



Kehinde Andrews, Lisa Amanda Palmer, eds. *Blackness in Britain*. New York: Routledge Research in Race and Ethnicity Series. Routledge, 2016. 234 pp. \$155.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-138-84063-8.

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This new publication, *Blackness in Britain*, edited by Kehinde Andrews and Lisa Amanda Palmer and published by Routledge, begins with a bold assertion: “Blackness in Britain has been frequently and too often framed through the lens of racialised deficits constructed as both marginal and pathological” (p. i). One can of course recognize this approach as the foundational and systemic way in which much of the mainstream media frames Black people. It is, though, the academy as a site of Black British struggle that most concerns Andrews and Palmer in their attempts to table what is on the one hand an exploration of Blackness in twenty-first-century Britain, and on the other hand, a manifesto, or an argument, for an academia that takes respectful account of the presence of Black British academics and the subjects and histories they study.

This book emerged as a direct consequence of the “first Blackness in Britain interdisciplinary conference held in 2013 which brought together academics and community activists working in this field” (p. xi). It features fourteen contributors, whose texts appear across five sections, plus Palmer’s introduction and Andrews’s conclusion. Palmer’s rich, layered, and informative introduction early on alludes to an important paradox relating to Black British studies. “Ironically, British Black studies as a field of critical enquiry is taken

much more seriously in the US academy where a generation of Black British scholarship has been produced by African American Scholars and Black British scholars who have migrated to the US.” Palmer then goes on to outline the rationale and the importance of *Blackness in Britain*: to present the work of a “new generation of academics engaged with scholarly activism around Black studies in Britain who seek to place this important field of enquiry on to the academic curriculum and contribute to the development of this academic discipline in Britain” (p. 1).

Following Palmer’s introduction, part 1, “Black Studies and the Challenge of the Black British Intellectual,” features two texts, “The Absence of Black Studies in Britain” by Palmer and “Invisible Outsider: Reflections from beyond the Ivory Tower” by Martin Glynn. Palmer’s is a well-argued and well-constructed demand for Black studies to be embedded in British university curricula. She suggests that “Black studies in Britain has an important role to play in undoing and redressing knowledge power imbalances by dismantling binary structures of knowing that obscure the systematic racial order of contemporary Britain” (p. 17). In her conclusion, Palmer sees Black studies as being a challenge to the ways in which the unnamed but nevertheless real entity of “White studies” dominates within the academy. “Embedding

Black studies can intervene in the process of dismantling coloniality by helping us to see the specificity of ‘White studies’ as a particular form of knowledge production” (p. 21). Parts 2 through 5 each consists of three texts, which collectively cover a range of varied subjects, pointing, perhaps, to the pronounced comprehensiveness that Black British studies is, and wants to see, manifest in British universities. Subjects as varied as literature, music, theology, education of Black children, health, and so on are assessed in the book’s texts.

The texts in part 2, “Revolution, Resistance and State Violence,” are “The Case of the Two Williams: Black Revolutionists in Nineteenth-century Britain” by Tony Talburt, “Black Is a Country: Black People in the West as a Colonized Minority” by Andrews, and “Violence Old and New: From Slavery to Serco” by Adam Elliott-Cooper. Talburt’s text introduces the reader to two largely forgotten or overlooked figures from Black British history, William Davidson and William Cuffay. His text reminds us, or lets us know, that Black political activism has a long, distinguished, and fascinating history in this country, as he chronicles the life and times of Davidson (1781-1820), a Black British radical executed for his role in the Cato Street Conspiracy against Lord Liverpool’s government in 1820, and Cuffay (1788-1870), a prominent chartist who suffered the fate of being deported to Australia. As Talburt concludes in this particularly engaging chapter, “far from being absent from aspects of British political history and revolutionary activity, Black people in Britain were very politically active and took part in organized campaigns during the nineteenth century” (p. 48).

Part 3, “Blackness and Belonging,” consists of “Black British Writing and an English Literary Belonging” by Helen Cousins, “Grime Central! Subterranean Ground-in Grit Engulfing Manicured Mainstream Presses” by Monique Charles, and “Is David Starkey Right or Has the Jamaican Bible Movement Lost Its Mind? Language and Atonement” by Robert Beckford. This section points to the ways in

which pronounced interdisciplinary aspects lie at the heart of Black British studies, as indeed is the case in Black studies in general. Going from Cousins’s text (a significant section of which focuses on the young British novelist and writer of short stories Helen Oyeyemi) to Charles’s text on Grime (in which she seeks to “demonstrate what makes its sound sonically ‘Black’” [p. 89]) to Beckford’s intriguing text (that hinges on the taking to task of notorious comments about young Black Britons by David Starkey), one gets a strong sense of the editors’ mission of weaving a broader theoretical narrative characterized by breadth.

Part 4, “Exclusion and Inequality in Education,” presents three texts: “The Ties That Bind: Questions of Empire and Belonging in Black British Educational Activism” by Nicole M. Jackson, “The British School-to-Prison Pipeline” by Karen Graham, and “Black Mixed-Race British Males and the Role of School Teachers: New Theory and Evidence” by Remi Joseph-Salisbury. Since Jawanza Kunjufu’s *Countering the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys* (1983) was published over thirty years ago, interlocking issues relating to the non-education or miseducation of Black children have taken up a prominent place in the struggles of Black Britain, and this section points to new, twenty-first-century directions for this campaign. Joseph-Salisbury introduces into *Blackness in Britain* the question of where and how “mixed-race” ethnicities and identities can be situated within a field in which they are often overlooked or subsumed.

The book’s fifth section, “Black Women and the Gendering of Blackness in Britain,” brings together “Managing Diversity: Professional and Managerial Black African Women’s Work Lives in the UK Private Sector” by Diane Chilangwa Farmer, “Young Black British Women: Defining a Sense of Self in Relation to Hip Hop and Dancehall Musical Genres” by Dionne Taylor, and “Learning from the Liminal: Conducting Health Research in African Caribbean Communities” by Nicole An-

draws. Each writer locates the gendering of Blackness in Britain in distinct and differing fields, though again, the interconnectedness of the book's texts is always apparent. Andrews, for example, posits that "As a seldom heard group, Black women have developed sites of liminality where alternative understandings and knowledge are created and affirmed. Arenas such as music, dance, fashion, literature and everyday conversations are important locations for empowerment through the validation and affirmation of the African Caribbean experience" (p. 191).

It falls to Andrews to offer, in the conclusion, both a summation of the book and an articulation of mission to carry forward the project of Black British studies on this side of the Atlantic. Andrews states, or admits, candidly, that "Black studies is not going to bring the ivory tower down," but that it can be retooled "for the purpose of the struggles for Black recognition and freedom" (p. 213).

This hugely important book needs, perhaps, to be read or bracketed in the company of publications that preceded it, such as *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader* edited by Houston A. Baker Jr., Manthia Diawara, and Ruth H. Lindborg, published in 1996, and Kwesi Owusu's edited anthology, *Black British Culture and Society: A Text Reader*, published in 1999. These, and a significant number of other publications, point not only to the history of Black British academics carrying out no end of compelling, fascinating research but also to the struggle to view the university as a contested space that did not and should not remain above the fray of agitation for racial progress.

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