

Who Was That Masked Man?

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Editorial Opinion

The phrase “masked man” is drawn from characters both fictional and historical, such as Zorro, the vigilante of colonial California, and the Man in the Iron Mask, a masked prisoner in France. My favorite masked character was the Lone Ranger, whom I later learned was based on the life of Bass Reeves—a legendary Black US Marshal in the American Old West known for his bravery, clever disguises, and commitment to justice.

Today, a “masked” cornucopia of alphabet agencies is being deployed to American cities. The National Guard supports these agencies in addressing issues related to migration and crime.

Many of these soldiers are concealing their identities, much like the Ku Klux Klan Night Riders, concerned about potential repercussions associated with actions taken against their neighbours and civilians. The use of masks reflects an awareness that specific directives from the federal government may conflict with societal norms or personal convictions.

In the poem “We Wear the Mask,” Paul Laurence Dunbar employs irony to convey the concept that African Americans often present a façade to society through the metaphorical “mask.” The irony arises from the contrast between outward expressions of happiness and the underlying reality of hidden emotional pain.

The third line of Dunbar’s prose describes our wearing of the mask as a “debt we pay to human guile.” This line suggests that the mask conceals the trauma that is paid for by the façade we present throughout our lives.

While we voice concerns about the current political regime’s unprecedented actions in our communities, we have largely remained silent, opting for critique over engagement. This prompts me to ask: Are we hiding behind a figurative mask to survive today’s political crisis?

The administration attributes crime and violence as the major factors responsible for the occupation of Democrat-led cities, mostly with Black mayors and large Black populations. They claim these cities make America less safe. The deployment of “masked” men to American cities undoubtedly increases the risk of unrest. Furthermore, this deployment may result in overlapping areas of conflicting authority among local, state, and federal governments, which could potentially affect governance processes such as elections. Efforts to question the integrity of the electoral system were particularly apparent in the actions promoted by the administration preceding the events of January 6th at the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C.

Black Americans hold a critical role in protecting democratic processes. It is imperative to uphold

the right to petition the government and ensure adequate representation through voting, especially in light of recent federal court decisions and congressional measures. Ongoing civic participation and voter engagement remain essential, echoing the historical significance of the ballot during the Civil Rights Movement.

Elections empower individuals to effect meaningful change. Each election cycle—held in November, March, or June—offers a vital opportunity to shape governmental decisions. Consistent participation in all elections is essential, as each involves matters and candidates that significantly influence public policy and legislation. Additionally, civic engagement through lawful protest and local political activism between elections further contributes to the democratic process.

Please do not let complacency be your veil. Throughout history, African Americans have played significant roles in movements for freedom. The perspectives of all individuals are critical, and it remains essential for Black Americans to actively articulate their concerns about the nation's trajectory.

The National Urban League mantra is “Not alms but opportunity.”

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