

Mary Prince

Mary Prince was a British abolitionist and one of the first Black writers to publish a book in England. She was born in Bermuda in 1788 to enslaved parents and aged 12, she was sold to a number of brutal owners, suffering significant mistreatment. In 1826, she married Daniel James, a former slave who had bought his own freedom. She had to marry secretly and was beaten by her owner when the wedding was discovered. In 1828, Mary Prince was taken to London from Antigua along with her master and his family, and later escaped captivity with the help of domestic servants and campaigned against slavery whilst working alongside the Anti-Slavery Society. While living in London, England, Mary Prince documented her slave narrative in *The History of Mary Prince* (1831). This was the first publication in the UK to ever document the experience of a Black woman. The account was transcribed for Prince as she was illiterate, whilst living and working at the home of Anti-Slavery Society founder, Thomas Pringle. The first-hand account of enslavement was released during a time when slavery remained legal in Bermuda and British Caribbean colonies, which thus had a galvanising effect on the anti-slavery movement. Mary was the first woman to present an anti-slavery petition to Parliament.

Poly Styrene

Marianna Joan Elliott-Said “Poly Styrene” was a British musician, singer-songwriter and one of the first female punk icons. Styrene was born in 1957 in Bromley, England and raised in London. Aged 19, she decided to form the punk band X-Ray Spex. She became known for her unpolished vocals and protests against consumerism and environmental destruction. X-Ray Spex’s best-known song was Oh Bondage Up Yours! Which spelled a rejection of social and gender norms. She was involved in antiracist activity and played on stage at Victoria Park for the Rock Against Racism march in 1978. After the band split up, Styrene went on to record a more subdued solo album entitled Translucence before retreating from the music industry to move into a Krishna temple with her daughter. In February 2011, in a *Sunday Times* magazine interview, Styrene revealed she was suffering with cancer and died two months later, at the age of 53.

Muriel and Doris Lester

Muriel and Doris Lester were two of five children of Henry Edward Lester, an eminent Victorian shipping engineer. They were born into a wealthy family in Leytonstone in 1883 and 1886, and came to learn of poverty after seeing the slums and poverty of London’s East End from trains whilst travelling in to the City. They became committed to those who did not experience the same privilege and later founded the Children’s House in Bromley-by-Bow in 1923 and Kingsley Hall in 1928. Doris was a teacher and believed in progressive education and she persuaded her sister that the new buildings would enable a psychological transformation of the people and the environment which would be run by the local community. The women created an ideal learning environments for young children amongst dirty and polluted cities. Muriel and Doris did not see their work as charity but an “overdue act of justice.” Both community centres remain in use today.

Nasreen Siddique

Nasreen Siddique is an Asian woman whose family lived under siege for almost six years in London. In 1982, aged 12, her father opened a shop in Stratford but was soon tormented by local youths who were consistently abusive and targeted the family because of their 'race'. Nasreen kept a diary of the racist attacks on her and her family. She revealed how the abuse continued for six years night-after-night and forced her father to board up the shop and block their letterbox. The council offered to move the family, but they refused, arguing that they wanted the racists dealt with. The attacks relented after six years when the Siddique family took the minicab office which attracted the youths next door, to court and it was closed down. Nasreen later commented that she never experienced childhood. Her accounts were covered in *The Daily Mirror* and she became known as 'Anne Frank with a telephone.'