Clive Nwonka and Anamik Saha eds, *Black Film British Cinema II* (London: Goldsmiths Press), pp. xix + 223, ISBN 978 1 91 268563 9 (pb), £21.

For those of us who attended the Black Film British Cinema II conference at Goldsmiths University of London and the Institute of Contemporary Arts on 18-19 May 2017, it was apt that we woke on 18 May 2021 to news that had broken in the film world overnight that black British star John Boyega was to re-team with director Joe Cornish to reprise his breakthrough role as Moses in a forthcoming sequel to the 2011 comedy sci-fi action genre hybrid *Attack the Block*. Imagery from this culturally significant film – noteworthy for its interventions into persistently pernicious cultural stereotyping of black British masculinity, and of the cultures associated with high-rise living in London's tower blocks - was central to the publicity for that event. Four years on from the conference itself, it has now given rise to a highly anticipated new publication, co-edited by conference organisers Clive Nwonka and Anamik Saha, *Black Film British Cinema II*, purposely named for its status as a follow-up to the 1988 originary conference of the same name that preceded it, and the ensuing publication of *ICA Documents 7: Black Film British Cinema* (Mercer ed 1988). This and the event from which it emerged is inarguably one of the most important landmarks in the history of black British film studies and black British film culture, and now, so too is *Black Film British Cinema II*.

The book features an eclectic range of writing styles in a collection of wide-ranging essays that offer a combination of broad as well as niche coverage of the core subject matter of black British film, which it explores from an illuminating variety of critical, analytical, interrogative and in some cases polemical viewpoints. Chapters vary in length between essays that differently constitute longer-form pieces of academic scholarship, shorter-form position and think pieces, and in one case a transcribed panel discussion (Martin et al). This is commensurate with Nwonka and Saha's stated intentions to include voices that span those of academics, practitioners, curators, programmers, policy makers, journalists and cultural heritage workers, with a view to paying tribute to the spirit of

the 1988 volume and the variety of voices showcased therein, but also to ensuring "a range of cross-generational, inter-disciplinary and international approaches to the issue of 'black British' film." (10)

Content and coverage span mainstream industry fare, art cinema, and gallery located visual practice, and approaches taken by contributors draw on ideas and traditions from film, media, cultural and communication studies and those of the social sciences. What unites them though, is the purposeful commitment shared by the editors and all contributing authors to explain, contextualise and interrogate the "practices, values and networks of collaborations that have shaped the development of black film culture and representation" (back matter) from the 1980s through to the present. To this end, the material is organised into four parts that differently speak to the book's key concerns, namely: the new politics of representation in black film (I); black film aesthetics (II); curatorship, exhibition and arts practices as they pertain to black British film (III); and the politics of diversity in industry (IV).

Two figures that loom largest in the book's coverage (both men, highlighting one of the reasons why Part IV's interrogations of the intersectional politics of film industry diversity are such crucial inclusions) are filmmakers John Akomfrah whose work past and present, both as part of the Black Audio Film Collective (BAFC) and under his own name, is discussed in chapters by Kara Keeling, James Harvey and Alessandra Raengo, in some ways anchoring the book to its predecessor, in which the BAFC likewise looms large. And Steve McQueen who, as the focus of the aforementioned panel discussion, is held up as exceptional due to his status as "the most celebrated Black British film director of all time," (81) albeit he was "not yet making films about Black British life." (82) However, panellist Ashley Clark was prescient in predicting that McQueen would become "the returning son [presumably from the black British diaspora to the US film industries] who will come back and make this great body of work about Black British life." (83) With McQueen's staggering new additions to his oeuvre represented by the films comprising 2020's *Small Axe* (on this, see Naidoo 2021) and now *Uprising* (2021), Clark's prediction has already come to pass.

Sarita Malik's contribution, which explains and contextualises the key flashpoints in the history of black British cinema from the 1980s to the present does essential work in both expanding the scope of the important terrain-mapping undertaken by the editors in the introduction, and in more fully laying the political and historical foundations for the rest of the book's coverage, concerns and themes. As indicated above, Part IV is politically crucial, but is also noteworthy for the empirical approaches taken to analysing the contemporary politics of film industry diversity by three of its four essays, and for the extent to which the arguments made and light shed on the industry realities in question are enabled by an impressive range of hard data, both quantitative (Cobb and Wreyford; Hoyes) and qualitative (Skadegård Thorsen).

The closing gambit by Bidisha is the most outspokenly polemical of the contributions, but I mention this not to take anything away from the critical validity or substance of this piece. On the contrary, the impassioned first-person perspective from which it is written lends a refreshingly experiential and personal viewpoint to many of the issues concerning both the industry politics of diversity and the intersectional cultural politics of race and representation that are treated with more critical distance by contributors elsewhere.

Black Film British Cinema II takes its place alongside landmark publications like the forebear for which it is named (1988), Givanni's (ed) *Remote Control* (1995), Bourne's *Black in the British Frame* (2001), Malik's *Representing Black Britain* (2002), and Saha's own *Race and the Cultural Industries* (2018) and *Race, Culture and Media* (2021), as an era defining take on the politics of blackness and Britishness in film. Nwonka's forthcoming volume on the aesthetics of British urban cinema (2022) looks set to do likewise, and I look forward to seeing it too reviewed in this journal in due course.

Further, given both the overlaps and the divergences between British and American cinema, especially via the connection between them that arises from the diaspora of black British performers to Hollywood in flight from the UK film industry's racialised glass ceiling (highlighted in this volume in

chapters by Hoyes and Bidisha), the more industry and mainstream oriented contributions in this book are also in productive dialogue with crucial work done by Erigha in the superb industry study of Hollywood's racial hierarchies *The Hollywood Jim Crow* (2019). *Black Film British Cinema II* is a must-read volume for anyone interested in the landscape of British cinema now.

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