

# Sancho – An Act of Remembrance

A play written and performed by Paterson Joseph



Dramaturg: Ian Flintoff  
Set Design: Jenny Watkins  
Sound Design: Ben Park  
Lighting Design: Laura Choules, Costume Design: Linda Haysman  
An Oxford Playhouse & Paterson Joseph Co-Production  
Developed with support from the National Theatre Studio



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**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**

This Oxford Playhouse education resource offers further learning around the subject and history of the play.  
Contributors

Paterson Joseph - Writer and actor

Natty Mark Samuels - Writer, journalist and director of African School <http://africanschooluk.blogspot.com/>

Michelle Knight - Producer, Oxford Playhouse

Madeleine Vose - Learning and Community Manager, Oxford Playhouse



## An introduction from Playhouse Producer Michelle Knight

Some months ago Paterson Joseph approached Oxford Playhouse with a script for a one-man show – the first play he had ever written – and asked if we would help him produce it as a theatre piece. We couldn't help but be impressed by his infectious passion for the extraordinary and important story of Charles Ignatius Sancho, and we knew from Paterson's reputation as one of the country's finest stage and television actors that he would excel at bringing this charismatic story to life on stage. We wanted to help. We began by working with Paterson on securing funding from Arts Council England to support the

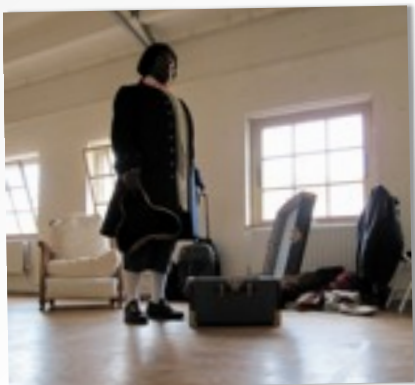
creation and development of the production – this meant that, as well as employing the creative team and covering rehearsal costs, we would be able to offer education activities alongside the performances, provide subsidised tickets to the show for school and community groups in Oxford, and produce a published edition of the script.

Even a small-scale show like this one, with just one performer and a few props, is always a big team effort involving lots of experts in specialist fields – people an audience never sees on stage. Having Paterson rehearsing in the theatre for a couple of weeks has

been a really exciting process for us all.

Everyone who has been working on the show – from our learning department to the technical team – has been able to see Paterson crafting his performance day by day into the finished production. And it doesn't end here. Paterson hopes to tour the production to theatres nationwide next year and conversations have already begun with venues who are interested in hosting some performances.

We hope Charles Ignatius Sancho is very pleased that his spirit will live on, and we wish Paterson all the best for the show's successful future life!



# A Need for Heroes

Paterson Joseph on Sancho's journey to a 21st Century stage.

In the late nineteen seventies my generation of young black peers grew up with the notion that we were the first manifestation of black British youth that had ever been seen on these islands. The majority of our parents, most of whom had arrived in the UK from Africa and the Caribbean islands in the fifties and sixties, knew no different it seemed. We were to a great extent a people without a British history. Then came the American television show, *Roots*. Alex Haley's moving dramatisation of his ancestor, Kunte Kinte's journey from Africa to America via the slave trade stunned us all. Suddenly for us young black Britons the veil of history had been lifted. But whose history?

The African-American story is one most of us are now familiar with. Young black Briton's identification with the movers and shapers of that history, from Frederick Douglass via Martin Luther King to Barack Obama has been well documented. Much of the music created by black British youth has clearly imbibed all the influences of African-American culture; we think of jazz and later hip-hop and R and B. Our ways of dressing, and even idiosyncratic modes of speech, have been



adopted and assimilated from that vibrant and powerful African-American culture.

My slight worry with this phenomenon has always been one of personal identity. We may want to absorb the history of another but in the end we may find that we can only really stand firm on our own story.

What makes Charles Ignatius Sancho a forerunner for the black British experience is his very un-American take on life as a black man among whites, and his unique place in British society. A less angry voice crying out against slavery than, say, Frederick Douglass, Sancho epitomises the very British love of argument and rhetoric, mixed with large doses of wicked humour. Together with his ability to love life and drink it's cup to the dregs, he has an historian's eye on the 'weather' of racial politics. He noted when

it was time to challenge and time to play music; he refused to be told to sit down and be quiet and chose instead to write, sing, dance and, indeed, act. In his widely read letters, Sancho's satirical and biting take on the social mores of his age, its political hypocrisy and downright cruelty, set him apart from the slave-narrative form adopted by his African-American counterparts.

And this is the nub of the matter; for however much you try and make the African-American history a facsimile of the Afro-British journey you run into the problem of detail. Sancho may not have even been formerly a slave; his owner/guardian sent him to live in relative luxury in Greenwich rather than subject him to the vicissitudes of a life on a plantation; his assimilation into 'polite' society was so deep that his portrait was painted by the foremost portraitist in English history. Thomas Gainsborough's depiction of Sancho, not as slave, nor even servant, but in the typical pose of Gentleman, is almost shocking in its dignity and warmth.

# A Need for Heroes

Charles Ignatius is quite simply a perfect example, and by no means the only one in British history, of the strange sometimes uncomfortable relationship that the UK has always had with its colonies and colonial peoples. On the one hand exploitation was rife and unbridled, and on the other the natural and common humanity of the British would not allow them to fully embrace the horrors of the American model of slavery, at least on British soil. And so Sancho's life was filled with the joy and pain of being at once free and simultaneously caged within his race and place in eighteenth century society.

My interest in Sancho began on opening a page of a book entitled, *Black England* by Gretchen Gerzina. I had been searching for a black British history so that I could perhaps write a film script that would reflect a longer history than had been available to the wider public up till then. In Gerzina's book I read many a curious story. There was a tale from ancient Britain about the black soldier reported to have been on Hadrian's Wall screaming defiance at the besiegers. There were ribald tales of Julius Soubise, young black Casanova of the eighteenth century. The tale of Queen Elizabeth the First's decree that there were too many blacks on London's seventeenth century

streets, and so a boat should be chartered to take them all back to Africa....no one turned up. These all tickled me greatly and gave me a real sense of the historical presence of black people in the UK that I'd never had before. However, it was on turning over a page and reading the domestic, personal and downright comic tale of Charles Ignatius Sancho that I knew I'd found my subject. He struck me as a true British model of survival without overt heroism, and indefatigability without bitterness. A true Afro-Brit some two hundred and twenty years before The Empire Windrush set sail for Britain. But my real starting point was, of course, seeing his portrait for the first time. I found that though his

letters tell us, albeit guardedly, much about his character, for me his portrait revealed almost all. His poise, humour, curiosity and deep intelligence shine through. His self awareness is evident, too, but one feels he was not cowed by the knowledge of his 'place' in society. In other words, Charles Ignatius Sancho is a hero to all black Britons who aspire to be a functioning and integral part of the country of their birth, the country of their adoption. And for all of us, of whatever shade, he shows the way to count our circumstances as given, but not the final word on our destiny.



Gainsborough's Sancho  
Illustration by Philip Smith

# A Distant Quartet - A Dedication to Black Pioneers

by Natty Mark Samuels

**Olaudah Equiano, Born c.1745; a member of the Ibo people of present day Nigeria enslaved and bought his freedom. Let me tell you how he made his most precious purchase – that of himself . His owner made a promise - For £40 freedom would be his.**

Never thinking it a possibility that he could raise the requested amount, Robert King was shocked and stunned when the following year Olaudah showed him the money.

I salute him. Founder member of *Sons of Africa*, this pressure group wrote letters to MPs, to newspapers, sent delegations to parliament, working closely with the British abolitionists. His words, written and spoken, gave a massive boost to the fight against slavery.

His manumission story is a perfect illustration of the 'Abolition Man'.

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**IT WASN'T EASY PICKING THIS FOUR. SO MANY OTHERS OF EQUAL IMPORTANCE CONTINUE TO MEANDER THROUGH MY HEAD; AN EXTRA BOUNCE IN MY STEP. INSPIRATION ETERNAL.**

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**We step now from the Georgian into the Victorian era. To Mary Seacole, born in Jamaica. Born free, still dominated by slavery in her society.**

Tending soldiers at local army bases alongside her mother taught her the centrality of herbal usage to medicine and healing in fighting cholera and yellow fever - in Jamaica, Panama and the Crimea.

During the Crimean War as an independent provider repulsed by government agencies she came to be known as "Mother Seacole" by the English soldiers she nursed there. Soldiers, low-rank and high, responded to the adverts in the national press to alleviate the financial suffering of their beloved nurse, made bankrupt by the Crimean War.

*Times* journalist William Howard Russell said of her "I have witnessed her devotion and her courage.....and I trust that England will never forget one who has nursed her sick, who sought out her wounded to aid and succour them and who performed the last offices for some of her illustrious dead".



## OLAUDAH EQUIANO

BORN C.1745 OF THE IBO PEOPLE IN PRESENT DAY NIGERIA.

HE WAS ENSLAVED AND BOUGHT HIS FREEDOM

HIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY WAS PUBLISHED IN HIS LIFETIME IN 1789. IT WAS AN INSTANT BESTSELLER

*"It was Mr David Garrick who, on the occasion of commemorating a new statue of Mr Shakespeare outside his theatre in Drury Lane, composed the lines for The Sweetest Bard and knowing I was in the process of completing my book on the theory of music, commanded me to fit a tune to it. And here we have it..."*  
Sancho - An Act of Remembrance

**DEBATE THIS!** Ignatius Sancho could never have realised his ambitions without help from a white advocate.



## MARY SEACOLE

BORN FREE IN JAMAICA IN THE 19TH CENTURY

CALLED 'MOTHER SEACOLE' BY BRITISH SOLDIERS SHE TENDED

JAMAICA HAS HONOURED HER NAME THROUGHOUT ITS LANDS

**Martin Luther King called Ralph Abernathy “the best friend I have in the world.” From the Montgomery Bus Boycott onward, they stood together.**

Abernathy suffered bombings, state brutality, prison and death threats. Armed with two degrees in Sociology and Mathematics, his father’s words an eternal echo:

"If you see a good fight, get in it and fight to win it."

With deep faith and its resultant energy until his death in 1990 he was a tireless campaigner against racism and poverty.

On the eve of the Apollo 1 launch at Cape Canaveral our hero protested against government spending on space exploration, when so many citizens were sinking in poverty. He fought alongside hospital workers in South Carolina and Native Americans in Dakota.

At his passing the former Mayor of Atlanta, erstwhile colleague in the Civil Rights campaigns of the sixties, said Reverend Abernathy would be remembered as a "jovial, profound, loving preacher, who gave his life in the service of others".

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**ENJOY THIS RHYTHM OF HUMAN BEAUTY, PLAYED BY THIS DISTANT QUARTET; FOUR MELODIES INTERTWINED. INTRODUCE AND SHARE THEIR CRUCIAL SONGBOOK WITH ALL WHO YOU MEET.....**

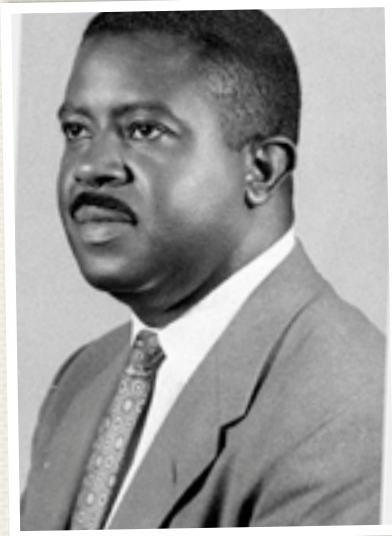
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**Abernathy’s contemporary Lorraine Hansberry became the youngest winner of the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Play when *A Raisin in the Sun* was produced.**

A play about dreams and the struggle to attain them hampered by racism and greed. The year was 1959: mission accomplished.

The road that led to Broadway and national acclaim began years before. Following an uninspiring time studying drama and stage design at Wisconsin University, she took lessons in writing at the New School for Social Research in New York.

Set up in 1919 by progressive academics in the Greenwich Village area it has a reputation for innovative teaching and an ethos towards social change. Students include Marlon Brando, Tennessee Williams and Woody Allen.



## THE REV. RALPH ABERNATHY

BORN IN ALABAMA IN 1926

A CLERGYMAN AND A LEADER OF AMERICAN CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

MARTIN LUTHER KING CONSIDERED HIM "THE BEST FRIEND I HAVE IN THE WORLD"

*“And one is yet further removed from any sense of tedious ennui (boredom), when one learns that the sitter is an African Gentleman of Letters, musician, composer, author.....Methodist....and thrice-blessed Valet to the gentle George 1st Duke of Montagu...”*

Sancho loves telling the world of his achievements. Try this Lesson in Boasting with a partner. You’ll be crowing your importance in no time!

A Lesson in Boasting

Working in pairs, think very carefully about one thing you really admire about your partner. Practice praising your partner on their talent or skill. Your aim is to praise your partner so convincingly that they feel proud of themselves.

Be aware of the following to make your praise believable!

Tone

Volume

Enthusiasm

Belief



## LORRAINE HANSBERRY

FIRST AFRICAN-AMERICAN PLAYWRIGHT TO BE PRODUCED ON BROADWAY

'A RAISIN IN THE SUN' PLAYED FOR NEARLY TWO YEARS

REVIEWS CALLED IT "THE PLAY THAT CHANGED AMERICA FOR EVER."

# The Lighthouse Man

Without guidance, an isolated child's talents may never be realised. Here Natty Mark Samuels describes the significance of Sancho's mentor - the Duke of Montagu

When Ignatius Sancho was brought to England, he was given to three spinsters. Believing that ignorance was the best path to obedience, they refused to educate their young slave. Secretly, he taught himself to read and write.

Then along came a man, a neighbour and friend of the trio, resident in the Blackheath area of London. His thinking brought different results than theirs; a belief in mental enrichment for all.

John Montagu, the then Duke of Montagu, put his money where his mouth was, by purchasing books for the young aspirant and lending others from his own library. Supporting his education in any way he could. Montagu saw the spark; later on, everyone would see the flame. Whilst others were trying to darken his brightness, such as the ageing maidens refusing him access to literature, Sancho was blessed with the arrival of the 'Lighthouse Man'.

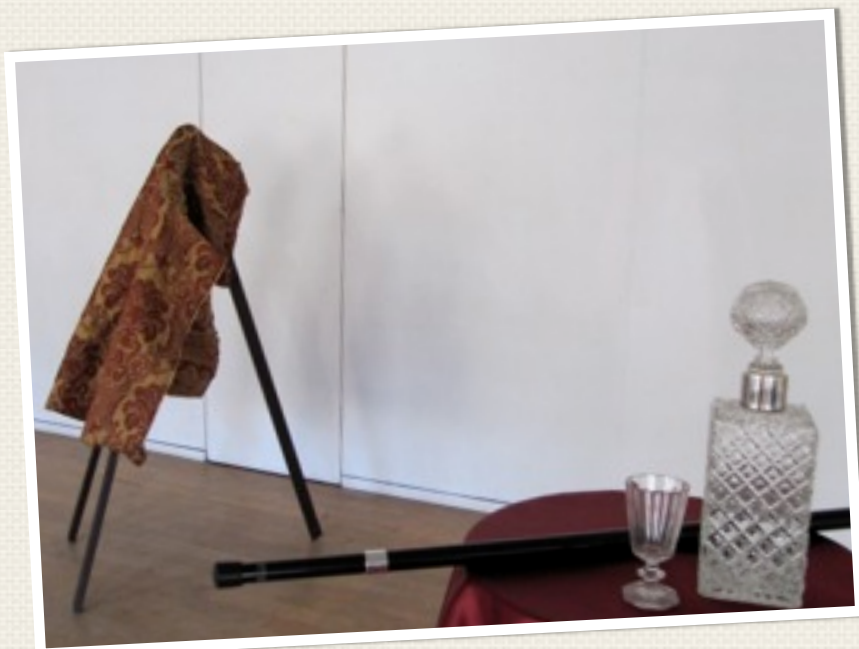
Like the mentoring the great Walter Sisulu gave to Nelson Mandela, when he first came from the village to the city - the young Nelson running from the decree of the chief to the mines of Johannesburg. Walter Sisulu who in the 1950s before being sentenced to life with Nelson helped provide the space for *Mandela and Tambo*; the first law firm in South Africa founded by Africans.

The support of *Studio One* founder Coxsonne Dodd, to the young Bob Marley, homeless and newly married. Coxsonne Dodd, first great figure of modern Jamacian music, who like Berry Gordy at Motown, nurtured the musical talent of the ghetto youth. The guiding hand of Harry Belafonte to the new immigrant, Miriam Makeba, young exile from apartheid South Africa. Harry Belafonte, who was himself mentored by the

monumental Paul Robeson, became a committed activist for civil rights in Africa as well as America. Finally becoming a United Nations Goodwill Ambassador.

The myriad talents of those they mentored would have shone out eventually, come what may. But these figures of light came at a time of real uncertainty in the lives of those they helped. Seminal people at the foggy crossroads, a lamp held in the hand.

Once upon a time, in a land far away from his birth, a slave boy, without parents or love, discovered solace and joy in the pursuit of knowledge. But the Three Witches who owned him, blocked his every endeavour to enrich his life. Snatching moments when they napped; by candlelight, when they were out working their night-shifts. One day, a good knight came by. Hearing the cries of the stifled boy, he freed him from his dark hole. Immediately, he recognised the brightness of this boy, so he decided to sponsor him, taking him to the Kingdom of Light. The boy flourished in the new environment, forever grateful for the day he met the Lighthouse Man.



## DISCUSS THIS!

Do you have a mentor in your life?  
What qualities does a mentor need to make an impact?

# Sancho –

## Discover a wealth of knowledge



*Pj's Sancho*  
Illustration by Philip Smith

A few great sites for you to continue learning at home or in the classroom - define your own journey through Britain's cultural heritage and history!

### PLAYING YOUR HERO

Think of someone you know who has overcome great challenges and who you admire.

Now imagine you are this person. What would they say about the struggles they have faced?

Try writing a side of A4 as this person. Are they humble or matter-of-fact about their achievements or are they bold and delighted like Sancho? Try speaking these imagined words out loud. This will help you to choose which bits to change and improve. It will also help you to take on the characteristics of the person you have been inspired by and think about what it is you admire about them.

<http://www.brycchancarey.com/sancho> An independent, thoroughly researched page on Sancho with accompanying pages covering slavery, abolition and further reading.

<http://www.understandingslavery.com> UK-based accessible website on the history of international slavery. Check out the page on partner museums in London, Liverpool, Bristol and Bath.

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/empire\\_seapower/black\\_britons\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/empire_seapower/black_britons_01.shtml) One of many BBC pages around Britain's cultural identity; this page gives a broad historical overview of cultural immigration to our island.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/mar/17/black-britain-unemployment-conservatives> A 2010 article by Prime Minister David Cameron on black unemployment in the UK

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/the-top-10-black-britons-but-one-may-not-be-569259.html> 2004 article on top 10 black Britons. Do you agree? And can you spot a grand omission?

<http://www.blackpresence.co.uk/>

Lively, independent website best presented by Phil who created it: "mixed race guy, born in Manchester England, in the 1970's. I was adopted and grew up in the Almost totally White Peak District. The website was born out of my ongoing quest to understand my ethnicity."