

SPOTLIGHT ON: BLACK HISTORY MONTH



CHRISTIANAH BABAJIDE



AYANNA NELSON



For Black History Month, Christianah Babajide speaks to Ayanna Nelson, Barrister at 7BR, about her journey to the Bar.



#BLACKHISTORYMONTH2022



#BLACKHISTORYMONTH2022



What inspired you to become a barrister?



I've wanted to be a barrister since I was very young, and so I can't quite remember what it was specifically that inspired me, but I remember thinking that being a barrister was the 'best' job for the 'cleverest' people, and therefore only the best would do! As a proud member of a working class immigrant family I didn't know any barristers, and so my only point of reference was the ITV drama *Kavanagh QC*!



#BLACKHISTORYMONTH2022

Q

Have you faced any challenges as a person of colour?



A

The challenge I face most commonly, and it's something I've faced my entire life, is not being taken seriously by people I meet. I'm frequently patronised or spoken down to by judges and opponents before I've even opened my mouth to speak. It's as if they have very limited expectations of me from the outset. The clear (positive) change in their demeanour once I begin to address them confirms this; you can literally see the shock on their faces. This is something I've grown used to, but it continues to frustrate (and sometimes upset) me nonetheless. If you add into the mix that I'm a woman, and look much younger than I in fact am, being taken seriously becomes an almost daily challenge.



#BLACKHISTORYMONTH2022



How can the Bar tackle diversity issues?



There appears now to be some recognition that the Bar is not as diverse as it could and should be, although I do think that there's an over-reliance on unhelpful statistics. Whilst the proportion of minority barristers compares favourably with our overall representation in UK society, this doesn't account for the fact that the overwhelming majority of barristers practise from London, Birmingham, Manchester and other large cities, all of which have large ethnic minority populations. The comparison is therefore akin to apples vs. oranges. I'm certain that if proper, proportional calculations were made, factoring in these variables, we would find that the ethnic diversity within the profession is woefully low. Until we accept this fact, we will continue to celebrate our achievements prematurely, which in turn will hinder any further progress.



#BLACKHISTORYMONTH2022

Q

If you could speak to your younger self today, what would you say to her?



A

My younger self was fearless, hugely ambitious and liked nothing more than being told 'no' in order to motivate her. As time has gone on, these qualities have been watered down by a combination of the cynicism that comes naturally with age and a growing list of responsibilities, which means that far less time can be devoted to dreaming. Also, and most interestingly, it seems that the more you achieve, the more prominent the 'imposter syndrome' becomes, which really makes no sense, given that we should really feel buoyed by our achievements. If I could speak to my younger self, I would tell her to write down exactly what it is that allows her to remain fearless, ambitious and motivated, and keep it somewhere safe, so that the older me could take it out and read it whenever I have moments of self-doubt.