

**Reflection** by Beverley Hillman, from *All Nations Baptist Church in Clapham, London*. from [ctbi.org.uk/black-lives-matter-and-racial-justice/?ct=t\(CTBI Monthly Newsletter-Sept2020\)](http://ctbi.org.uk/black-lives-matter-and-racial-justice/?ct=t(CTBI%20Monthly%20Newsletter-Sept2020))

These are exceptional times. Report after report from the government, whitewashes the findings of structural racism and discrimination affecting the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME), community. As Black people, the effects of systemic racism is not alien to us. It affects our daily lives and we wear a 'metaphorical' mask to disguise how we really feel and to navigate our way through the systems.

But I am **tired** of wearing the metaphorical mask. Tired and weary of the hoops I and many have had to jump through, because we are Black. Tired of the overt and covert racism.

Paul Laurence Dunbar (an African American poet), wrote, in 1896, '**We Wear the Mask.**'

In the poem, Dunbar, makes reference to the hidden feelings and emotions of those struggling with racism and segregation. Yet, a cheerful expression is presented to the world. Maya Angelou, later adapted the poem as it was still relevant today.

In 2020, we are still having to wear the metaphorical mask in some situations. Now in Covid-19, we wear the physical mask and I struggle to breathe under it.

So, here we go again... Blood pressure rising! Covid-19, lockdown, economic and social inequalities, Grenfell and Windrush scandals ongoing and on the back burner again. Then the murder of George Floyd and the world erupts like a volcano!

Witnessed by the world, the White policeman squeezes the life out of George Floyd. With his knee on the neck of George Floyd, for 7 minutes and 46 seconds, we shudder and tremble, as he calls out for his mum! The racism of the police is exposed **again** in the US, the UK and around the world.

Black Lives Matter open the eyes of the world to what is really happening and many have woken up to the unpleasant realities. Black and White, old

and young, have united in challenging racism and publicly declaring, 'Enough is enough.' Demanding change for a better world. In the whirlwind, global protest and marches have called for all institutions to examine themselves and the part they have played in the lives of Black people historically and currently.

But we cannot manage all this in our own strength. God sees all. We are reminded:

'I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me.' - Philippians 4: 13.

We pray, we discuss, we share, we march, we protest, so that change happens and is sustained. But, words are not enough; action is also needed.

The Bible reminds us that:

'Faith without works is dead.' – James 2: 14- 26.

Frederick Douglass (1818 -1895, African American abolitionist and orator), reminds us:

'If there is no struggle, there is no progress.'

We have been patient for too long. **NOW**, is the time for change.

Yes, the statues linked to the horrific past of enslavement must come down and be replaced by those who should be honoured.

Yes, institutional racism must be exposed and positive action taken.

Yes, the issue of reparations must be addressed.

Yes, the education system, universities, schools and colleges need to decolonise their curriculum and... **the truth must be told!**

### ***We Wear the Mask***

***Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906)***

*We wear the mask that grins and lies,  
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,—*

*This debt we pay to human guile;  
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,  
And mouth with myriad subtleties.*

*Why should the world be over-wise,  
In counting all our tears and sighs?*

*Nay, let them only see us, while*

*We wear the mask.*

*We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries  
To thee from tortured souls arise.*

*We sing, but oh the clay is vile*

*Beneath our feet, and long the mile;*

*But let the world dream otherwise,*

*We wear the mask!*