



Albert Jonas and John Xiniwe of The African Choir 1891
London Stereoscopic Co.
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Eleanor Xiniwe of The African Choir 1891
London Stereoscopic Co.
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Sarah Forbes Bonetta (Sarah Davies) 1862 (detail)
Camille Silvy
© National Portrait Gallery,
London

‘There’s nothing like a photograph for reminding you about difference. There it is. It stares you ineradicably in the face.’

The enlarged portraits of members of the Africa Choir dominated the main wall of the mezzanine floor. Large-scale modern prints from the original 19th century glass plate negatives made a dramatic statement; the vibrant and striking subjects have an air of self-assurance, gazing out with confidence and calm authority. The choir consisted of fourteen adults and two children who toured Britain between 1891 and 1893, raising funds to establish a technical college for black students of the Cape coast, South Africa.

The portrait of the younger members of the choir, Albert Jonas and John Xiniwe, is a playful take on the photographic process, as they pose for each other while posing for us. The large camera is as much a subject as the aspiring photographer. It also shows the natural exuberance and curiosity of young people towards new technology. The photographer has sought to create the appearance of a snapshot, despite the image being as carefully staged as the portraits of the adult subjects.

On his return to South Africa, choir member Paul Xiniwe (1857 – 1902) became a leader in Imbumba Yama Nyama (South African Aborigines Association), an organisation that sought to unite African people in their struggle for political rights. He and his wife Eleanor were members of a small group of educated African elite that were involved in national politics, working towards social change and self-government.

The original glass negatives belong to the vast collection of the Hulton Archive. They only came to light through recent curatorial research led by Renée Mussai, conducted as part of Autograph ABP’s ‘The Missing Chapter’ project – an endeavour seeking photographic evidence of underrepresented black history, to address the lack of visual representation of Britain’s diverse communities in its cultural history. The printing technology used has resulted in images with great clarity and presence.



‘There is an umbilical connection. There is no understanding Englishness without understanding its imperial and colonial dimensions.’

Sarah Forbes Bonetta (1843 – 1880) was a Yoruba woman, thought to be of royal lineage, captured during a slave raid when she was only five. King Gezo of Dahomey (in present-day Benin) sent her as a gift to Queen Victoria, who arranged for her education. The Queen maintained an interest in the young woman, and was particularly impressed by her academic and musical abilities. Sarah became a regular visitor to Windsor Castle and an admired member of the royal court. Shortly after she married the businessman and philanthropist James Pinson Labulo Davies (1829 – 1906), they moved to Sierra Leone. Queen Victoria was godmother to their first child Victoria.



KRYSIA KITCH REVIEWS BLACK CHRONICLES AT THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY, LONDON.

The exhibition *Black Chronicles: Photographic Portraits 1862 – 1948* was a collaborative project between the National Portrait Gallery, London and Autograph ABP, a charity that works with photography and film to expand discussion of cultural identity, race, representation and human rights. The exhibition, which ran from May to December 2016, included forty original albumen cartes de visites and cabinet cards, together with nine large-scale modern prints from 19th century glass plates. The portraits included some of the earliest photographs of black and Asian sitters in the Gallery Collection; it also included material discovered in the Hulton Archive, a division of Getty Images, through a long-term Autograph ABP research project (supported by England’s Heritage Lottery Fund) investigating early representation of Black and Asian subjects in Britain.

I viewed the exhibition in late 2016 and was moved by the images, their accompanying stories, and the perpetual relevance of the themes explored. They demonstrate the strong presence of black lives and experiences within Britain, long before the major immigration from the Caribbean that began in 1948 with the arrival of the first large contingent of immigrants on the vessel *Empire Windrush*.

The exhibition layout was multifaceted; it consisting of the main space on the mezzanine floor at the front of the building, as well as display cases in two further Galleries. The final component was a single photographic portrait of the sociologist Stuart McPhail Hall, by Dawoud Bey. Excerpts from an unpublished lecture of Hall’s, given at ABP in 2008, were set above the photographs on the mezzanine floor, providing overarching context. His quotes are interspersed through this article to punctuate the narrative in similar fashion.

Back in black



Camille Silvy, considered one of the greatest French photographers of the nineteenth century, established many of the conventions of early portrait photography. Under the patronage of Queen Victoria, he photographed members of the upper echelons of society, as well as the aspiring middle classes, from his studio in Bayswater. The National Portrait Gallery London has twelve of Silvy's Daybooks in its collection, examples of every studio session set out chronologically, and all sitters documented by number and name. Sarah Davies (formerly Forbes Bonetta) and James Pinson Labulo Davies appear in Daybook volume nine, photographed separately and together on the occasion of their marriage in 1862.



Dadabhai Naoroji 1892
London Stereoscopic & Photographic Company
published by Messrs
RM Richardson & Co
© National Portrait Gallery,
London



Sarah Davies (formerly
Forbes Bonetta) and James
Pinson Labulo Davies 1862
Camille Silvy
© National Portrait Gallery,
London

'It will re-remember who we are, where we came from, and why we came.'

Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917) was an educator, social reformer and political leader active in India and Britain. He was the first Indian elected to the House of Commons, and was a Liberal MP from 1892 to 1895. The portrait was made in the year that he was elected, and depicts him with relaxed yet pensive countenance. Despite humble beginnings, Naoroji achieved outstanding academic results and became the first Indian professor at the prestigious Elphinstone College in Mumbai, teaching mathematics and natural philosophy. Naoroji moved to London in 1855, taught Gujarati at University College London, and founded the London Zoroastrian Association in 1861. He played a leading role in establishing the Indian National Congress and was president three times. The organisation was a precursor to the Indian Nationalist Movement.

Sir Henry Morton Stanley;
Kalulu (Ndugu M'hali) 1872
London Stereoscopic &
Photographic Company
© National Portrait Gallery,
London

Martha Ann Erskine Ricks (1816 – 1901) began life as a slave in Tennessee, until her father bought the whole family's freedom in 1830, whereupon they moved to Liberia. She was an industrious woman and prospered in her new country. Later in her life, Ricks designed and made an intricate cotton silk quilt depicting a Liberian coffee tree with over three hundred pointed green leaves with bright red coffee berries, all hand appliquéd onto white fabric. It is thought that the material is a combination of Liberian cotton silk and cotton, interwoven as if representing two strands of her life experience. The quilt took her over twenty-five years to make, and, in 1892, she travelled to Britain hoping to present it to Queen Victoria. Through the efforts of the Liberian ambassador she was granted an audience with the queen at Windsor Castle, thus achieving her long-standing desire. In her portrait, Ricks is very smartly and fashionably dressed – it would be fascinating to know whether her outfit was her own creation.

'We are here because you were there.'

McPhail Hall's reference to the cause and effect of colonialism resonates with all of the life stories represented in the exhibition, but perhaps none more poignantly than that of Ndugu M'Hali (c. 1865 -77). M'Hali was only about seven years old when he was given as a slave to the journalist Sir Henry Morton Stanley, who was in Africa in search of the legendary Dr David Livingstone. Stanley renamed the young boy 'Kalulu', and he became Stanley's personal



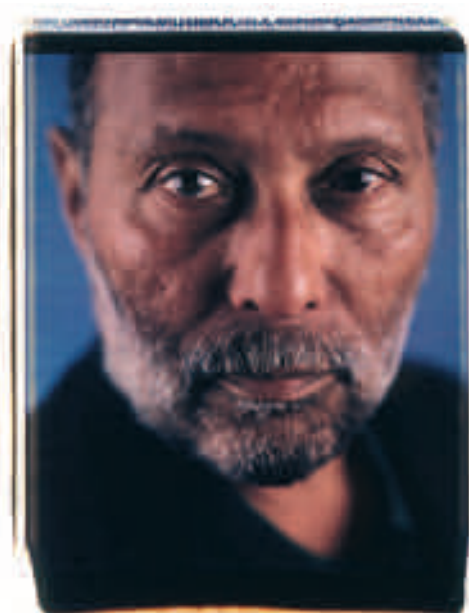
Kalulu (Ndugu M'hali) 1872
London Stereoscopic Co.
© Hulton Archive/
Getty Images

Stuart McPhail Hall 1998
Dawoud Bey
© National Portrait Gallery,
London, Dawoud Bey

Peter Jackson 1889
London Stereoscopic Co.
© Hulton Archive/
Getty Images

servant, accompanying him in his travels across the globe. M'hali died with four others when their canoe overturned navigating rapids in the Lualaba River in the Congo. Stanley named them 'Kalulu Falls' in his honour. There were several photographs of M'hali in the exhibition – two from the series with Stanley 'recreating' scenes from the search for Livingstone, with painted backdrop and rocks and vegetation strategically placed in the foreground. M'hali is clearly depicted as servant to his master, serving him tea in one image and carrying his second gun in another. In the solo portrait he is standing, leaning lightly on a heavy chair, his sombre face a sharp contrast to his casual stance. His slightly crumpled three-piece suit adds to the relaxed style of the portrait, yet it still feels staged – M'hali conveys a sense of caution rather than ease.

Intriguingly, there was also an Australian connection in the striking photographic portrait of the boxer Peter Jackson. The tall handsome man, formally dressed in morning suit and top hat, poses nonchalantly, hands in pockets. Born on the island of Saint Croix (now part of the US Virgin Islands), he moved to Sydney in his late teens, working in and around the docks. He then made his way to Brisbane where he became involved in boxing. In 1886 Jackson won the Australian heavyweight championship, and two years later travelled to the United States of America and Britain,



'An archive is a conversation between the present and the past. This project wants to bring back into memory and representation, history – the forgotten, the ignored, the disavowed – the marginalised experience.'

unbeaten in twenty-eight fights. He was at the height of his prowess when his portrait was taken by the London Stereographic Company. Despite his international reputation he was denied the opportunity to challenge for a world championship, as heavyweight champion John Sullivan refused to fight a black man. James Corbett undertook more covert evasion,



remembering their previous fight, prior to Corbett attaining the world title. That contest lasted sixty-one rounds and took four hours; it was declared a draw, as both men were exhausted. Jackson became known as 'The Black Prince' and had a reputation for being a well-mannered gentleman, as well as a highly intelligent and skilled sportsman. He returned to Australia and died in Queensland from tuberculosis at the age of forty.

The inhabitants of London are a vast array of peoples of different ethnicities, cultures and religions, overlaid with overseas visitors that swell its population with the seasonal ebb and flow. The portraits in Black Chronicles demonstrate that Britain was a multicultural nation much earlier than is generally presumed. The lives are fascinating, giving an insight into an alternate view of colonisation and the persistent cultural exchange and influence that existed between peoples of the Empire. This exhibition exposed new audiences to the ongoing project of reconciliation, and the work of Autograph ABP to redress the absence of black and Asian stories from the national narrative. ■

We acknowledge the gracious assistance of the Hulton Archive, Autograph ABP and the National Portrait Gallery London in providing images for this article. Autograph ABP will release a Black Chronicles book later in 2017.