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Tradition and Emptiness

The Alfie Roberts Institute is an independent education and research center based in Montreal, Quebec. Its activities target communities of African and Caribbean descent in Canada and overseas. Among its activities include courses and workshops, publications, public forums, and research. ARI is born out of a tradition of Black struggle and situates itself within the tradition of the Caribbean Conference Committee (CCC) which was located in Montreal. The CCC was comprised of young Caribbean women and men who migrated to Canada in the 1960s to study with the goal of returning to the Caribbean. In Canada, the group's political-intellectual work helped lay the theoretical foundation for the emergence of the Caribbean New Left, and its members were later at the center of the wave of social movements that swept the Anglophone Caribbean in the 1960s and 1970s.

I will discuss ARI and the CCC in order to highlight Canada's rich Black and Caribbean political traditions and its links to developments in the Caribbean and the emergence of Canada's Black left. I will also discuss the importance of continuity and the framing historical traditions. Lastly, I will argue that, while the university is an important place of learning, as knowledge becomes increasingly concentrated in the academy, the importance of public and community education is dissipating with dire consequences for communities of African and Caribbean descent, hence the importance of independent educational, research, and intellectual institutions.