

Collective Production

Black Audio Video Collective (1982 - 1998)

Marty Lucas • April 14, 2021



the SS Empire Windrush docked at
Tilbury June 22, 1948 with 492
passengers from the West Indies

Over a quarter of a million West Indians, the overwhelming majority of them from Jamaica, settled in Britain starting in the late 1940s. In 1951 the population of Caribbean and African-born people in Britain was estimated at some 20,000. In the mid-1960s, Britain had become the centre of the largest overseas population of West Indians. This migration event is often labelled "Windrush", a reference to the HMT Empire Windrush, the ship that carried the first major group of Caribbean migrants to the United Kingdom in 1948, hence, "The Windrush Generation." Today, the Black population of the UK is over two million, of whom over a million live in London, making up about 3% of the population.

The late 1950s through to the late 1980s saw a number of mass street conflicts involving young Afro-Caribbean men and British police officers in English cities, mostly as a result of tensions between members of local black communities and white racists. This unrest culminated in a series of conflicts in the early 1980s.



The **1981 Brixton riot**, or **Brixton uprising**, was a confrontation between the Metropolitan Police and protesters in Brixton, South London, England, between 10 and 12 April 1981. The main riot on 11 April, dubbed "Bloody Saturday," resulted in 279 injuries to police and 45 injuries to members of the public; over a hundred vehicles were burned, including 56 police vehicles; almost 150 buildings were damaged, with thirty burned. There were 82 arrests. Reports suggested that up to 5,000 people were involved.

Black Audio Film Collective

- Created in Hackney, London in 1982.
- Members came from Dominica, Ghana, Jamaica, Trinidad, and Britain.
- Members made films, ran filmmaking workshops, and held screenings and discussions in the neighborhood.



Handsworth Songs

Black Audio Film Collective, 1985

Director: John Akomfrah
Producer: Lina Gopal
Music: Trevor Mathison



Handsworth a neighborhood in the Northern English city of Birmingham, was the scene of social unrest in 1985.

INTRODUCTION: DE MARGIN AND DE CENTRE

Film culture in the '80s has been marked by volatile reconfigurations in the relations of 'race' and representation. Questions of cultural difference, identity and otherness – in a word, ethnicity – have been thrown into the foreground of contestation and debate by numerous shifts and developments. Within the British context, these trends have underpinned controversies around recent independent films like *Handsworth Songs*, *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *The Passion of Remembrance* – films which have elicited critical acclaim and angry polemic in roughly equal measure. The fragmented state of the nation depicted from a black British point of view in the films themselves contradicts (literally, speaks against) the remythification of the colonial past in mainstream movies such as *Gandhi* or *A Passage to India*; yet, the wave of popular films set in imperial India or Africa also acknowledge, in their own way, Britain's post-

unprecedented publication of black women writers) still seems extraordinary, however commercially astute. In addition, the widening circulation of Third World films among Western audiences, or the televisual 'presence' of Third World spaces like Ethiopia via events such as Live Aid in 1985, implies something of a shift within the boundaries that differentiated the First and Third Worlds.

One issue at stake, we suggest, is the potential break-up or deconstruction of structures that determine what is regarded as culturally central and what is regarded as culturally marginal. Ethnicity has emerged as a key issue as various 'marginal' practices (black British film, for instance) are becoming de-marginalised at a time when 'centred' discourses of cultural authority and legitimation (such as notions of a trans-historical artistic 'canon') are becoming increasingly de-centred and destabilised, called into question from within.

Downloaded from <http://screen.oxfordjournals.org/> at Hunter College Library on 0

Not one Black voice...but many... This goal led the groups to make formally innovative and psychologically nuanced stories of Black life in the UK.

Both BAFC and Sankofa believed in a plurality of Black identities. They opposed their work to the TV news approach that depicted a singular Black community, not to mention a hegemonic White England. This approach was framed by Sankofa member Isaac Julian in the essay he wrote with Kobena Mercer, "De Margin and De Centre"...

Note also how this differs from a US mainstream documentary approach of representation, e.g. we have a black gay person, a latino gay person, a gay man, a lesbian, etc.

The formation of Sankofa Film and Video Collective, like that of the [Black Audio Film Collective](#), was a response to the social unrest in [Britain](#) in the 1980s: "Influenced by contemporary debate on post-colonialism and social theorists such as [Homi Bhabha](#) and [Stuart Hall](#), both groups centered around investigations of black identity/culture within the British experience and reworked the documentary to articulate new voices in British cinema.



Around the Same time (1983) another collective Sankofa was started by Isaac Julien and others.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sankofa_Film_and_Video_Collective

Stuart Hall

Parent of 'Cultural Studies'

Connecting race and power, the need to uncover hidden – often unconscious and shifting – relationships was essential to his work. But that work was always nuanced: identity itself is always in transformation. And *there* is the optimism: the incremental changes he saw over his lifetime around multiculturalism and sexual identity. But his pessimism about class led him to analyse neo-liberalism brilliantly. He was not a communist nor an economic determinist but he used Marxist theory as a tool. Capital and its workings, he insisted, needed to be understood specifically, historically, as it changed from **post-Fordism** to full globalisation. What underpinned it ideologically?

Suzanne Moore • *The Guardian*



The Glasgow Media Group

Not Secure — glasgowmediagroup.org

Stuart Hall (cultural theorist) - Wikipedia

www.glasgowmediagroup.org/images/stories/pdf/timeline.pdf

Timeline

1974 – The Glasgow University Media Project is formed. Researchers are interviewed in the Summer and the project begins in the Autumn. The project is financed by the Social Science Research Council with a two year grant of between £35,000 and £40,000. Funding is secured by John Eldridge and Paul Walton from Glasgow University. Brian Winston, a former BBC and Granada TV producer and Senior Tutor at the National Film School in Bradford is hired as Research Director.

University of Glasgow
Department of Sociology
RESEARCH POSTS
Television Coverage of
Industrial Relations

Applications are invited for the following Research appointments in connection with SSRC financed project concerning national television coverage of industrial relations.

POST A
Minimum qualifications: Good Honours degree and experience of research and/or Postgraduate study. The appointment will last for two years beginning October 1974. Salary £2,000 per annum approximately.

POST B (2 Posts)
Minimum qualifications: Good Honours degree and experience of research and/or Postgraduate study. The appointments will last for one year beginning January, 1975. Salary £1,400 per annum approximately.

POST C. TECHNICAL ASSISTANT
Minimum qualifications: Good Honours degree. The appointment will last for one year starting January 1975.



In November 1982, Channel 4 debuted on British television. Conceived, in part, in response to the narratives that had played out in mainstream news outlets, this new channel sought to provide innovative content and give voice to those marginalized in British society, with a greater emphasis on the needs of minority audiences. As part of this demand, Channel 4, along with the Greater London Council, dedicated production funds and helped to establish workshops to facilitate the making of film and video from and by these communities. Through new avenues of institutional support and the formation of “publisher-broadcaster” stations like Channel 4, filmmaking collectives and workshops such as Black Audio Film Collective, Sankofa Film and Video Collective, and Ceddo Film and Video Workshop were founded in the early part of the decade as alternatives to the dominant modes of representation in the UK. These groups, alongside others like Retake Film and Video that focused on Asian identity, addressed conditions of race and class that had otherwise been told from afar.

Aram Moshayedi

<https://hammer.ucla.edu/programs-events/2016/in-real-life/the-workshop-years-black-british-film-and-video-after-1981>

Collective survival

- Financial basis in state funding for the arts (media arts workshop from chan 4, etc.)
- Studies in 1970s revealed bias in national broadcasting that demanded rectification. (Glasgow Media Study)
- Funding ended in late 1980s.

Extending the Boundaries of Black Film Culture

The Collective attempted to establish a critical discourse on the “complexity of black portrayal in films” through screening series such as “Cinema and Black Representation.”

These series, in conjunction with various technical workshops, functioned to foster a critically engaged group of black filmmakers who could not only dissect conventional films in terms of their representations of race and ethnicity, but who also had the means to create films with new representations. The earlier films (especially Handsworth Songs) produced by the BAFC also helped to inform a new brand of film criticism through the complex polarities of their reception.

Romph

The Creation of a New Formal Language



As opposed to straight documentary realism, the film takes on an essayist format, flowing between traditional documentary footage, interviews, and poetic interludes. The re-appropriation of cinematic form in *Handsworth Songs* functions to “deconstruct the hegemonic voices of British television newsreels” (Auguiste 157). Directly opposed to the didactic forms of documentary representation found in the newsreels, *Handsworth Songs* undermines the aims of such footage by creating a sense of ambiguity as opposed to clarity. For instance, the purpose of television news is to “get to the bottom” of something and inform the public. In a sense, television news and documentaries strive for closure; they attempt to find the most obvious cause of a given problem. *Handsworth Songs* utilizes a diverse array of cinematic techniques to re-evaluate the causes and circumstances surrounding the Handsworth riots. One singular mode of aesthetic discourse does not authenticate an entire black diasporic identity. The aesthetics of the film are as diverse as the British use of the word “black” as an all encompassing form of political identification.

Romph “Invention in the Name of Community”