

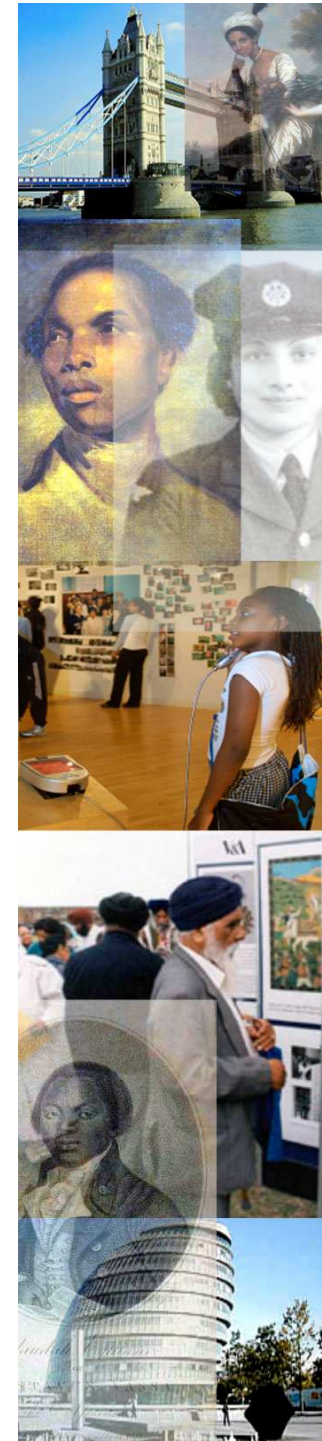


Mayor's Commission on African and Asian Heritage

MCAAH: A Case Study for Intercultural Strategies In a Multi-Ethnic Metropolis

04 September 2008

Presented By:
Makeda Coaston & Dr. Janice Cheddie



Setting the Scene

- London is home to over 45% of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups in England and Wales, and just over 30% of Londoners are from these communities.
- For social and economic reasons, many of these communities have been disenfranchised.
- London's museums, archives and historic buildings are home to some of the world's most precious heritage artefacts.
- Most of the UK's world-renowned collections are in London. They include: The British Museum, The British Library, The National Gallery, National Portrait Gallery V&A, Science Museum, Museum in London, and The National Archives.
- Seven of the top ten visitor attractions in the UK are national museums, yet these institutions (and the broader heritage sector) have been slow to reflect or represent the rich diversity of the communities they₂ serve.

Setting the Scene

- Cultural Diversity and social inclusion have been Culture sector buzzwords for well over a decade in the UK.
- The use of these terms in “policy speak” reflects a long-awaited acknowledgement of the UK’s intrinsic multiculturalism.
- This emergent equalities agenda was brought into sharp focus by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, instigated by the recommendations in the Stephen Lawrence inquiry report (1999) following the brutal and public murder of the black teenager
- This senseless act, and the challenges that followed, forced Britain to recognise and challenge its legacies of institutional racism.
- The legal amendments made in 2000 ensured a framework for service delivery by public authorities to adopt non-discriminatory practices. The culture sector however, due to its limited accountability to these regulations, has been slow to address its own fundamental inequalities and exclusivity.

Setting the Scene

Out of these recent shifts and challenges, many voices within the heritage sector called for changes to the status quo:

- *“The museum industry is a very white, middle-class profession. There is a lack of Black and ethnic minority staff, especially in positions of influence.”*
- *“Mainstreaming ensures that diversity is core activity. Too often diversity programmes are ‘add-ons’ and not included in the holistic culture of the museum.”*
- *“People perceive Black history and Black History Month in particular as a straightforward and rather cheap way of discharging their responsibilities to ethnic minority culture...”*

“ Until Lions have their own historians, tales of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.”

Igbo Proverb, West Africa

Setting the Scene

- The sector acknowledged a dominant perception of heritage institutions being mostly relevant to the 'white elite'.
- Museums, archives and historic houses were used to catering to a minority of Londoners and international tourists, assuming that simple "disinterest" was preventing wider communities from entering their doors.
- The sector had a longstanding history of excluding communities through class as well as cultural distinctiveness by adhering to traditionalist forms of cataloguing, curating, display and interpretation.
- In addition Black History Month, Mela and Chinese New Year were the only ways in which the sector was engaging with multi-ethnic communities. This had precipitated a 'tick-box' mentality, which limited the possibilities for meaningful forms of cultural interaction.
- Furthermore, African and Asian community-based organisations were being approached as outreach 'add ons' that were only useful for initiatives/projects related to their own communities.

GLA Context

The MCAAH was established in 2003 to address these concerns, building on the policies and principles outlined in the Mayor's Culture Strategy. The strategy outlined that:

- **Access to culture should be the right of all Londoners**
- **Improvements in infrastructure and support are necessary to realise the creative potential of London's cultural diversity**
- **Culture should be a means of empowering London's communities**
- **London needs to develop its branding and promote itself as a world cultural city and tourist destination**

**“ Heritage is the ultimate expression
of a multicultural dynamic and
interaction.”**

**Doudou Diène (Office of the United Nations High
Commissioner for Human Rights)**

MCAAH Strategic Vision

The MCAAH core aims were to:

- Address the mainstream's entrenched and exclusive organisational mores and practices in order to enable the sector to support and encourage broader access and engagement with a wider range of the Capital's communities.
- Encourage equitable partnership building between mainstream and community-based heritage organisations as a valuable means of enriching the sector and developing nuanced, inclusive and dynamic notions of heritage and cultural identity.
- Support the development of shared heritage – across cultures, acknowledging the richness of African and Asian cultures as have multi-layered narratives, experiences and contexts.
- Illustrate how African and Asian history, heritage and professional expertise could be more fully utilised to help improve culture and learning opportunities for all Londoners.

“ Many museums were born out of the pain of conquest and of collections that were brought here. I feel that there is a need for the museum community to acknowledge that pain.

Museums that present the culture of the world need to acknowledge the story by which those collections were acquired. An apology for this pain is necessary.”

Professor Jack Lohman (Director, Museum of London Group)

MCAAH Inquiry Process

- The MCAAH inquiry process ran from August 03 to June 04.
- The MCAAH was chaired by pioneering educationalist and equalities advocate Dame Jocelyn Barrow, and was comprised of 20 Black and Asian academics, heritage professionals and creative practitioners.
- Through consultation seminars, forums and negotiations with key infrastructure agencies, the MCAAH gathered vital evidence from mainstream and community-based heritage and cultural organisations, to assess cultural diversity issues impacting London's heritage sector.
- MCAAH delivery partners included 20 key heritage stakeholders who provided evidence and hosted inquiry sessions.
- 400+ participants engaged in the inquiry process including senior managers, practitioners, funders, community representatives and educators.

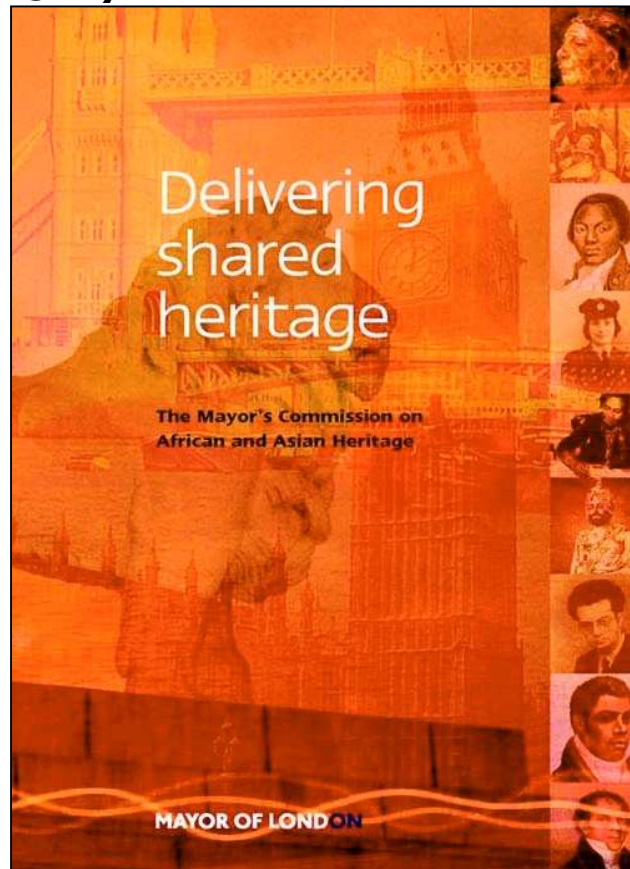
MCAAH Inquiry Process

The core Commission evidence was gathered through 15 seminars, where evidence was presented and debated around the following key issues:

- Increasing Black and Asian representation at senior levels in the sectors workforce and governing bodies.
- Advocating heritage sector accountability to promote cultural democracy and embed equalities good practice.
- Ensuring the continuing representation of Black and Asian histories in mainstream collections.
- Developing recognition of, and investment into, Black and Asian community-based heritage groups.
- Establishing equitable partnership protocols between mainstream organisations and community-based groups.
- Provision for heritage training and career progression for Black and Asian heritage professionals
- Embedding Black and Asian histories and heritage into formal and informal education.

Delivering Shared Heritage

MCAAH Final report, *Delivery Shared Heritage*,
launched in
July 2005



The MCAAH report was a culmination of the whole MCAAH process

It was highly anticipated since it drew on the “lived” experiences of the sector.

It enabled heritage practitioners to lobby for change using concrete evidence.

The narrative interrogated organisational culture, yet also highlighted examples of best practice.

Practical recommendations were presented for reforming cultural diversity practice within the sector

MCAAH Recommendations

The *Delivering Shared Heritage* report outlined recommendations in the following areas:

- **Leadership and advocacy**
- **Diversifying the workforce**
- **Developing and sharing best practice**
- **Valuing African and Asian expertise**
- **African and Asian infrastructure development through investment**
- **Building and sustaining equitable partnerships.**
- **Fostering inclusive education through heritage**

“ The key issue to emerge out of the report is about CONNECTIVITY, about how essential it is to connect smaller with larger organisations, local with national, community-based with those responsible for broader histories. This is the way to make effective change.”

Sandy Nairne (Director, National Portrait Gallery)

Empowering the Sector

- One of the key recommendations to emerge from the MCAAH report was to develop a mechanism for continuing the work begun by the commission.
- With this aim in mind, the **Heritage Diversity Task Force (HDTF)** was established.
- The HDTF builds on the co-operation generated during the MCAAH inquiry process, bringing together the leadership of the sector as a strategic collective.
- Together the HDTF members are utilising their expertise and influence as a leverage for embedding cultural diversity good practice into the sector's infrastructures.
- The HDTF members represent funders, development agencies, government and community-based groups.

Heritage Diversity Task Force (HDTF)

- In order to assess the key priorities for embedding equalities and cultural diversity good practice into the sector, the HDTF receives presentations from specialist subcommittees.
- The **subcommittees** reporting to the Task Force are convened to investigate policy issues and explore 'stand out' initiatives that will enable practical development in their specialised themed areas.
- Subcommittees are comprised of heritage practitioners with relevant working knowledge and expertise in the specified areas of **archives, collections development, workforce development, governance, equalities strategies, and equitable partnerships.**
- This focused collaboration between professionals in a particular area has helped to encourage joined-up thinking critically needed in the sector.

“ Partnerships seem key to mainstreaming. What seems to be important from the position of a national museum is the value and skills that partnership organisations can bring to the museums...The whole issue of mainstreaming is that museums must realise there is much to be gained from those partnerships and how they can effectively work.”

, Eithne Nightingale (Head of Access, Social Inclusion and Community Development, V&A)

Partnership: A Central Theme

- Critically, the MCAAH inquiry programme provided the first ongoing platform for both the mainstream and BME community-based heritage sector to engage together with issues concerning cultural diversity - bringing both to the table as equal partners.
- Such engagement helped to build the cultural and professional frameworks necessary for understanding and 'delivering' shared heritage.
- Partnership was not only the backbone of the Commission process, but was also a critical aspect of its recommendations.
- Building equitable partnerships, based on the exchange of expertise, collaboration and mutual respect, was highlighted as a necessary aspect of change for the heritage sector.

Principles for Partnership

- **Mutual Empowerment**
- **Clarity of Aims**
- **Independence**
- **Commitment**
- **Relevance**
- **Resources**
- **Equality/Respect**

The Road to Success

EUROCITIES Award

In recognition of its unique partnership approach, the MCCAHA was selected winner of the EUROCITIES Award for Cooperation in 2007, as an exemplary European local government initiative promoting 'Cohesive Cities'.



Looking Forwards

- We are still not at the stage where we can pat ourselves on the back.
- The Heritage Diversity Task Force is currently beginning an implementation process to embed Cultural Diversity in the sector, informed by the principles of participation, influence and change.
- Underpinning all of our efforts, is the knowledge that empowering the diversity of human expressions is both a right and a responsibility that makes social, ethical and good business sense!

“ Our work must always be transformative, with the development and inclusion of people as a first concern. Even the cold stones of our museums and galleries must take on a consciousness that speaks of life and progress.”

Patricia Ginton-Meicholas (*President, Bahamas Association for Cultural Studies*)