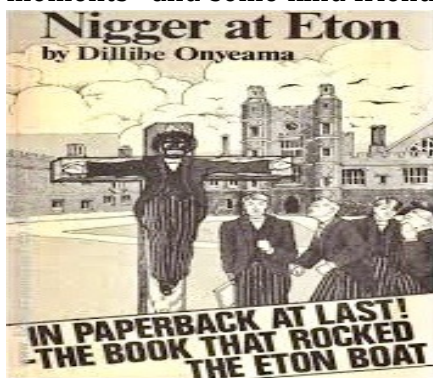


Nigger At Eton By Dillibe Onyeama The second black student in the school his welcome by his housemates was short-lived as the colour of his skin brought him under attack from his first week at what is perhaps the world's most prestigious boys' boarding school. In Dillibe's second week he began to participate in various school activities like the 'colour test' (memorizing the geography of Eton and the colours of the school's caps) the fagging system (running errands for the members of the Library-seniors) etc. Being black in the midst of about 1200 white students didn't help his chances at being invisible and his fellow students would often attach stereotypes they have about black people to him like the black man's lack of education and immunity to pain. Born in January 1951 to a prominent Nigerian Family Dillibe describes his life in Nigeria and his move to England the differences between his views of England prior to his schooling there and the reality. Dillibe Onyeama explains how his classmates and teachers related to him because of his skin colour; some of the masters turned a blind eye to the racial slurs being thrown at him while some defended him by punishing students that called him racist names. Ironically he was closer to a white South African than his fellow Nigerian Akintola whose relationship with him seemed to have been influenced by the fact that they were from different ethnic groups. His last week at Eton turned out to be fun and the author says he will always be proud of Eton where he learnt a lot morally and academically and came to terms with the fact that he was black and it was a world where people like him had to suffer. [Blog] - [Bookstagram] 102 I read this in 1983 just after my first year at a "minor" "public school" in Dorset England called "Canford" where I had been a "grov" to Middle Sixth Formers in Court House throughout that initial "Shell" year when I came across it in my father's library while on holiday back home in Liberia. 102 A rather sad but unsurprising true story Dillibe Onyeama was the second African ever to go to Eton College "the world's most famous school" as he calls it where he arrived in January 1965 aged fourteen having been put down for it at birth by his father an eminent Oxford-educated Nigerian judge. It may be lost on many today brought up in multi-racial societies but I well remember being excited when for the first time in my life I found myself next to an African in Lower Chapel my first morning at Eton. More ominously like every school since schools were invented Eton was plagued by a few bullies always ready to pick on anyone different and Onyeama soon began to hear humiliating ape noises following him around. " Resorting to violence which Onyeama says was part of African culture was not done at Eton; the news spread he became unpopular the racial taunts grew and he continued to react aggressively. Any boy who made himself unpopular was bound to be subject to some kind of wounding mockery so Onyeama's being of a different race became a far bigger issue than it need have been. In the fascinating chapter about his background in Nigeria and at English prep school (oddly placed third as it would have been more helpful placed first) he describes himself as lazy fat and constantly behaving badly. Of the one time he was caned at Eton (for being rude to his house's Italian waiters) he says "I had deserved it" and "other boys were beaten for far more trivial offences than that. The other side of the coin is that he was delighted when his prowess at sport was likewise attributed to his race just as he enjoyed being seen by crowds at the Fourth of June the school's greatest annual holiday feeling "arrogant to be the only black ... and enjoying all the looks of curiosity from families. It is an excellent account of what life at Eton was like for boys there in general the most thorough I know of and excluding fictionalized accounts like mine the most recently set of more than article length. Regarding the latter I suspect it is also pretty good as an indication of what it feels like to be there today as although the school has of course changed with the times its distinctive features have not. Even those who were there may learn something: though obviously aware that masters did not strike boys I had no idea boys were allowed to strike back if they did! The chapter on homosexuality unsurprisingly decried by The Sunday Times may be the most valuable because it was still rare and daring to describe it then and its character has changed so much since. "There was an atmosphere of sex at Eton all the time" but there were no women "so the only kind of sex that occurred or was usually talked about was that between males. " Describing copious discussion of it amongst the boys following the expulsion of two for raping another Onyeama says there was widespread feeling they should not have been expelled if it had been consensual though he himself disagreed believing

“homosexuality was unnatural and outrageous. ” That the homosexuality to which Eton boys were then inclined was pederastic and potentially pervasive (in sharp contrast to that of today’s gay minority) is illustrated by his housemaster’s “only view of homosexuality ... that big boys should not associate with little boys because of sexual attraction. ”As a measure to counter homosexuality perhaps unknown to Onyeama British society had been increasingly stigmatising all physical affection between schoolboys since the mid-nineteenth century when it was still common for them to walk arm-in-arm or hold hands. ” The sadness of this change is well brought out by Onyeama’s misfortune in being wrongly regarded as homosexual because in horseplay he failed to adapt from the carefree ways of his homeland to the British suspicion of prolonged physical touch. However though in the end he was “glad to have been at Eton” and “was always going to be proud of it” he still felt he “had never really been liked or accepted” and was glad to leave because “colour prejudice was the most outstanding feature of my experiences. Perhaps his father should not have sent such a sensitive son to an English public-school knowing as he did that he would be “ragged” there but with Onyeama finally glad to have been sent who can fairly say it was not worth it to achieve his desire “that his children should have the best education that he could possibly afford?” Finally not least of its benefits it led Onyeama aged only twenty-one to write this excellent book and he has continued to be a successful author ever since:

AREVIEW BY OKOLI UGOCHIDillibe Onyeama recounts his smooth transition from the Groove Park preparatory school in Sussex into Eton on the 19 th of January 1965, He also compares the behaviours of the average Englishman to that of the average Nigerian man recounting the role of various people who had prepared him for life as an Etonian: And while most of the students found it amusing to comment on the fact that he was black others were unbothered. But he noted that racism was not the only form of discrimination in the school as the students also discriminated among themselves based on how wealthy their parents were: Dillibe noted that he wasn’t always the victim as he had to defend himself against people that attacked him. In the long run he developed paranoia as a result of the racial discrimination. However things began to turn for the better after the school play Antonio and Cleopatra where he performed very well, He had a gift of hypnotism which was interpreted as ‘African occultism’. 102 ONE LINE REVIEWVery interesting look at racism in 1960s Eton but I would have liked to debate the author on a couple of points: Much of it resonated with my own experience as member of a very very small “minority” in a post WWII post “end of Empire” English elite boarding school, 102 Was really disappointed with the book or Mr Onyeama especially with his last comment about the Blacks: This account of his four years there is claimed by the author to be entirely true excepting some changes of name, I believe that as it rings consistently true of my experiences as a boy there at a later date when little had changed. As for the names Onyeama points out his use of aliases on the rare occasions he employs them: Real names and personal descriptions are given of almost every character including some with fairly unattractive portrayals or discreditable roles in the story, Onyeama arrived to find himself treated by everyone in his house “much more kindly than the other new boys: ” Successful appeal had evidently been made to the better nature of the boys in his house and at first they stood up for him whenever he ran into difficulties: When one of his tormentors asked him “Has your mother got a bone through her nose?” the outsized African lost his temper completely: ... He dropped to the floor like an inert sack and lay there crying, The happy faces of his friends distorted with shock and next they were shouting at me with disapproval, Unfortunately a reputation at Eton is hard to change and it was only at the very end of his time there that his happily did. One in his year has confirmed Onyeama’s unpopularity and its cause to me and that it was not for racial reasons since the other African at Eton Akintola was very popular. Onyeama is winningly honest to the point of being hard on himself. Though hurt that allowances were made for him since it was widely assumed to be because he was African he acknowledges they were well-intentioned, ” Do not suppose that the sensational-sounding racial angle to Onyeama’s story means that that is its only important point of interest, It benefits from having been written soon after the author left while he still retained a boy’s sense of what matters

uncorrupted by later wisdom, It should be much appreciated by anyone interested in either public school life in the sixties or by anyone curious about the unique character of Eton: " When discipline was suddenly lax towards the end of Onyeama's time there was an immediate surge of "big boys associating with little boys because of sexual attraction. As Tim Card reports in his 1994 history of Eton by then the boys had become "as prudish among other males as Victorian maidens, Ironically two of those who treated him most decently were Afrikaans whilst Akintola was his enemy. " This is terribly sad but I am not sure that heavy blame can fairly be placed on anyone except the odd ill-intentioned bully, The other boys and the masters can hardly be blamed for their ignorance of Africans, Though Onyeama blames his unpopularity on his own violence it is impossible to ignore the pain that gave rise to it. Edmund Marlowe author of Alexander's Choice a novel set at Eton in 1983-84 <https://www>. He is hopeful that at some point things will change. Enough said. Inevitably though there was widespread curiosity. "I swung a powerful right-hander at his chin." He blames his poor academic performance on his laziness. I really felt important. This adds to its emotional authenticity. Onyeama's time at Eton was by no means entirely bad. He had "many enjoyable moments" and some kind friends. [amazon.com/dp/191457107X](https://www.amazon.com/dp/191457107X) 102



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