

Agents of critical hope: black British narratives

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This chapter focuses on black British educational and intellectual movements from the 1960s to the present. It emerged from my years of work on race, education and social justice as a practitioner and as an academic: work that stems back to the 1980s. The chapter is based on the research that produced my book *Black British Intellectuals and Education: multiculturalism's hidden history* (Routledge, 2014). The premises of this chapter are two-fold. First, I suggest that when we talk of struggles against racism, we often look to iconic figures from the USA. However, Britain has its own black intellectual traditions and its own master teachers, among them CLR James, Claudia Jones, Ambalavaner Sivanandan, Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy.

Unfortunately, black British thinkers remain routinely marginalized - and Britain as a whole pays the cost of that neglect. The decolonization of our education systems must begin by restoring histories of black British thought and activism. Secondly, this chapter explores black British educational movements because education has been central to black British identities since the mass migration and settlement of the 1950s and 1960s. Struggles over what it means to be black *and* British have been enacted repeatedly around sites of educational desire and despair. As such, 'critical hope' – the term used in this chapter - is almost too perfect a descriptor of the conflicted agency that has driven black British communities' encounters with the education system. It is no less apt for all that. The story of Britain's black education movements is largely the story of how the hope that black parents initially invested in the British school system was necessarily refashioned by their lived experiences and struggles. For black Britons, critical understanding of the school system's maintenance of race-class inequalities and belief in education as potentially transformative, a site of liberation and solidarity, have for decades existed in tandem and in tension.