Introduction to Black Urban Studies: Black British Culture and Representation

Class code SCA-UA 9105-001

Instructor Details Dr Deirdre Osborne

Class Details Introduction to Black Urban Studies: Black British Culture and Representation

Monday 9.30-12.30

Location to be confirmed.

Prerequisites

Class Description Introduction to Black Urban Studies: Black British Culture and Representation

This course negotiates the complex range of influences that construct black culture and identity in Britain today from socio-cultural, historical, geo-political and aesthetic standpoints. The changing conceptions of Black British identity (and its detractors), is explored in a cross-disciplinary curriculum which attempts to straddle the perhaps irresolvable division between the recognition of cultural differences and the refusal of marginalisation, as played out in the urban context, namely London. Key areas of investigation include: representation via literature, drama, film, television, music, sport and the visual arts and the ways in which these areas are shaped by and shape black citizens’ experiences of society’s institutions through the media, education, criminal justice system and the arts. As an indicative rather than definitive hold-all, or framing device, the use of the term ‘Black British’ follows the Parekh Report’s lead, that ‘belonging is about full acceptance, being recognised as an integral part of the community’ (2000:54). The course assumes automa cultural constituency for indigenous black Britons as they belong to and contribute distinctively to contemporary society. It moves beyond centring inheritance in terms of the immigrant or arrivalist sensibil in order to explore Britain’s unique manifestation of the African diaspora as sited firmly within contemporary Europe. The breadth of the course aims to: introduce students to cultural criticism and theory, apply this to Black Urban Studies in the British context and encourage research into a wider range of questions that will arise from investigating the above.

The course format will involve lectures, seminar discussions, one field trip and sessions with guest speakers. Supplementary material will also be distributed from time to time in

Desired Outcomes

By the end of the programme, students should have gained knowledge and understanding of:

- significant intellectual and historical contexts that inform contemporary Black British culture and its relationship to the urban space.

- selected critical and theoretical debates about the characteristics of literary and socio-cultural innovation in writing and representation.

- factors which facilitate or impede cultural citizenship and their connection to a sense of belonging
Written coursework should demonstrate ability in and evidence of:

- writing lucidly and with focused relevance
- identifying and examining key issues in relation to the work in hand
- drawing upon and evaluating primary and secondary sources as appropriate
- sustaining a critical response through the development of coherent analysis
- presenting written criticism that displays insight, intelligence and stylistic aptitude
- structuring and sustaining a coherent argument at an appropriate level

Assessment Components

Grading of the course:

Class participation: (10% based upon preparation and one presentation exercise weekly per student)

Essays: 1x 1,500 -2,000 paper (30%) submitted in session 5 and
1 x 3,500-4,000 words (60%) submitted in session 14.

Topics will be distributed in the first session for essay one and in week seven for essay two. Students may NOT re-write their own versions of these topics but must follow the rubric exactly and answer the set question. For the second longer essay (60%) you will be expected to incorporate the ideas and material covered on the course and to take this in new directions based upon your area of particular interest.

Failure to submit or fulfil any required course component results in failure of the class.

NYU in London aims to have grading standards and results in all its courses similar to those that prevail at Washington Square.

Assessment Expectations

Grade A: At the top end of this grade, the assessed work would need to demonstrate evidence of exceptionally rigorous and sophisticated analytical research in its conceptualization; a highly secure and discriminating knowledge of the field of study in its cross-disciplinarity and to be stylistically exceptional and accomplished in its presentation. At the lower end, work will show evidence of rigorous analytical research in its conceptualization; feature a secure and discriminating acquaintance with rather than knowledge of the field of study, engage with the subject in a notably intelligent way; offer clear and efficient presentation with careful and accurate scholarly procedure and consistently display outstanding merit in all or a combination of these areas.

Grade B: To achieve this grade, the assessed work would need to demonstrate an overall achievement of the learning outcomes to a good level which would indicate some qualities of Grade A work at the lower end of the scale. The difference would be in the degree of realisation. Thus, the work would show evidence of good analytical research, registering cross-disciplinary aspects; a soundness of argument or analysis; a good acquaintance with the field of study; a good level of coherence, relevance and efficiency in its style of presentation, largely following correct scholarly procedure. The work should be of high merit in all of these areas, or considerable merit in some areas and a good

Grade C: A mark in this category would mean that the assessed work would demonstrate a majority of the learning outcomes had been achieved to threshold level. The grade would reflect solid competence and achievement, although the work might be partial rather than consistent in clarity, precision and effectiveness. Research would show some evidence of the ability to identify relevant issues, but might, for example, be inconsistent in its recognition of the need for a contextual framework in its deployment of ideas and registering of cross-disciplinarity; or, it might rely too heavily on secondary sources at the
expense of developing an independent critical standpoint; be insufficiently detailed; or tend towards description rather than analysis. The work should be of a good standard in the areas listed above or good in some areas and of a satisfactory standard in others.

Grade D: This grade would indicate that the majority of outcomes have been achieved to a less than satisfactory state. Marks in this category would reflect work that is significantly inconsistent in its level of response to the set task or the conceptualisation and realisation of the project. It would be applied to work which does not utilise a sufficient range of processes or materials; or, its research shows limited evidence or little ability to identify the relevant issues. There would be limited or inconsistent deployment of analytical or contextual skills and poor scholarly presentation.

Grade F: A mark in this category would represent a significant failure to achieve the appropriate learning outcomes. While the work may not be without merit, the concept may have been realised inappropriately or ideas may have remained under-developed; the range of research may have been limited, with little interpretation or analysis of material; or, it may be lacking in breadth or largely devoid or unaware of the need for a conceptual framework and lacking in focus or coherent argument. It would be scholastically and stylistically incompetent.

Grade conversion

NYU in London uses the following scale of numerical equivalents to letter grades:

A=94-100
A-=90-93
B+=87-89
B=84-86
B-=80-83
C+=77-79
C=74-76
C-=70-73
D+=67-69
D=65-66
F=below 65

Where no specific numerical equivalent is assigned to a letter grade by the class teacher, the midpoint of the range will be used in calculating the final class grade (except in the A range, where 95.5 will be used).

Grading Policy

NYU in London aims to have grading standards and results in all its courses similar to those that prevail at Washington Square.

In addition, Stern School of Business classes adhere to the following Stern grading guidelines:

There should be no more than

- 25-35% A's - awarded for excellent work
- 50-70% B's - awarded for good or very good work
- 5-15% C's or below - awarded for adequate or below work

A guideline is not a curve. A guideline is just that - it gives an ideal benchmark for the distribution of grades towards which we work.
NYUL has a strict policy about course attendance. **No unexcused absences are permitted.** While students should contact their class teachers to catch up on missed work, you should NOT approach them for excused absences.

Excused absences will usually only be considered for serious, unavoidable reasons such as personal ill-health or illness in the immediate family. Trivial or non-essential reasons for absence will not be considered.

Excused absences can only be considered if they are reported in accordance with the guidelines that follow.

**Please note that you will need to ensure that no make-up classes – or required excursions - have been organised before making any travel plans for the semester.**

**Absence reporting**

1. On the first day of absence you should report the details of your illness by calling free (from landline) 0800 316 0469 (option 2) or by emailing absences@nyu.ac.uk including class missed, professor, class time and whether any work was due including exams.

2. Generally a doctor’s note will be required to ensure you have sought treatment for the illness. Contact the Gower Street Health Centre on 0207 636 7628 to make an appointment, or use HTH general practitioners if you cannot get an appointment expediently at Gower Street.

3. At the end of your period of absence, you will need to complete an absence form online at [http://www.nyu.edu/global/london/academics/attendance_policy.htm](http://www.nyu.edu/global/london/academics/attendance_policy.htm)

4. Finally you must arrange an appointment to speak to Assistant Director for Freshman Programmes (freshmen) or Nigel Freeman (non-freshmen) on your first day back at class. You must have completed the absence form before making your appointment.

Absence requests for non-illness purposes must be discussed with the Assistant Director for Freshman Programmes (**Freshmen**) or Assistant Director for Academic Affairs (**non-freshmen**) **prior** to the date(s) in question – no excused absences for non-illness purposes can be applied retrospectively.

Supporting documentation relating to absences must be submitted within one week of your return to class.

3% will be deducted from the student's final course mark for each unexcused absence. Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence.

Unexcused absences from exams are not permitted and will result in failure of the exam. If you are granted an excused absence from an examination (with authorisation, as above), your lecturer will decide how you will make-up the assessment component, if at all (by make-up examination, extra coursework, viva voce (oral examination), or an increased weighting on an alternate assessment component, etc.). In the past, students have asked about early departure from the program at the end of the semester. This will not normally be allowed. Under no circumstances will we allow a student to take a final exam at any time other than it has been scheduled - neither before the other students in the class, nor afterwards. Students have been informed not to make return travel plans before the end of the exam week. Exams may not be held during your regularly scheduled class meeting. Please do not make plans during the exam period until you know the
exact times of your exams.

NYUL also expects students to arrive to class promptly (both at the beginning and after any breaks) and to remain for the duration of the class. If timely attendance becomes a problem it is the prerogative of each instructor to deduct a mark or marks from the final grade of each late arrival and each early departure.

Please note that for classes involving a **field trip or other external visit**, transportation difficulties are never grounds for an excused absence. It is the student’s responsibility to arrive at an agreed meeting point in a punctual and timely fashion.

Please refer to the Student Handbook for full details of the policies relating to attendance.

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**Late Submission of Work**

1. Written work due in class must be submitted during the class time to the professor.

2. Late work should be submitted **in person** to the Administrative Assistant for Academic Affairs **in office hours** (Mon – Fri, 10:30 – 17:30), who will write on the essay or other work the date and time of submission, in the presence of the student. Another member of the administrative staff can accept the work, in person, in the absence of the Administrative Assistant for Academic Affairs and will write the date and time of submission on the work, as above. Please also send an electronic copy to academcis@nyu.ac.uk for submission to Turnitin.

3. Work submitted within 5 weekdays after the submission time without an agreed extension receives a penalty of 10 points on the 100 point scale.

4. Written work submitted after 5 weekdays after the submission date without an agreed extension fails and is given a zero.

5. **Please note** end of semester essays must be submitted on time.

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**Plagiarism Policy**

Plagiarism: the presentation of another piece of work or words, ideas, judgements, images or data, in whole or in part, as though they were originally created by you for the assignment, whether intentionally or unintentionally, constitutes an act of plagiarism.

Please refer to the Student Handbook for full details of the plagiarism policy.

All students must submit an electronic copy of each piece of their written work to www.turnitin.com and hand in a printed copy with the digital receipt to their professor. Late submission of work rules apply to both the paper and electronic submission and failure to submit either copy of your work will result in automatic failure in the assignment and possible failure in the class.

**Electronic Submission**

The Turnitin database will be searched for the purpose of comparison with other students’ work or with other pre-existing writing or publications, and other academic institutions may also search it.
In order for you to be able to submit your work onto the Turnitin website, you will need to set up an account:

1) Go onto the Turnitin website http://www.turnitin.com
2) Click ‘Create Account’ in the top right hand corner
3) Select user type of ‘student’
4) Enter your class ID & Turnitin class enrolment password (these will be e-mailed to you after the drop/add period, or contact luke.harper@nyu.ac.uk if you have misplaced these).
5) Follow the online instructions to create your profile.

To submit your work for class, you will then need to:

1) Log in to the Turnitin website
2) Enter your class by clicking on the class name
3) Next to the piece of work you are submitting (please confirm the due date), click on the ‘submit’ icon
4) Enter the title of your piece of work
5) Browse for the file to upload from wherever you have saved it (USB drive, etc.), please ensure your work is in Word or PDF format, and click ‘submit’
6) Click ‘yes, submit’ to confirm you have selected the correct paper (or ‘no, go back’ to retry)
7) You will then have submitted your essay onto the Turnitin website.
8) Please print your digital receipt and attach this to the hard copy of your paper before you submit it to your professor (this digital receipt appears on the web site, immediately after you submit your paper and is also sent to your e-mail address). Please also note that when a paper is submitted to Turnitin all formatting, images, graphics, graphs, charts, and drawings are removed from the paper so that the program can read it accurately. Please do not print the paper in this form to submit to your lecturers, as it is obviously pretty difficult to read! You can still access the exact file you uploaded by clicking on the ‘file’ icon in the ‘content’ column.

Please also see the Late Submission of Work policy, above.

Students must retain an electronic copy of their work for one month after their grades are posted online on Albert and must supply an electronic copy of their work if requested to do so by NYU in London. Not submitting a copy of a piece of work upon request will result in automatic failure in the assignment and possible failure in the class. NYU in London may submit in an electronic form the work of any student to a database for use in the detection of plagiarism, without further prior notification to the student.

Penalties for confirmed cases of plagiarism are set out in the Student Handbook.

Required Text(s)
STUDENTS MUST OBTAIN THESE

These can be purchased on-line, second hand or new. Any edition is acceptable. All are available as paperback books.

The following texts will be distributed in extract form as photocopies in the Course Reader in advance of class. They are to be read in the order they appear in the Reader as directed by the weekly schedule IN CONJUNCTION WITH the reading set from the required texts above.

All films and television programmes will be viewed in extract form in class.


Storm Damage Written by Lennie James, directed by Simon Cellan-Jones. BBC 2000.*


Internet Research Guidelines

Additional Required Equipment

Session 1

‘What’s in a name?’
(William Shakespeare)

2nd September

Patsy: I ain’t British though.
Tanya: Yes you are. You’re as English as I am.
Patsy: No I ain’t.
Tanya: Yes you are. You was born here.
Patsy: So? Just ‘cause you born in a stable, that don’t make you a horse.

(Urban Afro-Saxons by Kofi Agyemong and Patricia Elcock 2003:72)

Overview of the presence of black people in Britain pre-1945 to chart the changing definitions of ‘black’, ‘Britishness’ and ‘Englishness’ in relation to indigenousness. Traces and spaces: settlement patterns, evolving cosmopolitanism, political and representational presence before the beginnings of mass migration. As this is the first class, we will read through the critical materials in class as the basis for our initial discussions.

Preparatory reading:

Innes, C.L. A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain. 7-16. CLASS HANDOUT


TOPICS FOR FIRST ESSAY DISTRIBUTED

Session 2

The Chief Commodity: Sugar, Slavery and London

9th September

This session is a museum field trip to The Museum in the Docklands to reflect upon London’s role in the slave trade and the competing cargoes that supplied the imperial centre. It should be used as a basis for developing an evaluation of the legacy of this aspect of empire in contemporary urban mapping.
Preparatory reading/ consultation:
Innes, C.L. *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain* 56-71.
www.tradingfacesonline.com
www.museuminthedocklands.org.uk

Please note: you will be set an investigative task for which you will provide feedback in session 3.

**Session 3**

[16th September]

*Know whence you came*.
*(James Baldwin)*

Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within the narratives of the past.
*(Stuart Hall 1990)*

Evoking the past to create legitimacy, lineage and positive identities in the present in both fiction and polemic. Performing blackness across geography, gender and history.

Preparatory reading:
Martin, S.I. *Incomparable World*

**Session 4**

[23rd September]

From postwar to post-colonial to Black British (I) : City, Dwelling, Imaginings

In a post-colonial context, the front room deserves further study because it raises questions about modernity and migrant aesthetics, the process of decolonisation and the subjective desire to redefine oneself through material culture in the home.
*(Michael McMillan 2008)*

Racialised restrictions and ‘white open spaces’; the legacy of “No Irish, No Dogs, No Coloured”; the aspirational domestic and the aesthetics of marking out territories in a changing urban landscape and socio-economic circumstances, the 1950s/60s then and now.

Preparatory reading/ viewing:
Selvon, Sam. *The Lonely Londoners*

In Class - viewing of *Tales From the Front Room* Prod. and Dir. Zimena Percival
**Session 5**

**From postwar to post-colonial to Black British (II): Political Activisms**

FROM THIS SESSION ONWARDS STUDENT PRESENTATIONS WILL BE BEGIN EACH WEEK. THIS IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE 10% CLASS CONTRIBUTION MARK THAT IS INCLUDE IN YOUR FINAL GRADE.

‘Come what may, we’re here to stay’

(Linton Kwesi Johnson)

The post-imperial city and the imperial mindset, 1970s/80s. The Deptford Fire, mobilisation of the black London community against racism and establishment disregard. Class and political affiliation, ‘black’ as political affiliation rather than ethnic identity.

Preparatory reading:


**Essay 1 (1,500-2,000) words due.**

**Session 6**

**From postwar to post-colonial to Black British (III): Arenas of Contestation in the Arts**

Traditionally sport, carnival and music have been the cultural spaces accorded to the black community in British culture. This session looks at the interfaces in politicised expression of those circumscribed by delimiting stereotypes and the resistances to them by considering representations and receptions of black people’s contributions to the arts.

Preparatory reading/viewing:


Williams, Roy. *Sing Yer Heart Out for the Lads*

In-class viewing of extracts of *Playing Away* Written by Caryl Phillips, directed by Horace Ove. 1986.

**Session 7**

‘No Justice, Just Us’ : The Black Body in the Criminal Justice System

As The Parekh Report reinforces, the longstanding problematic relationship between the criminal justice
system and the black body in the public space has defined contemporary social relations and degrees of belonging and unbelonging for indigenous black Britons. The watershed of the publication of the Macpherson Report (2000) and its findings of endemic institutional racism in Britain is negotiated implicitly in the polemic and representational forms of this session.

In the light of recent uprisings in London and other urban spaces in the UK, we will consider the political and media viewpoints of who constitutes the “feral underclass” that the Home Secretary Kenneth Clarke termed in relation to the history of discrimination and disenfranchisement.

Preparatory reading/viewing:

Johnson, Linton Kwesi. ‘Sonny’s Letter’ – CLASS HANDOUT


FIRST ESSAY RETURNED, TOPICS FOR FINAL ESSAY DISTRIBUTED.

Session 8

At Face Value: Representing Black Experience in Film, Television and the Visual Arts

As black figures were habitually invisibilised in history and their demographic and social presence discounted, in the visual arts and its counterparts of film and television, the scarcity of black people has been notable and sustained – despite changing social realities – up to the present. This session traces contemporary artists whose work across various media literally illuminates and restores the contribution of black people to the field.

Preparatory reading/viewing:


OR


AND

Mercer, Kobena. Welcome to the Jungle 69-81.


Extracts will be shown in class from Black British Style Written and presented by Gigi Morley, directed by Robby Reddy MAP TV/BBC, 2004.
15th October - COMPULSORY CLASS TRIP: “Free at last” Gary Younge in conversation with Hannah
Pool PURCELL ROOM, Queen Elizabeth Hall, South Bank 7.45pm

Session 9
[21st October]

Mixed Heritages: Mixed Messages
Struggles over ethnic or racial classification are emblematic of struggles over the right to a social identity and over the matter of self-definition. (Jill Olumide 2002)

Children born to parents of different or intermixed racial lineages have similarly, historically, traversed straightforward categories of upbringing and cultural affiliation. This has produced conundrums of political identification and self-termining that was frequently at odds with social nomenclature - which aimed to do this identifying for them - indicated by the indiscriminateness of 1980s social policies where black and Asian people for example, were housed under the same (discriminatory), multicultural umbrella. This session considers how we are to make sense of the census featuring a methodology of comparison and contrast between British and American approaches to demographic measurement.

Preparatory reading:
Kay, Jackie. The Adoption Papers 10-34.


CLASS HANDOUT

Session 10
[28th October]

The Care System: Facts, Aesthetics and Fictionalising
In contemporary representations of the institution of the family and in particular that of the mother/child relationship, a unique British manifestation of African diasporic inheritances has emerged, produced by writers who embody a protean identity in terms of racial and cultural knowledge and standpoints which have traditionally been edited out of the familial story. “Trans-raised” (coined by writer and performer Valerie Mason-John) describes a generation of people who grew up in Britain in the 1960s and 70s who self-identify as black or mixed race but were reared by white people: adoptive or foster parents or in white-run care institutions. This session looks at representations of looked-after and adopted children (as created by themselves as adults) to investigate how the parameters of the national story are being flexed.

Preparatory reading/viewing:


Storm Damage BBC written by Lennie James

FALL BREAK: 4th – 10th November

Session 11
Black Women: Activism and Visibility, Textuality and Sexuality.
British Black lesbians write in a variety of styles and employ many different forms: […] Of course we share much common ground with other Black people, especially heterosexual Black women writers, and with white lesbian writers. However, Black lesbian literature is not a fusion of these two with an extra dash of feminism and race awareness. (Anita Naoko Pilgrim, 1999)

Considering black women’s historical marginalisation and resistances to this in a range of activisms from historical retrievals of black women’s presence to assertions of difference and the relationship to feminism.

Preparatory reading:

Carby, Hazel. ‘White Woman Listen!’ in Owusu ed., 2000, 82-8


Levy, Andrea. Small Island


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**Session 12**

[18th November]

**GUEST SPEAKER**

Students are to offer a 5-10 minute outline of their research for the final essay topic and be prepared to answer questions on work-in-progress

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**Session 13**

[25th November]

**Activate and Commemorate: Education and Other Processes of Publishing and Archiving Black British Experience**

I was educated to be English. Alongside me – learning, watching, eating and playing – were white children. But those white children would never have to grow up to question whether they were English or not. (Andrea Levy, 2000)

The critical attention given to black writers in Britain has been dominated by white scholars at home and abroad, leaving many writers feeling that they are left on the sidelines, de-authorised to participate in critical conversations about their own work or a field in which they have expertise. Many anthologies on the field have contextualised artistic endeavour within socio-cultural and issues-based frameworks of analysis or else, Black British writing’s admission to critical discourses is frequently premised upon connections being made to established, white-dominated, authoritative traditions and aesthetic models, or, as responses to specific socio-political conditions. The ramifications of this upon black British identity are explored through issues surrounding the education system and the still developing networks of archiving.

Preparatory reading:

John, Gus. ‘Parental and Community Involvement in Education’ in Richardson, ed. 2005. 97-107


Session 14
[2nd December] Re-cap of course.

Final essay (3,500-4,000 words) due.
HAND IN FINAL ESSAY

Session 15
[9th December]

THERE IS NO EXAMINATION FOR THIS COURSE

Classroom Etiquette
Eating is not permitted in any classrooms in 6 Bedford Square or at Birkbeck College. Please kindly dispose of rubbish in the bins provided. Although use of a laptop for note-taking is acceptable, any other use in class is prohibited as is the use of mobile (cell) phones. Students will attend class having read the required materials.

Required Co-curricular Activities
We will attend an event specifically for Black History Month on 15th October.

Suggested Co-curricular Activities
Take advantage of the range that is offered by NYU and try to supplement these with attending events related to Black culture as advised by your tutor and also as derived from your own research.

Your Instructor

Australian-born Deirdre Osborne is a Senior Lecturer at Goldsmiths, University of London and promotes the work of black British writers in all contexts in which she has taught, from universities to high security prisons. Currently she is editing The Cambridge Companion to British Black and Asian Literature (1945-2010) and has interviewed and published critical essays on key black British writers over the past decade (Kwame Kwei-Armah, Andrea Levy, debbie tucker green, Roy Williams, Lenn Sissay, SuAndi, and Courttia Newland), in a range of journals such as New Theatre Quarterly, Women: A Cultural Review and in the anthologies, Performing Poetry: Race, Place and Gender, Hybrid Cultures Nervous States (both Rodopi), Contemporary Poetry in Crisis (Palgrave), Methuen Modern British Playwrights, and “Black “ British Aesthetics Today. She edited the Methuen classic of Lorraine Hansberry’s A Raisin in the Sun Her writing has been translated into Portuguese. Her edited anthology of Black British plays and critical introductions, Hidden Gems (Oberon, 2008) will be joined by Volume II (2012). Three more books are in preparation: the monograph Critically Black: Black British Dramatists and Theatre in the New Millennium (Manchester University Press), the edited Contemporary Black British Women’s Writing: Contradictions and
Heritages and co-edited Modern and Contemporary Black British Theatre (Palgrave). In 2012 she organised ‘D-Day: Celebrating Diane Abbott’s 25 Years as an MP’ on 26th October 2012, a day of panels and performances to honour Britain’s first black woman to be elected to the House of Commons. Her current project is organizing ‘The 3Rs: An Evening with Darcus Howe’ (11th October 2012), to honour one of Black Britain’s longstanding and leading political activists, writers and broadcasters.