Eddie Chambers, *Roots & Culture: Cultural Politics in the Making of Black Britain*.

London: IB Taurus, 2017. xix + 284 pp. (Paper US\$28.00)

This pioneering book explores the cultural narratives surrounding the development of black¹ popular culture in Britain. Eddie Chambers chronicles the migrant story (“migrant” referring not only to the black people who came to the United Kingdom but also to their children who were born British) during the 1960s–1980s, insightfully showing how these people tapped into the cultural resources of their original Caribbean and African roots to challenge dominant European discourses and to re-interpret displacement in their new environments. These consciously created cultural productions—music, poetry, theater, art, and sport—embody the fragmented histories of being Black British. Chambers looks at how they are employed to recover and recreate new identities in the development of contemporary Black Britain.

The introduction and eight chapters are more or less labeled in Jamaican creole, a personal touch since Chambers was born in the United Kingdom to Jamaican parents. The chapters move widely across shifting West Indian social strategies and practices and the material circumstances in which Blacks operated in Britain to understand how culture matters politically and how politics matter culturally. The accompanying nomenclature changes constantly as Chambers describes how “West Indians” become “Afro-Caribbean” and eventually “Black British.” Central to these narratives is the discursive work—the cultural discourses and social meanings from the mid-1950s to the late 1970s that indirectly and directly impacted the structure and development of Black British artistic expression in the 1980s.

Chapters 1 and 2 showcase the arrival of the first West Indians in London on the *Windrush* and their unstinted loyalty to England, their mother country. They are confronted with rejection that was quickly transformed into disappointment and consequent marginalization. Chambers looks carefully at these ethnic minorities’ need to use that displacement to carve out other identities and values and an identifiable cultural niche in mainstream British society. During that volatile period of the 1970s, even though independence from Britain was a pertinent issue in the West Indies, it merely intensified the problem of dispossession; the migrants were seen as a problem in both Britain and

1 Chambers argues that “the issue of upper-case B or lower-case b in the writing of the word ‘Black/black’ is of some importance. [*Roots and Cultures*] has used ‘Black’ with an upper case B, to refer to individuals and communities of specifically African-Caribbean background ... Black with a capital B refers to people of the African Diaspora. Lowercase black is simply a color.” *NWTG* journal style is, however, to capitalize “black” as a noun but not as an adjective.

the Caribbean where paradoxically they were labeled as expatriates and visiting tourists.

Chapter 3 addresses a unique combination of factors: the idiom of *Rastafari*, the dread culture, and the birth of Reggae music in 1970s Britain. The migrants continued to reinvent their terrain by embracing Rastafarianism, with its promise of freedom from oppression (Babylon). This religious move engendered a re-incorporation of Reggae in their cultural repertoire that served as the productive point of encounter between music and the messianic effect of Rastafarianism that unsettled and destabilized the mainstream. Thus, music extended and reshaped their newly evolving black identities in the British metropolis.

Chapter 4 depicts the role that language played in the narratives of Black British development. *Patwa* as a form of artistic expression originated in Jamaica with a group of poets that consciously used it as a centerpiece of their poetry. The carry-over to London is seen through the poetic works of Linton Kwesi Johnson, a British-Jamaican poet. The use of Creole in poetry and its ambivalent oscillation between standard British English and its informal vernacular forms, creates another novel technique in the story of Black British cultural development.

Chapter 5 gives special attention to Africa and the dominant role it played in the creation of Black British identity. Whereas black people were generally likened to aliens stranded in strange lands, this chapter focuses on important events of the 1970s. The airing of *Roots* on British TV recentered Africa as a crucial part of identity formation for the children born in Britain to West Indian parents.

Chapters 6–8 focus on the riots of the 1980s involving black youths and the constant clashes with the police. This only enhanced the creation of powerful symbols for the re-attainment of territorial power that was manifested in black art and film, which fomented new mediums for mobilizing the oppressed while simultaneously concretizing the birthing of a new metropolitan cultural identity.

What this book does is to reorganize our understanding of how West Indians have been instrumental in shaping the cultural texture and sociopolitical life of Black Britain. It is a living testimony to Chambers's generation in Britain, which undoubtedly casts a different perspective on the meaning of Britain and Black British-ness.

Patricia T. Alleyne-Dettmers

Department of Economics, Social & Legal Sciences,
University of Applied Sciences, Konstanz, Germany
patricia.alleyne-dettmers@htwg-konstanz.de