

The main title "Celebrating Black History Month 2017" in large, white, sans-serif font, centered over a background image of a Black man's profile.

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01 NOV 2017

We have hosted a number of events to mark Black History Month and have loved sharing music, patties and poetry with the people of MediaCom. To round it off, we wanted to share some insights from some prominent industry figures: Selma Nicholls, Yomi Adegoke, and our very own Karen Blackett, Marisa Ambersley, Ashley Ogunremi and Hannah Lee

[Selma Nicholls Interview](#)

Selma is the successful CEO of *Looks Like Me*, a talent and casting agency that represents underrepresented groups in the advertising world and makes sure black children can see

themselves reflected in the media that everyone consumes- an issue that has been often over-looked.

How did you get your start in media?

I set up *Looks Like Me (LLM)*, a talent and casting agency, to raise the profile of underrepresented groups. It provides exceptional talent, models and extraordinary diverse/real life campaigns represented in fashion and advertising content.

Ten weeks into launching #lookslikeme I entered a life changing partnership that has a meaningful impact on our children.

The partnership is the great initiative #thesowhiteproject, with co-founders and industry change makers Nadya Powell Nathalie Udolpho Gordon and Wren Graham.

It is mentored by the inspirational Karen Blackett OBE and Nishma Patel Robb, in collaboration with our powerhouse team Michael Adeyeye, Helen Marsden, Yvadney Davis, Jade Rathore and #lookslikeme talent/casting agency (Marsha Matthews & our talent #creativechildren).

Supported by 20 plus media & advertising agencies, client brands, TV broadcasters, Getty images, Exterion and PRIMESIGHT, #Lookslikeme has provided approximately 75 of our talent (creative children) work within our first year and at least 45 of these children got work through #thesowhiteproject, providing #lookslikeme talent positive representation through real life imagery – super proud of what we have achieved together

The proof is our images!

Who is your biggest inspiration?

1. My daughter Riley-Ann – Looks Like Me was founded by [Selma Nicholls](#), motivated by Riley-Ann, her three-year-old daughter, questioning her

identity (on two occasions) due to the limited visibility of children that looked like her on bill boards, theatre shows, the big screen, magazines, and advertising. [Read full article](#)

2. Karen Blackett- one of the most inspirational and generous women I have met along my journey into media. Karen opened the door and introduced me to exceptional leaders in the media world.

Name a book you think everyone should read:

SELMA 1965, The March That Changed The South, Charles E. Fager Introduced by Stephen B. Oates – “A fascinating portrait of the most significant campaign of the Civil Rights Movement.” This book was given to me at 20 years old.

What is a stand out experience that shaped who you are today?

At 19 years old I was offered a scholarship to study a BA Honours in Dance at London Contemporary Dance School. I was attacked one month before completing the end of my first year at LCDS. When I left hospital the Principle of the LCDS sent me away to recover for two weeks. On return the LCDS board reinstated my scholarship, I had to rebuild myself within a very short time (one month) and continue to be the best I could be. My Principle Veronica Lewis took me out to dinner in the city and I asked her “why are you helping me so much?” She replied, “because I can see the greatness within you Selma, and you will be great at whatever you do in life and I want to support you and be part of that journey”. From that day forth I have never achieved anything less than exceptional. I transformed myself into a beautiful dancer, leading to a scholarship to further my studies at California Institute of the Arts, USA. This experience taught me that anything is possible, through commitment, passion and drive – but you have to truly believe and love what you do. Nearly twenty years on I don't dance anymore, however dance continues to live within my heart- that's my secret driving force.

What is the best piece of advice you've ever been given?

Know who your cheerleaders are! Keep it moving! Remain focused on your focus! Tune into your inner greatness!

What does Black History Month mean to you?

Black History Month illuminates what I/Looks Like Me celebrates daily! Exchanging, enriching and evolving from Black history and culture, making it part of our everyday narrative.

Ashley Ogunremi Interview



Ashley is a young Londoner who successfully applied for the Apprenticeship Scheme at MediaCom.

How did you get your start in media?

Preparation met opportunity and I was blessed with a position upon the Apprenticeship Scheme at MediaCom.

Who is your biggest inspiration?

David Lammy MP

Name a book you think everyone should read:

The Secret by Rhonda Byrne

What is a stand out experience that shaped who you are today?

Volunteering in an old people's home and a gentleman telling me that life is a compilation of experiences and that I simply need to pack in as many as possible. Regret nothing and do things that others won't.

What is the best piece of advice you've ever been given?

You don't get it if you don't ask.

What does Black History Month mean to you?

A celebration of black culture and history, and the contributions that have been made to science, the arts, politics and everyday life.

Yomi Adegoke Interview



Yomi is a successful journalist (Complex, The Huffington Post, The Independent, The Debrief, The Guardian), blogger and co-author of the upcoming 'Black girl Bible', Slay In Your Lane.

How did you get your start in media?

I had quite an unorthodox start in media, initially studying law at Warwick university but deciding to start a blog on a whim during a year out. After reading my ramblings online, an acquaintance suggested I think about getting into journalism but the prospect of being paid to write just seemed far too good to be true. After a few months, I tentatively started applying for internships and managed to successfully secure an internship at The Telegraph newspaper where I was for several months before landing my first job at ITN.

Who is your biggest inspiration?

My biggest inspiration is probably my older sister, who is also a journalist in Nigeria. She managed to make it in media after the financial crash in 2008 when journalist jobs were even scarcer than they are now – and she also bit the bullet in terms of breaking to my parents she wanted to work in media, which gave me a much easier ride when I too decided I wanted to write!

Name a book you think everyone should read:

I humbly recommend my own book, 'Slay in your Lane' which is a guide to life for black British women out next July. My co-author Elizabeth Uviebinene and I have interviewed nearly 40 game-changing black women in the UK about their experiences in work, education, relationships and with health and we have compiled their invaluable advice in what we call 'the black girl bible' – but their responses are of use to anyone seeking to better themselves. Interviewees include BAFTA award winning director Amma Asante, author Malorie Blackman, Vogue publisher Vanessa Kingori – and of course MediaCom chairwoman, Karen Blackett!

What is a stand out experience that shaped who you are today?

Taking a year out of university completely changed my life course. I was unwell and decided to leave temporarily which at the time felt like the end of my world, but had I not left, I would have never realised that I could write or how much I liked it. What was a first a

bleak period became career defining for me and every day I'm grateful I made the decision to take some time out.

What is the best piece of advice you've ever been given?

'Avoid cliques, gangs, groups. The presence of a crowd won't make your writing any better than it is.' – Zadie Smith

What does Black History Month mean to you?

Black history month to me means an opportunity to shine a light on the contributions of those that are so often sidelined. Black culture continues to shape so much of British life and October places the onus on us all to applaud the works of pioneers and support those who are still upcoming.

Karen Blackett, OBE Interview



Karen Blackett, OBE is a media maven and the successful chairwoman of MediaCom. She's topped the Black Powerlist and her influence is widespread, acting as an inspirational figure for many that would like to choose media as a career path.

How did you get your start in media?

It was really difficult to get into the Industry, as in the early 90s, very few agencies were recruiting. I used the statistics module of my Geography degree and I replied to a Job Ad in

the Independent Newspaper to be a trainee Media Auditor.

At the time the Auditor role was a division of a media agency and during the interview process, they thought I should speak to the Direct Response buying team at the agency. That's how I managed to get into the industry. Thank goodness, as I am not sure my creativity would have been unleashed as an auditor!

Who is your biggest inspiration?

My parents are huge inspirations to me. They left their country at the age of 19 for an adventure to the UK, a country totally different in every way to their beloved Barbados: weather, food, people, accents, music and energy. My dad worked on the buses for a year as a bus conductor, before taking up an Apprenticeship as an electrical engineer for a Telecoms company. My mum trained as a nurse and worked as a Staff Nurse for over 40 years.

Despite facing prejudice, they built a life for myself and my sister, purchased a home, ensured we benefited from a good education, that they themselves were unable to obtain when they were younger. They worked incredibly hard.

Their work ethic I totally admire: they viewed being able to work and live here a privilege, which they would not throw away. They helped to build the incredible country that we live in today by doing jobs that those here at the time did not want to do.

Name a book you think everyone should read:

- 1) Leaders Eat Last by Simon Sinek
- 2) The One Minute Manager by Ken Blanchard & Spencer Johnson
- 3) The Glass Wall by Kathryn Jacob & Sue Unerman

What is your favourite album and why?

Michael Jackson's 'Off the Wall'. It was Michael Jackson's first solo album and his first collaboration with Quincy Jones. The freedom, joy, and talent shines through in this album.

It makes me want to get up and dance every time I hear it. It is definitely one of my Desert Island discs.

What is a stand out experience that shaped who you are today?

There are loads, firstly playing competitive sports at a high level, it teaches self-motivation, focus, success, failure and knowing yourself. Every loss, injury and win taught me something which I use now.

The sudden death of my Dad was a pivotal moment, as I almost left the industry to take care of my mum, but thankfully my Cheerleaders kept me in.

The birth of my son – he is the love of my life and my motivation. Everything I try to do to make my small part of the world a better and equal place, is for him.

Topping The Powerlist – The 100 Most Influential People of African or Afro Caribbean descent in the UK is full of people that I admire, respect and cheerlead. To top that list and to be the first Business woman to do so, was slightly overwhelming.

Receiving an OBE – I was lost for words as this was totally unexpected, I still have no idea to this day who nominated me. Taking my mum, sister and son to The Palace was an extremely proud day for the Blakett family.

What is the best piece of advice you've ever been given?

My Dad's wise words still ring in my ears today, and I pass it on to my son.

1. You are black and female, meaning you must try twice as hard as everyone else. My parents experienced prejudice, they were judged by their skin colour first, not who they were as people. Unfortunately, this has not changed and we live in a society where difference can be feared. Privilege is invisible to those that have it and equality still has a long way to go.

2. Celebrate your differences: you are who you are, own it. Do not try to blend in, it's OK to be you.

3. Find your cheerleaders – when you need a boost of encouragement or for those moments when you lack self-belief or self-confidence, find your cheerleaders – they will keep you going.

4. Network – magic can happen when your network is broad and wide.

What does Black History Month mean to you?

A celebration of, and recognition for all those unsung heroes in history and present day who have helped shape the world we live in.

Marisa Ambersley Interview



Marisa is an EmPower role model, strategy director at MediaCom and the creator of the brilliant 'Mediacom Talks' events that we all love so much!

How did you get your start in media?

My media agency career started back in 2007 after I saw an ad in the Guardian for a 'media planner'. I had no clue what a 'media planner' was but the role sounded interesting. The day after sending my CV I got the phone call for the interview, and the rest is history. It

was clearly meant to be.

Who is your biggest inspiration?

My biggest inspiration is my mother. She's unstoppable and has worked extremely hard in both life and motherhood as a single parent. She's taught me a huge amount by just being a great example through the way she conducts herself. She set no boundaries to what I could achieve as an individual, woman, and black woman.

Name a book you think everyone should read:

I'm currently reading a book called 'You Can't Touch My Hair' by comedian Phoebe Robinson. I'd recommend because it's hilarious and very real! It talks about what it means to be a black woman in America, and she discusses race and feminism in such an authentic way. It's a great read and perspective!

What is your favourite album and why?

'Brown Sugar' is a favourite album because D'Angelo's vocal harmonies are incredible, and every song has so much character!

What is a stand out experience that shaped who you are today?

When I was back in college a teacher/ mentor at the time told me that I should "use my difference as my advantage". She said I should be proud of my identity as a black woman, and use it to offer new perspectives, insight and inspiration. This was a huge confidence boost for me, and has since shaped my goals, experiences and contributions in life and work.

What is the best piece of advice you've ever been given?

A great quote from Maya Angelou: "*When you get, give. When you learn, teach*" – I think it's really important to be generous with your time and knowledge because I believe your

experiences and growth is determined by how willing you are to share.

What does Black History Month mean to you?

It's a celebration of the past and present, to inspire the future. Celebrating the achievements of noble black personalities that have paved the way for today's talented individuals across all industries. These role models within the black community inspire future generations.

Hannah Lee Interview



Hannah Lee is a media executive at MediaCom.

How did you get your start in media?

I joined the BBC School News Report at school which led to me thinking I'd like to do something in media. Then I finished school and applied to the exec scheme at MediaCom...

Who is your biggest inspiration?

My mother and my older sister Nat. All the strong, talented, funny, creative, loving women in my family. Everyone black who's done it and who's doing it that has paved the way for me.

Future Hannah.

Name a book you think everyone should read:

The Book of Night Women by Marlon James, The Thing Around Your Neck by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

What is your favourite album and why?

Kanye West's My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy is a work of art; genius reimagining of iconic samples, legendary features, fabulous production, powerful social commentary and emotion relayed in experimental vocal warping, plus the accompanying visuals injected with mythical mystic...the album is timeless, virtually flawless

What is a stand out experience that shaped who you are today?

Being in hospital when I was younger. It revealed a lot to me about the beauty of the human spirit both in others and in myself and has made me more determined than ever to live my best life.

What is the best piece of advice you've ever been given?

"Better to see it once than hear about it a thousand times".

What does Black History Month mean to you?

Celebration, acknowledgement, storytelling! I think it should be the whole year round and taught properly in schools

DIVERSITY INSIGHT PEOPLE