Anti-racist cultural politics in post-imperial Britain: the New Beacon Circle


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Abstract or Description

This chapter explores the activist-pedagogy of one group that sought to negotiate an inclusive place in Britain for the descendants of Black and Brown migrants: New Beacon Circle, based in North London, England. Whereas many contributors to this book have addressed contemporary alternative educational initiatives, I consider one that started in the mid-1960s and is still active today. In this way, I emphasize the continuity in radical experimentation in utopian pedagogy. In the case of New Beacon Circle, such experimentation has been a component of contestant responses to specific situations of class and ‘race’ domination, and which have been, simultaneously, attempts to build progressive educational alternatives that might endure into the future. Bringing a particular reading of anti-colonialism in the British West Indies to their activist work in London, the New Beacon Circle is centred around the New Beacon publishing house and bookshop, which was established in 1966. Over the next four decades, New Beacon Circle’s activities encompassed and wove together Black cultural production, anti-racist organizing and community education. This chapter explores a number of initiatives of the New Beacon Circle and concludes by analyzing them through the lens of cultural politics.
Cultural politics is definitively the politics of these new movements, for which alienation was perceived as the greater threat to human happiness than exploitation, thus shifting the focus of revolutionary thought and action from the strict economic domain of society to its interconnected cultural formations. A consequence of this shift was the constitution of a kind of politics that attacks, for instance, the exclusionary distinction of high and low culture, and further, foregrounds the way in which elite groups value the cultural capital which they possess while devaluing that of those subo Anti-Racist Cultural Politics - Alleyne. Page 1. multicultural reality of Britain has come about not as a gift of the British nation-state but through decades of political and cultural work, central to which has been a struggle over meaning – in short, “cultural politics.” Education has been both a recurring element of and a historic condition of possibility for many of these struggles. Bringing a particular reading of anti-colonialism in the British West Indies to their activist work in London, the New Beacon Circle is centred around the New Beacon publishing house and bookshop, which was established in 1966. Over the next four decades, New Beacon Circle’s activities encompassed and wove together Black cultural production, anti-racist organizing, and community education.