

## **Dismay as UK's first specialist black bookshop forced to close**

*New Beacon Books in north London announces it will close and move online only after more than 55 years*



*New Beacon Books first opened in 1966, intending to create a space for black writers.*

Tom Ambrose  
Wed 29 Dec 2021

The UK's first specialist black bookshop is to close after more than 55 years due to financial problems, it has been announced.

New Beacon Books in Finsbury Park, north London, first opened in 1966 and staved off the threat of closure as recently as 2016.

But with financial pressures exacerbated by coronavirus adding to the competition from online retailers such as Amazon, it has been confirmed the store will close its physical outlet on Stroud Green Road and move online only.

Creating a space for black writers, New Beacon Books was founded by the activist John La Rose and his partner, Sarah White.

Speaking about the prospect of the UK's first black publisher and specialist bookshop closing, Prof Augustine John, chair of the Communities Empowerment Network (CEN) charity, said it was "at the heart of the community" and should be saved.

“New Beacon Books is the only remaining independent black publishing and bookselling entity in the UK,” he said.

“Throughout its 55 years, it has been pivotal to the growth of the Black Education Movement, the Black Supplementary School Movement and current calls for the decolonisation of the curriculum.

“Unlike Amazon, Alibris and other online suppliers, New Beacon has been at the heart of communities, building social movements and giving expression to young voices.”

Prof John, an award-winning Grenadian writer, added: “It remains a huge part of the history of the adaptation of British society to its historical black presence. Save and develop it for coming generations.”

The announcement of the store’s closure, posted on its website earlier this month, has been met with dismay and disappointment on social media.

The actor Adjoa Andoh tweeted: “I am so sad about this wonderful bookshop and the haven of cultural solidarity and information it provided to the black and extended communities for over half a century.”

Another social media user, Elliot Ross, commented: “How have we in the UK made this a time of unprecedented ‘visibility’ for works by Black authors, while at the same time producing the conditions in which a radical bulwark like New Beacon Books can’t sustain itself after half a century of vital work?”

Emeka Forbes tweeted: “Much of what I know about anti-racism, I found between the pages of books purchased at New Beacon when I lived in Finsbury Park.”

There have been calls for crowdfunding campaigns to help save the shop, with the actor and poet Francesca Gilbert tweeting that there will be an update “in a few days”.

The shop’s director, Michael La Rose, the son of John La Rose who died in 2006, previously told the Guardian that a “sustained movement” was needed to ensure the longevity of specialist black bookshops.

He said last year: “The consciousness-raising of the global [Black Lives Matter] movement has made every country question what is going on in their societies – people want to know what has happened in the past, to get books, to get information, to get facts.”