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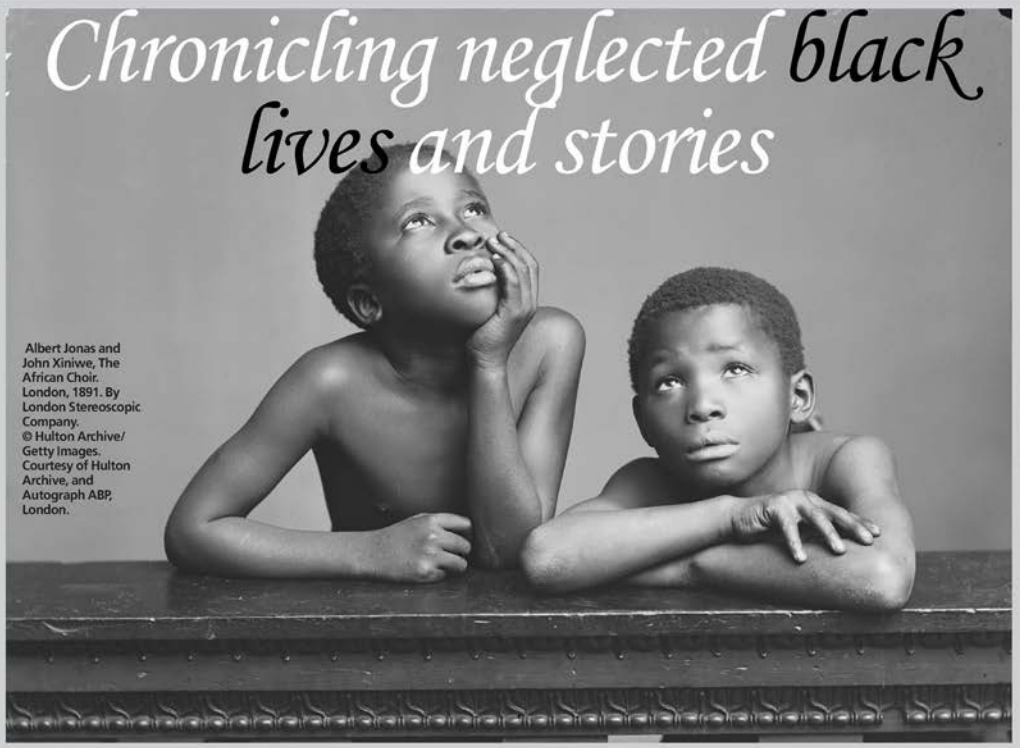
# Chronicling neglected black lives and stories



Albert Jonas and John Xiniwe, The African Choir. London, 1891. By London Stereoscopic Company. © Hulton Archive/ Getty Images. Courtesy of Hulton Archive, and Autograph ABP, London.

Peter Jackson. London, 1889. By London Stereoscopic Company. © Hulton Archive/Getty Images. Courtesy of Hulton Archive, and Autograph ABP, London.

Eleanor Xiniwe, The African Choir. London, 1891. By London Stereoscopic Company. Hulton Archive/Getty Images. Courtesy of Hulton Archive, and Autograph ABP, London.

THE long-awaited fourth iteration of *Black Chronicles*, a highly acclaimed photographic and multimedia exhibition, is finally in the country.

The exhibition, presented by London-based photographic arts agency Autograph ABP and curated by Renée Mussai (senior curator and head of archive and research there) opened at the FADA Gallery at the University of Johannesburg.

*Black Chronicles IV* presents an extraordinary array of studio portraits, reprinted from original glass plates and archive prints – a number of which were buried in the Hulton Archive's London Stereoscopic Company collection for over 125 years, until their rediscovery in 2014.

The images are highly relevant to contemporary black representational politics and cultural history, revealing alternative perspectives to the modes of colonial ethnographic display prevalent at the time.

Offering the public a unique opportunity to encounter a diverse range of black presences through the prism of 19th century studio photography in Europe and America, the exhibition foregrounds the extraordinary stories of both ordinary and prominent black figures – performers, dignitaries, politicians, servicemen and women, missionaries, students, businessmen and royalty.

*Black Chronicles IV* includes portraits of black South Africans such as political activist, academic and founder of the Bantu Women's League, Charlotte Maxeke, her sister Katie Makanya and Paul Xiniwe, photographed in London at the turn of the century as part of The African Choir.

As members of the 'African Intelligentsia', they became leading social activists and reformers.

Enabling different ways of 'seeing' individuals often marginalised within Victorian Britain, colonial Southern Africa and the American South, *Black Chronicles IV* contributes to an ongoing process of redressing the persistent absences of black narratives.

Previous iterations of *Black Chronicles* exhibitions have been showcased in such distinguished venues as Autograph ABP's Rivington Place Gallery (London); the London National Portrait Gallery; the Ethelbert Cooper Gallery for African and African American Art (Harvard University, Boston, Massachusetts); and the Spelman College Museum of Fine Art (Atlanta, Georgia).

"The aim of the *Black Chronicles* series is to open up critical inquiry into the archive to locate new knowledge, and support our mission to continuously expand and enrich photography's cultural histories," said Mussai.

"Not only do the sitters' visual presence in Britain bear direct witness to the complexities of colonial and imperial history, they also offer a fascinating array of personal narratives that defy preconceived notions of cultural diversity in the 19th century."

A highlight of the *Black Chronicles IV* exhibition is the sound and image-based installation, *The African Choir 1891 Re-imagined*.

The installation, presented in a discrete gallery space, comprises 16 individual photographic portraits of the original members of The African Choir, who toured Britain in 1891.

The portraits are accompanied by an evocative five-channel soundtrack of songs composed and arranged by South African artists Thuthuka Sibisi and Philip Miller as a creative re-imagining of the choirs' 19th-century concert programme.

*The African Choir 1891 Re-Imagined* sound installation has been made possible through generous financial support from the national Department of Arts and Culture.

Another significant component of the exhibition is the inclusion of more than 200 images selected from leading African-American scholar and civil rights activist WEB Du Bois's landmark collection of photographs, which he presented as *The American Negro Exhibit* at the 1900 Paris Exposition.

These images have not been exhibited in South Africa (or on the continent) previously.

Mussai said it was hoped that the exhibition would drive debate around representation and black subjectivity, and examine the ideological conditions in which such photographs were produced.

"Politics of access, gate-keeping and the marginalisation of histories are particularly relevant to consider in the context of *Black Chronicles* – especially in the light of the emergence of decolonial work across the academy, the museum and other institutions.

"We are confident that *Black Chronicles IV* will inspire people to ask questions, and to look closely, and consider carefully why it is only now – in the 21st century – that we are beginning to create a more inclusive visual portrait of a nation in the making," said Mussai.

■ *Black Chronicles IV* opened yesterday and will run until May 31. Entry is free.

Untitled, from Types of American Negros, Georgia, USA (1900) and W.E.B. Du Bois: The Paris Albums 1900 Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Untitled, from Types of American Negros, Georgia, USA (1900) and W.E.B. Du Bois: The Paris Albums 1900. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Ndugu M'Hali (Kalulu). London, 1872. By London Stereoscopic Company. © Hulton Archive/Getty Images. Courtesy of Hulton Archive, and Autograph ABP, London.

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Powerful voice behind the scenes Page 19

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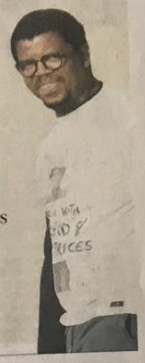
Will the terror return? Page 17

From Cradock 4 to SABC 8
Lukhanyo Calata's legacy Page 15



Photographs of black South Africans taken in Victorian England were all but forgotten

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A photographic exhibition which opened at the University of Johannesburg on Friday shows portraits that have not been seen for more than a century. They could be portraits of any middle-class Victorians, but what makes them different is that the subjects are black.

Black Chronicles IV is an exhibition that includes images found in an archive after more than 120 years, hidden among a treasure trove of 80 million largely uncatalogued materials.

Some of these images are of a group of black South Africans who toured Victorian England as a choir and performed for Queen Victoria. Also exhibited are about 200 photos of African-Americans, taken 35 years after slavery was abolished.

Two months ago, at the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg, I attended the opening of an installation that forms a key part of this one. Titled The African Choir 1891 Re-Imagined, it featured 14 large portraits that gazed out regally while a soundtrack filled the space with choral singing and stomping. The effect was mesmerising.

## Precious, fragile history

The exhibition is extraordinary on many levels: how it came about, who it portrays and its musical soundtrack all add to the impact.

The African Choir portraits had not been seen for more than a century. Their glass negatives had "lain undisturbed, bound in brown paper and string for more than 120 years", said Matthew Butson, vice-president of the Hulton Archive, a division of Getty Images in London where they were unearthed.

The photos were not so much discovered as excavated, to use the terminology of Renée Mussai, senior curator and head of archive and research at Autograph ABP, the British nonprofit photographic arts agency.

Mussai has presided over all four iterations of Black Chronicles, shown at venues such as Harvard University and the National Portrait Gallery in London.

The negatives "were deeply buried amid 80 million largely uncatalogued materials", said Mussai. Finding them was part of a project called The Missing Chapter, a search to find the first photographic depictions of black people in the UK.

"The project was inspired by a remedial visual desire for visibility, for excavation, if you will — an attempt to interrogate the archive to offer new knowledge and annotate the cultural history of photography," said Mussai. The result is "the most comprehensive body of photographs depicting the black subject in Victorian Britain".

**Charlotte Maxeke (neé Manye), 'The African Choir' 1891, by London Stereoscopic Company.** Picture: Hulton Archive/ Getty Images, courtesy of Autograph ABP, London

Central to that body is a group of South Africans born between 1850 and 1862, the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the first converts to Christianity in the Eastern Cape. They were members of a choir associated with mission institutions that performed in Britain for a year.

Within four days of their arrival in 1891, they sang at the final event of the Jubilee celebrations for Queen Victoria at Crystal Palace and were then invited to perform at her summer palace of Osborne on the Isle of Wight. They also toured northern England, Scotland and Ireland and sang at high-profile events.

## Charlotte Maxeke, the chorister

Knowing the names of some members of this choir adds another layer of frisson to the exhibition encounter.

They included Paul Xiniwe, his wife, Eleanor, and two children believed to be his nephews, John Xiniwe and Albert Jonas. Xiniwe was a teacher and activist who became a member of the political group Imbumba Yama Nyama and later a leading figure in the South African Native Congress, the forerunner of the ANC. He had taught two other choir members, sisters Charlotte and Katie Manye, who at the time the portraits were taken were 18 and 16.

Charlotte has left the most prominent legacy. She married Marshall Maxeke, who later became editor of the weekly Umtetelell wa Bantu (The People's Advocate). Today her name is well known because of Charlotte Maxeke Hospital, formerly Johannesburg General Hospital.

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# Insight Photography

A poster for a fight between James J Corbett and Peter Jackson, before Corbett became champion

## A gift to Victoria

Sarah Forbes Bonetta (1843–1880), born into a royal West African dynasty, was taken to England as a child and given to Queen Victoria as a "gift". Her parents had been killed in a slave hunt when she was five, after which she was taken prisoner by King Ghezo of Dahomey, which today is part of Benin.

When she was about eight, Captain Frederick E Forbes of England's Royal Navy visited Dahomey.

He convinced the king to give Sarah to Queen Victoria, saying: "She would be a present from the King of the Blacks to the Queen of the Whites."

Sarah was given Forbes's surname as well as the name of his ship, the Bonetta.

On November 9 1850 she was taken to Windsor Castle and received by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. Captain Forbes later wrote of Sarah in his journal: "My extraordinary present, the African child ... She is a perfect genius, she now speaks English well and has a great talent for music ... she is far in advance of any white child of her age, in aptness of learning, and strength of mind and affection."

She married James Pinson Labulo Davies, a 31-year-old Yoruba businessman living in Britain. They moved to Lagos where Davies became a member of Nigeria's legislative council from 1872–74.

They named their eldest daughter Victoria and the queen agreed to be her godmother. Little Victoria Davies was given an annuity by the queen and visited the royal household regularly. — Sources: www.blackhistorymonth.org.uk and www.royalcollection.org.uk

**Sarah Davies (née Forbes Bonetta) and JPL Davies in London in 1862, photographed by Camille Silvy.** Picture: Hulton Archive/Getty Images, courtesy of Hulton Archive

**Peter Jackson in London in 1889, photographed by the London Stereoscopic Company.** Picture: Hulton Archive/Getty Images, courtesy of Hulton Archive and Autograph ABP, London

## Pugilist prince

Peter Jackson (1860–1901), also known as "The Black Prince", was a heavyweight bare-knuckle boxer who fought internationally. Born on the island of Saint Croix in the West Indies, he emigrated to Australia where he became the 1886 Australian heavyweight champion. He was celebrated as the "Coloured Champion of the World" when he beat 28 of the best boxers from England and America between 1888 and 1892. In 1889 he beat reigning champion Jem Smith at the Pelican Club in Soho, London.

He never fought a world championship because the American John Sullivan refused to defend his title against a black man and James J Corbett, also an American, avoided him after Corbett won the title.

Jackson wasn't able to get any fights after 1892. He starred in a touring production of Uncle Tom's Cabin in 1893, based on the popular novel of the same title, becoming only the second black man to play the role of Uncle Tom. Jackson is buried in Toowong Cemetery in Brisbane, Australia. On his grave is written "This was a man", a quote from Julius Caesar. Jackson is said to have often quoted from Shakespeare. — Source: themissingchapter.co.uk

# Little-known history back in focus

→ excerpts from a speech on archives and cultural memory by the late cultural theorist, Professor Stuart Hall of the Open University.

For Black Chronicles IV, the soundscape consists of songs composed and arranged by Tshisha Boys Productions, namely Philip Miller and Thjithuka Sibisi, which include an isicathamiya version of *God Save the Queen*.

There was no recording of the original choir, but Miller and Sibisi located a programme and, rather than merely recreating the songs, they set about, with a group of 15 singers, reimagining their inner narrative through music.

The bulk of the visual exhibition consists of digitally reproduced photographs first shown at the Paris Exposition in 1900 in an exhibition called The American Negro by WEB du Bois, a sociology professor at Atlanta University and the first African American to receive a PhD from Harvard University.

"Du Bois was effectively the first black curator of photography," said Mussai in an interview for Aperture magazine's website. "Together with others who shared his mission, he strategically deployed 363 photographs to stage a claim for the humanity of the black subject."

The images are all of affluent, elegant people. Professor Henry Louis Gates Jnr, director of the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research at Harvard University, said he imagined Du Bois had wanted "to refute the extremely popular [and derogatory] images of black people that peppered postcards, advertisements, sheet music, and virtually every other form of popular visual culture during the 1890s, precisely at the same time that Jim Crow segregation was being legalised".

The Library of Congress in Washington, DC, which houses the original prints from Du Bois's 1900 American Negro exhibition in Paris, has this note on the subject: "The wide range of hairstyles and skin tones represented in the photographs demonstrated that the so-called 'Negro type' was in fact a diverse group of distinct individuals. The one public statement Du Bois made concerning these photographs was that visitors to The American Negro exhibit would find 'several volumes of photographs of typical Negro faces, which hardly square with conventional American ideas'."

The most modern piece in Black Chronicles IV is a digital reproduction in the form of a large-scale wallpaper of a work commissioned in 1996 by Autograph ABP.

Titled *Efiolk*, it is a satirical self-portrait by London-born, Lagos-raised artist Yinka Shonibare, who appears in the dress and exaggerated pose of an 18th-century nobleman. This, alongside the solemn portraits of past generations, shines a powerful light on questions of cultural identity and representation.

* Black Chronicles IV is an Autograph ABP touring exhibition, presented in partnership with the Visual Identities in Art and Design Research Centre, Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture (FADA) at the University of Johannesburg (UJ). It is at the FADA Gallery at UJ's Bunting Road campus in Auckland Park until May 31

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What's that? It's China's H2

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CANVAS Life

Saturday Star · April 14 2018

# Chronicling neglected black lives and stories

Adult male and male Kirnas, The African Chair, London, 1891. By London Stereoscopic Company. © Hulton Archive/Getty Images. Courtesy of Hulton Archive, and Autograph ABP, London.

Peter Jackson, London, 1893. By London Stereoscopic Company. © Hulton Archive/Getty Images. Courtesy of Hulton Archive, and Autograph ABP, London.

Eleanor Kinnes, The African Chair, London, 1891. By London Stereoscopic Company. Hulton Archive/Getty Images. Courtesy of Hulton Archive, and Autograph ABP, London.

The long-overdue South exhibition of black Victorian life, a highly acclaimed photographic and textile exhibition, is heading to the country.

The exhibition, presented by London-based photographic arts agency Autograph ABP, features some of the most iconic images and text of archive and research from the SAHA Collection at the University of Johannesburg.

Black Victorians II presents an extraordinary array of studio portraits, mainly from original glass plate and archive prints, a number of which were lodged in the Hulton Archive's London Stereoscopic Company collection over the years and then rediscovered in 2014.

The images are highly intimate in composition, having depicted some subjects and cultural leaders, presenting alternative perspectives to the dignity of colonial officialdom. Display panelled at the time.

Offering the public a unique opportunity to encounter a diverse range of black persons through the prism of 19th century studio photography in Europe and America, the exhibition designers have presented their work alongside contemporary work of 19th century and prominent black thinkers – particularly diasporic – who have explored and mined, through write, visuals, testimonies and media.

Black Victorians II includes portraits of black South Africans such as political activists, academics and leaders of the Basic Women's Union, Charlotte Maxeke, her sister Sara Makanya and Paul Kruger, photographed in London at the turn of the century as part of The African Chair.

As members of the African intelligentsia, the women leading social activists and educators.

Exploring different ways of seeing subjectivities that marginalised African Victorian Britons, colonial Southern Africa and the American South, Black Victorians II uses contemporary to creating moments of reclaiming the personhood of black ancestors.

Photographs featuring of Black Victorian subjects have been mediated in solo autographic covers in autograph ABP's Kingsgate Fine Gallery (Location: the London Dockland Partner) that vary the Kingsgate Gallery for African and African American Art Historic University, Boston, Massachusetts, and the Spelman College Museum of Fine Art in Atlanta, Georgia.

"The idea of the Black Victorian exhibit is to open up critical inquiry into the notion to make new knowledge, with support our ancestors to environmental, aspect and social photographic cultural contexts," said Mirasol.

"Not only do the visitors visual presence in British hold there are now to the competitions of colonial and imperial history but also offer a fascinating sense of personal narratives and daily experiences subject of colonial history in the 19th century."

A highlight of the Black Victorian II exhibition is the social and imaginary transitions. The African Chair (1891) is unusual.

"The exhibition schematic is a Victorian gaze upon, inscribed in collective photographic portraits of the cultural members of The African Chair, who toured Britain in 1891.

"The portraits are accompanied by an evocative Afro-Saxon soundtrack of songs composed and arranged by South African artists Mandisi Dyosi and Philip Miller as a lyrical re-imagining of the classic 19th-century concert programme.

"The African Chair (AC) in its original stage constitution has been partly possible through personal financial support from the national Department of Arts and Culture."

Another significant component of the exhibition is the inclusion of more than 80 images selected from twelve African American artists and civil rights activist W.E.B. Du Bois's personal collection of photographs and documentation in The American Negro Exhibit at the Paris Exposition.

These images have not been exhibited in South Africa yet or the Northern Hemisphere.

Mirasol said it was hoped that the exhibition would drive debate around representation and black subjectivity and mobilise the intellectual traditions in which such photographs were produced.

"Politics of access, belonging and the commodification of histories are particularly relevant in relation to the concept of Black Victorians – especially in the light of the emergence of Black social media across the continent, the museum and other institutions.

"We are confident that Black Victorians II will inspire people to ask questions, and to look closely and consider carefully what it is that we are drawing to our attention. We are challenging to create a more inclusive cultural sphere in a country in the making," said Mirasol.

■ Black Victorians II opened yesterday and will run until May 5. Entry is free.

Untitled from Types of American Negro, Georgia, USA (1900) and W.E.B. Du Bois, The Paris Albums, 1900. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Untitled from Types of American Negro, Georgia, USA (1900) and W.E.B. Du Bois, The Paris Albums, 1900. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Bibaye Mfindi (Kafula) London, 1872. By London Stereoscopic Company. © Hulton Archive/Getty Images. Courtesy of Hulton Archive, and Autograph ABP, London.

# *The* Afri*stocrats*

*Black Chronicles*, an international photographic intervention that scrutinises how black folks gaze back at their historical selves is celebrated for renewing debate on, amongst other things, the 'souls of black folk' in the history of the photographic medium

TEXT **BONGANI MADONDO**

**This page clockwise from top left:**
Charlotte Maxeke (née Manye), The African Choir. London, 1891. By London Stereoscopic Company. © Hulton Archive/Getty Images. Courtesy of Hulton Archive, and Autograph ABP, London.

Wellington Majiza, The African Choir. London, 1891. By London Stereoscopic Company.

Eleanor Xiniwe, The African Choir. London, 1891. By London Stereoscopic Company.

Peter Jackson. London, 1889. By London Stereoscopic Company.

**WHAT?** An Autograph ABP touring exhibition, presented in partnership with the Visual Identities in Art & Design Research Centre (VIAD), Faculty of Art, Design & Architecture, University of Johannesburg. Curated by Renée Mussai of Autograph ABP, London. Featuring *The African Choir 1891 Re-Imagined*, with songs composed and arranged by Philip Miller and Thuthuka Sibisi.
**WHEN?** 13 April - 4 May 2018
**WHERE:** FADA Gallery, University of Johannesburg, Bunting Rd Campus, Auckland Park.

A visual treasure of previously unseen, unacknowledged and thus erased photographs of black folks, particularly cultural, political and economic achievers in the late 18th and 19th centuries in England (to wit the 'Black bougie' of the Edwardian and oh-so chic Victorian eras), *Black Chronicles* is the brainchild of Autograph ABP Senior Curator and Head of Archive & Research Renée Mussai. It debuts in South Africa this month.

Of specific poignancy to local audiences is the inclusion of *The African Choir 1891 Re-Imagined*, a sound and image installation in collaboration with South African composers Philip Miller and Thuthuka Sibisi. The story of what was alternatively known as 'The Native Choir' is part of a singular, tragic and ultimately heroic South African cultural and political narrative, one not told often enough.

Led by King Williamstown (Qonce) entrepreneur Paul Xiniwe, the 16-member choir, plus two British tour managers, two youngsters (11-year-old Albert Jonas and 13-year-old John Xiniwe) and South African Native National Congress (SANNC, later the ANC) co-founder and educator-activist Makgomo 'Charlotte' Manye (later Maxeke) and her sister Katie, travelled to England in 1891 expressly to raise funds for the construction of educational colleges in the Eastern and Northern Cape. They performed for Queen Victoria, a factoid re-imagined with evocative gutsiness by Miller, Sibisi and their 15-member choir in a new adaptation of Thomas Arne's 'God Save the Queen', part of the exhibition's accompanying CD that revisits the choir's original songbook.

While *The African Choir 1891 Re-Imagined* has had runs at Iziko National Museum in Cape Town and the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg, the University of Johannesburg's FADA Gallery is now hosting the most extensive range of photographs from the *Black Chronicles* exhibition, of which *The African Choir 1891 Re-Imagined* forms part. *Black Chronicles IV* comprises some startling material, including 200 images reproduced from African-American intellectual WEB Du Bois' iconic *American Negro* exhibition from the 1900 Exposition Universelle in Paris.

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Highly acclaimed photographic and multimedia exhibition Black Chronicles is finally in SA. An extraordinary array of studio portraits – some unseen for over 125 years – it shows both prominent and ordinary black figures in a radically different light, writes **Thabiso Hika**

ART EXHIBITION

**PENSIVE** Albert Jonas and John Xiniwe, the African Choir. London, 1891
PHOTO: HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

**REFLECTIVE** Kalulu (Ndugu/M'hali). London, 1872
PHOTO: HULTON ARCHIVE

**BOXER** Peter Jackson. London, 1889
PHOTO: HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

**WISDOM** Wellington Majiza, the African Choir. London, 1891
PHOTO: HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

# THE *blackness* THEY NEVER SHOWED US

**Black Chronicles IV**
Fada Gallery, University of Johannesburg, Bunting Road Campus, Auckland Park
Gallery hours: Tuesdays to Fridays 9am to 4pm; Saturdays 9am to 1pm; closed on public holidays
Free entrance

On my way to the exhibition opening of **Black Chronicles IV**, I tried obsessively to keep an open mind. The exhibition promised a range of portraits taken from the Victorian era.

My previous experiences of photographic representations of black history have always been littered with images of scantily clad bodies, held by some sort of a harness, standing next to a proud white figure. Some alternative approaches consisted of depictons of African-American slave families dressed in sub-standard attire, again denoting racial inferiority.

Walking into the Fada Gallery at the University of Johannesburg, my preconceived notions began to dissipate. A brief discussion with Ama Josephine Budge, a writer, curator, artist and researcher from London, emphasised how extraordinary it is that these images exist. She dreamily described how, as a young, mixed-race girl growing up in the UK and reading Jane Austen novels, the image of a strong black woman dressed in fine clothing in this era was an almost absurd idea until she came across these images. Her words drew me to the majestic portrait of Sara Forbes Bonetta. The picture stands almost life-like, towering over all the other images in the gallery, depicting a relaxed Forbes Bonetta sporting a gentle smile. Come to think of it, hers is one of the few pictures where a modest smile can be detected.

A slight turn of the eye away from Forbes Bonetta, one is met with three panels showing a young, distinguished gentleman standing in a strong, assertive pose. He is Peter Jackson, a boxer originally from what is now known as the US Virgin Islands. Jackson would subsequently gain Australian citizenship, and his career took him to the US and later the UK. I shudder at the thought of the struggle of a black boxer in 1890's Europe; my only consolation came from how indestructible he looks in these images. If I were to inherit that sort of strife, I would want to look like he does.

My attention shifts to the two panels beside Jackson's. A young boy, barely a teenager - his innocence clearly visible. Kalulu was a slave who was later adopted by Henry Morton Stanley. Yes, the same Henry Morton Stanley who uttered the words "Dr Livingstone, I presume?"

Kalulu's pictures are displayed in stark contrast to Jackson's. I gravitate towards the one in which he is wrapped in a shawl, standing in a stoic, almost feminine pose. For a second, I'm taken aback by the sheer quality of these pictures - photography was such a young technology at this time.

The true gem of this exhibition lies in the sound-and image-based installation of The African Choir. The group of South African singers, including Charlotte Maxeke and Eleanor Xiniwe, toured the UK, even performing for Queen Victoria, in the early 1890s to raise funds to build a technical college in South Africa. The installation includes a five-track reimagining of the choir's 19th-century concert programme. To my surprise, a physical copy of the programme is also there for one to view, along with a newspaper article that gives detailed information on some of the key members of the choir.

**MAJESTIC** Sara Forbes Bonetta, 1862
PHOTO: NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY, LONDON

Racial inequality and race relations are a continuous battle even in the 21st century, and what this exhibition has afforded me is a keyhole view of a lost piece of black history ... lost for a 125 odd years.

Renée Mussai, senior curator and head of archive and research at Autograph ABP, describes it best when she states that "At the heart of the exhibition is the desire to resurrect black figures from oblivion and reintroduce them into contemporary consciousness."

● Black Consciousness IV runs until May 31

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# KEEP IT CONSTANT

text
MICHELLE CONSTANT

## ON THE POWER OF SONG

I AM READING an engrossing account of the first black lawyers in South Africa, The Land is Ours: South Africa's First Black Lawyers and the Birth of Constitutionalism in South Africa, by author and advocate Tembeka Ngcukaitobi. In it he describes the visit of the US Hampton Institute Jubilee Singers to South Africa in 1890. It was during this visit, that Ngcukaitobi says "the true value of the [singers] becomes apparent… New identities were being forged, and a particularly important identity was being established through education." The visit of the singers "demonstrated what education might accomplish for the native races of South Africa". What struck me about Ngcukaitobi's description was that "soft" or "cultural" engagement has the power to affect history.

A year later, in 1891, a South African choir, The African Choir, journeyed to the UK (also under the auspices of raising money for education). The photos of this group of black South Africans, including Charlotte Maxeke, are currently on display at the UJ Fada Gallery, with the title Black Chronicles IV. The images are extraordinary, and almost spiritual in representation. Pictures of one Eleanor Xiniwe and Maxeke (née Manye) are beautiful, highlighting the importance of the exhibition in restoring historical black narratives.

Perhaps though, the real power of the exhibition lies in the sound/image installation The African Choir 1891 Re-Imagined. The songs performed by the choir on its trip to the UK consisted of both traditional English, and traditional South African works. These songs taken from the 1891 programme (no recordings were made, or found) have been reworked, re-imagined, and re-composed by Thuthuka Sibisi and Philip Miller, and sung by a 21st-century, 15-member choir.

The choir's isicathamiya version of God Save the Queen is an unbelievable example of how we can, through creativity, rework conversations on colonialism and history. The song is powerfully ironic and subversive in its reworked version. The recordings also talk to the alignment of lived and imagined experiences: firstly, the importance of imagination to recreate forgotten experiences, and; secondly, to be able to re-interpret what is described as "black presences" in the exhibition.

The trip of the African Choir to the UK has, finally, not only been recognised, but has proved that history has the ability to change the narrative of the future, through imaginative reworking in the present.

*Black Chronicles IV is on at the UJ FADA Gallery, Auckland Park, Johannesburg, until the end of May; Constant is the CEO of Business and Arts South Africa and the presenter of SAfm lifestyle (Saturdays, 9am to noon)*

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UITSTALLING

# Kroniek uit 19de eeu werp nuwe lig

## Deftige ateljeefoto's

Foto's wat 'n ander lig werp op die lewe van swart mense gedurende die koloniale tydperk is ná 125 jaar opgediep waar dit vergete in die Hulton-argief in Londen bewaar is.

Die foto's is herdruk vanaf glasplate en word binnekort in Johannesburg uitgestal. Die vierde aflewering van die *Black Chronicles*, 'n hoog aangeskrewe fotografiese en multimediatentoonstelling, open op 13 April in die Fada-galery by die Universiteit van Johannesburg.

Hierdie fotografiese beelde is hoogs tersaaklik rakende die eietydse debat oor die verteenwoordigende uitbeelding van swart mense en kultuurgeskiedenis. Dit bied alternatiewe perspektiewe op 'n tydperk (die vroeë 19de eeu) waar die gebruiklike koloniale etnografiese voorstellings van swart mense geheers het, hetsy in Victoriaanse Londen, koloniale Suid-Afrika of die Amerikaanse suide.

Politici, werkers, sangers, staatsamptenare en kunstenaars het gesit vir dié portrette wat Johannesburgers 'n skaars kykie gaan gee op die wye verskeidenheid van swart verteenwoordiging in die ateljeefotografie van die 19de eeu in Europa en Amerika.

Suid-Afrikaners soos die politieke aktivis, akademikus en stigter van die Bantu Women's League, Charlotte Maxeke, en haar suster Katie Makanya, asook Paul Xiniwe, is in Londen afgeneem as deel van die African Choir.

Die lede van die Afrika-intelligentia het later sosiale aktiviste en hervormers geword.

Vorige hoofstukke van *Black Chronicles* is onder meer in die Nasionale Portretgalery in Londen uitgestal, asook in die Ethelbert Cooper Gallery for African and African American Art by die Harvard-Universiteit in Boston, Massachusetts.

'n Klank-en-beeldinstallasie herverbeel die Suid-Afrikaanse African Choir wat in 1891 na Londen gereis het.

Die portrette van die koorlede word vergesel van 'n evokatiewe klankbaan van liedere gekomponeer en versamel deur die Suid-Afrikaanse komponiste Thuthuka Sibisi en Philip Miller.

Meer as 200 foto's van die Afro-Amerikaanse akademikus en burgerregteleier W.E.B. Du Bois se seminale fotoversameling wat hy by *The American Negro Exhibit* van die *Paris Exposition, 1900* uitgestal is, is ook te sien. Dit is nog nooit voorheen in Suid-Afrika uitgestal nie. Die portrette toon middelklas-Afro-Amerikaanse mans en vroue 35 jaar ná die afskaffing van slawerny – welaf en suksesvol met hul eie ondernemings.

Toegang tot die tentoonstelling is gratis.

**Foto's opgeneem in die *Black Chronicles*-tentoonstelling wat eersdaags in Johannesburg open.**

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# 'Black Chronicles IV' opens in Joburg

THE long-awaited fourth iteration of *Black Chronicles*, a highly acclaimed photographic and multi-media exhibition, is in the country.

The exhibition, presented by London-based photographic arts agency Autograph ABP and curated by Renée Mussai (its senior curator and head of archive and research) opened at the FADA Gallery at the University of Johannesburg

*Black Chronicles IV* presents an extraordinary array of studio portraits, reprinted from original glass plates and archive prints – a number of which were buried in the Hulton Archive's London Stereoscopic Company collection for over 125 years, until their rediscovery in 2014.

The images are highly relevant to contemporary black representational politics and cultural history, revealing alternative perspectives to the modes of colonial ethnographic display prevalent at the time.

Offering the public a unique opportunity to encounter a diverse range of black presences through the prism of 19th century studio photography in Europe and America, the exhibition foregrounds the extraordinary stories of both ordinary and prominent black figures – performers, dignitaries, politicians, servicemen and women, missionaries, students, businessmen and royalty.

*Black Chronicles IV* includes portraits of black South Africans such as political activist, academic and founder of the Bantu Women's League, Charlotte Maxeke, her sister Katie Makanya and Paul Xiniwe, photographed in London at the turn of the century as part of The African Choir.

*Black Chronicles IV* opened yesterday and will run until May 31. Entry is free.

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