

I was brought up to not rock the boat, especially when it was about culture and race. My parents disliked drawing attention to us. They both experienced a lot of racial discrimination and were often dismissed when they challenged it. At school, we focused on British values and culture. We skirted past slavery – though of course, it was emphasised that it was history and that the Western world was not to blame. Sheepish for having a difficult to pronounce Nigerian name, I always offered an Anglicised version or my British name. I adopted white role models, listened to mainstream music and avoided speaking my mother's tongue. Blending in and apologising for being afflicted with "blackness" was the norm.

Since starting University, my African heritage has felt especially important. I listened to a TEDx talk about 'third culture' children, caught and confused between different cultures and recognised this dissonance within myself. I started to explore and embrace my heritage in many ways. I slowly started to reclaim my Nigerian name, cooked traditional foods, read news in Yoruba and listened more to rap, grime, afrobeats and R&B.

I was particularly captivated by black music. I had once dismissed a lot of music for being crude. Now these same lyrics were poetic and poignant, delving into the stark reality of poverty and exclusion. Somehow, artists were able to craft anger, pain and desperation into something hauntingly beautiful.

As part of work, I was tasked with coming up with an event for a Black History Month 2020 and decided upon looking at the history of Black music. Researching black music was an interesting and amazing experience. I spent hours listening – and singing along abysmally - to Motown, samba, jazz, R&B, grime and the blues. I delved into various cultures, stories and biographies. I was surprised to say the very least – I didn't realise that for many black people, being heard was a stressful ordeal. I am so used to hearing Beyoncé and Stormzy on the radio that it feels like that was always the case. However, in the shadows, many glass ceilings had to be and are still being smashed. There are so many beautiful and talented voices lost in the abyss. Ongoing is still a massive fight for justice. It has taken such a long time for grime and rap to be accepted. Unfortunately, it seems that being a talented black artist isn't enough – you have to be a pioneer, a rebel, role-model – and maybe then, if you collaborate with a white artist and mellow the rawness of your grime, you may and reach the UK official charts or make it to air time or radio.

Realising this has changed my view of music entirely. Music is powerful. It makes me appreciate Motown, who were a black record label creating opportunities for black artists. It hits me deep in my soul when Dave raps *"Black is pain, black is joy, black is evident/It's workin' twice as hard as the people you know you're better than."* Most of all, researching into black music has shown me that society has come far from the black slaves who sang the blues to keep up their morale. However, there is still so much work that needs to be done and so much talent that is being stifled.

Discussing these issues once a year in October is not good enough. We need to make consistent efforts all throughout the year to look at the contemporary realities and struggles of black people. We need to listen black people and as they express themselves without trying to refine or change their voices.