

Searching for THE MOTHERLAND

The Windrush generation and their community 25 years on

An exhibition of 50 photographs and poetry

Robert Golden: photographer

Shaniqua Benjamin: poet

27 September – 16 November 2024

Shire Hall Museum, Dorchester





Shire Hall Museum in Dorchester is hosting an emotive photography exhibition from Bridport based photographer and writer **Robert Golden**. The exhibition offers an intimate insight into the lives and experiences of the Windrush generation, 25 years after their arrival in the UK. Robert gives some background to the photographs and how they came about.

These photographs were made throughout the 1970s. Explaining the background to the images Robert says the older people in the pictures, some of whom are amongst the original group, can be seen responding to social, cultural and economic conditions, perhaps as any group of migrants or strangers in a strange land have forever responded. In their home islands the UK dispossessed them of their freedoms and their economic survival; in the UK they were dispossessed through rejection, arbitrary racism, harassment by civilians, police, bureaucrats, landlords and politicians, and condemned as 'Other'. But they had imagined a life in a cold, distant land being better for them and their children than living in what was too often an economic and cultural dead-end on the many island domains left impoverished once the value of tobacco, sugarcane and cotton dropped and the strategic value of the islands no longer existed for the British Empire.

Their children were even more harassed, finding less solace in the church and in the hostile population of the so-called Motherland. 'So-called' because in mythologies, Mother embraces her children and cares for them. She is of the earth and nurtures the children physically and cares for their souls. The Empire generation's children, suffering discrimination, harassment and with fewer opportunities, with their potential and abilities ignored because of skin pigmentation, remained exiles in England, cast out from their mother's embrace. Some revolted, finding a voice in race and class based ideologies. Others turned their backs as best they could on the dominant culture and attempted to forge their own way, some in desperation were tragically criminalized, but others,

against the odds, succeeded culturally, educationally and professionally.

How did I, a young white foreign photojournalist become accepted? Previously I played a part in the American Civil Rights Movement and in the anti-Vietnam War struggles. When I moved to London from New York I became engaged in the Right To Work Campaigns and the anti-Nazi campaigns as a photographer/designer and as a participant. In brief and for reasons of my own history, upbringing, self-education and my studying history, not only did I find racism and nationalism emotionally unacceptable, but intellectually hollow and morally repugnant. I found many of the people I met in the black communities, warm, friendly and often humorous.

Look at these images. Look closely. What you may see, if you spend time, is what state of mind individuals were in at that moment of being photographed in that place, illuminated by that light. What you can see is that I was either invisible or accepted because the people in the pictures sensed I was to be trusted. At best they liked me; at worse they simply 'paid me no mind'.

These pictures are about creating image equivalents to my underlying always evolving story: that too many human beings are in struggle against economic, bureaucratic and political bullies, and that many of those in struggle possess dignity and untold strengths and even as they are forced to carry unacceptable burdens, they do so with grace and modesty; both worthy of embracing, celebrating and admiring.

Searching for the Motherland is on display at Shire Hall Museum until Saturday 16th November. Entry to the exhibition is included with a Museum ticket.

