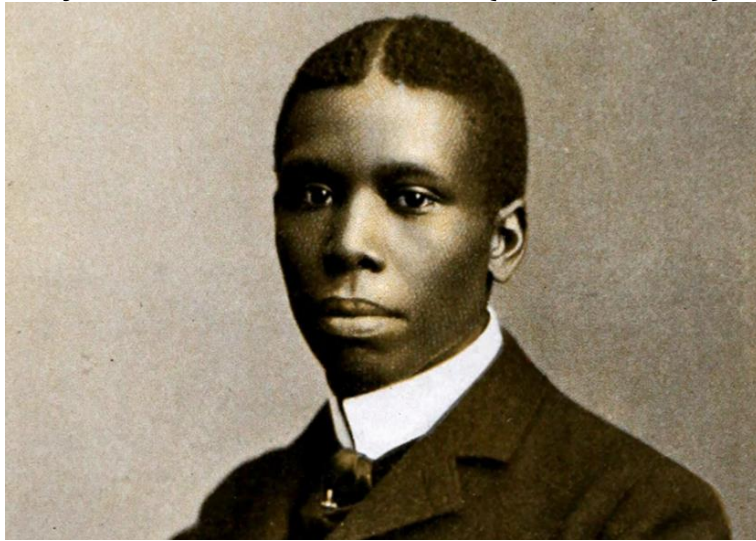


# We Wear the Mask (1895)

by 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!