

Let Them See Us: **Black Beauty Beyond the Mask**



Rev. Denise Anderson

Rev. Denise Anderson, former co-moderator of the PC(USA) and current Coordinator for Racial and Intercultural Justice for our denomination, will be leading a conversation about how Blackness has been portrayed in mainstream art and media.

In his seminal poem “We Wear the Mask,” Paul Laurence Dunbar spoke of how Black people create personas—masks—to hide the pain and trauma of racism. These masks take on many forms, but the goal is always to shroud ugliness in beauty. Indeed, racism shapes much of Black experience and identity, but there is more to Black people than trauma.

Many anti-racism trainings (rightfully) give attention to the dire effects of racism on communities of color. In this unique anti-racism education opportunity, we will look at how Black beauty and creativity arise apart from and in spite of racism, prejudice, and oppression. Using examples from the visual and performing arts, we’ll have honest discussions about cultural appropriation, Black American aesthetics, and the “normative gaze.” Together, we will sensitize ourselves to the specific beauty of Blackness and envision a world in which “masks” are no longer necessary.

Suggested reading/viewing prior to the event:

- Poem: [“We Wear the Mask”](#) by Paul Laurence Dunbar
- Movie: [“Soul”](#) (available on Disney+)
- Movie: [“Moonlight”](#) (available on Netflix, Amazon Prime and other streaming services)
- Episodes of TV show: [“Blackish”](#)
- Book: [“Between the World and Me”](#) by Ta-Nehisi Coates

**JANUARY
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6-8 PM**