

...

## Statement in support of the Black Cultural Archives (BCA)

To whom it may concern,

The RACE Working Group, and the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) write in support of the **Black Cultural Archives (BCA)**. We are deeply concerned by the potential closure of the BCA as a result of a reduction in funding and urge the government to provide sustainable long-term funding for this valuable collection and community space, which is a crucial resource of national and international importance.

The BCA is a nationally and internationally vital collection that serves to illustrate the diverse international histories, geographies, and cultural identities that have made and continue to make Black Britishness and British identities, and support diasporic understanding of how people and places are made and remade. The BCA includes unique archival materials which help us to understand issues central to the discipline of geography, for example: migration, belonging, empire and its legacies, the lived experience of different communities in Britain, and important campaigns for recognition and equality and anti-racism.

These issues are important to the geography syllabus in schools and colleges and are a vital focus in university contexts. The BCA, its expert educators, exhibitions and collections, provide important community education resources across a range of events as well as unique and irreplaceable collections and resources for teaching across key stages at schools and colleges, and at undergraduate and masters level, and are increasingly utilised in research. These resources held in a building especially built to house this collection, located where it is, gives a rich sense of place and history that is internationally respected and regarded. Its resources are used by geographers far beyond London. For example, the first Race, Culture and Equality (RACE) Working Group Undergraduate Dissertation Prize [in 2016] was awarded to a piece of research drawing on BCA collections, by Omar Clarke of the University of Nottingham, on identity, performance and the Notting Hill Carnival.

### Testimonies from academics

Colleagues from across Geography, and from a range of other disciplines, have been eager to support us in our call for support for BCA. Below is a selection of

1 Kensington Gore  
London SW7 2AR

**T** +44 (0)20 7591 3000

**F** +44 (0)20 7591 3001

**E** [info@rgs.org](mailto:info@rgs.org)

**W** [www.rgs.org](http://www.rgs.org)

**President**

Rt Hon Baroness Chalker

**Director**

Professor Joe Smith

the diverse examples they gave of how this resource is active in their teaching and academic contributions:

*Jacob Fairless Nicholson, 3rd year doctoral candidate King's Geography (AHRC funded through the London Arts and Humanities Partnership): 'Learning anti-racism: a cultural geography of anti-racist education in London, 1970-1990'*

I have used several BCA collections in my doctoral research thus far. My research draws both on existing archival collections including the Ansel Wong, Tony Soares (uncatalogued) and Heart of the Race Oral History collections. Not only have these collections been tremendously useful in forming key contributions to three drafted chapters of my thesis, they have also led to collaborations and connections with individuals to whom the collections belong, and with staff working at the centre. Through this I have been able to collect original oral history data, much of which was recorded on the centre premises.

*Dr Ruth Craggs (Lecturer in Human Geography, King's College London)*

I use the archives regularly in my teaching with undergraduate students learning about the 20th century city. Alongside a walking tour of Brixton focusing in on the intersections of community, housing, the colour bar, police violence, urban uprisings, and community activism, the students visit the exhibition space at the BCA and work with materials from the collection throughout the module (from oral histories to photographs and ephemera), developing their understandings of the politics of race in London after World War II, and of the methods and sources we can use to research them.

*Dr E. James West (Leverhulme Early Career Fellow in American History, Northumbria University)*

BCA archives are highly important for international scholars, not just those within UK academia or for British grassroots organisations. In the US at the moment there is a wave of interest in Black British history emerging, with scholars such as Kennetta Hammond Perry (now based in the UK), Tanisha Ford, and others who have used the BCA for their research. The AAIHS blog 'Black Perspectives' (one of the foremost black studies web presences in the US) provides plenty of evidence of scholars whose work has benefited from the BCA

*Dr Kate Quinn (Senior Lecturer in Caribbean History, University College London)*

I have had at least two undergraduate students over the last two years produce excellent dissertations based on archival research they conducted at the BCA, and another one this year who intends to use it for hers. They were all for the final year 'special subject' course which is the culmination of the UCL History degree programme - for which students produce a 10,000 word dissertation based on original, independent research. The BCA has been absolutely invaluable to running my special subject course on 'Race and Resistance in Black Atlantic Thought'. Many of the students on this course have a particular interest in Black British History, and they have benefitted enormously from being able to access these sources. One student this year plans to do her research on Olive Morris, using BCA archival and other resources; previous dissertations using the archive included one on the Organisation for Women of African and Asian Descent (OWAAD), and one on Black and Asian women's activism more broadly; both of these received high distinction grades, but beyond that, being able to access this rich and important source base was really inspiring for students, who, with any luck, will be the next generation of scholars. It would be a dreadful loss should the maintenance of this amazing resource for students and scholars be in any way compromised, let alone closed.

1 Kensington Gore  
London SW7 2AR

**T** +44 (0)20 7591 3000

**F** +44 (0)20 7591 3001

**E** [info@rgs.org](mailto:info@rgs.org)

**W** [www.rgs.org](http://www.rgs.org)

**President**

Rt Hon Baroness Chalker

**Director**

Professor Joe Smith

*Dr Jak Peake (Senior Lecturer in Literature, Film and Theatre Studies, University of Essex)*

I undertook a field trip to the Black Cultural Archives (BCA) on 7 November 2018 with a cohort of 2nd-year undergraduates taking the module, LT218: Black Lives Represented: Writing, Art, Politics and Society, within the Department of Literature, Film, and Theatre Studies at the University of Essex. The trip, which involved use of the archives' materials, is part of the essential learning of the module and it is envisaged that the BCA trip will be repeated in future years indefinitely, for as long as the module runs.

*Dr Nathaniel Adam Tobias Coleman (Senior Teaching Associate, University of Bristol)*

I co-convoked an event that was only made possible thanks to the BCA. Here is the resultant audio-visual output, by Nathan Richards: [https://youtu.be/E\\_z29K2p1g](https://youtu.be/E_z29K2p1g)

*Dr Alana Harris (Lecturer in Modern British History, Kings College London)*

As part of the Department's commitment to develop 10 new D&I orientated modules as part of the Athena SWAN Action Plan, I have designed and planned learning activities, with a strong focus on experiential learning, as part of this module which will be co-delivered by the Black Cultural Archives in Brixton (2017-8). The module is entitled 5AAH1071 Black in the Union Jack: Black Lives in Modern London and draws upon primary sources from the BCAs collection. Seminars in alternate weeks are delivered using archival material in Brixton and co-delivered by Dr Alana Harris and Munira Mohamad (Educational Officer). Drawing upon primary source material from their collection, technology enhanced learning and alternative assessment models, the module equips learners with knowledge of public history praxis and the heritage sector, and enables students to co-produce module materials through identification of new archival material for potential incorporation the following academic year. Teaching materials used include a walking tour, role-play session and oral history audio materials, alongside a digital source pack of archival sources. Student feedback from the first year pilot (56 students) was exceptionally positive:

- Black in the Union Jack feels refreshing and provides proof that KCL History is listening to us and hears our concern about the content of the degree.
- KCL History bringing their A-game in 2018
- Different to the 'pale, stale and male' history that dominates KCL module selections
- I worry that had I of not taken this module, I genuinely could have graduated from the History department at King's without being able to recognise famous names in both the historiography (like Peter Fryer and Paul Gilroy) and the history (CLR James, Padmore). The module has exposed me to pretty crucial pieces of British historiography and crucial figures in British history, and I fear that I would not have been exposed to these materials without Black in the Union Jack.
- Partnership with the BCA – It has been so obvious how enthusiastic the BCA is to host this module, which is inviting in itself. It's really amazing have my university take advantage of the resources around us. As a student, I feel so fortunate to be able to live in London, and it's important that we take advantage of what students at other universities do not have at their finger tips. Why don't more modules partner with institutions around London?

1 Kensington Gore  
London SW7 2AR

T +44 (0)20 7591 3000

F +44 (0)20 7591 3001

E [info@rgs.org](mailto:info@rgs.org)

W [www.rgs.org](http://www.rgs.org)

**President**

Rt Hon Baroness Chalker

**Director**

Professor Joe Smith

## Conclusion

The Black Cultural Archives serves as a clarion call to remember. The Black British community often remains invisible, particularly within higher education institutions, whereby there are no black academics employed within top roles. Initiatives such as the BCA play an essential role in the preservation of Black British cultural patrimony within such institutions. Destruction of the Black Cultural Archives by removing it from its current location or splitting up the collections would be cultural and historical vandalism. It would damage our collective historical, contemporary, and future knowledge. It would be a knowingly reductive action. It is too high a cost to pay.

We very much hope that the value of this collection will be recognised by the Government, and funding found to prevent the loss of an irreplaceable resource.

...  
The Race, Culture and Equality Working Group of the Royal Geographical Society  
(with the Institute of British Geographers)

[RHED@rgs.org](mailto:RHED@rgs.org)

**Royal  
Geographical  
Society**  
with IBG

Advancing geography  
and geographical learning

1 Kensington Gore  
London SW7 2AR

**T** +44 (0)20 7591 3000

**F** +44 (0)20 7591 3001

**E** [info@rgs.org](mailto:info@rgs.org)

**W** [www.rgs.org](http://www.rgs.org)

**President**

Rt Hon Baroness Chalker

**Director**

Professor Joe Smith