

Black British Writers Collectives in 1980s London

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Research Question

How did writers collectives in the British Black Arts Movement facilitate the exploration of Black identity?

Background

During the British Black Arts Movement of the 1980s and 1990s, Black creatives gained prominence in the art scene against a backdrop of violent anti-immigrant sentiment, political unrest, women's liberation, and police brutality. Black writers' collectives and publishing groups flourished, each with a different perspective on Black identity.

Two notable groups — the Black Ink Collective and the Asian Women Writers' Collective — explored contemporary Black identity and sought to intentionally curate space in their communities in different ways.

Defining Political Blackness

Political Blackness is characterized by the shared background of a colonized homeland in this time period, and is inclusive of people of African Diasporic and South Asian descent.

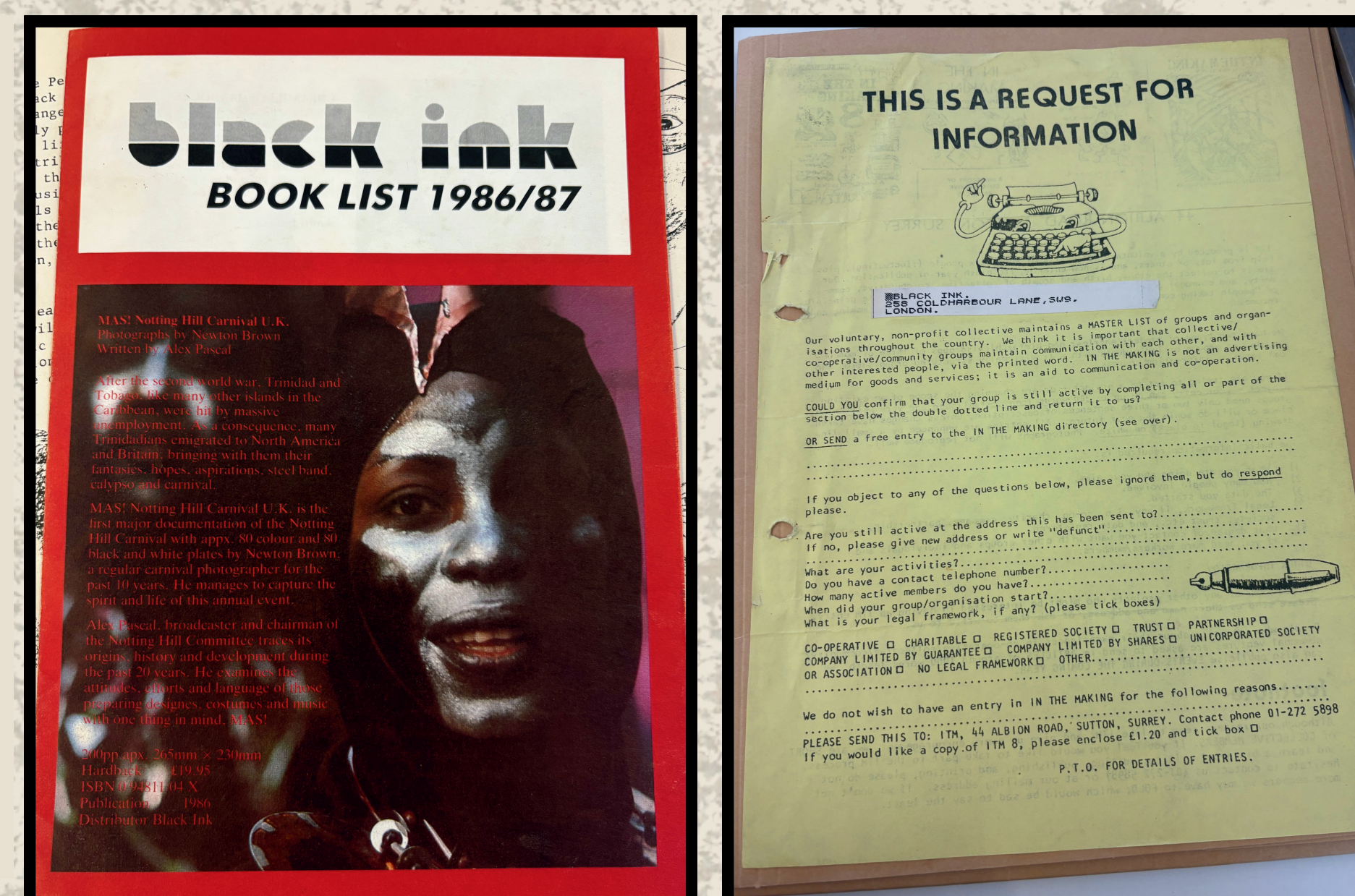
Methodology

Analysis of 140 archival materials, inclusive of ephemera, manuscripts, correspondence, and published catalogues from the Black Cultural Archives, George Padmore Institute, and London Archives in London, England. Evaluation of 6 anthologies from the Black Ink Collective and Asian Women Writers' Collective, spanning 163 short stories, poems, essays, and plays, with a random selection of 24 texts for close readings.

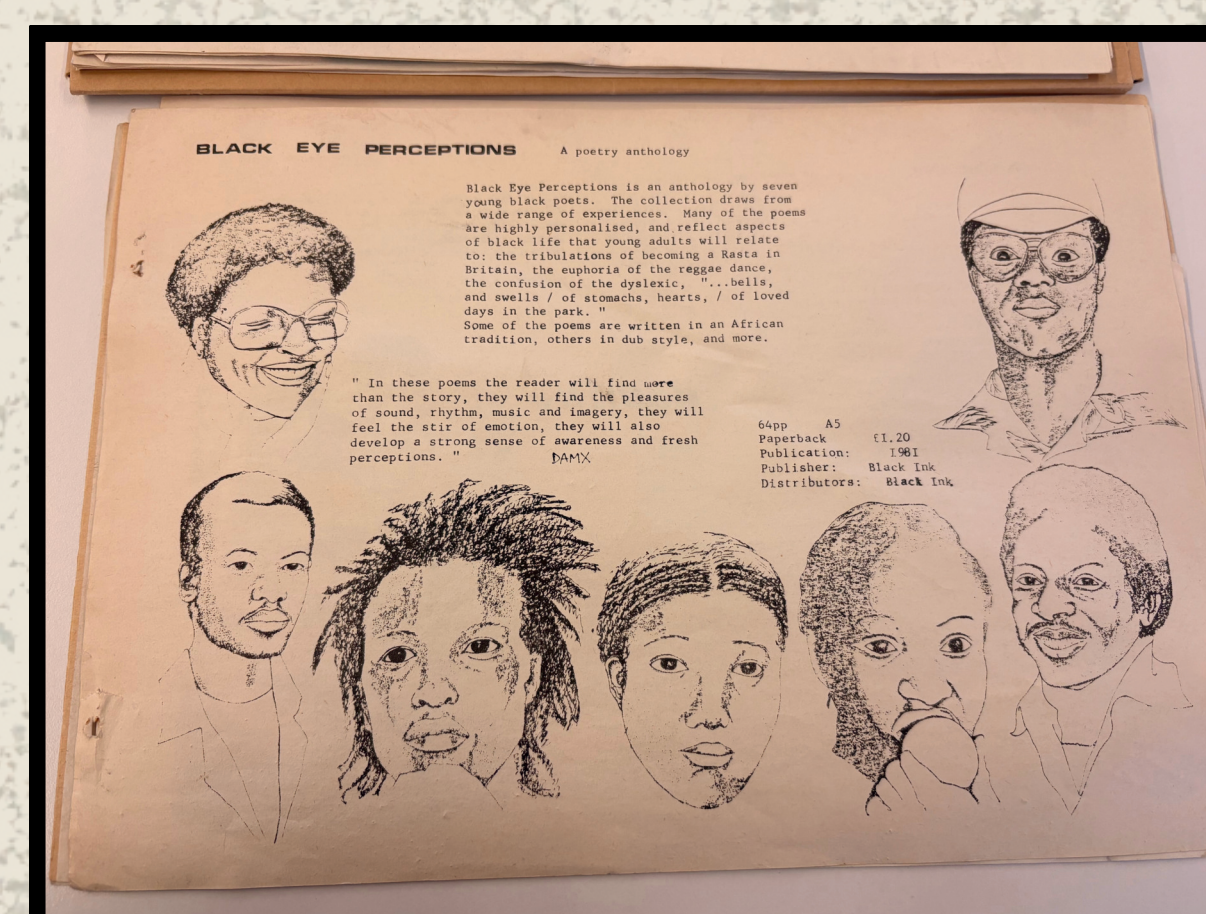
Black Ink

- Manner of curating space
- The Black Ink Writers Workshop
 - Readings
 - Created writer-in-residence program to fund the Asian Women Writers Workshop
 - Youth events
- Exploration of Blackness
- Transcultural
 - Youth
 - 1st, 2nd, 3rd generation voices

Black Ink Catalogue 1986/87



Form for community arts groups database



Black-Eye Perceptions

Analysis

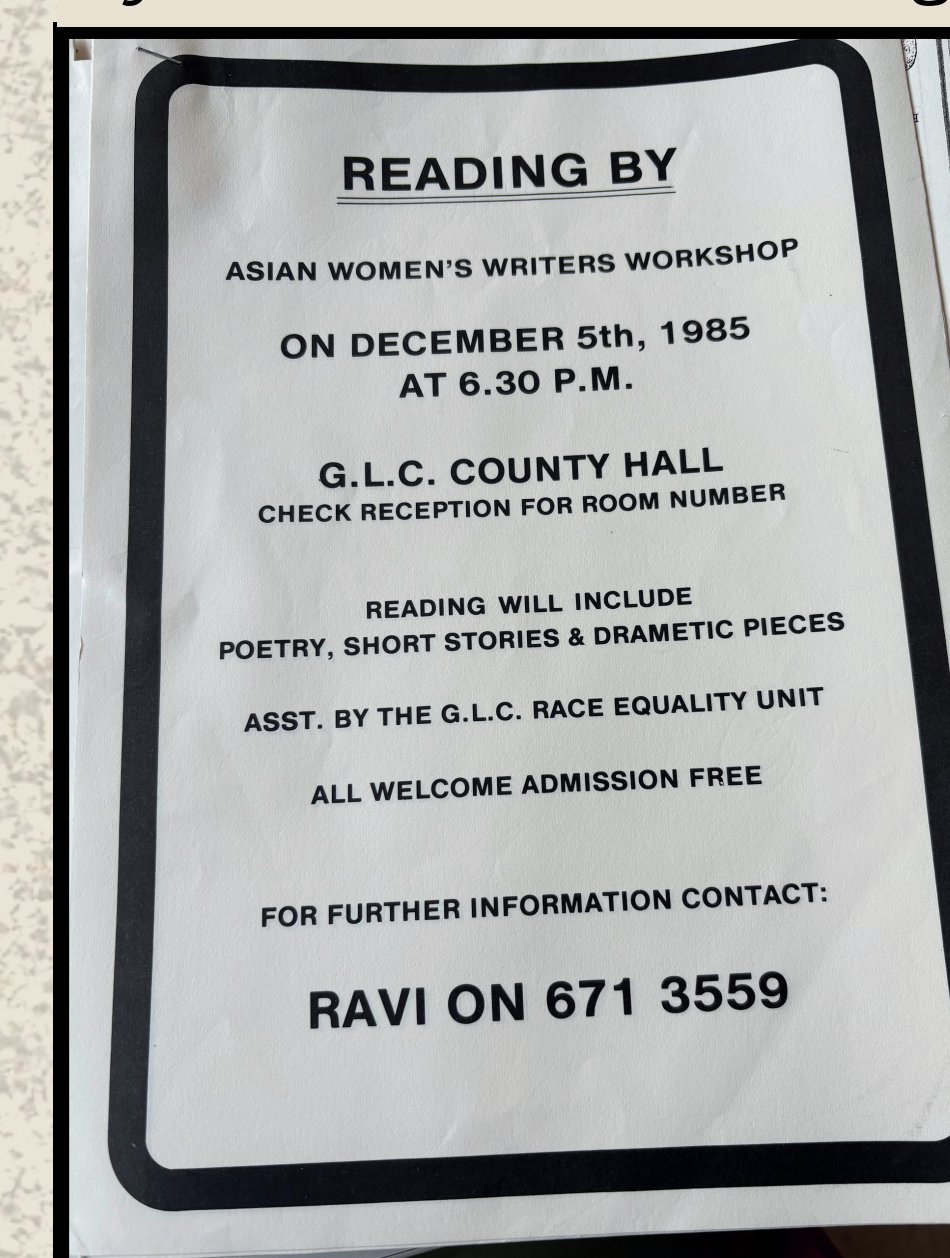
- Patterns in literature indicate a focus on education, violence, childhood romance, parents
- Editorial critiques show a preference for anti-colonial, non-sentimental work from adults

Asian Women Writers Collective

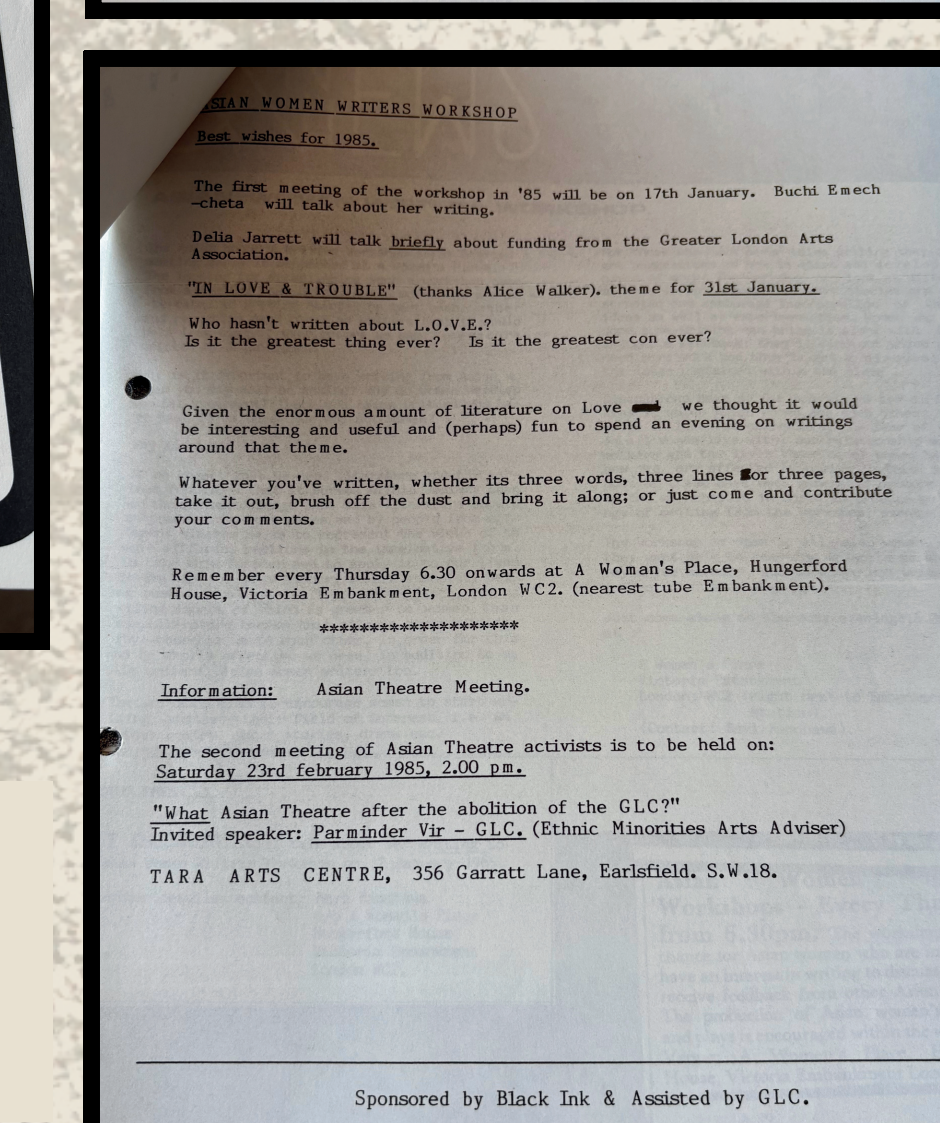
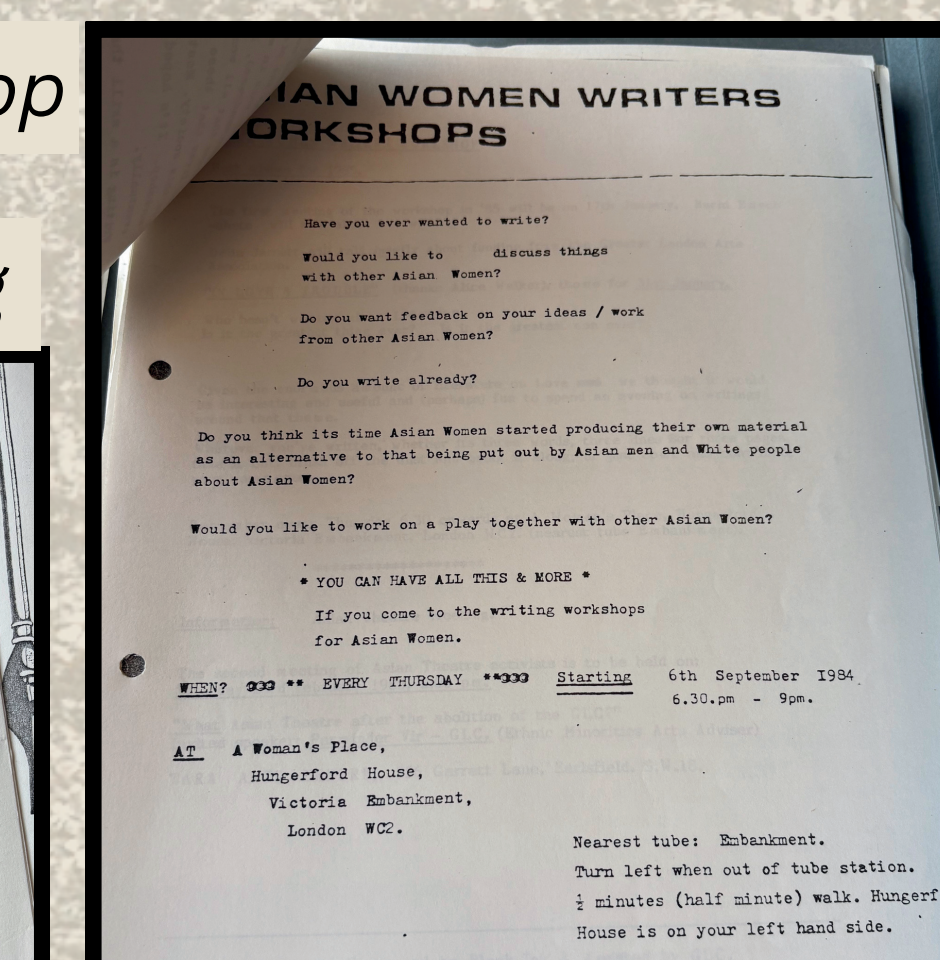
- Manner of curating space
- Asian Women Writers Workshop
 - Open membership
 - Readings
- Exploration of Blackness
- South Asian, later Asian
 - Feminist
 - Older women
 - 1st generation
 - Transnational

Flyer for the Workshop

Flyer for AWWW Reading



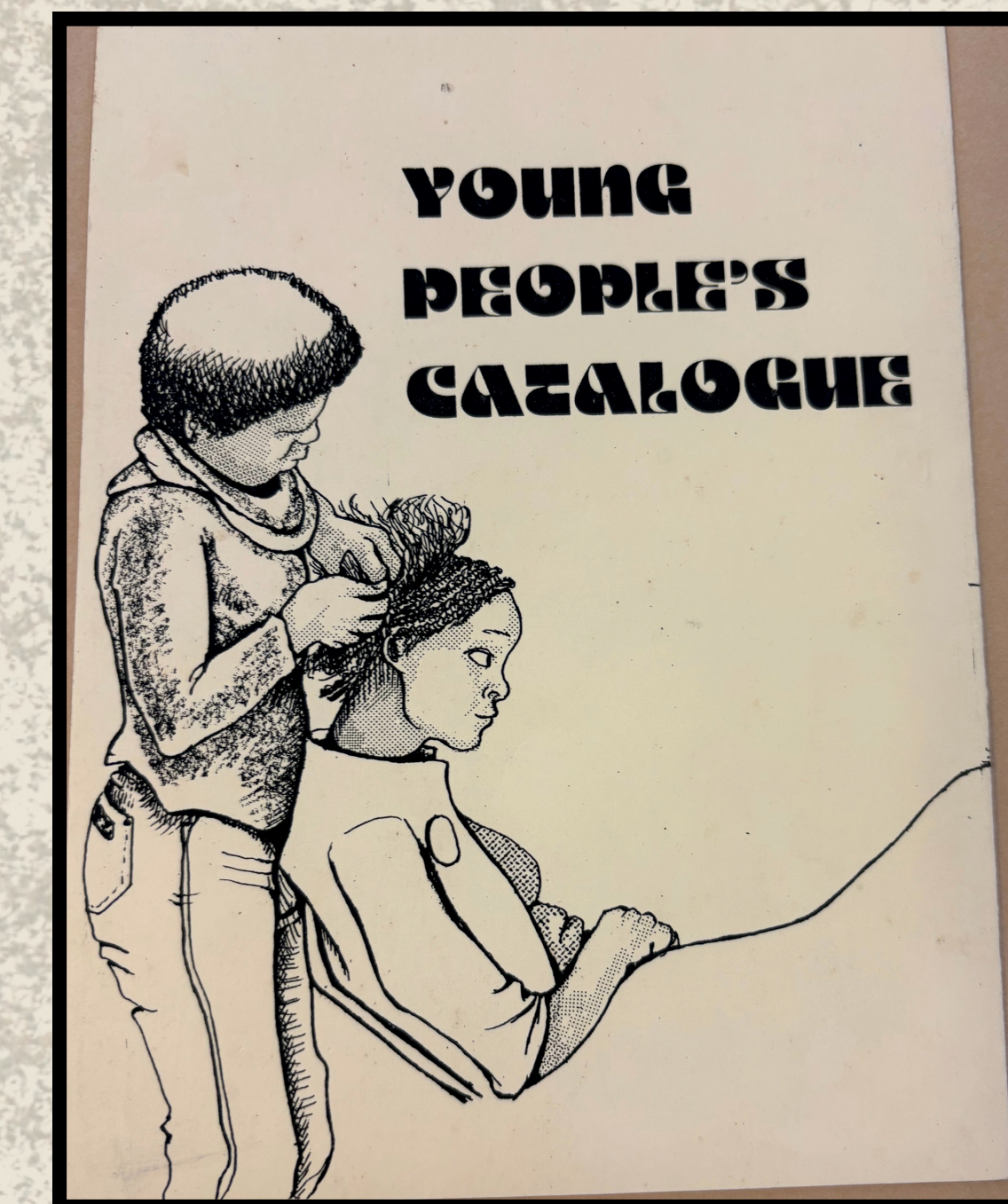
Internal missive about a screenwriting training course



Analysis

- Literature indicates focus on migration, love, family, sexism, employment, isolation
- Internal missives show desire for mass participation and increased membership, encourages publishing-focused trainings for members

Black Ink Catalogue



Right of Way cover

Conclusions

- Writers groups formed in order to fill gaps in publishing and popular literature as noted by their founders
- Each collective curates their writers and their published materials in order to present the picture of a distinct Blackness
- Further research is needed to examine the political and economic underpinnings that supported these collectives

The British Black Arts Movement was the site of creation for an expansive definition of Blackness, which was grassroots in nature. As Blackness became an identity prioritized over ethnic and transnational ties in the contemporary era in Britain, the Movement and its literature presents an invaluable opportunity to witness racial identity formation from the perspectives of everyday people.

Works Cited

