

## Reclaiming our stories : narratives of identity, resilience and empowerment



### Aim

This paper focuses on the misconceptions in narratives surrounding Black history and culture with a view to enlightening and promoting awareness to the extraordinary contributions of the Black race to humanity from an academic position.

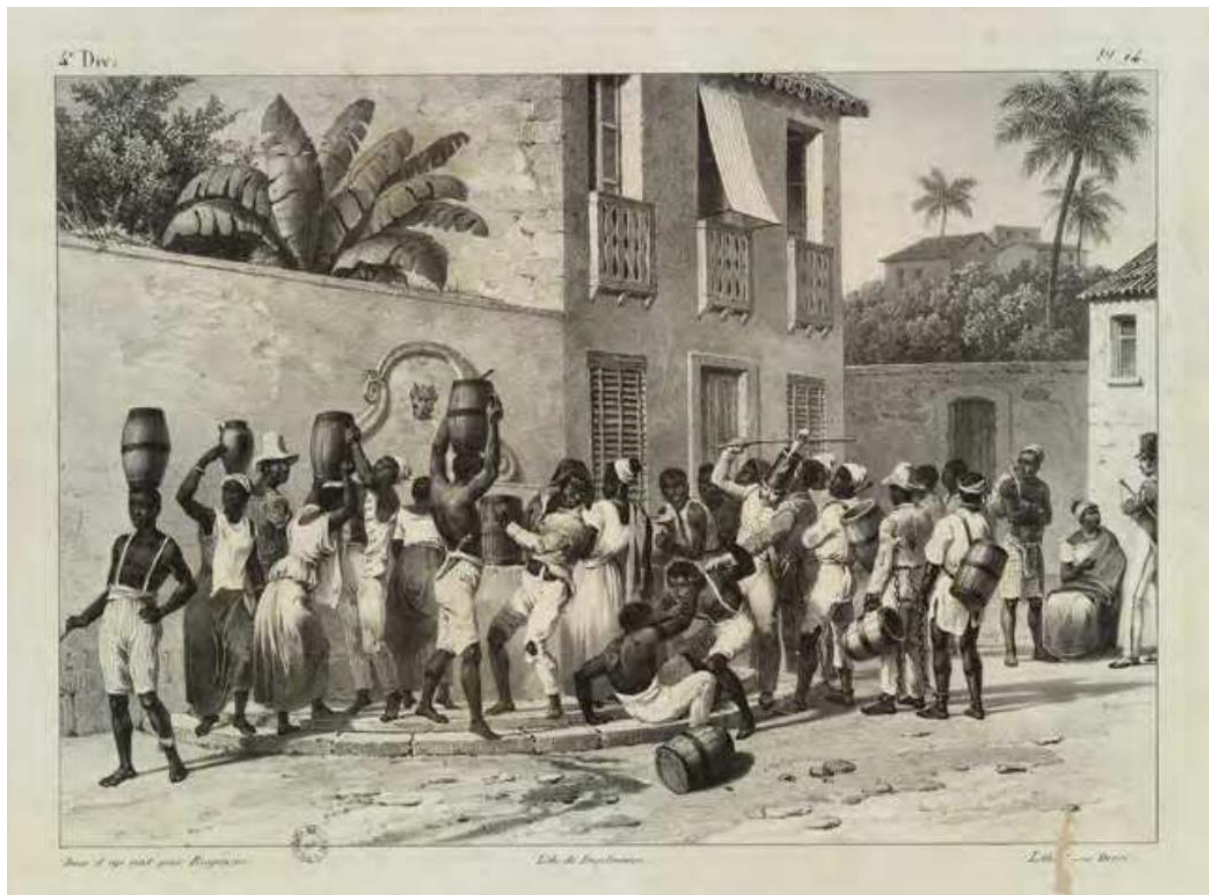
Figure I:



Source: Preisinger et al., (2017).

The above picture is providing a historical background to the culture and lifestyle of “Blacks”.

Figure II: Porteurs d'eau (Water carriers)



Source: Preisinger et al., (2017).

**Figure II:** The picture above describes the variation in behaviour occasioned by slavery: the white elites were interested in the continuous functioning of the aqueduct, while the black slaves exhibited disturbing or sometimes violent behaviour based on their lived experiences.

### Conceptualisation of 'Blacks', Narratives, Beliefs – Origin of people of colour

- The Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus defines narratives as "a particular way of explaining or understanding events"
- Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary defines narratives as "a story or a description of events"
- According to Alves, (2009), the terms "nigger," "negro," and "nigga," were derived from the Latin word, "niger," meaning black. The terms were used to describe American blacks (African Americans) in a derogatory fashion. Additionally, Alves (2009, p 25), noted that "The Americans bought 'Ne-gros,' which is the Spanish word for black that derives from the Latin adjective 'niger.' Slaves then used the word 'Nigger' in their attempt to say 'Ne-gro' or black"
- Scholars have noted that the Greeks considered the Negroes as human beings, with respect and friendliness contrary to several misconceptions that Africa is

only known for its resources such as gold, ivory, and human capital about 2,000 years ago (Bourgeois, 1972).

- According to Richard Moore who is a distinguished Caribbean scholar, there was a calculated effort to erase African history for five centuries (from the 15<sup>th</sup> Century) caused by the invasion and plundering of Africa by Europeans leading to a denial of the history, culture and human resource capabilities of Africans (Clark, 1970, p6-7).
- “On July 13, 2013, Patrisse Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi posted #BlackLivesMatter on the micro-blogging site Twitter. Cullors, Garza, and Tometi created the hashtag to protest the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed African American teenager” (Tillery, 2019).
- According to King and Brown (2014) declarations made by the historian Arnold Toynbee indicating that Black individuals “made no productive contribution to civilization” (cited in Winston, 1975, p. 462) or the philosopher Georg Hegel’s (2004) statements that Africans possessed an “unhistorical spirit” (p. 171) revealed the opinions and generalizations on the Black peoples’ heritage as shown in early textbooks (Epstein & King, 2012).

### **Current Legislation: Equality Act 2010:**

“Equality Act 2010: guidance

The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society.

It replaced previous anti-discrimination laws with a single Act, making the law easier to understand and strengthening protection in some situations. It sets out the different ways in which it’s unlawful to treat someone”.

### **Brief History of Black History Month (BHM)**

- Negro History Week was developed in the year 1926 by Carter G. Woodson, an educator and historian who reflected that anti-Black narratives in education were inseparably connected to the aggression that Black people suffered. Carter worked to design a new approach that taught students counternarratives using presentations embedded in the original Black ideologies (Givens, 2019).
- According to Sesay (1996), Black History Month first began as Black History Week. The aim is to showcase the contributions of black people to the pluralistic society and an appreciation of the Black heritage.



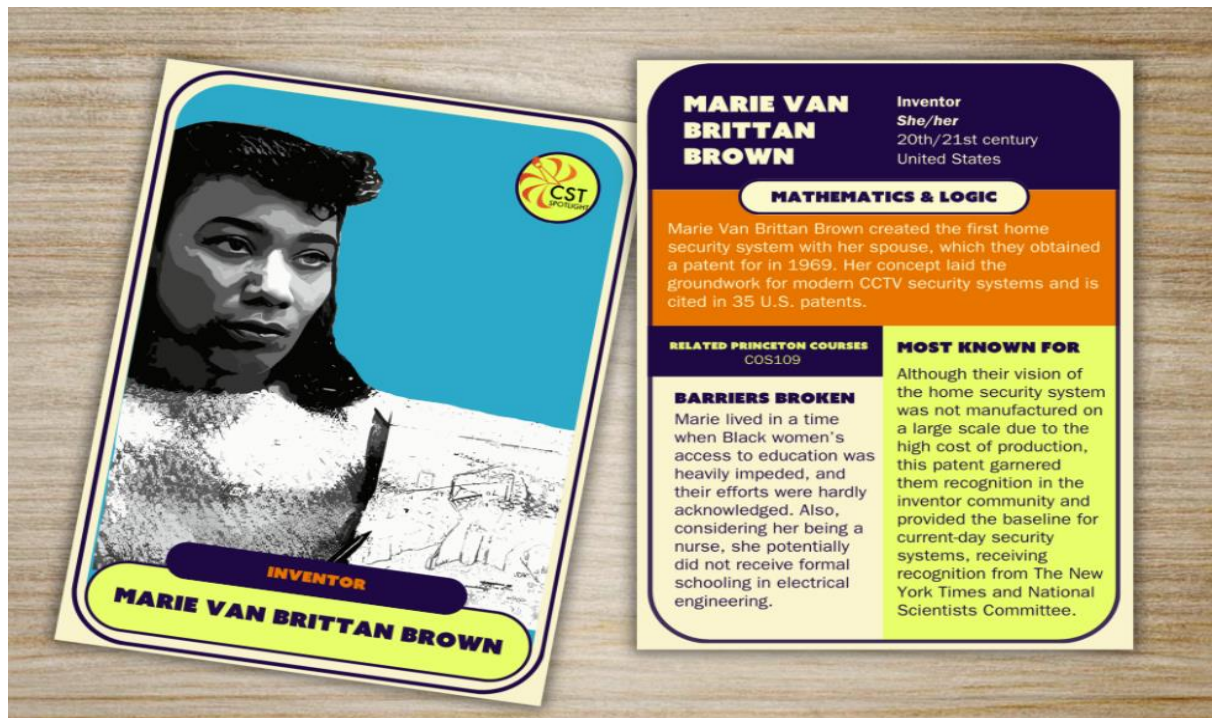
## Contributions of Black Race to Global Development

- i. **Dr Osatohanmwon Osemwengie:** The Nigerian engineer who makes drones for the US.



Source: Som Tribune, (2018)

- ii. **Marie Vann Brittan Brown** -Inventor of home security system



Source: Council on Science and Technology, (2024)

- iii. **Martin Luther King, Jr.** American religious leader and civil-rights activist.



(Source: Britannica, History and Society).

iv. **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie:**



She wrote “Half of a Yellow Sun (2006; film 2013), Adichie’s second novel, was the result of four years of research and writing. It was built primarily on the experiences of her parents during the Nigeria-Biafra war. The result was an epic novel that vividly depicted the savagery of the war (which resulted in the displacement and deaths of perhaps a million people) but did so by focusing on a small group of characters, mostly middle-class Africans. Half of a Yellow Sun became an international best seller and was awarded the Orange Broadband Prize for Fiction in 2007. Eight years later it won the “Best of the Best” Baileys Women’s Prize for Fiction, a special award for the “best” prizewinner from the previous decade”. Source: 100 Women Encyclopaedia Britannica.

## **Impact of Narratives in History**

### **The Need: Why discuss Blacks and Narratives**

The reality is that racial discrimination, racial profiling, microaggressions, and racism are found in services rendered in physical and mental health-care establishments in western nations (Cénat, 2020).

In a recent Insight article in The Lancet Psychiatry, Stossel succinctly described the ravages of individual, institutional, and systemic racism on the health and lives of individuals and their families (Stossel, 2020).

Several organisations comprising psychiatrists and psychologists (eg, the Canadian Psychiatric Association, Canadian Psychological Association, Royal College of Psychiatrists, American Psychiatric Association, and American Psychological Association) have designed steps to address the challenge posed by racism,



unfortunately these approaches have limited direct application to resolving the issue (Cénat, 2020).

### **Pragmatic steps to resolving misconceptions on Blacks:**

According to Cénat (2020): The following steps can be adopted to address anti-racist mental health care:

“Use psychotherapies that have been shown to be effective in Black communities: culturally adapted cognitive behavioural therapy, culturally adapted cognitive processing therapy, and culturally informed prolonged exposure (integrating racism-related stressors and traumas).

**An assessment adapted to the real needs of Black individuals:** Assess factors related to microaggressions, discrimination, racial profiling, microaggressions, and racism as structuring, triggering, precipitating or sustaining factors in mental health problems.

**An awareness of racial issues:** Self-examination (give clinicians an awareness of their own cultural backgrounds and also inform them about their beliefs, ideas, attitudes, and privileges).

**A humanistic approach to medication:** Prescribe only if there are no other alternatives:

- First, because there have been over-prescriptions of medication among Black people, which has caused a loss of confidence in medication and mental health services
- Second, because prescribing is often a quick and easy solution, while people’s needs are often elsewhere”.

### **Concluding Remarks:**

According to King and Swartz (2014):

“Education should prepare us to live in a diverse world because that is the only world”.



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