



A History of the *Empire Windrush* as a cultural motif in Britain

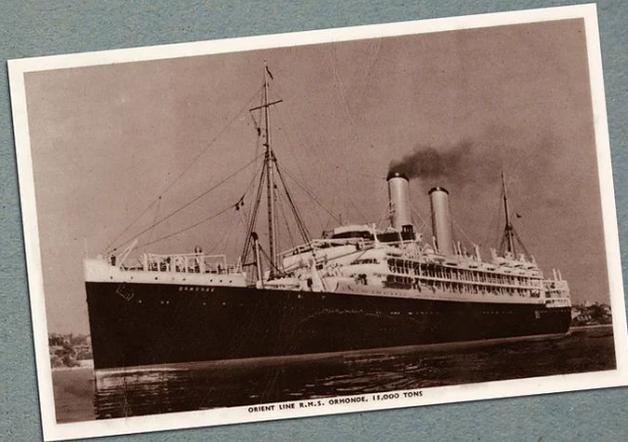
Zakiya McKenzie - July 2023

– WINDRUSH'S FORGOTTEN FORERUNNER –

ORMONDE

BY HANNAH LOWE

– NEXT GENERATION POET 2014 –



INTRODUCTION BY MIKE PHILLIPS

THE OTHER SHIP

BY HANNAH LOWE

The poems in this collection are about the passengers on the ex-troopship *Ormonde*, which sailed from the Caribbean to Liverpool in March 1947. The poems are works of imagination, but their genesis comes from the archive material included here – the passenger list, photographs, newspaper articles, and also from the notebook of my father, Ralph Lowe (usually known as Chick). This is my personal connection to the *Ormonde* – my dad was a passenger on that voyage. As a young man, he travelled in cabin class, listing his destination address – like many of the other men on board – as care of the Colonial Service Club on Wimpole Street in London. Seeing his name on the passenger list was a moment of wonder to me. It cemented the scant details I had about his early life and suddenly furnished my mind's narrative – I could see him stepping onto the ship, I could see him stepping off. So a few of these poems are about my father, or a man like him at least, making that journey.

I first read of the *Ormonde* in the notebook I found years after my dad's death. In it, he describes his early years growing up in rural Jamaica – a life of hardship and lack of opportunities. He was a teenager when the Second World War began. The island's poverty became worse. There were few jobs. He had no family to rely on. The notebook closes with his description of his decision to leave Jamaica:

For the first time I realised that my father was part of the 'Windrush Generation' – a group who were to become characterised as stalwart pioneers.

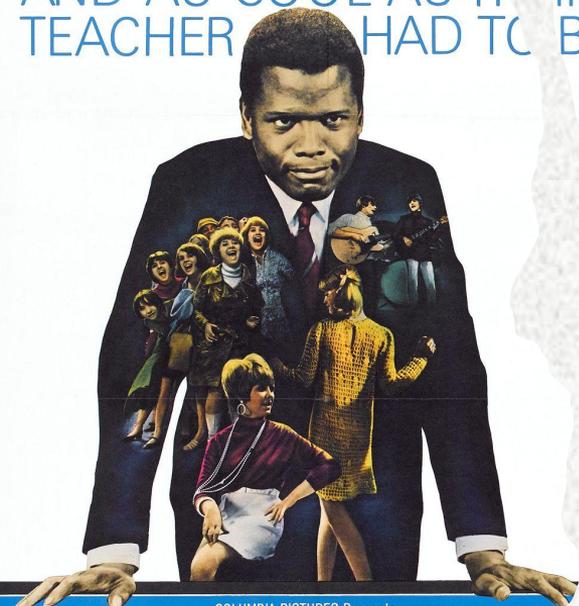
"My thoughts turned to immigration as a way out of my predicament. I had been hearing from people that it was easy to get to England, so I started to make inquiries as to how I could get there. I soon found out that you could book a passage on ships bringing back servicemen who had fought in the Second World War. So I duly booked my passage on the SS Ormonde paying the princely sum of £28."

Once I knew its name, I looked for more references to the *Ormonde*, but came across surprisingly little information. It took me a while to work out that *Ormonde* was actually the first ship to travel from the Caribbean to Britain in the postwar period – over a year before *Empire Windrush*. It became fascinating

..... Notes written in the 1980s by the author's father, describing his decision to book passage on Ormonde:
..... "On board the ship was a small batch of the first immigrants to leave Jamaica for England ..."

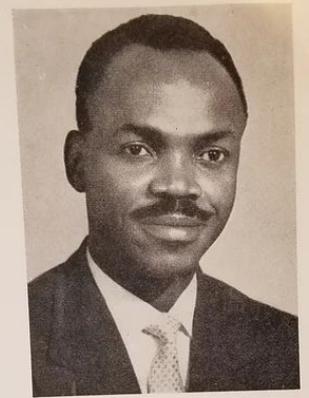
There were ships before the Windrush. Hannah Lowe writes about her father's journey on the Ormonde.

A STORY AS FRESH AS THE
GIRLS IN THEIR MINDS...
AND AS COOL AS THE
TEACHER WHO HAD TO BE



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To Sir, With Love - a novel by E.R. Braithwaite



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

E. R. Braithwaite was born in British Guiana and studied in the United States. During World War II he was an air crewman with the R.A.F. *To Sir, With Love*, his first book, was originally published in England where, according to *Time*, it "was a moderate literary sensation." Mr. Braithwaite is now a children's officer for the London Welfare Department.

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Windrush arrival in the Press

200 Jobless Jamaicans Come To Britain

WHEN the ex-troopship Empire Windrush slid alongside the landing stage at Tilbury (London) early today her deck was crowded with 492 Jamaicans, who have come to Britain to seek work.

Unloading was organised by the Jamaicans themselves because of the dock strike.

Fifty-two of the men have volunteered for the Services, 386 have prospects of work, and 216 are without jobs.

Flight-Lieut. J. S. Smith, who has looked after their welfare on the voyage, stated: "Between 30 and 40 of the men have volunteered to go down the mines, and all are hoping that something will be done for them to help them to begin a new life."

STOWAWAYS ON SHIP

Eight stowaways were found aboard. Two were put off at Bermuda and one, a veteran, had her first class fare totalling £48, paid for by the officials who organised a collection when they heard she was to be put ashore.

Five more were discovered last night and today.

Among the Jamaicans are singers, students, pianists, boxers—and there is a complete dance band—who are to seek engagements here.

Mr. Floyd Royce, a business man from Kingston, is here to buy agricultural machinery and livestock.

Many of the men would not stick the conditions and poor

pay in Jamaica," he said. "Some of them think that the streets of Britain are paved with gold, and a lot will be disappointed." Winston Webb, a builder from British Guiana, said: "All we ask is for a job and a chance to help Britain in her manpower shortage."

WHY 492 WEST INDIANS CAME TO BRITAIN

Not All Intend to Settle Here

From our Special Correspondent

TILBURY, TUESDAY. What were they thinking, these 492 men from Jamaica and Trinidad, as the Empire Windrush slid upstream with the flood between the closing shores of Kent and Essex? country did them a disservice in not letting us know." However, one could discover no evidence of "organisation." They had seen the advertisement of the shipping company in their local papers—a thousand berths on the troop-decks vacant, £28 each—found the money, and in due time embarked with high

JAMAICAN EMIGRANTS ARRIVE

A Thames Greeting

As dusk fell over the Thames at Tilbury last night launches were still taking sightseers to the 14,400-ton ex-troopship Empire Windrush to welcome the 492 Jamaicans who have come to seek the work they could not find in their own country. As the launches circled the ex-trooper the Jamaicans returned the sightseers' waves of greeting as they walked the deck. Early to-day the Empire Windrush will pull into the landing stage and the Jamaicans will disembark.

Jamaicans Want
British Jobs
Hundreds more West Indians
are ready to follow the 450 job-
seeking Jamaicans bound for
Britain in the Empire Windrush,
according to statements by
emigrants after the ship docked
at Hamilton, Bermuda, to-day.

'London is the
Place for Me'

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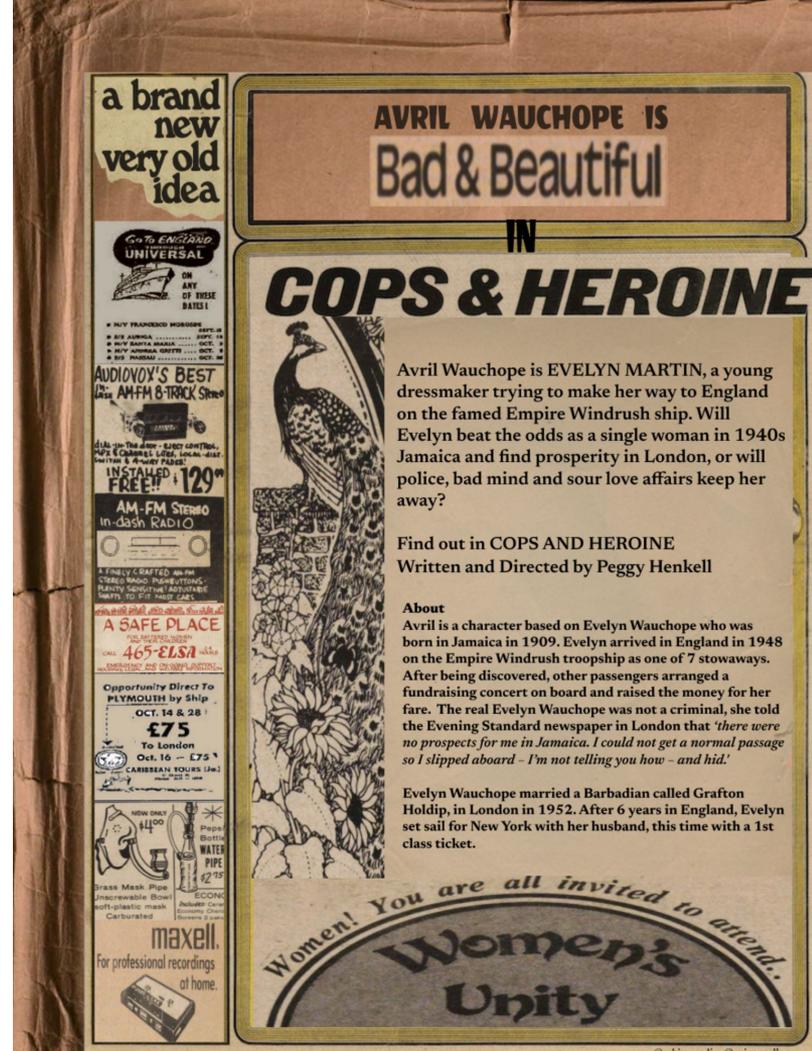
Lord
Kitchener



[John Parsons interviewing Trinidadian calypsonian Lord Kitchener upon his arrival on the Empire Windrush, 1948 - British Pathe](#)

- Revolutionary to Raas, 2022, Digital Collage

By Zakiya McKenzie for **The Harder They Come 50th Anniversary exhibition** at 10A Kingston Gallery - Jamaica



The Listener

Thursday 20 March 1969 Volume 81 No 2086 1s. 3d.

Spring Books: Geoffrey Grigson on the poetry of Tennyson
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The Population of Britain by Christopher Serpell

The sailing of the *Mayflower* from Plymouth in 1620 is established in the canon of 'turning-points' in the history of the British people; the docking of the *Empire Windrush* at Tilbury in 1948 may prove to have equal symbolical importance. The one event marked the departure of British subjects to a 'new world', in search of greater religious and political freedom; the other, the arrival in the 'old country' of British subjects in search of greater economic opportunity. The name of one ship stands for mass emigration at the beginning of a period in which an empire was founded overseas; the name of the other may come to stand for mass immigration at the end of the period in which that empire was liquidated. The outward-bound passengers of 1620 were white; the inward-bound passengers of 1948 were black.

All the available accommodation on the *Empire Windrush* had been swamped in Jamaica by a rush of West Indians seeking to escape from a local crisis of poverty and unemployment; between 400 and 500 boarded her, including 13 stowaways. As she made her leisurely return journey, the news of the passenger list began to worry both Whitehall and the House of Commons. Mr George Isaacs, Minister of Labour, sternly rebuked the Jamaican authorities who had permitted such an exodus: 'The arrival of these substantial numbers of men under no organised arrangement is bound to result in considerable difficulty and disappointment. I hope no encouragement will be given to others to follow their example.' Anxious MPs—conspicuous among them was Mr Tom Driberg—pestered Ministers with questions about the provision that was being made for the immigrants, and



Colour and Citizenship by Nicholas Deakin

In the summer of 1948, a former cruise liner and wartime troop-carrier docked at Tilbury. Writing in the *Listener* earlier this year, Christopher Serpell described the voyage of this ship, the *Empire Windrush*, with her 400 Jamaican migrant passengers, as having been as important to the future of this country as the voyage of the *Mayflower*. Of course, race relations didn't begin with the *Windrush*: if you really want to go back to the roots of what is miscalled the immigrant problem, the voyage you would probably end by picking would be John Hawkins's first expedition of 1562, on which he 'got into his possession, partly by the sword and partly by other means, 300 Negroes at the least'. But Serpell's basic point is a fair one: the twin—but distinct—questions of immigration and race have grown steadily in significance until, by common consent, they constitute one of the major social issues of the day.

Consent about this, but about precious little else. For race exerts a powerful tug in opposite directions: half attraction, half rejection. Take the way that the press handles the topic. Clearly, race is good copy: but it also has a whiff of forbidden fruit about it. So back-street scuffles that go unnoticed on Saturday night in Camden Town become front-page news in the Sundays if one of the participants happens to have a dark skin. But the editorial homily alongside the report will talk about the necessity for keeping things in proportion if integration is to be achieved. Or take the ambivalent ways in which some young people—young whites—interest themselves in race questions. They are attracted to

An immigrant meets his Waterloo

Soundings

Issue 10 Autumn 1998
A journal of politics and culture



**WINDRUSH
ECHOES**

ANNE PHOENIX Contradictory Identities

JACKIE KAY Windrush Short Story

SONIA BOYCE Hair

soundings Autumn 1998 issue 10

Tony Blair and the jargon of modernisation

Alan Finlayson

Alan Finlayson scrutinises the contradictions and political implications inside the New Labour rhetoric of modernisation.

Modernisation is not an end in itself. It is for a purpose. Modernisation is not the enemy of justice but its ally.

Tony Blair, Labour Party Annual Conference 1997

The jargon and rhetoric of 'modernisation' abound within the discourse of the current Labour government. It is a rhetoric that is central to the vision, or 'project' of 'New Labour'. But what does it mean?

A number of competing interpretations of the New Labour phenomenon have considered the meaning of 'modernisation' but they do not always focus on it as a term fulfilling a particular rhetorical and ideological function. For example, modernisation has been taken to be: the name of the process whereby the Labour Party adopts a Thatcherite agenda; a continuation, perhaps culmination, of the party reforms first attempted by Gaitskell; simply an empty term hiding the single sin of having nothing to say.

Mike Kenny and Martin Smith argue that interpretations of Blair such as these underestimate both the novelty of his political approach and the complexity of forces, structural and ideological, to which it is a response. Frustratingly, however, while advocating a 'multi-dimensional interpretative

Thank you...

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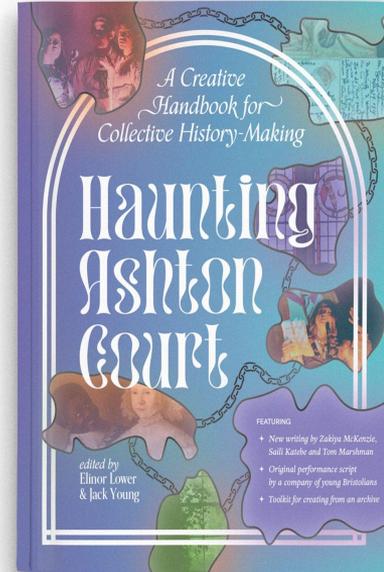
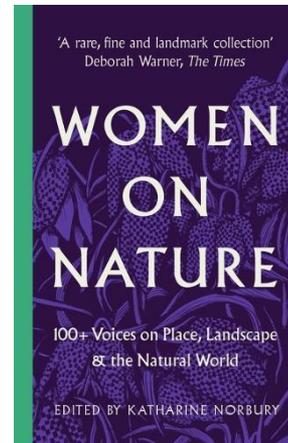
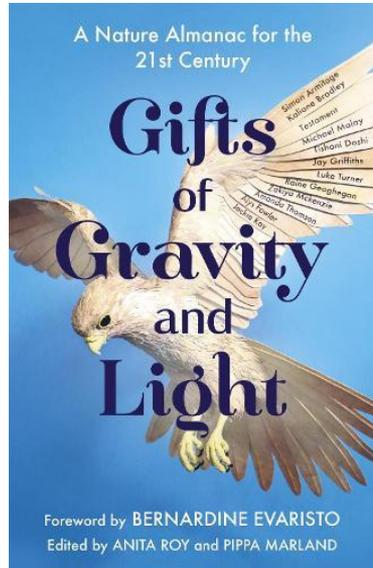
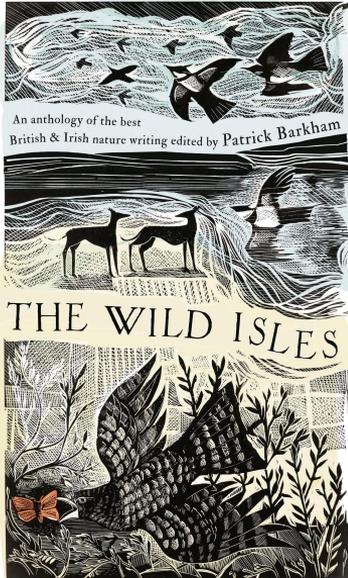
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Zakiya McKenzie

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