

<b>Institution:</b> Anglia Ruskin University
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 28
<b>Title of case study:</b> War Babies of Black GIs and British Women: increasing a sense of belonging and engendering public awareness
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2013-2020
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>
<b>Name(s):</b> Lucy Bland
<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b> Professor of Social and Cultural History
<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b> September 2013 - present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2015 - December 2020
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)  This project has directly transformed the lives of over 60 people born to black GIs and British women in World War II. These mixed-race Britons were interviewed, and their histories presented on radio, television, in a book, articles and two exhibitions. Telling their stories (of racism, the stigma of being illegitimate, racial confusion and a lack of belonging) and being helped to find US relatives has increased their sense of belonging and enriched their lives. Many have met each other through the project, thereby giving them a sense of community. Their narrated stories have also changed public understanding of this largely unknown recent history.
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)  During World War II, of the 3,000,000 American GIs stationed in Britain, approximately 8% were African-American. The latter's relationships with British women resulted in the birth of an estimated 2,000 mixed-race offspring, labelled 'brown babies' by the African-American press. As the black population of Britain in the 1930s was 7,000-8,000, these 2,000 children born over three years represented a 25% rise in British people of colour. Black GIs, in the then segregated US Army, were generally forbidden by their (white) commanding officers to marry their white girlfriends. Nearly half of the mothers of these babies, faced with the stigma of illegitimacy and a mixed-race child, placed their children in children's homes. However, few were adopted as adoption societies would not take a 'half-caste' on their books, deeming them 'too hard to place'. There has been minimal study of these children and the difficulties they faced, such as racism, lack of a father or a clear identity. Bland's project is the first to undertake an in-depth study of these 'children' (now in their 70s) drawing upon over 60 first-hand accounts – oral histories – that chart and historically contextualise this important, but hitherto neglected, aspect of black history and of World War II, in terms of the period's practices and beliefs concerning race, prejudice, illegitimacy, government policy and child welfare.  Bland was the sole researcher. She received a British Academy/Leverhulme small research grant for September 2015 - December 2016 for travel and transcription. This enabled the employment of professional transcribers for the interviews and allowed the tapes to be edited for storage at the Black Cultural Archives (BCA) where they can be accessed by the public.  Key findings of her research include realisation of some of the difficulties faced by these children: illegitimacy; for those placed in homes, little likelihood of adoption; for all the children

<p><b>Institution:</b> Anglia Ruskin University</p> <p>an extreme sense of difference, isolation, experience of racism and lack of role models, especially given that the vast majority of these children were growing up in predominantly 'white' geographical areas; very little knowledge as children of their fathers, giving a strong desire to find their 'origins'; a sense of self-worth if and when they found birth fathers or US relatives. Also discovered were the extreme difficulties facing the mothers of these children. Key publications disseminating this work are listed below, the main one being <u>Reference 3</u>. <u>Reference 1</u> considers the British Government's ambivalence about these children being mixed-race and half-American, <u>Reference 2</u> highlights the bravery of the mothers who kept their children, <u>Reference 4</u> focuses on the children's search for their fathers' roots.</p> <p><b>3. References to the research</b> (indicative maximum of six references)</p> <p><u>Publications and grants</u> (all solely by, or obtained by, Lucy Bland):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Lucy Bland, 'Interracial Relationships and the "Brown Baby Question": Black GIs, White British Women and their Mixed-Race Offspring in World War II', <i>Journal of the History of Sexuality special forum on 'Sex, Love and Violence in World War II'</i>, 26:3, 2017: 424-453. <a href="https://doi.org/10.7560/JHS26304">https://doi.org/10.7560/JHS26304</a> Peer-reviewed.</li> <li>2) Lucy Bland, 'Defying racial prejudice: Second World War relationships between British women and black GIs and the raising of their offspring', <i>Women's History Review</i>, 28:6, 2019: 853-868. <a href="http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2017.1346867">http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2017.1346867</a> Peer-reviewed.</li> <li>3) Lucy Bland, <i>Britain's 'Brown Babies': the stories of children born to Black GIs and White Women in the Second World War</i> (MUP, May 2019) ISBN: 978 1 5261 3326 7. Submitted in REF2.</li> <li>4) Lucy Bland, 'Born to Black GIs: from the demonization of father and child to the search for American roots', <i>Journal of Transatlantic Studies</i>, 18 (3), 333-352, 2020, <a href="https://doi.org/10.1057/s42738-020-00052-z">https://doi.org/10.1057/s42738-020-00052-z</a> Peer-reviewed.</li> <li>5) Lucy Bland, British Academy/Leverhulme Small Research Grant for September 2015 - December 2016: 'An Exploration of the Experience of Growing Up as Mixed-Race Offspring of African-American Soldiers and British Women born during the Second World War', £5,255; Reference: SG151118. Peer-reviewed.</li> </ol> <p><b>4. Details of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 750 words)</p> <p>Bland's research has been extensively disseminated. Her book <i>Britain's 'Brown Babies'</i> has sold over 2,000 copies, in hardback and on Amazon Kindle. An exhibition, created by Bland with the support of a designer, was launched at the Black Cultural Archives (BCA) in November 2019, funded by a small grant from the <i>Being Human Festival</i>. It then started a tour of the country, but given Covid-19, it was exhibited only in London and Manchester, November 2019 – March 2020. Footfall at the BCA, Brixton, where the exhibition was situated for 2 weeks, was c.800 a week; Church Street Library, Edgware, where it went next for 2 months, had c.1,800 a week, while Manchester Central Library, where it was for 2 months until lockdown, has approximately 2,000,000 visitors a year, so a footfall of c.38,000 a week. The exhibition, along with certain oral histories and new material from others who have approached Bland, was then greatly expanded and uploaded onto the digital website Mixed Museum in September 2020 (<a href="https://www.mixedmuseum.org.uk/brown-babies">https://www.mixedmuseum.org.uk/brown-babies</a>). By late December the online exhibition had had 1,120 visitors. On request, Bland and the Mixed Museum wrote an article for the Museum Association and a blog about the exhibition for The National Archives in December 2020. The museum's profile is expanding through Twitter, Facebook and YouTube: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCuPWq3GIb6D5VJTgZx1Odg">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCuPWq3GIb6D5VJTgZx1Odg</a>.</p>
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In addition, the research has been disseminated through 50 talks (to universities, libraries, museums, government departments, community groups), 30 local, national and international radio and television programmes (including the BBC's Woman's Hour, with an audience of 4 million) and articles, including in *The Conversation*, May 2019 (with over 66,000 reads and republished by Scroll.in) and *BBC History Magazine*, August 2019 (with a 98,000 readership). A Channel 4 documentary with Wall-to-Wall production company will appear in 2021, currently delayed by Covid-19.

### **Beneficiaries**

- 1) The mixed-race GI babies whose stories were recounted in one-to-one interviews with Bland.
- 2) 23 people not in the book but themselves mixed-race GI babies who have contacted Bland on hearing of the project.
- 3) A wider public, in the UK, Ireland, Europe, US and Australia, who, in exhibition surveys, relate how they have now learnt about a new aspect of Black British history.

### **1) In what ways did the GI babies benefit?**

#### ***Narrating personal stories***

Bland's interviewees/participants benefitted greatly through the cathartic process of telling their stories. Since everything written about each interviewee was shown to them for their approval, they feel a real stake in the final product. To quote one: 'I have an official history, as a member of a collective, and as a person of indeterminate, hybrid ethnicity. It also feels good to have an opportunity to contribute my small piece in the telling of that story...I feel like I belong here in the UK just that little bit more.' Another wrote: 'I can't thank you enough. It feels like vindication for what was a difficult start in life. My grandchildren will read it one day and hopefully learn about how it was in the words of us who lived it. If I could have put into words what I hoped for at the end of my life it would have been a book that told my story - you did that.' There are at least twenty such testimonials ([source 1](#)).

#### ***Creating a Sense of Community***

At the book launch in June 2019 there were over 160 people present, including many of the interviewees, and their families. Two participants gave speeches, one declaring: 'It was a tonic for me to talk to someone who really wanted to know about me and how my life had been.' Another summed up the main effects of the book on his life: 'Catharsis, tears, healing and empowerment.' ([source 1](#)). At this launch they formed a private Facebook group: 'Britain's "Brown Babies"'. Membership of this group is growing as Bland directs new contacts to it. It is a forum for sharing stories, photographs and meeting each other and is seen by its 50 participants as hugely valuable. For example, one wrote: 'It is so comforting to know that we all share very similar experiences which until now we could not express. I am sure most of us felt alone in our anguish of those early days.' ([source 2](#)). This growing community of self-defined 'brown babies' is an important aspect of the project's impact.

#### ***Finding relatives via DNA***

There are also the benefits of DNA testing, which have led to a greater sense of belonging and racial pride. When Bland first interviewed her participants, many said they knew little or nothing about their fathers, often not even a name. She encouraged them to undergo a DNA test then join the free organisation GI Trace (an on-line self-help group that traces GI relatives) and seek the advice of a freelance DNA researcher. The researcher has so far helped 13 of Bland's interviewees. To quote her testimonial: 'Without a doubt finding American birth families has changed people's lives.... There is a common phrase used by many people...: "thank you, you have given me my roots". Without Lucy referring these people and many others to me they would not have found their American families.' ([source 3](#)). One recently found his half-sister and commented: 'the Brown Babies' story is still unfolding, even as we speak. It's so important to know where you come from. It can mean so much to so many people.' ([source 2](#))

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## 2) Those 'brown babies' not in the book

There are a further 23 'brown babies' that Bland has come to know about since the publication of her book, many of whom approached her, delighted that 'their' story was at last being told. For example, one wrote: 'Thank you for writing this book. It describes a part of Britain's social history that was almost lost and here, thankfully, is recovered. The story you tell speaks directly and personally to me in a way that other race-related social research has never done. I too was one of the "brown babies". I am utterly amazed by the insight that your book gives me into my own experience.' ([source 4](#)). Nine of these 'brown babies' have had their stories added to the new digital exhibition.

## 3) Raising awareness in the wider public

The wider public has benefitted from hearing about the research, learning about an unknown aspect of British black history, history of World War II and the post-war childcare system ([sources 5-10](#)). [Source 8](#) gives feedback from the online exhibition in the form of surveys. Asked in the survey what they took away from the exhibition, one wrote: 'The truth of our "official" histories hides in the stories people don't tell - because we don't ask. Stories, questions, wonder - they all take time, time we think we don't have. Thanks so much for asking the questions, taking the time, sharing the stories. My aunt, who survived Auschwitz, only told her own story after seeing *Schindler's List*. I hope others will be inspired to ask more questions, and to hear more stories. Thank you, thank you.' Another commented: 'The powerful nature of the personal stories which are so moving and also the amazing power of old photographs when well explained and contextualised. A really engaging exhibition - full of life, and in turns poignant, sad and at times joyful.' Another plans to share: 'the whole exhibition. It's absolutely fascinating. I love the use of images and oral testimony. The impact of these resources is incredibly powerful.' The exhibition is explicitly encouraging the writing of a 'Responses' section, a resource which is contributing further to the exhibition, and creating a new archive for other researchers, as is substantiated by [source 9](#). A museum in Norfolk, Ancient House Museum, has used the findings from the book and the online exhibition in their educational programme with schools ([source 10](#)).

The research has made a very distinctive, tangible contribution to the lives of the 'brown babies', giving them a sense of well-being, community (ever-growing as more find the Facebook group and the online exhibition), empowerment and knowledge of their heritage. It has also made an important contribution to popular historical knowledge about the plight of these children and a new dimension to the history of World War II. The product of Bland's research is innovative in creating a self-sustaining community of participants which will last well beyond the end of the research project.

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Ten dossiers have been drawn up by Bland that corroborate impact:

- 1) Emails from the 'brown babies' and two speeches given at the June 2019 book launch
- 2) Comments from the Facebook 'Britain's "Brown Babies"'
- 3) Testimonial from DNA Researcher
- 4) Positive reactions from other 'brown babies'
- 5) Comments from audience at Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) talk, 1 October 2019.
- 6) Comments from audiences at several other talks
- 7) Comments from spectators of the physical exhibition
- 8) *Mixed Museum* survey responses
- 9) Testimonial from the director of *Mixed Museum*
- 10) Statement from Learning Officer, Ancient House Museum, Norfolk