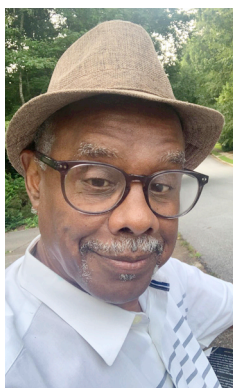


## COMMENTARY / CULTURE

## “Don’t Go for the Okey-doke... (or the Single Story)!”



There’s not a day that goes by when I don’t get several annoying messages from scammers promising me millions of bucks once I pay their required “delivery fee.” Am I alone in this experience? Anyway, here’s an abbreviated version

of one of the latest:

“Hello dear. I’m Elizabeth from the federal government of Nigeria and contacting you regarding your consignment box worth of \$12.5 million. You only need to pay the \$50 delivery fee to receive your funds. So, get back to me with your bank account and routing numbers and a copy of your ID card so that we can deliver your funds. God Bless you dear.”

First this advice: When it comes to scams like this, “don’t go for the okey-doke.” Now in case the term “okey-doke” is unfamiliar, it means a trick or scam. So delete those messages immediately.

Back to the above request from “Elizabeth Dear” from Nigeria.

“Drop dead you typical scamming, (cuss word) Nigerian,” is the thought that ran through my head as I broad brushed all Nigerians as scammers. But suddenly I thought about a brilliant Nigerian – repeat, NIGERIAN - novelist and her message about how we all sometimes fall into the trap of “a single story” as I just did with my hair-trigger mental reaction to “Elizabeth dear” purportedly from Nigeria.

“The Danger of a Single Story” is speech by Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. In it she talks about the danger of believing one story instead of acknowledging the complexity of many stories.

As a child, Adichie wrote stories exclusively about white people in Western countries, having only encountered Western literature not realizing that books could depict anything else. It was only when she discovered

other writers when she realized how limiting her “single story” had been. At the same time she admitted to herself that she was not immune to stereotyping.

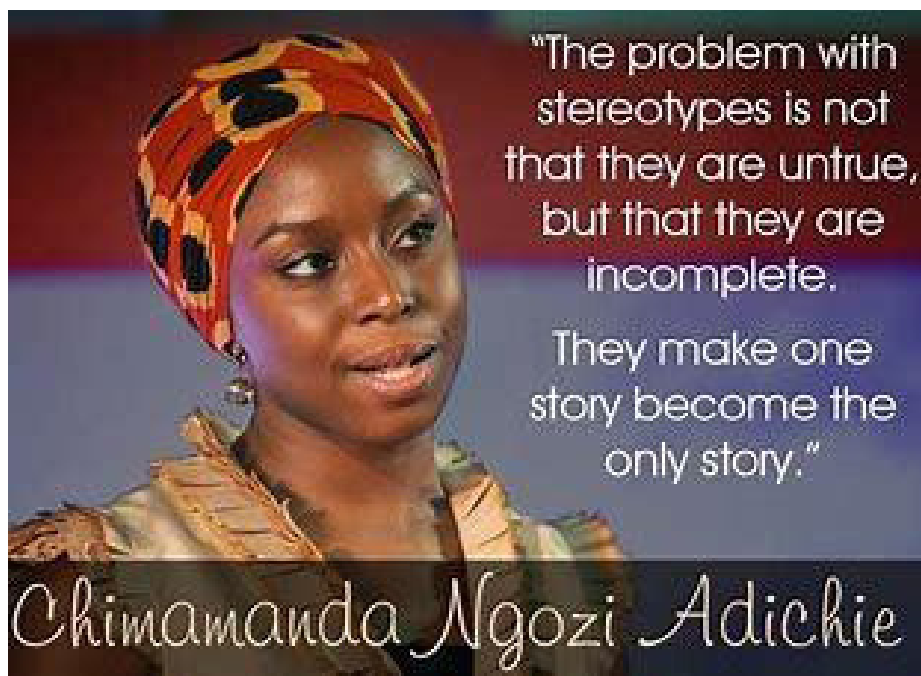
When Adichie went to college in America, she grappled with her classmates and instructors’ stereotyped ideas about her. She can’t truly blame Westerners, she says, for absorbing the single stories they encounter and offered a personal story as proof. While living in America, Adichie encountered so much anti-immigration rhetoric that the experience of traveling to Mexico and witnessing its diversity surprised her and broadened her perspective.

So, what are the origins of single stories? Although the answer to that question is a complex one, part of the answer is misunderstandings, media portrayals and a basic lack of knowledge. Another part of the answer is “cultural laziness,” an unwillingness to set aside the convenience of stereotypes to individualize others. Instead, we often subconsciously engage in “confirmation bias,” the tendency to look for evidence that confirms the stereotype we hold.

Now it is no stretch in imagination to conjure up single stories about Jews, Christians, Muslims, Asians, gay people, poor people, northerners, southerners, obese people, or even Republicans and Democrats. For example, regarding political parties, I had a single story about Republican Liz Cheney, daughter of former VP Dick Cheney. Until I watched her impressive performance as a member of the congressional committee investigating the January 6, 2021, insurrection, my perspective about her was narrow. Politics aside, I’m now a fan of Liz Cheney although I may disagree with her in some areas.

Let’s dig deeper.

Single stories also exist in perceptions about businesses and in the field of education. For example, my friend “Terri” who chairs a network that supports minority-owned businesses shared her frustration with the “single stories” she hears about the quality and



efficiency of those businesses. Sadly, she says, some customers – yes, some dirty laundry airing here, minority ones too - walk into those establishments looking for evidence to support their “single stories.”

In higher education, the New York Times recently did a series on the explosion of interest by talented Black students in enrolling in HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) schools, driven in part by wanting to avoid feelings of isolation - and overt acts of racism – on other campuses. Increasingly for those reasons, many turn down acceptance into Ivy League and other elite colleges.

That New York Times and similar articles tend to cite Morehouse and Spellman as the “best” HBCUs. For the record, two of my nephews are Morehouse graduates, and two of my nieces are currently students at Spellman, so I have no bone to pick with those two fine schools.

But rarely in those articles is there a mention of other 100+ HBCU schools that produce Black talent, among them schools and alumni from North Carolina A&T (astronaut Dr. Ron McNair); Florida A&M (former Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms); Tennessee State (Cellular Base Station inventor

Jesse Russell); sometimes Howard, sometimes Fisk, sometimes Hampton and sometimes other great institutions.

Does this tendency to highlight certain schools put those not mentioned at a competitive disadvantage in attracting Black students? Humm, something to think about, huh?

Hey, like yours truly, once we’re startled on realizing that we’ve been had by a single story, we’re embarrassed, look for the nearest rock to crawl underneath, and may even re-evaluate other single stories we hold from past experiences. And that’s not such a bad thing, is it?

Again folks, now slowly repeat after me; don’t go for the okey-doke from

“Elizabeth dear”... or the single story!

© Terry Howard is an award-winning writer and storyteller. He is also a contributing writer with the Chattanooga News Chronicle, The American Diversity Report, The Douglas County Sentinel, Blackmarket.com, Hometown Advantage, co-founder of the “26 Tiny Paint Brushes” writers’ guild, recipient of the 2019 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Leadership Award and 3rd place winner of the 2022 Georgia Press Award.

## This Week in African American History

## The Revolutionary War Had Freedom Riders, Too



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READ  
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## Wentworth Cheswell



New Hampshire patriot.

Most famous for:

- First African-American elected to public office
- Fighting at the Battle of Saratoga
- Being a messenger and reporting on British Actions

Wentworth Cheswell was a member of the secret network of patriot riders during the Revolutionary War.

By Robin Smith

Americans celebrate Independence Day with little appreciation that--while a resolution was adopted to declare that independence by the Second Continental Congress was declared on July 4, 1776--the domination and violence of the British had commenced years earlier, and the Revolutionary War continued through 1783.

Let’s take a moment to learn about a few overlooked people who did extraordinary things.

Economic oppression overwhelmed the colonists. England’s new territories brought rich resources and new reasons to collect taxes for the Crown to help England pay its debt, beginning in 1763, and continuing for over a decade with no colonial representation or voice within the British government.

In 1770, citizens of Boston (population of 16,000 at the time) grew angry with 2,000 British troops roaming their streets enforcing the tax laws. A brawl escalated to a riot, called the Boston Massacre. These economic oppressions, met with growing re-

sentment, moved the British government to disarm the colonists who grew more vocal in their protests.

Messengers, or 18th Century Freedom Riders on horseback, were critical to track British troop movements in the colonies when only word of mouth, letter writing, newspapers and pamphleteering were the means of communication to the public. The famed midnight ride of Paul Revere made for historic prose, as enjoyed by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s poem, Paul Revere’s Ride. But two riders, infrequently mentioned and overlooked in history, deserve attention!

Before the more famous ride in April 1775 from Boston to Concord and Lexington and the “shot heard around the world,” came the 66-mile wintry ride to New Hampshire in December 1774. Paul Revere carried information to neighbors in Portsmouth, New Hampshire where the grandson of a slave and son of a free black man, Wentworth Cheswell, rode as a member of the secret network of patriot riders mobilizing militia members to secure munitions and weapons before



Sybil Ludington is remembered for her valiant defense against British attack during the Revolutionary War.

British troops arrived to seize them.

A few months later, in April 1775, despite years of colonial pleadings for representation amidst greater public protests, British troops marched from Boston to Concord, Massachusetts to seize a cache of weapons. Paul Revere was joined by William Dawes, Samuel Prescott and Israel Bissell sounding the alarm of the British government’s actions.

Following in the same role as these dispatched riders, Sybil Ludington--yes, a young woman--at the age of 16 years young, rode 40 miles throughout the night from her family’s farm in Kent, New York to Danbury, Connecticut almost two years later to the date of Revere’s ride to alert of British plans to destroy a military supply depot used by the Continental Army in the fight for independence.

In efforts to survive and obtain independence from the economic oppression by the British government under King George III, colonists demonstrated courage and determination. Many were overlooked, but historians are finally recognizing that Wentworth Cheswell and Sybil Lud-



When Wentworth Cheswell was elected town Constable of Newmarket, New Hampshire in 1768, he became the second person of African ancestry to be elected to public office in what would become the United States.

ington assisted the fearless citizenry who created America.

Is America perfect? No. Just a land where the brave lived and left their trace. May we follow their selfless example.