# Black role model project launched

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A £37,200 grant has gone to BTWSC (formerly known as Beyond The Will Smith Challenge), which will research the lives of at least 30 British male role models of African descent over the century from 1907.

A team of young volunteers will also record testimonies from a number of national and local figures. The information collected will be used to create a DVD, booklet, website and a six-month exhibition at Brent Museum.

Links are being forged with local schools and workshops will be arranged to bring the findings direct into the classroom.

For the current project, role models will be chosen from politics, the sciences, the judiciary, business, voluntary organisations and charities. Among those to be studied are composer and musician Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, world-class cricketer and lawyer Leary Constantine, and present day politician and diplomat Paul Boateng.

BTWSC is a not-for-profit organisation that uses the creative arts to promote social inclusion. Its name derives from its first project, the **Beyond The Will Smith Challenge** competition, where young people were encouraged to write poems, songs or short articles that had to be uplifting and devoid of offensive language. It took its inspiration from American superstar actor and rap artist Will Smith's challenge to fellow rap artists to come up with hit songs without using offensive language.

Commenting for BTWSC, co-ordinator Ms Ama Serwah, said: "Too often, it is said that there are not enough British male role models of African descent. This is simply not true. We do not need to continually look outside Britain, to places like America. Britain has countless role models in various fields, not just in music and entertainment. Many are unsung heroes close to home, who are doing their best to improve their communities."

For the Heritage Lottery Fund, Chairman of the London Committee Wesley Kerr, said: "All young people need examples to see what is possible, and HLF is all about people of all backgrounds fulfilling their potential. I am delighted that this is one of many similar projects that we have supported over the years, and this week's inauguration of President Obama shows that everybody has the potential for greatness."

In December the HLF also announced a grant of £96,200 to ensure that the only known portrait of a prominent British female role model – Victorian nurse Mary Seacole – could remain at the National Portrait Gallery.

**Notes to editors**

Black role models who will feature in the project include:

Henry Sylvester Williams –first African barrister to practice in Britain up to 1908. He was a pan-Africanist organiser, and was involved in local politics – he won a seat on the Marylebone Borough Council.

Dr Harold Moody – qualified as a medical doctor in 1910 and was a pioneering race relations activist in the UK .

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor – gifted composer, whose musical composition Hiawatha's Wedding Feast was a critical and

commercial success. Until his death in 1912, he was Professor of Composition at the Trinity College of Music in London. He brought an African perspective to classical music.

Paul Boateng – a lawyer who had a mercurial rise in national politics. In 1997 he became the first African British minister. Prior to this, he was a community and political activist.

Bernie Grant – one of the first Black British MPs and a prominent civil rights leader.

Carl Palmer – one of three entrepreneurial brothers who set up Pama Records in 1967, the forerunner of Jetstar Records, which is an on-going business and one of the biggest reggae distributor in Europe.

Lord Leary Constantine – he moved effortlessly from being a world class cricketer in the 1920s-40s, to becoming a lawyer, and was knighted and made a peer in the 1960s. He brought a successful ‘colour bar’ case in the 1940s.

Professor Geoff Palmer – from being assessed as educationally sub normal, he went on, in spite of several racist obstacles, to become a renowned scientist, gaining a PhD and Dsc. His academic work and discoveries through the 1960s-80s transformed the brewing industries worldwide.

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported more than 28,000 projects, allocating over £4.2billion across the UK, with over £840 million has granted in London alone.

**Further information**

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