



St John's Giants, 1986

GALLERY

Photograph by

LEROY COOPER

The first black settlers arrived in Liverpool, a port city with roots in the transatlantic slave trade, in the early 18th century. The black community that grew up there is one of the oldest in Britain.

Emigrating from Jamaica as a child in the early 1960s, Leroy Cooper was raised in the Toxteth area of the Liverpool 8 postcode. Growing up he experienced the tensions caused by unemployment, racism and police brutality. In 1981, he was arrested after coming to the aid of another resident who was being searched by police. The incident sparked the Toxteth riots, also known as the Liverpool 8 Uprising, some of the most violent protests ever seen in Britain.

After his arrest, Cooper decided to enrol in a photography course. It would be a way of bearing witness to what he had seen and lived through. For more than 40 years, he documented Liverpool's racially diverse inner city,

countering negative perceptions of Toxteth as violent and unsafe. His photographs reveal an integrated neighbourhood, a "place of warmth, community and family".

Cooper took this photograph, "St John's Giants", in 1986. "Back in the day," he said, "kids from the neighbourhood would go to the local shopping mall on Saturday afternoons... These teenagers had lived through the hostile environment after the 1981 uprising and had grown up to be giants. They took pride in coming from Liverpool 8."

Cooper died in May 2023, a month after an exhibition of his work opened at the Museum of Liverpool. He was able to visit the show, and it has been extended in his memory. **FT**

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*Words by Sinéad Campbell.
 "Liverpool through the Lens"
 at the Museum of Liverpool runs
 until June 16*