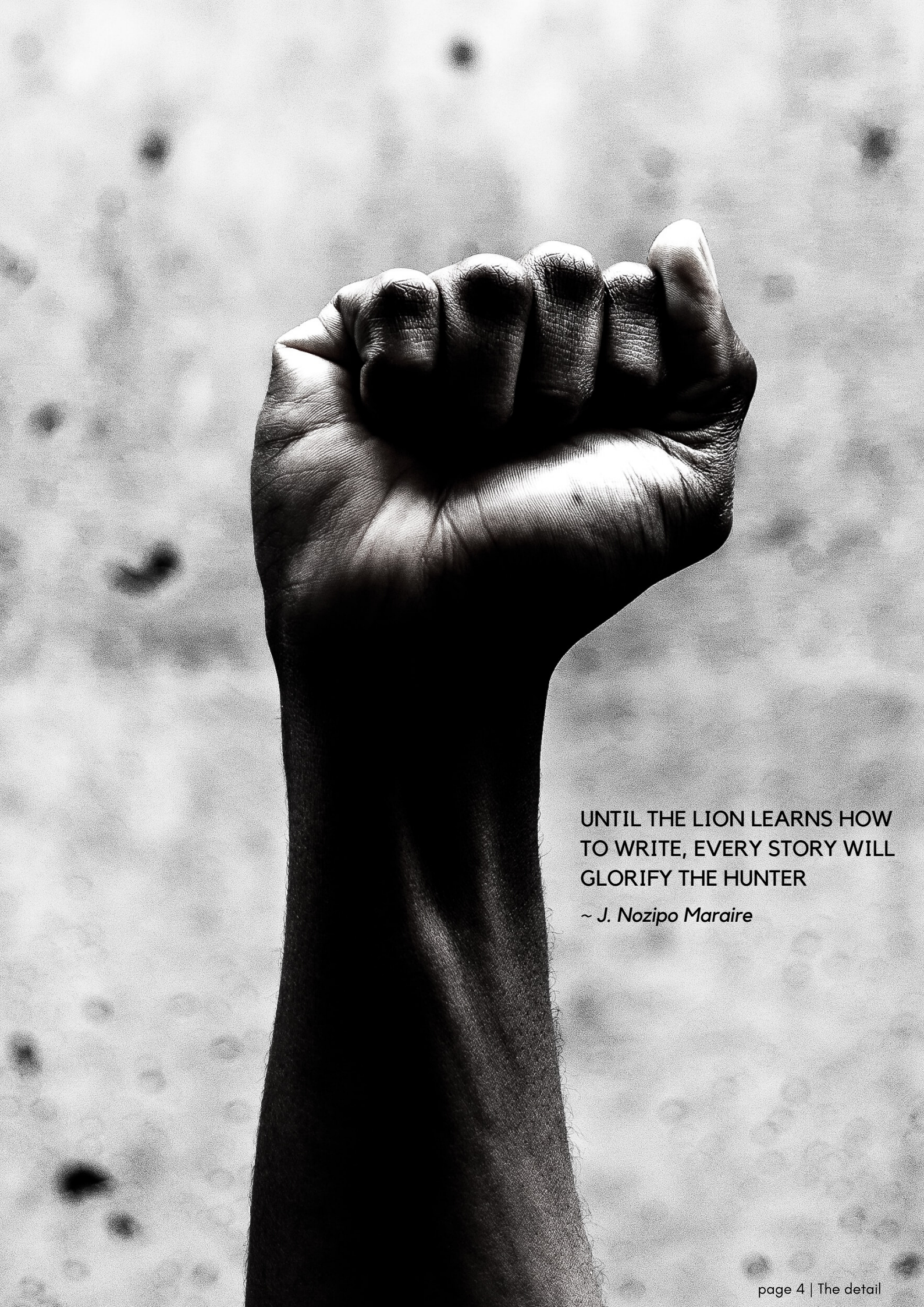
Image from 56 BLACK MEN
Campaign

I should begin this Issue by making It clear that Black History is not an event or festival. It is a rich reality built through Kings and Queens, on the back of slaves and free men and by innovators and educators. This reminder is important when we consider the tumultuous media landscape we currently inhabit. As the founder of *The Common Sense Network*, I know the power of narrative and imagery. The motif which dominates mainstream channels today is that Black boys are dangerous, that black women are angry and that black people only excel in sports or music. Those observant will realise that this is nothing but a tired old trope. I hope this issue of *The Detail* will challenge these persistent narrates and show you another side, something *The Common Sense Network* is created to do.

Black people only make up 3% of the Great British population, which means we are often described as a 'minority'. This is the only thing minority about us. Black culture and influence can be seen in every facet of British society.

We are giants and have enriched British culture beyond description. If you are reading this, I hope the issue causes you to dream bigger and to take pride in who you are. Our history is rich, illustrious and important.

Here's *The Detail*.

A high-contrast, black and white photograph of a raised fist. The fist is the central focus, with the hand clenched and the arm extended upwards. The skin is dark, and the lighting highlights the texture of the hand and the veins on the forearm. The background is a bright, overcast sky with soft, wispy clouds. The overall mood is one of strength, defiance, and solidarity.

UNTIL THE LION LEARNS HOW
TO WRITE, EVERY STORY WILL
GLORIFY THE HUNTER

~ J. Nozipo Maraire

A letter to my younger self



Michael John Hastings, Baron Hastings of Scarisbrick CBE (born 29 January 1958), is the Former Global Head of Corporate Citizenship for KPMG International. He was previously the BBC's Head of Public Affairs and then the first Head of Corporate Responsibility (2003–06). He is the second Chancellor of Regent's University London. He was installed on 21 February 2017.

If it is true that the world is wide open and that there is abundant opportunity out there, then I need to explore this complex multi-racial, multi-economy, multi-community world with true dedicated intelligence, and resist the high pressures on me. Now that I'm an adult at eighteen, I could waste away layers of life and limited resources on frivolity and banality.

I need to make better choices than my friends have. I need to explore history, to get to grips with the context in which communities live. I need to travel widely across this country and abroad. Not to lie still in static sunshine, but to know the roots and causes and reasons why things happened.

Most of all, to hear the voices of hurt and left behind peoples who look to another generation to engineer the best from the basic, and build hope where only the mundane has been managed.

I need to open my eyes to the balance between technology and tenderness, to be roundedly human and absolutely genuine and authentic in relationships holding true to committed responsibility over wreckless idleness and carefree disengagements.

I need to know when to stay and stand still, paused with wonder and seeking peace. I need to find ever great purpose because now I am eighteen, it's up to me, alone.



A Black History Month That Acknowledges Its History

BY SAMRAN RATHORE

In light of the recent backlash from Black twitter against the British Army in their tweet honouring Indian contribution for Black History Month UK and a similar backlash against the usage of a poster by the student union at the University of Kent showing Zayn Malik and Sadiq Khan for Black History Month in 2016, I as a 3rd generation British born South Asian, want to address this.

First of all, an 'honour' from the British Army is just that, a pat on the back from our past colonial masters who ruled us, tortured us, murdered us, robbed us and then forced us to fight alongside them against their enemies, they can keep that honour. However, I was more intrigued by the response from those of Afrikan ancestry who felt a certain way about the usage of 'black' by fellow South Asian folk and seeing as this concerns our two communities and not them, let's have this conversation.

Personally, I don't affiliate with 'political blackness', for me 'black' itself is a colonial term which I have no motivation to argue with anyone about. Using a colour to define a whole continent of various, distinct cultures and languages and histories while I have the privilege of ticking a number of ethnic groups from the geographical region of my origins, I'll happily take the latter.

However, if we are talking Black History Month UK, wouldn't it be inaccurate, to not acknowledge that people of South Asian descent were at various points in British history also referred to as 'black'? Wouldn't it be inaccurate, to not acknowledge the South Asian contributors to the 'black' cause in the UK such as the late Mala Sen and Farrukh Dhondy, who alongside notable members like the late Darcus Howe and Linton Kwesi Jonhson, founded Black Panthers UK?

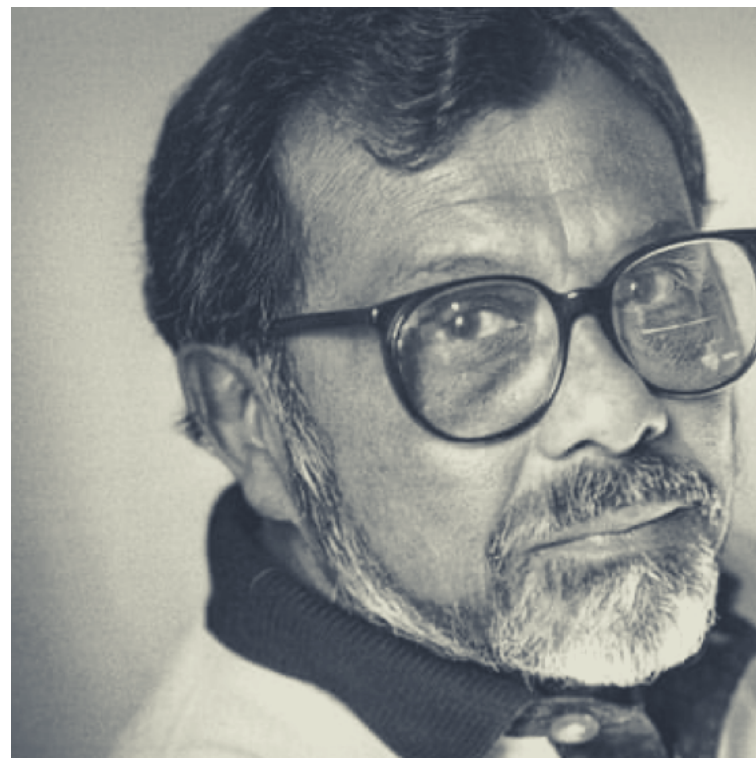
Or the late Ambalavaner Sivanandan, director of the Institute of Race Relations, who is still considered one of the greatest black political thinkers in the UK for his various works which changed the way in which Race relation were viewed in the UK.

Or the fact that the early South Asian activist movements like United Black Youth League again included South Asian members who identified with 'black'?

Clearly blackness in the UK was understood differently to blackness in the USA. Where else in the West has there been a coalition of Afrikan and South Asian people, or for arguments sake, any other non Afrikan group identifying as 'black' whether on a political level or not? Should we not celebrate and acknowledge this unity during Black History Month in the UK whilst ALSO having the conversation about what political blackness is?

To my Black friends and family, we do not seek to take away or erase your experiences, our struggles and history is similar yet not the same, yes colourism exists amongst South Asians and there is a stigma against 'blackness' which believe me started long before we broke bread together here in the UK; its roots are colonialism, imperialism, self hatred, the corruption of the Hindu caste system and anti Dalitness to name a few.

When South Asians arrived in the UK and suffered racism and oppression, they were inspired by the stories of their ancestors who had lived through and fought against colonialism in their own countries aswell as the African American struggle and resistance/ This is why two communities united. Black History Month UK is to celebrate Afrikan presence in Britain and we have not asked to be included on a national level as historically we were automatically boxed within the frames of 'blackness' which was then used internally to unify our communities.



I wanted to write this to reach out personally as like I mentioned above, this is OUR conversation, not for numerous right wingers to have a field day on Daily Mail in the comments section and cause divide. Many South Asians like myself are working hard everyday to challenge shadeism, colourism, anti-blackness and anti-Africanness within our communities. Understandably it causes you pain, upset and enrages your community when everyone groups us all as one whilst we are dealing with internal conflicts within our own communities.

My only point regarding Black History Month is that my community was a part of black' history in this country. If I was still in school it would empower me to learn about how we worked alongside the African and African-Caribbean community united under the banner of blackness. Whilst that is not something the majority of South Asians identify with today, it is the history of blackness in the UK and I personally feel through this learning, we could eradicate and stifle anti-blackness within every community.





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TO EVERY STORY.

Dear Little Black Girl



Anusha Stribbling



From the day you walked into the gates of pre-school, your Blackness was being policed, even though you didn't understand how or why. And how could you? You are so young. I can't promise that it will get easier. The people who are causing you harm right now will grow up and continue to do so - but just in different ways.

Those boys who are constantly speaking over you in class will become men who will take pleasure in gaslighting you. When you try to create boundaries with them, they may call you "rude" or "aggressive". You are neither of those things.

When grown women in your middle school, people you thought you could trust, start obsessing over the size of your waist or bust - I know it'll feel uncomfortable. These people will become women who will take it upon themselves to police your body and your clothing whilst telling you the ways in which you can conform to be more 'acceptable'. You then may feel like you have to diminish yourself, physically and mentally, in order to be left alone.

This, is white supremacy. And unfortunately, it's very hard to escape. These people want you to feel less than so that white supremacy can continue to function and benefit them. And it gets lonely, again, I can't promise that it's going to get easier.

However, there are people who are around you now and people who will be around you in the future, that love and support you. There are people who will allow you to exist as yourself.

The only thing I ask from you is to 'be'. Those who benefit from white supremacy will continue to exercise their power over you. As you get older, you will be triggered by people who gaslight you. The way you feel about your body will constantly change. And this is all okay. Continue to be a you - a quirky, queer Black girl.

Because your body belongs to you. Your voice belongs to you. You don't just deserve to survive, you deserve to live.

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COMMON SENSE SPOTLIGHT

ELIJAH AJUWON

Editor | NORTH30

Letter To My Younger Self

Maz Hedgehog

Hi there, me. You've just turned 16 and are more miserable than you ever thought possible. I won't tell you what to do, or how to deal with untreated generalised anxiety disorder and clinical depression whilst occupying an entirely different social space to your white peers. I know you did the best you could. All things considered, you did really well.

One thing I will say though, making jokes about being "not really Black" won't make it true. This upsets you, I know it does. I know that you don't want to be Black because of everything you've been taught it means. You hide under a love for Evanescence, manga and Sherlock Holmes, because you hope that it will make the people around you forget that you're not really like them. It won't. It never will. This isn't a bad thing. Some will learn to love your difference and the rest will fade away. In time you'll meet people more like you (racially and otherwise) and you'll find little pieces of home in them.

In a couple years you'll go to university. There, you'll spend the nights you're not working reading about the Mau Mau Uprising, about the British Black Panther Party, about Claudia Jones. You will stay up all night sobbing over the Black Panics in Kenya and South Africa, over the Notting Hill Riots. You will take immense pride in the Mangrove Nine, in Biafran soldiers (your dad included), in the Bristol Bus Boycott.

You will learn something you always knew - the history of Black people is a painful one. The difference is, you will learn that pain is not all there is. You will come to know that the glory, joy, resistance and power in Black people is to be celebrated. You will celebrate it, along with Black mediocrity, and mundanity, and general Black humanity.

You will only learn this by reading though. May I recommend Paul Gilroy as a start?

"You will learn something you always knew - the history of Black people is a painful one"



“

**KRASODOMSKI-
JONES:**

**THE ABILITY TO PROCESS A
DIVERSE RANGE OF OPINION
AND, ABOVE ALL, AN
ACCEPTANCE OF SOME KIND OF
SHARED REALITY AND TRUTH
ARE CENTRAL TO A
FUNCTIONING DEMOCRACY**

Alex Krasodonski-Jones writing on the Demos website.

”



KENNY IMAFIDON

If I could, I would tell my younger self at eighteen so many things. Young Kenny, be more patient and understand that no matter how talented or capable you are, things just take time. As much as you try you cannot rush the process. Enjoy the moments you are in and allow yourself a moment every now and then to just smell the roses. Take pride in every step you take. However, above all, and most importantly, seek God and his word. He will change your story and your life in unimaginable ways, for the best.

"I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality.... I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word."

—*Martin Luther King, Jr.*

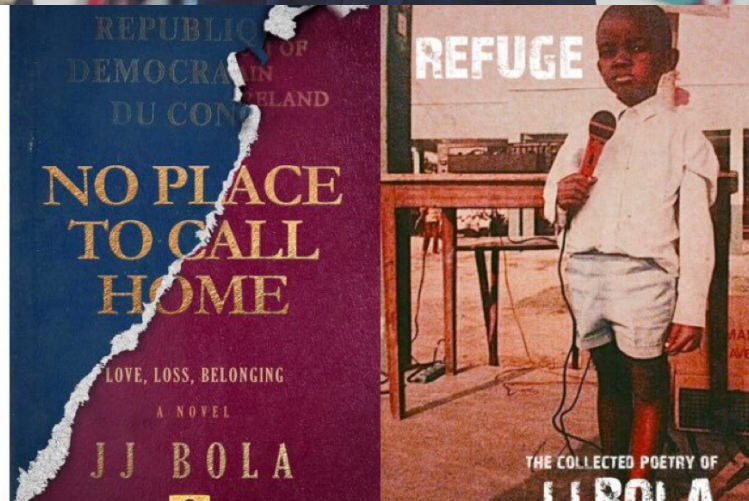
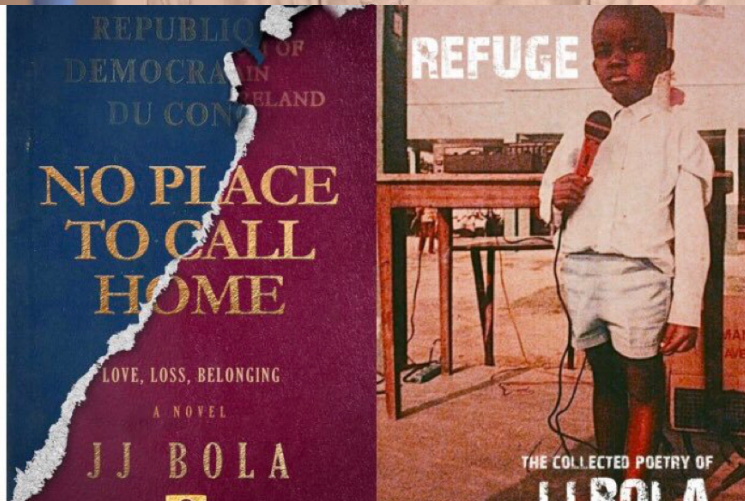


Black History Month is as much about acknowledging the whitewashing of history and reclaiming narratives as it is about creating new histories.

We spoke to 3 Black British poets about what inspires them and what the cost to their artistry has been

JJ BOLA
JAMAL GERALD
SAMUEL COLE





JJ BOLA

When did you discover you had a “talent”?

When I read a poem at my very first open mic and people gave me feedback. I’m not even sure if that meant I had “talent” but it was the first time anyone had ever read or heard my work and it felt very cathartic and affirming. I kept writing. However, since then, I see talent less and less as something I have, and focus more on what I consider to be crucial, which is endless persistent and stick-to-it-ness.

What have you had to sacrifice to nurture your talent?

My time. Although I’m doing what I love, reading and writing, there are also a number of other things that I would love to have tried to dedicate myself to that I know I would not be able to. For instance, I’d love to learn to play the piano so that I could play one of my favourite songs. Perhaps in the future.

Who inspires your artistry?

I’m largely inspired by my life experiences and what is going on in the world. I take things that I know or have seen and fly away with it in my imagination.

What is the biggest misconception people have about poets?

That poets are sad, lonely and boring and only concern themselves with the serious matters of existence. Whilst those may be valid, to a degree, at least for me, it is not absolute. I love a good party. I am adventurous and do things many would not expect me to.

In an age where digital echo chambers are growing wider, what role do you think poetry can play in this?

Poetry can teach people how to feel; how to be human again. It can bring us back to ourselves, and listen to each other, rather than just being stuck in the same space shouting.

Has a poem ever humbled or frightened you? What was it? When did it happen and what did you do afterwards?

Not really humbled or frightened, but some moments have made me cry. I cried whilst listening to David J Pugilist’s poetry performance about police brutality. I cried listening to Anis Mojgani.

Some poets claim that a poem is like a living creature: once it's out there is not much you can do to 'correct' or 'improve' it, while others edit meticulously, not leaving much from the original, draft form. What is your take on it?

I don't know. It's neither here nor there for me, a poem is it's own thing; poets are the vehicles through which it arrives. And it comes and goes and comes and goes and comes and goes, and perhaps, for a moment, we are lucky to read/hear the poem, luckier still to even write it in the first place.

How do you define success?

The ability to survive the madness that is this existence and the absurdity that is life itself; everyday above ground is a success, and even days beneath it too.

Do you ever regret sharing your work publicly? Do you trust the reader in a world of instant gratification and instant communication?

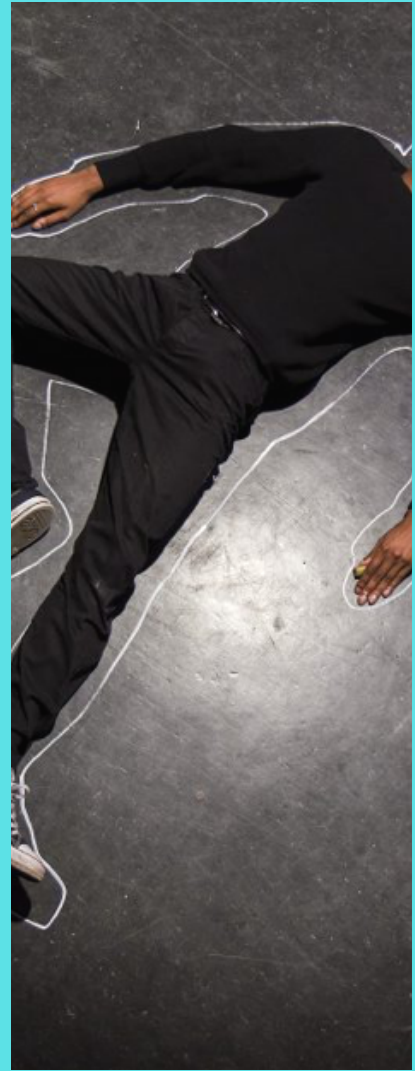
No regrets. There is no trust other than the trust that my art, my writing, will find who it needs to find and at the right time they need to find it in.

*You can buy JJ's novel *No Place to Call Home* and his poetry collection *Refuge* in all book stores, or directly through his publisher **HERE***





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Jamal Gerald

When did you discover you had a “talent”?

I competed in my first poetry slam when I was 13. It was Voices of New Generation which was run by Leeds Young Authors. It's a poetry slam festival for teams. I used to take part in things just to be in the centre of attention, but then I realised that it was something I was quite good at. So, I kept on doing it.

What have you had to sacrifice to nurture your talent?

Hmmm. I personally don't feel like I've had to sacrifice anything. Because I always wanted to nurture my talent. I'm not really good at many other things, trust me, the amount of jobs I've applied for and nothing. One thing I might have had to sacrifice is not always having money in my account. Ha! Coming to terms with the reality that working in the arts isn't really sustainable financially. But, I'm still happy to do what I love.



“

I think one of the biggest misconceptions is that poets are cry babies.

Who inspires your artistry?

Prince, Danez Smith, Tim Miller, Freddie Mercury, Selina Thompson , Kendrick Lamar, Scottee , Zodwa Nyoni

In an age where digital echo chambers are growing wider, what role do you think poetry can play in this?

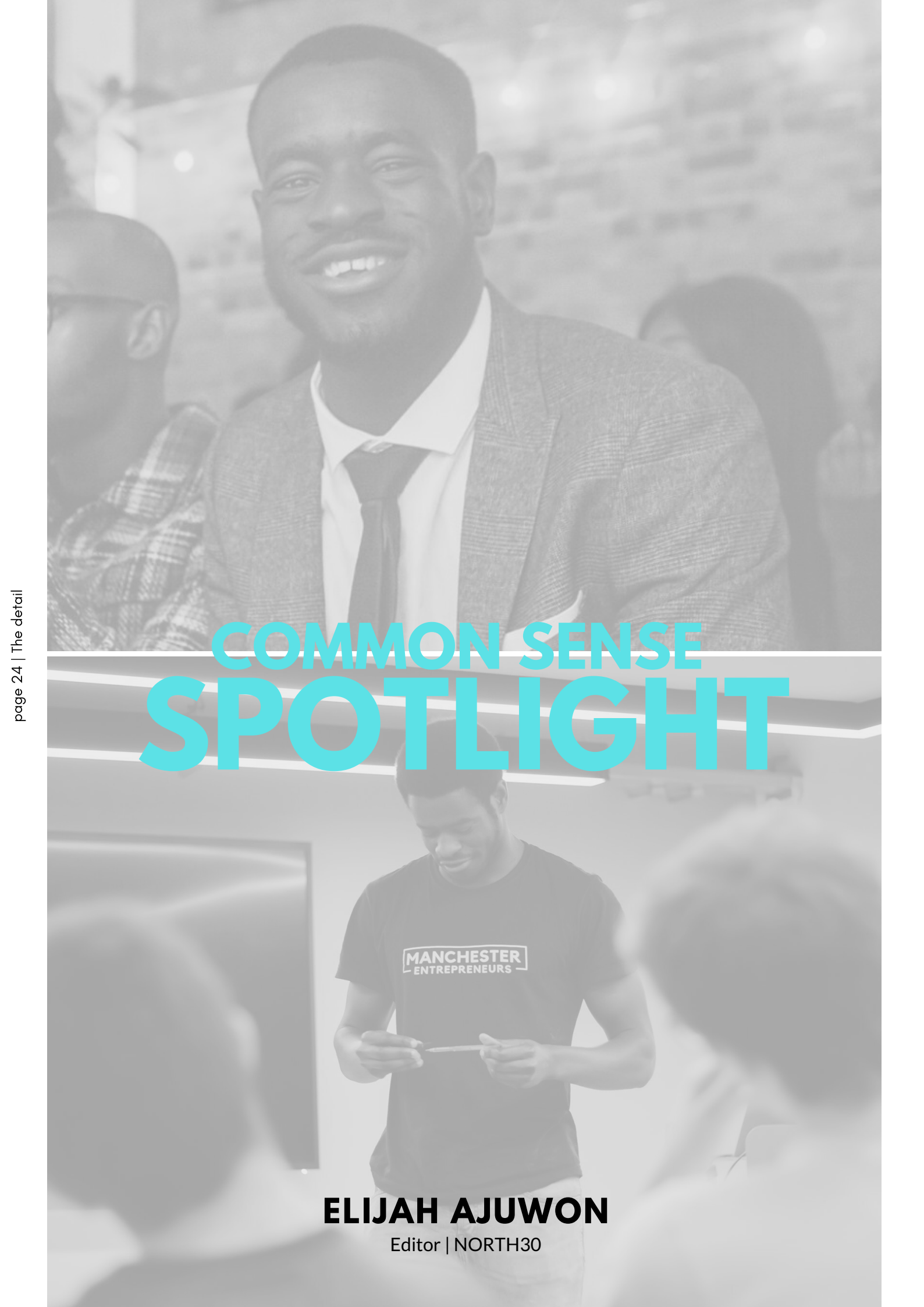
Poetry could continue to be used as a tool to convey any type of message. It'll be nice to continue see and hear poetry elsewhere, besides the page and the stage.

Some poets claim that a poem is like a living creature: once it's out there is not much you can do to 'correct' or 'improve' it, while others edit meticulously, not leaving much from the original, draft form. What is your take on it?

I think with a lot of work, you could always edit it whenever you want to. No matter if it's out there or not. I think even if a work of mine is out in the world, either published or on film, and I wanted to change it, I could, especially since it's my work. I don't think work should automatically be done just because it's been published or filmed. That's boring and limiting to me.

How do you define success?

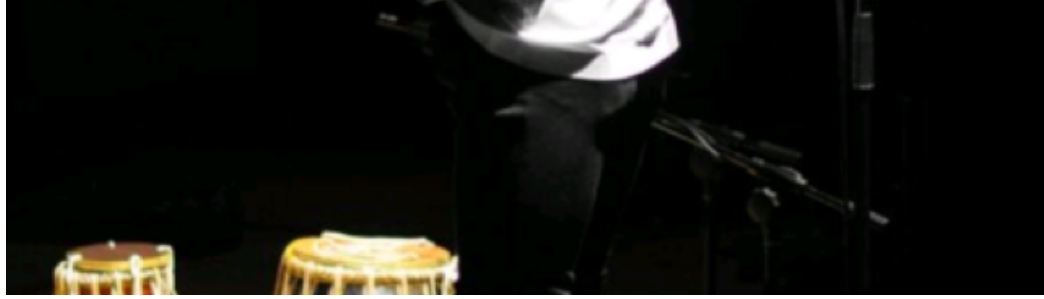
Being happy with where you're at. I find it hard to label myself as 'successful'. Even though, I've done quite a bit. I just feel the need to constantly outdo myself and to do more. But, I'm trying to celebrate the things that I've accomplished. And once you can get to that point, I feel that's where you could define it as success.



COMMON SENSE SPOTLIGHT

ELIJAH AJUWON

Editor | NORTH30



SAMUEL COLE

When did you discover you had a “talent”?

7 years ago I signed up to take part in a filmed project to highlight the positive contribution of young people in my borough. It was meant to be a filmed project but for some reason or another, the filming dates kept getting cancelled. Anyway, the project ended up not happening but I said I'd contribute by sending in an audio copy of a poem. I ended up writing a poem called Young Monarch. I sent it in and the lady who received it was blown away that's where it all began.

What have you had to sacrifice to nurture your talent?

Pride and ego. Just because I wrote a poem didn't make me a poet. Neither did watching Def Jam Poetry regularly or reading Shakespeare. I had to move beyond treating it as a casual diary entry, humbling myself, developing a respect for the craft and sharpening my pen. That meant writing constantly, reading constantly and getting feedback on my work.

In sacrificing pride I learned to be vulnerable. That didn't necessarily mean exposing my pain, but it did mean being transparent.

Prioritising clarity and the content of my message above all else. When I performed, I began to see the stage as a place where ego died and the message was in the limelight. I needed to forget about looking 'cool' or 'impressive', being loud and an entertainer or seeking finger clicks from the audience and instead say something true that might actually change someone's life.

Transparency meant talking about how I actually saw the world. The things that actually bothered me or made me laugh. Ultimately I wrote not only to be understood but to understand – not to be admired. I learned that when I wrote about specific experiences, (rather than vague ideas that are detached from reality), my message resonated more deeply with those who listened. It's a balance. On the one hand I needed to show more of 'myself' in order to be transparent, but not so much of myself such that I ended up blocking the message.

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Has a poem ever humbled or frightened you? What was it? When did it happen and what did you do afterwards?

I remember one of the first poems I performed publically called 'How Long'. It was a message about not being lazy and seeking God. I was so eager to share it. I went to an open mic night and performed it. It lasted about 5 mins, and the crowd looked at me with stone cold faces from beginning to end. I was so confused. Afterwards I was told it was far too loud and far too preachy. I was crushed. In hindsight it probably would have worked better as a sermon than a poem!

Some poets claim that a poem is like a living creature: once it's out there is not much you can do to 'correct' or 'improve' it, while others edit meticulously, not leaving much from the original, draft form. What is your take on it?

I think as the poet it's your work and you can do whatever you please with it. I generally don't tinker with published poems because I like drawing a line under a piece and letting it speak for itself at the time of its release – whether it's perfect, imperfect, warts and all. Have I had new ideas for a piece after I release it? Of course! But for me, ultimately each poem is a flag pushed into the ground marking a stage and time in my life. There's always more that could be done to embellish or improve a piece – simply because as time progresses we develop. Ideas which were true and firm for us before become amorphous and ambiguous, feelings that were intense and heartfelt become less impassioned. We change. It's unfair then to force our current ideas and values to fit our older works. Almost as odd pouring new wine into old wineskins!

I do recognise that what gets posted online, stays online. I'm sharing my work with the world and let's face it – not everyone has the energy to consume edit 1, edit 2, edit infinity of a piece. That would be exhausting! Imagine if Michael Jackson had 5 versions of Billie Jean or Lauryn Hill rewrote The Miseducation.

There's a misconception I think, that you must keep updating the poem to keep it alive. A piece is alive as long as someone can pick it up and feel something.

The question does feed into a wider conversation about art though. When is a piece of work really 'finished'? When you publish it? When you think it's 'perfect'? For me it's when you publish it, because I won't publish something that I don't think is finished. If it's a great piece then why change it! If it sucks, then let it be! It's a starting point which you progress from. With all this being said I do adjust my pieces for live performances. The poem at its core doesn't change, but the way I express it might. I may add a verse relevant to theme of the event, or switch a word that I feel is more potent at the time. I gauge the atmosphere in the room and 'remix' the words to suit. Through the remix of poems I've sometimes ended up creating a completely separate new piece entirely.

Advice

To expose oneself to opposing viewpoints is tricky. If we digest information from a news source geared toward an angry base whose views differ from ours, we'll get even angrier at the "lies" they are spreading. If we go to a neutral news source, we will read/watch/listen with our own ideas in mind and our confirmation bias will cause us to hear what we want to hear within the information.

Reading rational commentary from both sides of the aisle in the Editorial section of major (and local) newspapers is a good way to see both sides of an issue without being overloaded with propaganda.

But, most importantly, read everything presented to us as being fact with a discerning eye. Do the research. Google it. Examine the story elements. Does it add up?

Even it feels true, it might not be true.



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