He was my role model. A great man with a great heart.

These are the words of Sir Bradley Wiggins, a contemporary British icon of cycling, speaking to the significance of his relationship with an early mentor and cycling coach Russell Williams – a British-born man of Afro-Caribbean heritage. Sir Bradley's response appeared on my @blackchampions_ Instagram page. It was in acknowledgement of my development of an exhibition of oral testimonies, memorabilia and photography showcasing the lives of Black British champions in cycling. This exhibition was intended to mark and celebrate the year 2018 as the 70th anniversary of the HMT Empire Windrush first arriving in Britain. Although it was not the first ship to do so, the Windrush is widely known for transporting many Afro-Caribbean migrants and citizens of Britain to the country in 1948 at the invitation of the British government. As a key moment in British history, it forged the beginning of a 20th century ethnogenesis. A Black British identity emerged, and through cultural and ethnic interactions, it led to a new way of seeing our national identity.

As a cyclist, a Black British educator and a scholar with Afro-Caribbean heritage I wanted to create something to recognise our multicultural interactions and diversity. I wanted to represent this through cycling and share it with the wider British public. “Made in Britain: Uncovering the Life Histories of Black British Champions” became my concept and project. I saw the 70th anniversary of the Empire Windrush as an opportunity to mark and celebrate the achievements of our Black British champions and to encourage something to recognise Caribbean heritage and to educate and inspire with Afro-Caribbean exhibitions, lectures, and workshops. The exhibition was a key moment in my research and development of an exhibition on Black British champions exhibiting a constellation of lives in cycling. Words & Illustrations: Dr Marlon Moncrieffe
the 'Windrush Generation' as a perfect opportunity and time to bring these representations in cycling to the fore.

I began the project in January 2017. A key aim was to collate and share stories of the excellence of black, British-born Champions who from their grassroots entry to the sport had achieved 'glory' as medallists and winners at British, European and World Championships and international stage races.

I have been involved in the sport for nearly 30 years. I mixed racing with my work as a primary school teacher. I have been a school cycling coach, a volunteer national schools cycling championships event organiser and a racer in my own right (TT, road and track). A significant moment came for me after winning an E12 race. I jumped early and outsprinted the bunch by about 10 lengths. After the finish, the late British cycling great Mr Keith Butler approached me and suggested I give track sprinting a go. I didn't live very near to a track at that point. But I took his advice and went on to win multiple medals at British, UEC European Masters and UCI World Masters Championships.

When reflecting on my cycling experiences, knowledge, and ethnic identity, I sensed that this project was made for me to develop and share. I knew enough folk in the cycling community. I am an academic specialising in critical history and narrative inquiry. I knew exactly which Black British champions I could approach, and where to find them to get their oral testimonies.

Black British Champions in Cycling

Maurice Burton was my obvious starting point. This is because I knew that he was the first Black British national champion in cycling by virtue of winning the 20 km scratch race in 1974. He progressed his career on the continent by becoming an amazing and respected six-day racer. During our interviews, Maurice provided me with a stimulating account of his life growing up in south London – from joining the Velo Club de Londres (VCL) to becoming a professional athlete by winning the 1974 British Olympic Cycling Championship. From there he went on to the Elite World Championship. From his base in the East End, he raced the six-day track racing circuit, often taking the 'A' race. He was a natural leader and was always in the mix, even if not always the outright winner. His story is part of a larger narrative of how cycling for Black British and Caribbean people is a way of life, a way of expressing oneself and a way of building community. It is an example of how to build grassroots cycling programs and nurture young talent. He is a true legend of the sport and his story is told in his own words.
Russell Williams was a champion racer and youth cycling coach who I already knew about. His racing career spanned three decades from the 1970s to around 2000. He was an 18-time British champion on the track and road. He raced as a professional with the best of his peers in Britain and across the world. The 2014 World Track World Cup was a highlight of his career. He was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 2019.

Charlotte Cole-Hossain. She is a double British champion and the first female of Black British heritage to win a national title. Her cycling career has been marked by her success in the sprint events. She has won multiple medals in national and international competitions.

David Clarke was a professional road racer who I had seen racing quite a bit in south-east England. He had won British Cycling Premier Calendar races and performed well at international stage races, with his finest achievements including overall victory at the Tour of Cameroon in 2009 and a mountain stage plus the King of the Mountains classification at the Tour of Alsace in 2004. He was also King of the Mountains at the Tour of Ireland in 2012. He was the best-placed British rider in the 2012 Tour of Britain. He raced as a professional with the best of his peers in Britain and across the world. The 2014 World Track World Cup was a highlight of his career. He was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 2019.
Experiences of the cyclists mentioned above. The research is grounded by these experiences to examine the sport of cycling. This is a welcome call seeing that in sport representation and inclusion of minority ethnic groups people in some communities are older. I see the need for diversity in the sport of cycling.

Diversity, Representation, Access and Inclusion

Inclusion in the sport of cycling is seen as a key to diversity, representation and access, and how their experiences speak to diversity, representation and access and inclusivity in the sport from the 1970 to the current day. How did my sample of cyclists cover 50 years of Black British cyclists?

The 1992 Star Trophy Series with Mark McKay, also features in this exhibition. Mark McKay is a former Olympic Gold Medalist and his 1986 World Championship win is a testament to the Black cyclist's ability.

Diversity, Representation, Access and Inclusion

Some commentators today speak of the need for diversity, for representation and inclusion of minority ethnic group people in the sport of cycling. This is a welcome call seeing that it is a sport seemingly dominated by the white British majority. However, no reference is given by those commentators to the career experiences of the cyclists mentioned above. What could be missing in the narrative of diversity and representation?
Brilliant exhibition. Please make this tour public response for some of your great oral testimonies of the Black British cycling heroes. They all had a very tough time to go through, but they were resilient and pushed their way to the top, inspiring others and becoming role models for future generations.

The Exhibitions

This exhibition highlights a side to cycling that is not conscious of skin colour. I wanted to represent each cyclist through visual portraits that would illuminate their stories. The work includes comic imagery in mind when I created the multicoloured portraits. Still, these are a true representation of each cyclist's journey through the sport.

I now have a heightened awareness of the inequalities and racism they faced at times. Brilliant work.
reflection of the cyclists in their prime, and each portrait creates for me a unique sense of the cyclists and their characteristics. I began with Maurice Burton’s image and continued the process of creation for all of the other cyclists. The multicoloured portraits have become a recognisable feature of my exhibitions and work in showcasing Black British champions.

Public Responses (see above)

I wanted the general public to read the oral testimonies and give me feedback on these and my exhibition. They have provided me with outstanding appreciation of the exhibition’s aim to uncover and showcase the excellence of Black British cycling champions, exhibiting them as a constellation of lives in cycling.

The public responses have recognised the double-edged nature of the exhibition, i.e., one of celebrating the strength, resilience and successes of Black British champions against the hostile, exclusive and discriminatory factors of ‘whiteness’ and ‘privilege’ and in some cases clear and indicative evidence of institutional racism towards Black British cyclists at the highest levels of the sport in this country.

“For me to be half the man he was when I grew up would have been enough.”

I conversed with Sir Bradley Wiggins on Instagram messenger and invited him to attend my exhibition at ‘The Big Velo Fete’, Herne Hill Velodrome, in June 2019. He accepted without hesitation. We planned for him to conduct a Q&A and public conversation with his early mentor and coach Russell Williams. I had influenced Russell to fly over from Australia to England for this meeting. The quote above is one of many from Sir Bradley Wiggins, speaking to the presence of Russell Williams in his life when reflecting on the time he was a young aspirant racer who would cycle from his home in Kilburn, north London, for training sessions led by Russell at Herne Hill Velodrome. Sir Bradley Wiggins spoke from the heart. It was a beautiful conversation, where genuine respect was shown between mentor and mentee.

I think that the greatest beauty in conducting this research work for my exhibition is that it has brought people together who haven’t seen each other for many years. I witnessed grown men with tears in their eyes when coming together at my exhibition at Herne Hill Velodrome. I witnessed hugs and smiles and general happiness. Friends coming together, reliving the days where they lost and won races, friends that have lived and breathed cycling. A key aim was to bring together the lives and stories of the cyclists and make this happen.

I conversed with Sir Bradley Wiggins on Instagram messenger and agreed to have his quote above appear on my exhibition at ‘The Big Velo Fete’. He consented with pleasure.

The country continues to advance, and the excellence of Black British cyclists is showcased and highlighted across platforms and in exhibitions. The success of Black British cyclists is celebrated through various platforms and exhibitions, and the stories are shared and celebrated. The exhibition is an opportunity to showcase the excellence of Black British cyclists and their achievements. It is a privilege to be able to make this happen.

The quote above is from Sir Bradley Wiggins, speaking to the presence of Russell Williams in his life when reflecting on the time he was a young aspirant racer who would cycle from his home in Kilburn, north London, for training sessions led by Russell at Herne Hill Velodrome. Sir Bradley Wiggins spoke from the heart. It was a beautiful conversation, where genuine respect was shown between mentor and mentee.

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