



From the Director of Television

19th April 2006

Toyin Agbetu  
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Dear Toyin

### 2007 Bicentenary of the Act of Abolition

Thank you for your letters of the 4th March 2006 to myself and Liz Molyneux concerning the BBC's plans to commemorate the 2007 Bicentenary of the UK Act of Abolition.

Of course it is a timely moment to raise your concerns regarding the inclusion of a diversity of African voices and opinions. The BBC has programmes - in production and at planning stage - across all platforms. We are currently considering how these productions may come together to mark this extremely important anniversary and your letter has been forwarded to senior editorial staff so that they are aware of the issues you raise.

The assertion contained within your letter that any programming related to commemorating the bicentenary of the Act of Abolition should be African-led is interesting and surprising, particularly in light of previous correspondence between Ligali and the BBC about *The Slavery Business*. As you know, the two BBC produced films *Breaking the Chains* and *Sugar Dynasty* within that series of three, were series-produced by an African British member of BBC staff who - as outlined in his detailed, 7-page response to Ligali's concerns and criticisms at the time - totally disagreed with Ligali's view that this series was offensive and guilty of denigrating African identity.

This difference of opinion demonstrates that there is no automatic correlation between racial heritage and perspective point of view and that to expect all people of African heritage to share one common view about anything and everything is to deny the diversity that undoubtedly exists within the African Diaspora and on the continent. Your letter suggests that only people with a particular racial background and a particular set of views which are in total accord with those held by Ligali should work on programmes related to Africa and the Diaspora. By extension, this would suggest that only a woman who has been raped could and should make programmes about rape victims .... this is obviously not the case.

My own view is that all BBC programme makers should be able to make programmes on a whole range of subjects, regardless of their background. Documentary makers will often be working on films that deal with subjects outside their own personal experience, for example the award winning *Children of Beslan* film, the deficit in their own knowledge of their subject matter is covered by extensive research, a key skill for all BBC programme makers. BBC programme makers need to be cultural navigators, able to transcend all boundaries and make fair, accurate and balanced programmes about anything.

The BBC is committed to reflecting the diversity of the UK in its output across all platforms. This is diversity in its broadest sense including race, gender, age, social class and education, faith, regionality, sexuality and disability. This is - as I am sure you will acknowledge - a work in progress with room for improvement. But it is of great importance to myself and my senior colleagues in the Television division.

Obviously, due to our previous correspondence, Ligali will not be surprised to learn that I do not agree with some of the other statements made in your letter. The BBC is a large, multifaceted organisation with an enormous variety of output across a range of platforms, so it is inaccurate to assert that because Roly Keating, Controller of BBC TWO, did not agree to the 100BMOL's request for a documentary on Rosa Parks, the whole of the BBC has refused to recognise her importance. Rosa Park's death was reported by several different BBC News bulletins, the **Heaven and Earth Show** did a feature on her life and Radio 4 broadcast **Playing Rosa's Tune. The Music of the Civil Rights Movement** on 14th February 2006. In addition to this, Rosa is also featured on the BBC GCSE Bitesize website, the BBC History website and the Top of the Pops website to name but a few.

In addition you might be interested to know about some other recent projects along with some projects which are underway

1. BBC TWO commissioned and broadcast **Life and Debt in Jamaica**, a film presented by Dr Robert Beckford and shown regularly by 100BMOL in their programme of educational screenings.
2. BBC TWO commissioned **The Apprentice**, won by an African British man, likewise Mastermind, won by Sean Wallace, another African British man.
3. **The Business of Slavery** was a series produced by an African British member of staff.
4. **Africa Lives** was a pan-BBC event, with a wealth of different output and events across all our platforms. Dr Gus Casely-Hayford, founder of Africa 05, was a key BBC partner for the **Africa Lives** season and just one of the African British advisors consulted by the BBC.
5. The **African School** documentary series, part of **Africa Lives**, has now been transmitted twice on BBC.

In answer to the specific questions contained within your letter, I am not able to give you detailed responses as scheduling and exact production details are not available for press release at present. There is TV, radio and online output currently in production including drama, documentary, music, factual and news and current affairs programming. The BBC is also involved in a range of events and input with community links. I can also assure you that we are consulting with African members of staff.

I hope this response will go some way towards reassuring you that the BBC is committed to accurately representing the diversity of the UK in its output.

Yours sincerely

JANA BENNETT  
**Director of Television**