

## ***Hynek Pallas: Time for Sweden to recognize black England***

**Culture debate - For many Swedes, England's culture is synonymous with Queen Elizabeth and "The Crown". But for half a century, immigrants from the former colonies have created their own British culture. It is time to pay attention to the country's ongoing revision of history, says Hynek Pallas.**



While the culture pages closely monitor Prince Harry's memoirs and praise "The Crown", England's ongoing revision of history is conspicuous by its absence. Hynek Pallas sees a photo exhibition and a blind spot (vit flack) in the cultural coverage by Swedish media . (kulturbevakning)

Photography begins to gain icon status in England. All that is missing is for Charlie Phillips' portrait "Notting Hill Couple" to become a postage stamp. Given the speed with which England has been researching its history in recent years, it is probably only a matter of time. Standing in front of the photograph at the Charlie Phillips exhibition "In Plain Sight" at Fullersta Gård in Huddinge outside Stockholm, it is clear how perfect the portrait is.

Humanness that opens up a time and a place. Black Gus Philip rests his arm around his white girlfriend Anita Santiago's shoulders. The eyes are fixed but slightly troubled into the camera in front of a very English wallpaper. The year is 1967, the apartment ads still say "No coloreds".

The image has entered the British consciousness, among other things, through the cover of the Ladbroke Grove record company Honest Jon's "London is the place for me" album, which collects calypso and other music recorded by immigrants in England. Along with Phillips's photographs, they have been important in rediscovering the culture of the so-called Windrush generation today. Sculptor Veronica Ryan received last year's Turner Prize after she created Windrush sculptures in the London borough of Hackney. Last year, the Tate Gallery showed "Life between islands", about how West Indian immigrants shaped community and identity in post-war England.

The first came with "Empire Windrush". The ship arrived in London in June 1948 with 492 passengers from Jamaica and Trinidad. Britain was in dire need of labor and between 1948 and 1971 attracted just over 500,000 people.

In 2018, The Guardian revealed that migrants and their children are being affected by changing rules put in place in 2012. People lost their jobs, pensions and social security. First and second generation Windrush migrants were also deported. With the Black Lives Matter movement as fresh a breeze, the scandal has changed English culture. It cast a light on things that have always have been "In Plain sight" but ignored or dismissed as non-English because they are black.

Like the Trinidad-born writer Sam Selvon, whose "The Lonely Londoners" became a sensation in 1956. It was the same year twelve-year-old Charlie Phillips set foot ashore from Jamaica. Four years later, he got a camera and started documenting his London neighborhoods to send pictures to relatives. He has the so-called "community" portrayal in common with Selvon and black English film directors such as Horace Ové and Menelik Shabazz. Films such as "Pressure" (1975) and "Burning an illusion" (1981) revolve around Portobello Road and Brixton. The British Film Institute is now finally restoring the material.

***" The ghetto became a home to the colonies' – often well-educated – immigrants, where they lived wall to wall with poor white workers. "***

Photographs, books and films documented not a black but a British everyday life, something Charlie Phillips points out in a video interview at the exhibition. Notting Hill in Phillips's early black-and-white photographs is worn, damaged in the flash. The ghetto became home to the colonies' – often well-educated – immigrants, where they lived wall to wall with poor white workers. The resulting culture is visible in the images: from calypso clubs to sound systems. Proud men in sharp fashion with reggae singles in their fists. The famous carnival is born here.

As Richard Curtis' 1999 comedy "Notting Hill" became a big success, this multicultural world was gentrified away, out of our consciousness. Evidently also in Sweden. Before the visit to Fullersta Gård - where the exhibition has been running since November - I search Phillips and can't find a single review in Swedish Newspapers and I find this incomprehensible. There is an apparent interest in England. The editors just competed to review Prince Harry's memoirs and praise another season of "The Crown".

Maybe because black culture in our country is synonymous with the USA, not Europe. A celebrated, August-nominated non-fiction book such as Amat Levin's "Black History" does not mention Windrush. No reviews pointed out the gap, despite England's black culture being so important to a Sweden where Anglophilia with an attraction to the subcultural was a status marker for a long time. Without Jamaican street culture, The Clash would never have sounded the way they did – and thus not Ebba Grön.

Do we learn more about racism and politics by only looking at the US? At Fullersta Gård there are several photographs from the black London restaurant Mangrove where frequent raids led to demonstrations and police violence. Incidentally, they were dramatized in 2020 in Steve McQueen's anthology films "Small axe" which was shown on SVT. The films were praised, but the background remained sketchy. There is no lack of cultural journalists schooled in this (Andres Lokko is excused - he has written the catalog text for "In Plain Sight").

***” In his later color photography, Phillips returns to the British-Caribbean funeral processions he has now documented for 50 years. ”***

This is as important to understanding what today's England has become as the mining strikes in the mid-1980s, those seen in the recent BBC series "Sherwood" on SVT. Still: Even when Nobel laureate Abdulrazak Gurnah – who has testified about the hostility he faced as an 18-year-old immigrant from Zanzibar in 1967 – won over bringing up Windrush in interviews, it changed nothing.

If you now necessarily want the royal house as a hook, Windrush is also central. To understand how hurtful the monarchs' racist attitude towards Meghan Markle was, and to the view of the empire. The West Indies saw themselves as British, evident in the calypso star Young Tiger's "I Was There (At The Coronation)", which is about Queen Elizabeth's coronation in 1953. Selvon's books and Phillips' photographs intertwine the music with the costumes in the same cut as those of the upper class. Something that made the immigrant men subversive because they so obviously considered themselves to belong to England.

Which they - after riots and police officers not investigating murders of black teenagers and a racism so systematic that in the 2010s people who had lived their whole lives in England were sent "home" - would realize was a lie. In his later color photography, Phillips returns to the British-Caribbean funeral processions he has now documented for 50 years. After a career as a fashion photographer and restaurateur, Phillips returned to reality when England caught up with its history and his images began to gain attention. It's a fitting ps: the funeral procession towards the church reminds the whites in the streets of Notting Hill's history. And we who look at the photograph cannot help but be reminded of the racist hate crimes of the decades, which seem to hover over the coffins.

It is this world – once lost but rediscovered in many places except in Sweden – that the cultural editors continue to ignore.

The exhibition "Charlie Phillips – In Plain Sight" runs at Fullersta Gård in Huddinge, Stockholm, until March 12.