

## Ephemera and its uses

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As a historian of the Black Presence in the UK, I can vouch for the fundamental importance of 'ephemera'. This is due to the almost total lack of archival material. Though during my tenure as Secretary of the Black & Asian Studies Association (1991-2003) we attempted to encourage local archivists to collect material from the Black population as they do from the White, not all have followed this suggestion. Any relevant materials already held are seldom catalogued to reveal their presence. Thus the historian is often reduced to the revelations in the 'ephemera' either held in archival collections, or more frequently volunteered by interviewees.

Let me use as an example the work I have done on Claudia Jones. (See Sherwood, Hinds & Prescod, *Claudia Jones: a life in exile*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2000) Trinidad-born Claudia lived much of her life in the USA, where she was among the top rank of the Communist Party. Exiled to Britain she, *inter alia*, published the first Black post-war newspaper, the *West India Gazette*; started beauty contests for Black women who had been categorised as 'Black cannot be beautiful'; and started what became Notting Hill carnival to demonstrate the creative and artistic talents of West Indians. Though a few of Claudia's papers have survived, given that I was told that her room in the shared house in which she lived in North London was crammed with books and papers, this 'archive' can be but a minuscule percentage of what was there when she died of a heart attack in 1965.

When someone from whom I had learned much about the many Black communities and peoples in England since the 1920s died, it dawned on my consciousness that many of those who remembered the work of Claudia Jones would probably soon be joining my recently deceased friend. A colleague and I organised a day-long oral history session, recorded by the British Library, of all those we could find who had worked with Claudia in her many enterprises. I followed this up with further research, and was given the flyer for Claudia's funeral as well as for the 1959 Caribbean Carnival.

The flyer for the funeral revealed not only what we had not known before, but told us that there had been a public meeting after the actual interment of ashes at Highgate cemetery. (We knew the site as she is buried next to Karl Marx.) Thankfully the flyer listed many of those who would be making tributes to Claudia. While some of the people listed we knew had been associated with Claudia's work, that, for example, she had known the author George Lamming or the singer Ewan McCall was new to us, as was the recording by Ruby Dee of her speech to the US Court prior to her imprisonment during the infamous McCarthy era. (Sadly, as we had no funding for research, we could not follow up on these leads.)

I was also given an absolutely priceless copy of the 'Souvenir of the Caribbean Carnival 1959'. This gives not only details of the program and the performers, but also states that it was televised by the BBC. Very sadly, the BBC has no copy of the broadcast and claims that it must have been live and unrecorded.

From a flyer found in a recently deposited collection at Birmingham City Archives (one of the few and most active of those collecting materials on the Black population) we learn that the Afro-Caribbean Conference, a group organised by the Afro-Caribbean Association, which was the 'official organ' of the *West Indian Gazette*, had organised a 'Commonwealth Lobby' at the House of Commons for 13 February 1962. This was to 'demand the withdrawal of the Colour-Bar Bill', ie, the forthcoming Immigration Act. The flyer lists those who can be called 'for further information', thus giving the researcher a list of affiliated organisations. Again, a very fruitful and irreplaceable source of information for future researches.

I hope this demonstrates that certainly in my area of research, ephemera are absolutely essential to the writing of this history. I am sure all my colleagues (the few that there are) would agree with me. We all depend on these flyers, etc for leads to meetings, events, etc whose existence are otherwise not recorded in archival listings.

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