

**Maxwell A. Ayamba's speech at the People of Colour event to commemorate the 1932 Mass Trespass at Edale, Peak District National Park - 24<sup>th</sup> April 2022**

Hi Everyone,

I am Maxwell Ayamba, environmental journalist/activist, Co-founder, Sheffield 100 Black Men Walk for Health Group now Walk4 Health, the first pioneering POC walking group in the UK set up in 2004, which inspired production of the national play, *"Black Men Walking"* by Eclipse and Royal Theatre production in 2018. First, thanks to the organisers - Nadia, Sam and others for their heroism. Thanks for inviting me to speak at this very historic event. Thanks also to everyone who have travelled from various parts of the UK to join in the commemoration of 90 years of the Kinder Mass Trespass.



*Hundreds of people from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds walking up Kinder as part of the Kinder In Colour Mass Trespass event at Edale, Peak District National Park*

However, may I remind everyone here today that, this event is not just historic because it marks 90 years of the Trespass, but because it is the first time in the history of this country POC have come together to celebrate and stake claim to the countryside for the right to roam. POC are invisible in spaces historically perceived as white spaces shaped by histories of colonialism and imperialism. The 1932 Mass

Trespass led by Benny Rothman and his working-class compatriots was a class issue, however, access and the right to roam today is more of a 'race' and privileged class issue. It is the racialisation and commodification of the English countryside that we are gathered here today to advocate for these spaces to be de-racialised and democratised, because it is the taxes, we pay that are used to manage them.

Trevor Phillips then Chairman of the Equality and Human Right Commission in 2004, described the English countryside as a place of 'passive apartheid'. Only 1% of visitors to national parks are from POC backgrounds. A 2017 study by Natural England, noted 26.2% of POC spend time in the countryside compared to 44% of white people. And yet, with the outbreak of Covid-19, it was POC who were disproportionately affected due to lack of access to quality green spaces.

Many people from the Windrush generation and other POC who came to work here or study and ended up staying for many years have never set foot in the countryside. Migrants and those living in urban communities often have a daily struggle in terms of jobs, health, education and everything else, and the last thing on their mind is leisure and recreation. However, one of the positive things to come out of the pandemic is that so many POC have discovered the joy of walking and the positive effect connecting with nature has on their health and wellbeing.

However, access to nature is unequal and not everyone has access to green space especially POC. Physical inactivity costs the NHS around £1bn per year and wider society around £7.4bn per year. And that's why the Right to Roam Campaign supports proposals to extend the Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000 to give access to woodlands, rivers, and Green Belt. As Nick Hayes in his "Book of Trespass - Crossing the lines that divide us" argues, we have a right to roam only 8% of the countryside, the remaining 92% is locked away in the hands of wealthy landowners, the aristocracy and gentry.



*Nick Hayes - Author, "Book of Trespass - Crossing the line that divides us" and SEM's Maxwell Ayamba, at the Kinder In Colour Mass Trespass event, Edale*

In fact, according to Guy Shrubsole, Author of the book, *Who Owns England - How we lost our land and how to take it back*, published in 2019, 95% of the population own no land, with 4,000 families owning half of the country. The Country Land Business Association states that 36,000 of its members own and manage over 50% of all the rural land in England and Wales which is a third of England and Wales combined. And yet, the Government through the Glover Review of Designated Landscapes 2019 is advocating for access to the countryside for everyone?



*Guy Shrubsole, Author of the book, "Who owns England - How we lost our land and how to take it back" and SEM's Maxwell Ayamba at the POC event, Edale*

*The Guardian* on Friday April 22<sup>nd</sup> 2022 reported that the Government have decided to shelve publication of the right to roam report saying the countryside is a place for business after Caroline Lucas - Former Leader of the Green Party questioned why the review headed by Lord Agnew for the potential expansion of the much fought over the right to roam is not published, which would have marked the 90th anniversary of the mass trespass.

Another issue of concern is the Police Powers and Protection Bill. The Conservative Government proposes to make trespass a criminal instead of a civil offence. This again, will send a signal that the countryside is not an open resource accessible to all, but a place of complex rules and regulations. Whereby, a walker stepping off a public footpath path could lead to a criminal sentence. And already there is a history between POC and the police in cities with Stop and Search and extending this to the rural countryside will take it to another level. This is despite the fact

the CRoW Act 2000 establishes the right to roam over registered common land and mapped out areas of mountain, moor, heath and downs as well as parts of the 'coastal margin', identified through the creation of the England Coast Path.

It is these unintended consequences of changes to legislation, if framed insufficiently which may give landowners the chance to criminalise harmless and often accidental trespass, particularly as more people are visiting the countryside and green space due to Covid-19. Many POC are not familiar with the Countryside Code and trespass laws. In fact, Guy Shrubsole and Nick Hayes co-founders of the Right to Roam Campaign started a petition last year supported by many environmental, civil and charitable organisations titled, "*Don't criminalise trespass*" on the UK Government's and Parliamentary website which gained 134,928 signatures showing the level of public opposition.

To conclude, significance of the play *Black Men Walking*, I believe underlines the importance of why we are gathered here today. To quote one of the characters in the play, "*Though as Black people we are written into the English landscape you don't see us - We walked England before the English*". Characters in the play challenged the contemporary stereotypes of Black people to illustrate that there has been Black presence in the English countryside since Roman times, enslavement, Tudors, Blackamoors, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Worlds whose blood and sweat contributed to make the English countryside the so-called "Green Pleasant Land", rural industrialisation and National Trust properties and stately homes such as Chatsworth House in Derbyshire as Guy Shrubsole said, remains the acceptable face of feudalism, yet histories of Black presence have been completely erased from the history of the English countryside. It is high time that we reframe these narratives and decolonise the countryside.

To learn more about history of the 1932 Mass Trespass, please buy a copy of Keith Warrender's book titled, "*Forbidden Kinder*" (2022) which was launched yesterday at Hayfield to commemorate the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the trespass and in which I have contribute a piece titled "*Forbidden Kinder - the Black Perspective*".

Thanks a lot