



Carter G. Woodson

BLACK HISTORY MONTH 2013

Black History Month originated in the United States as Negro History Week in 1926, at the initiative of Carter G. Woodson. His intention was to teach the history of black peoples in the States and to celebrate their traditions and cultures.

The week was expanded to a month in 1976, and has been observed in the UK every October since 1987. Black History Month has become a popular and successful celebration of the achievements and traditions of black peoples.

The Inns of Court have admitted many influential members of these communities, a selection of whom were presented in a display in the Inner Temple Library in 2013 and in this accompanying leaflet.

Further information and events surrounding Black History Month in the UK can be found online at www.blackhistorymonth.org.uk



The admission of overseas students to the Inns in the 19th century

From the admission registers, it seems that the first Asian member of the Inner Temple was Aviet Agabeg from Calcutta, a student of St. John's College, Cambridge, who was admitted on 11 June 1864 and called to the bar in 1868. He was followed, several years later, by Amanda Mohan Bose, Ali Ameer and Pathal Chandra Roy of Bengal (admitted in 1870); Arraloon Carapiel and John Apcar of Calcutta and Grija Sanker Sen of Dacca (admitted in 1871). There may have been others. The number of Asian students continued to rise in the 1870s and 1880s and included Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, who was admitted to the Inner Temple in 1888. Admissions to the other Inns of Court follow a similar pattern, with Lincoln's Inn claiming the first Indian student to join and become qualified: Ganendra Mohan Tagore, admitted in 1859 and called to the bar on 11 June 1862. By 1885, one hundred and eight Indian barristers had been educated in England, encouraged by the Indian government, the Inns of Court and the Council of Legal Education, which granted concessions to Indian students to facilitate their training. Lincoln's Inn also recruited a number of indigenous students from further east in the nineteenth century, the first being Ng Achoy (Wu Ting-Fang) from Hong Kong, admitted in 1872 and called in 1877. Lincoln's still retains a special association with India and Hong Kong.

However, identifying black African, American and West Indian bar students poses a problem, since the majority had adopted European style names. We know from other sources that Alexander Kennedy Isbiter of Hudson's Bay, admitted to the Middle Temple in 1862 and called to the bar in 1864, was part native American and that Thomas Morris Chester, admitted to the Middle Temple in 1867 and called in 1870, was a black American, probably the first black American to qualify as a barrister in England. Similarly without further evidence it would be impossible to detect that Christian Frederick Cole, the second son of Jacob Cole of Kiskey, Sierra Leone, clergyman, was a black African. He matriculated as a non-collegiate student at Oxford University in 1873, was admitted to the Inner Temple in 1879 and called to the bar in 1883. Cole seems to have been the first black student to join Oxford University and his appearance at university events caused considerable interest.

Whilst Oxford and Cambridge Universities seem to have started to accept black students in the 1860s and 1870s, the same period as the Inns of Court, it appears that non-denominational University College London commenced almost 30 years earlier. London University's first (quarter) black American student, an emancipated slave called Moses Roper, was admitted to UCL in 1838, whilst Indian students appeared in the admission registers from at least the 1840s.

English common law was considered an important area of study, since it was in operation in all the British colonies, although it never entirely replaced native laws and customs. Moreover, training for the bar had the added advantage of equipping students with advocacy skills and conferring status, prestige and potential wealth at home. It is no coincidence that many of the leaders of the early independence movements had been trained as barristers in England. These included Gandhi, Nehru, Seretse Khama, the first president of Bechuanaland (modern Botswana) and Tunku Abdul Rahman, founder of modern Malaysia; all of whom had been educated at the Inner Temple. Whilst in Britain, they adopted the dress and manners of English gentlemen in line with their contemporaries. Mohandas Gandhi was no exception. Nevertheless, Gandhi maintained a number of Indian practices and traditions in London, including his diet. As a committed vegetarian he must have caused some commotion in the Inner Temple kitchens on dining nights. However, he was a popular member of any student mess, because his refusal to drink alcohol meant that there was more wine for his companions.

Meanwhile, the promotion of British higher education spread further through the Empire. Students from Japan and Hong Kong arrived in England soon after those from India, whilst the sons of African chiefs, merchants and clerics were admitted to the Inns of Court and universities not long afterwards. In the West Indies the situation was different. With the virtual extinction of the indigenous peoples, the black population was made up almost entirely from former slaves, who did not share the advantages of their eastern counterparts. However, after emancipation, an educated class emerged, some of whom were able to send their sons to Britain. Since former slaves tended to adopt the surnames of their European masters, it is difficult to assess when the first black West Indians entered the Inns of Court. Certainly they were in evidence by the 1890s. In 1899 George Christian of Dominica, the son of a former slave, was admitted to Gray's Inn, where he was called to the bar in 1902. He was to play a significant part in the pan-African Congress held in London in 1900. He subsequently went to West Africa to assist in the establishment of the British legal system there.

To return to India, a country in which the vast majority of women remained in subjugation, it is interesting to find evidence of surprisingly liberal views amongst the Indian intelligentsia in Bengal. Thus Cornelia Sorabji, a Parsee whose parents were Christian, was allowed to travel to England to matriculate at Somerville Hall in 1888. In 1892 she became the first woman at Oxford University to sit the examination for Bachelor of Civil Law, although she could not be awarded the degree to which she was entitled for another thirty years. After the passing of the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act in 1919, Cornelia Sorabji was amongst the first women to be admitted to Lincoln's Inn. She was called to the bar in 1923, the year after the first female barrister, Ivy Williams, had been called at the Inner Temple. She subsequently enrolled in the Calcutta High Court and worked assiduously to remove the disadvantages of purdah.



**Bhimrao Ramji
Ambedkar (1891-1956)**

Adm GI 1916; Call 1922

One of the first
'untouchables' to obtain
a college education.

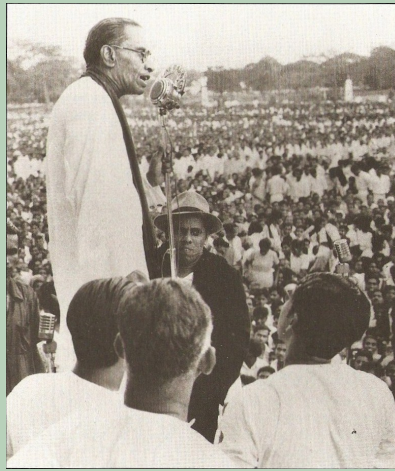
Upon India's
independence in 1947
he was appointed the
nation's first Law
Minister.



**Shami Chakrabarti CBE
(1969-)**

Adm MT 1993; Call 1994;
Bencher 2006

Director of Liberty since
2003



**Solomon West
Ridgeway Dias
Bandaranaike (1899-
1959)**

Adm IT 1920; Call 1924

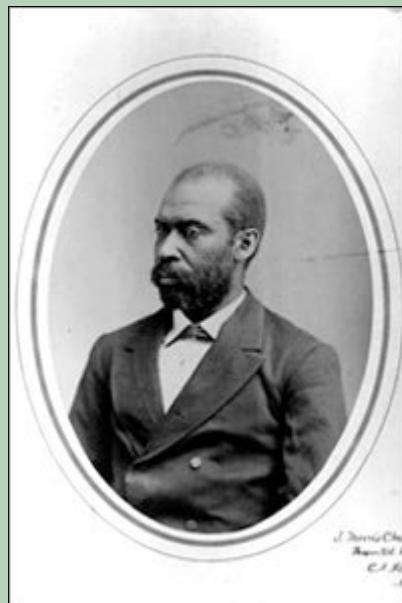
Founder of the Sri Lanka
Freedom Party. Prime
Minister of Ceylon
(afterwards Sri Lanka),
1956-1959



**Rt Hon. Paul Boateng
(1951-)**

Adm GI 1989; Call 1989

MP 1987-2005; British
High Commissioner in
South Africa 2005-2009;
Member of the House of
Lords since 2010

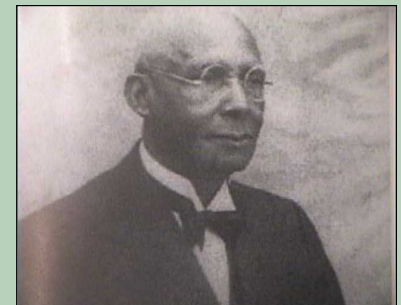


Cheyney University of Pennsylvania

**Thomas Morris Chester
(1834-1892)**

Adm MT 1867; Call 1870

The first black American
to qualify as a barrister in
England; Civil War
correspondent



**George James
Christian (1869-1940)**

Adm GI 1899; Call 1902

Son of a former slave, he
played a significant part
in the Pan African
Congress held in
London in 1900. He
subsequently went to
West Africa to assist in
the establishment of the
British legal system
there.



**Dame Linda Penelope
Dobbs, DBE (1951-)**

Adm GI 1980; Call 1981;
Bencher 2002

First non-white person
appointed to the senior
judiciary of England and
Wales. High Court Judge
2004-2013



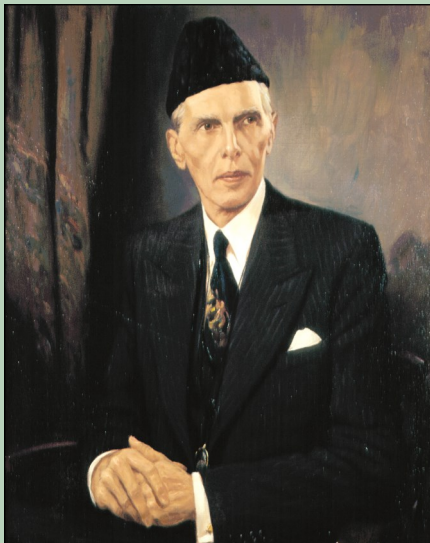
**Mohandas
Karamchand Gandhi
(1869-1948)**

Adm IT 1888; Call 1891;
Disbarred 1922;
Reinstated 1988
Architect of Indian
independence



**Hon. Yong Pung How
(1926-)**

Adm IT 1946; Call
1951; Bencher 1997
Chief Justice of the
Supreme Court of
Singapore 1990-2006



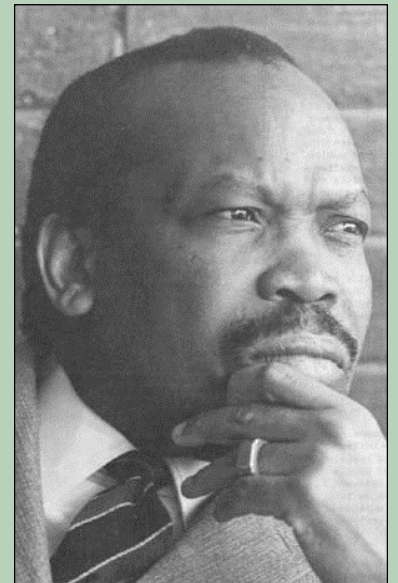
**Muhammad Ali Jinnah
(1876-1948)**

Adm LI 1893; Call 1896
Founder and first Governor-
General of Pakistan



**Sibghatullah Kadri QC
(1937-)**

Adm IT 1961; Call 1969;
Bencher 1997; QC 1989
Joint founder of the
Society of Black Lawyers
1973; Member of the
Race Relations Committee
of the Bar between 1983-
1985 and 1988-1989



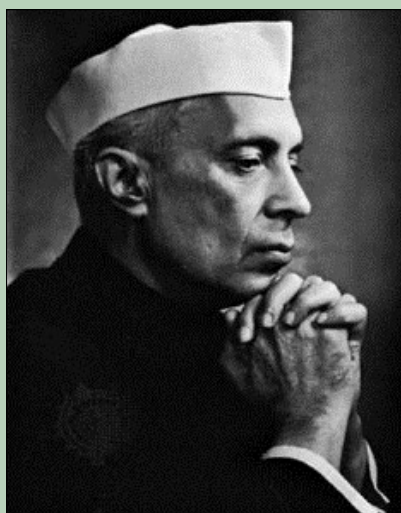
**Seretse Khama
(1921-1980)**

Adm IT 1946
First President of
Botswana



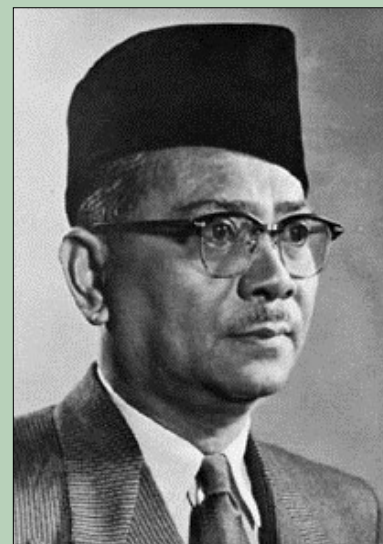
Her Honour Judge Mensah (1959-)

Adm LI 1982; Call 1984;
Bencher 2005
Circuit Judge since
2005; Senior
Immigration Judge,
Asylum and
Immigration Tribunal
(formerly Vice-
President, Immigration
Appeal Tribunal), since
2003



Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964)

Adm IT 1909; Call 1912
First Prime Minister of
India



Tunku Abdul Rahman (1903-1990)

Adm IT 1924; Call 1949;
Bencher 1970
Founding father and first
Prime Minister of
Malaysia



Dr The Honourable Navinchandra Ramgoolam (1947-)

Adm IT 1989; Call 1993
Prime Minister of the
Republic of Mauritius



Baroness Scotland of Asthal

Adm MT 1976; Call
1977; Bencher 1997
QC 1991; Attorney
General 2007-2010;
Shadow Attorney
General 2010-



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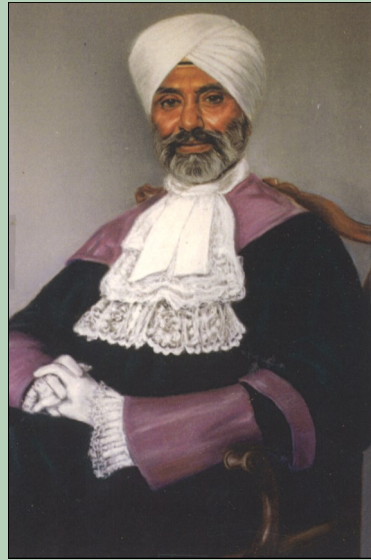
Sir Desmond de Silva QC (1939-)

Adm MT 1959; Call 1964
QC 1984; Chief
Prosecutor, International
Criminal Court, Sierra
Leone 2005-2006



The Hon. Mr Justice Singh (1964-)

Adm LI 1984; Call 1989
QC 2002; High Court
Judge since 2011



His Honour Mota Singh QC (1930-)

Adm LI 1952; Call 1956;
Bencher 2002 QC 1978;
Circuit Judge 1982-
2002



Cornelia Sorabji (1866-1954)

Adm LI 1922; Call 1923
First woman graduate in
India, first woman to
practise law in India,
and a champion of
women's rights



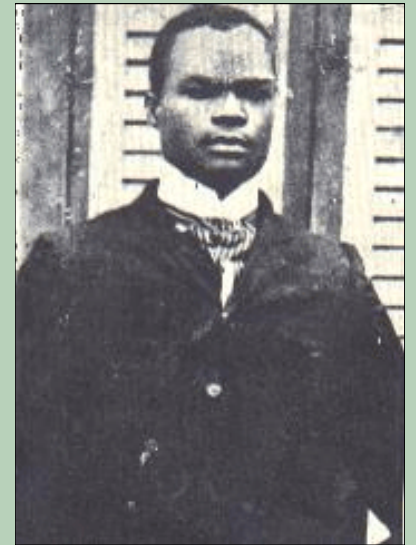
Baron Taylor of Warwick (1952-)

Adm GI 1975; Call
1978. Writer; Radio &
TV presenter



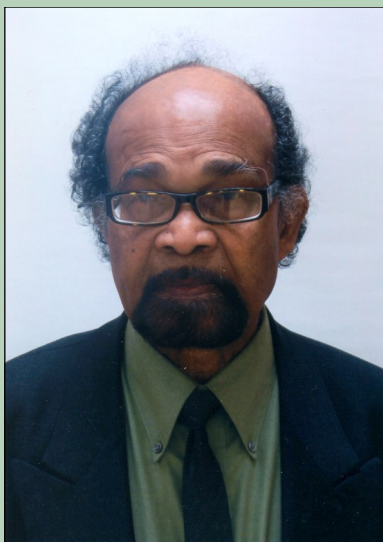
Wu Ting-Fang (1842-1922)

Adm LI 1872; Call 1877
Chinese Government
Minister under both the
Empire and the People's
Republic



Henry Sylvester Williams (1869-1911)

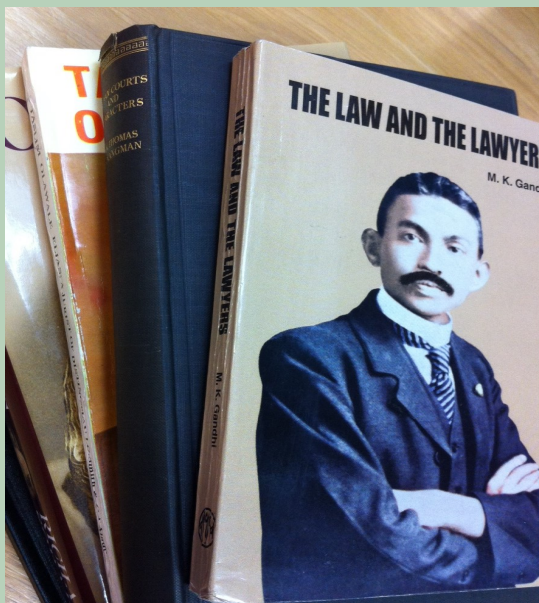
Adm GI 1899
He was instrumental in
the creation of the
African Association (Pan
African Association)



Len Woodley QC (1927-)

Adm IT 1960; Call 1963;
supernumerary Bencher
1990

Became Britain's first
Queen's Counsel of
Caribbean origin in 1988



MATERIAL HELD IN THE INNER TEMPLE LIBRARY

The Library holds many titles relating to members featured in this display, and other important black legal figures. A selection is presented here, but please search our online catalogue for a full record.

- Black Letter Law. (6th ed. 2011) Collection: REF (Bla)
- The law and the lawyers / by M.K. Gandhi (1999) Collection: LEGAL BIOG
- Trial of Gandhiji / edited by J.M. Selat (1965) Collection: TRIALS (Folio)
- Colour bar : the triumph of Seretse Khama and his nation / by S. Williams (1996). Collection: BIOG (Khama)
- Selected works of Jawaharlal Nehru : second series / By J. Nehru (1984-1988) Collection: BIOG
- Opening doors : the untold story of Cornelia Sorabji, reformer, lawyer and champion of women's rights in India / by R. Sorabji (2010) Collection: LEGAL BIOG
- English law and ethnic minority customs / Sebastian Poulter ; consulting editor Desmond de Silva (1986) Collection: EDS
- Sir Adetokunbo Ademola, Chief Justice of the Federation of Nigeria : a biography / by F. Coker (1960) Collection: LEGAL BIOG
- Taslim Olawale Elias : a jurist of distinction / by I.O. Smith & C.A. Alade (1991) Collection: LEGAL BIOG