



HERBERT
SMITH
FREEHILLS



ONWARDS AND UPWARDS

HERBERT SMITH FREEHILLS
LONDON BAME COMMITTEE
OCTOBER 2021



FOREWORD

Last year, we decided to put together a publication for Black History Month. Our aim was to showcase and celebrate the thoughts, expressions and experiences of (a selection of) the Black community both within the firm and externally. We asked people to write pieces on the topic of 'Community'. We found the process cathartic: at a time when we were in lockdown and there was much uncertainty over what the future would hold, we had a project which gave us a sense of purpose.

The publication was well-received, and we feel helped play a part in continuing conversations about race within and outside HSF. We are very grateful for all of your support in this respect. This year, we decided to build on the momentum and produce another collection of perspectives and lived experiences. Given the global nature of the firm, we thought it was important to feature contributions from Black colleagues across the firm, as we recognise that there is such diversity across the experiences of the Black community worldwide. We invited contributions from colleagues at HSF as well as other organisations that would reflect on the past year and look towards what lies ahead. We are grateful to the authors for how open and honest they have been and for their willingness to share their personal experiences with us. We have appreciated the opportunity to get to know the contributors on a more personal level, as COVID-19 restrictions have meant that it has not been as easy to meet new people.

You will observe some recurring themes across the pieces we have featured. Some authors have touched on the topics of belonging and identity: of being othered and also learning to be comfortable in their own skin. They talk about the difficulties of existing outside the Black community and the burden of toning oneself down. They discuss the racism faced by Black people in the workplace, including the racist abuse of Black football players at the EURO Finals. They speak about people's willingness to help others in difficult times: family members, communities and strangers. They reflect on how the past year has enabled people to slow down and to reflect on what is important.

The past year has undoubtedly been challenging: there has been a global pandemic, social, political and economic uncertainties and the murder of George Floyd, which has led to the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement. You will find various feelings expressed in the contributions. Many have discussed the uncertainty, sadness, anger and pain felt throughout the past year. However, several have also reflected on the silver lining: the resilience shown in the face of adversity and the ability to forgive others. Amidst all the challenges faced in the past year, there is a sense of hope for the future which runs as a strong undercurrent throughout the contributions. It is for this reason that we have decided to call the publication 'Onwards and Upwards': the title is a recognition that despite the turmoil of the previous year, together we can tackle challenges and look forward to a more positive future.

We are delighted and honoured to present 'Onwards and Upwards' to you. While reading these contributions, we encourage you to reflect on how you feel the past year has been, and what you consider lies ahead.



Vrinda Vinayak and Corinna Cherrie co-chair the HSF London Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Committee. The BAME Committee works with the Graduate Recruitment and Diversity & Inclusivity teams to improve the representation of ethnic minorities within the trainee population at the London Office. Vrinda is a Trainee at the firm and Corinna has just qualified into the Disputes group.

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01

**BLACK
LIVES
MATTER**



TANISHA ONYENAOHA

ALL AT ONCE

Last May, I had an interview with three partners in my group that would go a long way to determining whether I would be offered a job upon qualification. As the day approached I decided I would switch off from two things: social media and the news. This is a ritual I have adopted for as long as I can remember in an effort to compartmentalise ahead of a looming milestone. Settled (un)comfortably into lockdown one, detachment felt even easier. In a lockdown, I found out how readily my world had shrunk into the cocoon I had woven, existing in the brief pause between bedroom, kitchen and bathroom; a predictability both drearily monotonous and reassuringly safe.

When the interview was over, two friends knocked on my window with a little bottle of Prosecco to say a socially distanced well done for having completed it. We sat in a little triangle in front of my house enjoying each other's company and the childlike spontaneity of the evening, and although I was held by this beautifully happy moment, it was clear that something wasn't right, and I felt the air heavy with solemnity around us. And so, they shared the tragedy that was and would be *the news*, the murder of a Black man by a white policeman.

I had been a few metres outside of my house for all but ten minutes before the post-milestone buzz had disappeared, and there was a sudden, and visceral, shift in realities. Or rather, there was an acknowledgement that these two realities existed at once: security and relief juxtaposed against sadness and shock. This was, and still is, a stark reminder of the parallels that exist in Black life, which I had somehow let myself forget for a couple of days. For me, it was a moment that served as a reminder of the almost impossibility of existing outside of your community; of how the individual cannot be separated from the structure; and of how these parallels are so embedded in the individual experience.

And this became more and more evident in the sadness that overtook the summer of 2020, which gathered pace alongside the momentum that became the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement, which encompassed a mainstream celebration of blackness in a way that I had never seen before. While the next year or so felt full of personal achievement, it was set against this backdrop of a community in pain. This was simultaneous and powerful.

This was personal success co-existing with distant and communal grief.

This was a reminder that the intimacy between interior blackness and perceived blackness makes for a volatile relationship with the present, because, in any given moment, your joy can be levelled before a greater tragedy that is both far away from and integral to you, your life and the worlds of small

joys and connections you call 'you'.

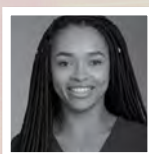
This was the simultaneous feeling of invisibility and hypervisibility.

This was knowing that, sometimes, the act of self-care may bring some harm to a wider meaning of yourself.

This was understanding both the beauty and the pain of being inseparable from your collective, because that collective is representative of so much of your happiness and sense of self, and at once can never be entirely separate from the ordinary and extraordinary terrors of oppression.

In Black History Month, then, we acknowledge these parallels, contradictions and conflicts, in the balance between the recognition of how hard it can be to hold these spaces to celebrate when at times the backdrop reminds us of what is historical and continuing Black pain, with the events and initiatives that celebrate the miracle that is Black joy and Black excellence. Black History Month is the celebration of the alchemy of contradiction; the life and joy that erupts from the very places it was not meant to be found. They are not separate; celebration is in remembrance, remembrance in celebration.

Happy Black History Month.



Tanisha Onyenaoha is an Associate in HSF's Technology, Media, Telecommunications and Data team. She is a Co-Chair of the London Multiculturalism Network and also Co-Chaired the trainee-led BAME Committee throughout the majority of her training contract. She studied French and Hispanic Studies at King's College London. Tanisha is also a Co-Founder and Trustee of the Black Heritage Fund, a charity that exists to promote and advocate for the advancement of the Black community through facilitating connections between donors and grassroots organisations within the community.

ESTHER ADEYINKA

THE PLIGHT OF MY PEOPLE

A little while ago, I started reading *Children of Virtue and Vengeance*, the second novel in Nigerian-American Tomi Adeyemi's debut series, *Legacy of Orisha*. There was a line in the novel that has really stuck with me.

It came during an argument between two of the main characters, Zélie and Amari. They had just restored magic back to the lands, heralding the beginning of a new dawn. But in the process, lives were lost, relationships shattered and the gang of friends were left with little worldly possessions. Amari tries to convince Zélie to talk a foreign mercenary into assisting them in their quest to save the maji from their oppressors and place Amari on the throne. Zélie, a maji herself, evidently exhausted, says in response, *"I can't be expected to carry the plight of my people forever."*

I'm a Nigerian woman who has had the privilege of living in Australia for a large part of my life. My experiences as an African-Australian are unique compared to those of my First Nations, African-American and Black British brothers and sisters. But it feels like we've been carrying our collective plight forever. It feels like the constant protesting, advocacy, educating and lobbying will never end. We're constantly fighting for a better future.

Many of us fight on a daily basis for simple things like the right to live or for equal recognition. But our fight also takes place in more subtle and quiet ways. Ways based on an awareness that the world we live in was constructed in a manner which often works against us.

Ask any Bla(c)k person who has found themselves to be the only one in a room, or in an organisation. We work in those spaces not just for ourselves, but for our families, for our people, so that their paths may be smoother than ours. We carry the plight of our people and we do it well, in fact, we do it with grace. After all, we've had a lot of time to practice.

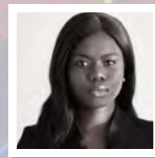
But do you know what it feels like to constantly shrink yourself in order to be more relatable? To change the cadence of your voice so that you don't come across a certain way? To always try and make a good first impression, not because it's just the right thing to do, but because others' first impression of you will inform how they relate to other Black people? It's weighty.

Every day I do these things because I'm *aware*. I'm extremely aware that when I walk into a room, I'm not only representing myself, but every other Black person who hasn't yet stepped into that same place. I'm quietly fighting every day to make it easier for others to accept not just me, but those like me who are yet to come.

I long for a time when I don't have to do any of these things. A time when I don't have to worry about those coming behind me. A time when I can bring my whole self into a space without wondering about how that reflects on others. A time when I can just *be*. There must be such joy that comes with the weightlessness of just *being*.

We're fighting an uphill battle and the weight of it all feels heavy.

I can't be expected to carry the plight of my people forever.



Esther Adeyinka is a Solicitor in the Disputes practice at HSF's Sydney office. She was previously an Associate at the District Court of New South Wales, working in criminal law. Esther is also the owner of SHADIE BY EA, a brand that provides ethically made intimates designed to match all skin tones. She currently sits as a Youth Member on the Multicultural New South Wales Advisory Board, an independent body that draws on the cultural diversity, skills and experience of its members to promote multiculturalism as an asset in New South Wales, Australia. Esther is also the youngest member on the Anglican Media Council after being nominated by the former Archbishop Glenn Davies.

The background of the entire page is a warm, golden-yellow color with a subtle wood-grain texture. Scattered across this background are several autumn leaves in shades of red, orange, and brown. Some leaves are whole, while others are partially visible or overlapping. The leaves are more concentrated in the lower half of the image, with a few smaller ones near the top.

02

**ON
COMMUNITY
AND
BELONGING**

KELECHI E. OKENGWU

A BROADER COMMUNITY

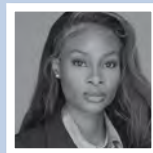
My first introduction to the politics of community and identity in America was in the fifth grade. I had just immigrated from Nigeria and I was swiftly labeled as the 'weird African kid'. It didn't help that I was incredibly shy and didn't speak very much. One day, all the kids in my grade had gathered in the cafeteria for lunch and I was patiently waiting my turn in line when a boy in my class turned to me and said, "go back to Africa." I wasn't offended or angry, I was confused. The boy had the same dark hues in his skin and curls in his hair. He was Black, like me. Surely, if I was to go back to Africa, he would be coming along. In effect, he had bluntly introduced me to the concept of 'us' and 'them' within the Black community. And I just learned that I was a 'them'. And just like that, my classmate had exposed the rift between Africans and African-Americans. This experience stayed with me and prompted questions in my own mind about community and what it means to be Black. Was it a particular history, was it an experience?

And then the Black Lives Matter movement came to the forefront of the American consciousness. It was a topic of discussion among my Black American friends and African friends, and both groups had divergent beliefs about certain aspects of the topic. My sense of community was further splintered.

Then the killing of George Floyd happened. The usual flush of outrage that follows such killings ensued. But this time, it was different – a tectonic shift, a broader reckoning. This time it wasn't just Black outrage. It was a collective outrage – young and old, Black and White, Democrats and Republicans, men and women – we were all forced to shed our protective layers of ignorance and apathy and face some uncomfortable truths. The killing ignited a wave of national then global protests. The killing even touched a nerve in Nigeria, where people gathered in the streets to protest against police brutality. The protests highlighted that there is no middle ground in this battle, as there never should have been. Millions experienced an awakening simultaneously. It was unexpected – that in the wake of such tragedy my community had broadened to include complete strangers, some of whom didn't look like me. I was skeptical, but the avalanche of protests nudged me in the direction of hope.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke in King Chapel at Cornell College, Mount Vernon, Iowa, on 15 October 1962. He said, "I am convinced that men hate each other because they fear each other. They fear each other because they don't know each other, and they don't know each other because they don't communicate with each other, and they don't communicate with each other because they are separated from each other."

It has been over a year since the killing of George Floyd and I am convinced that my sense of community is forever changed. I am convinced that the killing allowed people to inflect and start conversations on the path of transformative and conscious healing.



Kelechi E. Okengwu is an Associate in the Disputes team at HSF New York. She has been with the firm for nine months and is involved with the New York office's Diversity & Inclusivity initiatives and networks.

JUDY P. D'AGOSTINO

TILLING THE SOIL

I arrived stronger

hardy and robust, anticipating a hospitable environment for growth, only
To find fertile ground for seeds of doubt to take root
Sown, strewn, spread by Those who saw fit to cultivate a more palatable flora, invariably
well-intentioned.

I weathered a constant stream

of pernicious comments and clandestine cues from Them, polished signals that I was
permitted

To be there, but be quiet

Pinked by intense othering: a spectacle to be pruned ("must you be so vocal?"), probed ("why
can't I touch her hair?"), picked over ("why are you attacking Us?").

I departed depleted,

my righteous anger deemed hysterical, inimical slights imagined, qualifications
questioned, left

To unpack the fomented diffidence, disquietude, dismay in myself
Deepened by Their indignation that I should feel anything but grateful.

I am replenishing

among the green-thumbed who unearth latent buds, enrich the roots, till the soil; weaker,
but learning how

To trust myself again

Tending to the weeds left behind.



Judy Payen D'Agostino is a Consultant in McKinsey & Company's Washington D.C. office, where she serves clients across the public, private and social sectors on strategy, organisation design, and crisis preparedness and response. She has contributed to McKinsey's external publications, including 'Tips for new government leaders: Unlocking diversity and inclusion' and 'COVID-19: Investing in black lives and livelihoods'. Her personal work has appeared in The Huffington Post.

Judy has an MA (Hons) in Business Studies from the University of Edinburgh and an MBA from Harvard Business School.

DANIEL CLARKE

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE ENGLISH: THE 'MOTHER COUNTRY' – SUBJECTS OR CITIZENS?

It was throughout the 1950s and 60s that my great-grandparents and grandparents gradually made the move from the West Indies to England. Moving to England meant starting completely new lives which inevitably carried with it huge uncertainty. However, to them, one thing was certain – their British identity. For West Indians, like many others pertaining to the British Empire, England was the 'Mother Country'. England was home. At least that was the narrative that they were told in colonial teaching. Black workers were welcomed to support the war effort and to rebuild post-war England. Yet on arrival, West Indians were met with racial hostility and despite many being skilled workers, the jobs available were generally unskilled public sector jobs. For many in the Windrush generation, the 'Englishness' conferred onto them has been conditional on when they benefit the country.

The past year has brought the question of 'Englishness' to the forefront once again. Since 2015, many individuals from the Windrush generation were told they had no legal right to be in the UK and faced deportation due to the misapplication of the hostile environment policy by the Home Office. In September 2020, the Home Office accepted the recommendations of a public inquiry investigating the Windrush scandal. Despite this, the Windrush Compensation Scheme, designed to compensate the victims of the scandal, awarded only derisory awards and was excessively bureaucratic. This led some black individuals involved with implementing the scheme to resign. Even after the treatment of Windrush victims came to light, a poor attempt was made to rectify the harm caused. Given that my great-grandparents and grandparents claimed Englishness so readily, the fact that the legitimacy of their 'Englishness' was doubted some 60 years later made me question whether they were ever seen as citizens at all, or instead the subordinate identity of British subjects.

More recently, the question of 'Englishness' dawned on me again as I was watching the EURO 2020. The England squad is more diverse than ever. Gareth Southgate's squad has been hailed as a symbol for the strength of diversity. In fact, without immigration only half of the squad would remain. Despite this, the plan for the England squad to take the knee in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement was nothing

short of controversial. Players were booed, many argued that politics has no place in football. However, many of the black footballers playing for England have been subject to racist abuse whether online or from spectators. It is therefore difficult to see how anti-racist campaigns have no place in football. For the players called up to play for their nation, it is an honour. However, for Tyrone Mings, his 2019 England debut was overshadowed by racist abuse. He reflected on this in the BBC documentary *Krept and Konan: We are England* where the rap duo interviewed players and explored the nuances of English identity. "Never did I imagine that my England debut would be always remembered for racism on the pitch," he recalled.

Having been born in England, to English parents, with great-grandparents and grandparents migrating from British colonies, my English identity should be certain. However, it is sometimes difficult to wholeheartedly identify as 'English'. Whilst it would be great to simply 'put the past in the past' and accept that we are more diverse than ever, the only way to move forward is to acknowledge the country's past and how it has shaped our society now. We have come a long way from Britain's imperial past, however there is still a way to go until the English identity is not tainted by the remnants of British subjecthood.



Daniel Clarke is a Future Joiner (2022) at HSF, and has recently graduated from the University of Sheffield with a First Class in Law. He was the firm's campus ambassador at his university. He was also the Secretary for the University's West Indian Society, and Co-President of the African-Caribbean Society at his school.

LORRAINE GIBSON

LESSONS FROM MY 82 YEAR OLD MOTHER

What a tiring year it has been! There has also been positivity and hope, conversation and self-reflection and heaps of education.

At the time of writing, we have just come through the nail biting EURO Finals and all that it brought with it. The joy and ecstasy when the team was doing well and the sheer nastiness of a small contingent of supposed football supporters and others not even interested in the beautiful game, who seized an opportunity to attack those at the start of their career, who were representing the country.

The most interesting of the past year for me, is personal. For the first time, I listened to my mother talking about her experience starting a new job as a nurse at a hospital in Nottingham. While I was growing up, my mother's work involved caring for the elderly, infirm and disabled. I loved visiting the hospital as a young girl and felt a strong sense of pride in seeing my mother at work. I would regularly go with my father in his beloved VW Beetle to pick up my mother at the end of her shift, usually around 20:45. Occasionally my mother would make her own way home walking the 45 minutes at the end of her shift.

Recently, on a number of occasions, my mother has commented on the terrible things headlining in the news and she equates it to her early years working at the hospital. She wanted me to know about the horrible racism she faced from her fellow nurses. She couldn't bring herself to tell me the words they used or the behaviour they displayed, but I could tell she lived through a lot of pain at that time. I was shocked to hear my mother say that she had even told my father through tears that she wanted to resign and stop working at the hospital. He knew how much she enjoyed being a nurse and knowing what she would face elsewhere, he convinced her to stay and stick with it. Nothing was ever done to address the racism she faced from the other nurses, the very explicit racism – regardless, my mother went in to work every shift without fail. There was one nurse, who nowadays would be considered a modern day ally, who also convinced my mother to ignore the other nurses and stay at the hospital.

To think of my now 82 year old mother working hard to support her family, raising five boisterous kids (my siblings, not me) and trying to establish herself with my father in a new community and tolerating such behaviour is very upsetting. She worked at that hospital for more than 20 years. At the end of our conversation, my mother described those people, her fellow nurses, as the nicest people she could ever wish to work with. I found it amazing how forgiving she was. It could not have happened without the support of my father and her modern day ally.

My main learning of this year comes from my mother and others – it is the incredible amount of resilience displayed by so many in the face of adversity. Do not allow anyone to drive you away from something you love to do, from your passion, from something you feel is your purpose. Whether that is football, nursing or working in professional services. Stay with it and only then will we see a change in those people who initially refuse to understand and welcome difference. Only then will we see more people who look like us in a variety of different arenas.



Lorraine Gibson is a Business Development Director, UK, US & EMEA, based in HSF's London office. She has been at the firm for three years and has worked in professional services for more than 23 years. Lorraine is a member of HSF's UK Executive, EMEA Executive and together with Gary Hommel, another member of the UK Executive, Lorraine is an Executive Sponsor for Race, working with the Diversity & Inclusion team to drive engagement across the firm, keeping the wider Executive accountable for commitments made, and keeping the subject front and centre on the agenda.

BELLINA MATIWANE

THE COMFORTER

My name is Bellina which is very interesting as this was identified as my school name, and my home name is Duduzile, "the comforter", before you even ask me what is the meaning of my name, as it is a norm in South Africa to be asked this question. Most people I grew up with have two names – an African name and an English name, it was compulsory in those days to have both names. Our parents named us based on the situation that was happening during the time and even after a family member. Funnily enough we never even bothered ourselves to understand the meaning of the English name, thanks to Google that we can now search and understand the meaning of our names.

I was born in Soweto (South Western Township), a big location in Johannesburg. Growing up in South Africa as a black girl was quite nice and challenging at the same time as I did not understand what was happening around me until I started high school.

We grew up at the time of riots, in some cases these were so bad that some kids who were part of the groups who were fighting for freedom were expelled from school and couldn't continue with their education. Some kids were killed and this on its own was a challenge for parents when they lost their kids.

Growing up as the youngest child, my dad's favourite child, I was always protected by both parents and I had a brother who took it upon himself to protect me. As a bubbly and loving child, I enjoyed my childhood but I was always careful and I also tried to fit in. I am really proud that these days I can rock my Afro hair everywhere I go and still feel accepted for who I am. This was not the case when I was younger as black girls and women felt we were in a way forced to relax or use chemicals to make our hair look the part.

In my family I was the one who was fortunate enough to be given a chance to study further. This was made possible by my family members (my grandfather and my aunt) who were always there to assist with tuition fees. This taught me that a child is not only raised by its parents, but by family members and the community.

My parents didn't have the opportunity to go to school and both were working as general workers with very little salaries, but we never went to bed without food. They were still able to help other people who were less fortunate than us.

I learnt from their wisdom and love and I felt the need to help and support family members, friends and people in our neighbourhood who were less fortunate and did not have jobs, so could not provide for their families. Some people call it 'Black Tax', I call it 'Ubuntu' which means 'I am because of who we all are' and 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu' in Zulu my home language. I am a mother of three boys (Zwelethu,

Thandolwethu and Nkosinathi) and a grandson (Khayelihle), but because my late sister and brother left kids in my care, now I have 10 kids and 6 grandchildren (all of them have 1 name and do not have a school name).

Having to take care of my siblings' kids grew my love for people and I have helped them gain access to education as it is important. I want to believe; it was the reason I ended up in the Human Resources field. I am always available to help and I have felt the impact of helping people and I feel I am fulfilling to pay it forward which I learnt from my parents who were always willing to help with their scarce resources.

I have also made it a point that I instil in my children to love and support each other and also that they must be ready to assist where possible. I have created families from people whom I am not related with by sharing my love and support. The COVID-19 pandemic has meant that most people have lost their jobs and we have to make sure we support them in the best way we can. It is funny that this comes so naturally to me, and I came to realise that I follow my Zulu name.

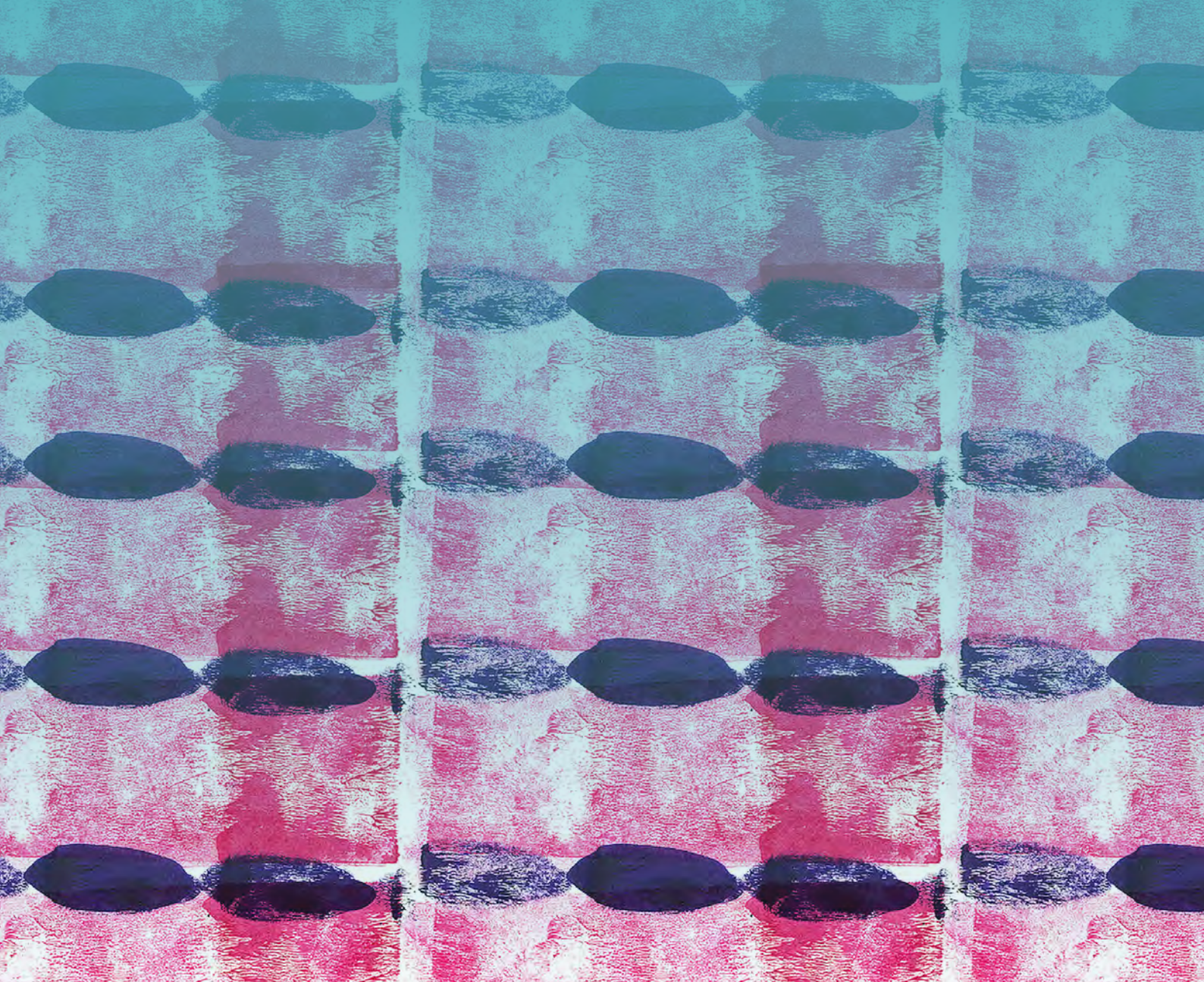
COVID-19 changed life as we knew it. We all had resolutions and hoped that 2020 would be the best year. It was rough and we were hit with a new normal: lockdowns, mask rules, economic crisis and travel bans. This forced us to work remotely and I am proud to say that the firm I work for managed to ensure that there were no disruptions. We learned to connect with each other virtually. Understanding the scale of this crisis and what lies ahead is a challenge for all of us, but we hope now that vaccinations are open to everyone, that things might get better.



Bellina Matiwane is a Human Resources Manager based in HSF's Johannesburg office. She joined the firm in January 2020 and has worked in Human Resources for more than 25 years. Bellina likes to make a difference to people's lives. She is a God-fearing woman and finds prayer a source of strength.

03

**RECOVERING
FROM THE
PANDEMIC**



ALEXIS WATSON

THE YEAR

2020 was supposed to be *the year*.

The year where babies blinked their way into a world (or room) full with smiling teary-eyed faces.

A year where:

Kids, lost in fun, pranced late into the evening sun;
Teens cruised for hours in their parents' hootie with no destination in sight;
Friends swapped dangerous adventure stories during long afternoon flights; and
Lovers laughed at the silliness of the other's day at dinnertime.

2020 was supposed to be the year where strangers smiled at others – their smiles being invitations for conversations and instead 2021 feels like the world is finally waking up from 2020's nightmare.

The nightmare where COVID-19 played hide-n-seek in the world's backyard.

A nightmare where:

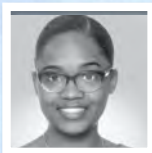
Nurses and Doctors mummified themselves in scrubs and face shields;
Moans from patients, zombified on ventilators, crept down hallways of hospitals;
Families sought comfort in isolation; and
Death lingered on the counters in coffee shops, in the aisles of grocery stores and on the seats in movie theaters.

A nightmare that we are almost finally free from.

A world where we are free to:

Interlock fingers on blind dates;
Laugh at dinner tables full of friends;
Dance on overcrowded dancefloors;
Breathe in blooming flowers;
Sit in a room full of strangers; and
Live without fear.

Maybe, hopefully, 2022 will be the deferred dream of 2020 and 2021.



Alexis Watson was raised in a small town in Virginia and moved to New York almost 12 years ago. She studied English, Psychology and Philosophy during her undergraduate studies, and most recently completed a Masters of Fine Arts at The New School. Alexis joined HSF in July of 2019 as a Floater Secretary and has since transitioned to the role of Diversity & Inclusion Advisor. She has a passion for solving puzzles and writing short stories and prose poetry.

MERCY NUTTALL

REFLECTIONS FROM SYDNEY

The past year has been a challenging and unpredictable one with the pandemic continuing to disrupt lives. Like many, my family has lost loved ones and postponed travel plans for family reunions. While video calls have made communicating easier, not knowing when we will see families again is tough, especially for my three young sons. And, after months of our communities rediscovering the joys of live sport and entertainment, dining out and socialising, we are back in lockdown.

That said, I am conscious that far too many around the world have had a more challenging year. Australia has been relatively lucky compared to other countries and my life has had few major disruptions. My job can be performed remotely and I live in a beautiful part of the world. My 2-3 hour daily commute has been replaced with walks exploring the headlands and wetlands around me, or just pottering along the beach. As someone with an autoimmune condition, I have benefited from people wearing masks when sick, and sanitising with as much zeal as I do. Most importantly however, my sons have thrived with both parents regularly working from home.

The past year has forced me to slow down, which has been a welcome change as I have always been a 'busy' person. My role is global which means my work hours can be erratic, and I have three very active sons. In spite of this, I have always felt the need to fill any down time doing things – be it exercising, gardening, trying out a new hobby or planning the next family event. I recently completed the Clifton Strengths assessment and my dominant theme was not surprisingly... 'Achiever'. Amongst other traits, an 'Achiever' *"feels as if each day starts at zero. By the day's end, you must achieve something tangible to feel good about yourself. And by "every day," you mean every single day -- workdays, weekends, and vacations."* A startlingly accurate assessment of soon to be 'old Mercy'.

Lockdowns can be a nightmare for us busy bods, and I had to find a way to channel all this energy into something positive. I decided to make the most of this opportunity to focus on myself and find more balance. I now strive to be more present in my home and work life, and am learning to set more flexible goals. I am taking time to appreciate the small things around me and when I come across a bump in the road, I remind myself that 'this too shall pass'.

As much as I am trying not to be anxious about things beyond my control, this isn't always easy with three mixed-race sons. I worry about the prejudices they may face as they grow older. Will they have the same opportunities as their friends and peers? Will they be racially profiled? Have I prepared them enough for some of the challenges they may face? Our family has always had

open discussions about race and politics, but I am a black African woman and my husband a white English man – we have lived very different experiences from those of a black man in a white world. That said, my sons are positive about the future, which is encouraging. They look up to the likes of Barack Obama and Marcus Rashford – black men who, like them, are proud of their identity and stand up for equality.

The future is always uncertain but I feel hopeful. Hopeful that with vaccinations, we will have those long-awaited family reunions soon. And beyond that, hopeful that my sons will grow up with a positive mindset, be mentally resilient and learn how to navigate adversity, and achieve their dreams.



Mercy Nuttall leads HSF's global Strategic Insight team and is based in Australia. An avid traveller, she has lived and worked in Africa, Europe, Asia and, for the past 11 years, Australia. She lives in Sydney with her husband and three sons, and can often be spotted trekking across the trails on Sydney's Northern Beaches while trying her best to avoid close encounters with the local wildlife.

04

ON HOPE
AND
GROWTH



JHANÉ GIBSON

IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY

2021 was a year of conversations. Over the last year, I've probably spent more time talking about topics such as race and mental health than I have in my entire life. Looking back, these conversations have allowed me to explore my identity in so many spaces and coming out of it, I have a better understanding of who I am and feel closer to the people around me.

Although I learnt a lot about myself this year (as I'm sure many of us have), the thing that stood out to me the most was that in the face of adversity, generally people tend to find positivity, people tend to rally together and show up for their communities. It has been a tough couple of years for everyone and the extent of that difficulty does not go unappreciated. But what has been striking to me is people's overwhelming ability to 'bounce back', to 'pull through' and to 'keep calm and carry on'.

I'm currently reading a book called *Human Kind: A Hopeful History* by Rutger Bregman and in the book the author describes the way in which humans have an innate ability to be 'good' when faced with life changing events and that *"we by nature, as children, on an uninhabited island, when war breaks out, when crisis hits – have a powerful preference for our good side."*

I think that the last couple of years have really put this theory to the test and I'm pleased to say (from my observation) that I think it is true. There have been a number of events and examples that have proved this almost certainly for me.

In the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd, I noticed this play out in real life. Outrage, frustration, sadness and then... hope. Rage was followed by petitions and trauma followed by education and conversations.

Standing in a sea of people at the Black Lives Matter protests, amongst the feelings of fear and anger, there was also an overwhelming feeling of hope. People were singing, chanting and speaking with strangers, swapping contact details and making plans for the future. Music played and despite the pain, people danced.

Again, I don't want to gloss over the reality or purpose of the movement and of course there are always exceptions but after such a challenging couple of years, I think it's important to acknowledge the strength that people continuously show when their backs are up against the wall.

The same can be said for the pandemic. In the space of a few months we all went from living our lives as normal to experiencing a complete lockdown. It still surprises me that people were able to keep going despite being faced with one of the biggest health disasters of my lifetime.

As part of my job, I manage some of the firm's responsible business and social impact programmes. This spring, we

hosted a virtual workshop for a group of refugees to support them with employability skills. One of the participants was a NHS nurse dialling in on one of his only days off. When I (selfishly) complained about the pandemic and treatment of NHS staff, he said he was grateful to be able to help people through such a harrowing period in their lives.

In the very first week of the national lockdown, my email inbox was filled with people asking what they could do to help local communities. When faced with uncertainty, one of the first things people did was reach out to find out what they could be doing to help each other.

I'm sure there are many other examples and of course there are plenty of scenarios where things weren't so rosy, but for this essay I wanted to reflect on the positive parts of the last few years. When reading this, I encourage you to take a few minutes to reflect on the moments when you have shown or seen this type of kindness, resilience and strength in the face of adversity.

All around me I've seen countless examples of this 'decency' and perhaps this observation is tainted by my naïve tendency to try to find the sunshine in everything or maybe, we aren't so bad after all.



Jhané Gibson joined the Responsible Business team at HSF London in 2019 after starting her career working for non-profit organisations and NGOs. Jhané now manages social mobility outreach programmes in the London office, helping the firm support over 200 young people through work experience, mentoring and insight days over the last two years. Jhané recently joined the Multiculturalism Network Committee in London and is part of the Social Mobility Steering Group. Outside of work Jhané is an avid traveller – she undertook a backpacking trip around South East Asia in 2018. She also started a food and cooking blog during the pandemic.

DAMMY SOKALE

"I AM THE ONE THING IN LIFE I CAN CONTROL"

On a personal and global level, the past year has had its share of challenges and turbulence. Among many situations, we have faced a global pandemic and social and political uncertainties which have highlighted some of the inequalities and injustices in the world, and we have also seen the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement. We have had to find our 'new normal' in the midst of the move for many to working from home and the rising pressures on mental and physical health.

It has also been a year of resilience, strength, community and compassion. A year of slowing down, a year to pause and take a deep breath, and a year to remind ourselves of what is important to us and find our 'why' and really consider 'what is all of this for?'

However, reflecting on the past year and what lies ahead can have a debilitating and overwhelming effect as there is so much going on, and it can feel like there is so much to do. Looking at the world holistically, it can all seem like too much. With every refresh of our social media pages and each new "Breaking News" alert, there can appear to be a new international disaster, a new COVID-19 variant, a new missing person, a new scandal and another thing to worry about.

You may wonder, how can I have a positive impact on the world when there is so much going on? Where do I even start? This can often prevent us from even trying or make us feel overwhelmed and exhausted. Or perhaps you try and second guess what the future will hold? This can often cause us to catastrophise situations or perhaps feel disappointed when things do not go to plan.

As an avid lover of all things theatrical, I tend to draw a lot of inspiration from the stage. Whether I am on stage myself performing or sat in the theatre being entertained, theatre has been a constant presence in my life and energises and inspires me.

Hamilton the musical is one of the shows I have watched the most and one I quote from all the time. One of my favourite songs is called Wait for It. A line from the song that has stuck with me from the first time I listened to the soundtrack to the first time I saw it on stage and still resonates strongly with me every time I have watched it since is the line sung by Aaron Burr. "I am the one thing in life I can control".

He sings this line in the midst of his frustration as he sees Alexander Hamilton continue to progress and rise in power while he falls behind. However, throughout his lament, his determination and belief in himself is strengthened and he sings that he is "inimitable" and an "original" and that he is "not falling behind or running late" and that he is "not standing still" but "lying

in wait". He resolves to stop focusing on his rival and the wider context and instead focus on himself and what he can do.

To me, the song is a mindset shift, it is a way of reconceptualising difficult situations and I frequently think about the words "I am the one thing in life I can control" in my everyday life. Reflecting on the past year, the words remind me that even during turbulent times, we can have autonomy over our own situations, and remind me of the importance of personal accountability. They are a call to action to be actively involved in my wider community and society.

Looking forward, we can all draw inspiration from Aaron Burr's words, we are all the one thing in life we can control. In doing so, we can be kind to ourselves when things do not go to plan and also feel encouraged to focus on how we can individually help to improve the world and our own personal situations.

We get to choose how we respond. We get to put our best foot forward and remain focused and adaptable even though the pathway may change. We can reclaim and exercise discretion and autonomy within our personal spheres. Ultimately, we can be reminded that we are in control of ourselves even when there are things outside of our control.



Dammy Sokale is an Associate in HSF's Finance division, based in the London office and working in Energy and Infrastructure. She is part of various committees and networks at HSF such as the Women Lawyers Network, the BAME Committee and the Legal Tech and Design Thinking Team. She is also actively involved with NOTICED, an inter-firm diversity network, and was a lead co-ordinator in publishing a toolkit for improving conversations about race in the workplace in January 2021.

LANRE SULOLA

THE ANTI-RACISM JOURNEY

We're all on the journey
It might be early
But we have to start somewhere
Aware that there is so much still to do
We can't pick or choose
When to focus on it
The time is clearly now
We all have a role to play in building equity
It's required to put in the work and energy
To make a lasting change
The purpose for us today
Is to increase our knowledge and understanding
Build a clear strategy for inclusion
Rid ourselves of the confusion as to who should have their say
We all should, we all need to
Leverage our capabilities for greater action
Gain traction, create attraction to an inclusive culture
Falter, we may from time to time
That's part of the journey
We are all in a different place
There are various levels of comfort talking about race
It's important we move at our own pace
As this is new territory for some
A deep area of expertise for others
However, it's a topic that covers the whole firm
The murder of George Floyd has accelerated the conversation
The consternation that such acts still happen in this day and age
Serving as a reminder of the need
For an initiative such as the 10 Actions for Change
We are moving from non-racist to anti-racist
No longer staying silent
Moving through the fear zone
That has held us back for too long
Into the learning zone
Surrounding ourselves with diverse voices and resources
Educating ourselves and being ready for what's to come
We're discussing the growth zone and what it will take to get there

It won't be an overnight shift
We'll need to lift our heads and hearts
Push through the worry of making a mistake
And look at the bigger picture
To become a better, more inclusive firm
Uphold a universal law
That opportunity should be open to us all
We've explored what systemic racism is
And the impact it can have
Recognised the danger of biased internalised beliefs
We've grieved at the microaggressions we still receive
Made commitments to address them
We've realised the impact of our words
Asked questions on how we can improve
Challenged, debated and provoked thought
We've caught, the spirit of the message and run with it
Shared stories that have touched and made a difference
Evaluated concepts, contexts and complexities
Discussed the flaws and gaps with meritocracies
Scrutinised structural barriers we still face
Marveled at the imagery
That stands equity out from equality
Explored privilege, dispelled the myths
No need to be on the defensive or apprehensive
When we dissect it in a helpful way
To understand our privilege and use it to create a fairer environment
Alignment of our ideas has felt great
Inspired to share openly on what we crave
We have the tools to more readily talk race
Creating space to learn, listen and engage
Recognising where we are and what's ahead
With a clearer aim and sense of direction
Reflections from a place of vulnerability
Creating connection, trust and solidarity
Listening to other perspectives with empathy
We've crossed regions, functions, hierarchies
Taken on roles as race leaders

Made plans to go further and deeper
We're fueled to keep the momentum going
To keep learning and growing
Experiencing all the benefits that inclusion brings
We may not have all the answers
It might not always be stable and sturdy
But it's about progression not perfection
As we continue this journey



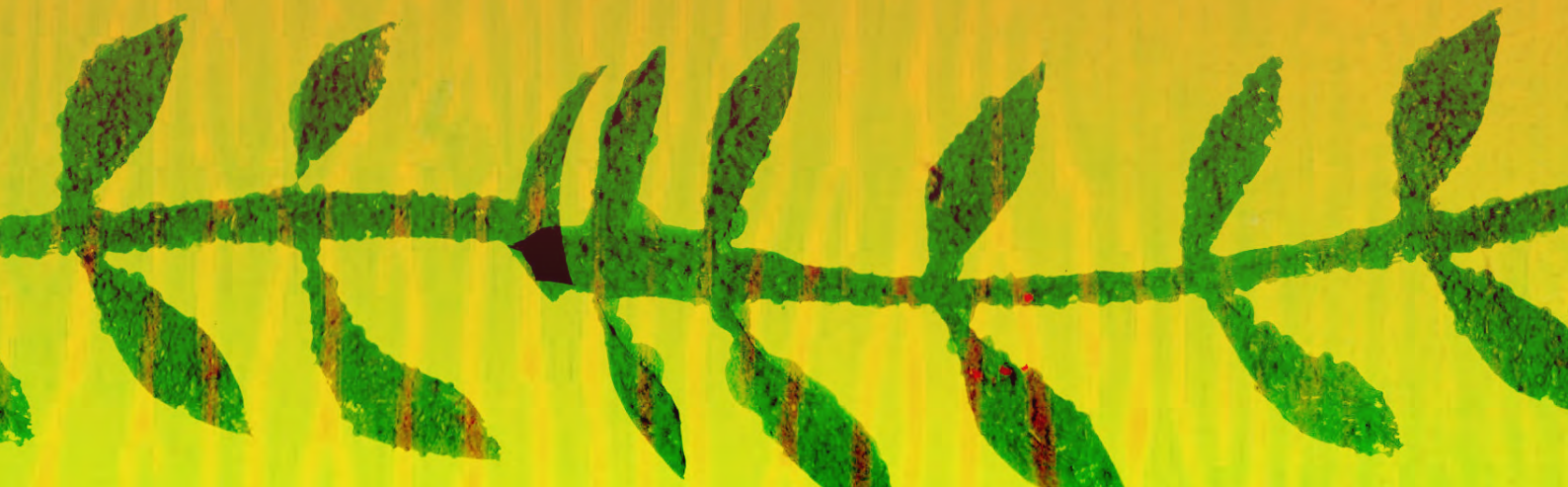
Lanre Sulola is the founder of Leadership Development consultancy, Inner Ambitions. He is passionate about empowering individuals to fulfil their aspirations.

Lanre's strong commercial and financial background has contributed to his outstanding record of designing and delivering inclusion and diversity programmes, people development workshops and improving capabilities through training and coaching. He has been working with HSF to facilitate the Anti-Racism and Building Equity workshops taking place throughout the firm.

He is also a poet and uses poetry as an innovative tool to help individuals engage and to communicate and share their values and vision in creative and expressive ways.

05

NOTES FROM OUR
LONDON
MULTICULTURALISM
NETWORK



NIC PATMORE AND TANISHA ONYENAOHA

THIS NEW ENERGY

The catalyst for this new energy was horrific. Last year, the world stood up following the murder of a black man at the hands of the very institution that society entrusts to protect against incidents like the one he suffered, leaving a family without a son and a father; leaving a community in mourning.

Although far from the only story of its kind, it caused people to think. People from different walks of life. Not just those in the US, but globally. Including in our society, in our city, and in our profession. This was a moment that encouraged some people to think about these issues for the first time and begin to question whether things could *really* continue in the way they had.

Can we carry on with people dying at the hands of the state on the basis of the colour of their skin? Should this violence which manifests itself throughout the different layers of our society be left unaddressed? Should people be held back from achieving their dreams and goals because of unequal access to opportunities based on racial inequality?

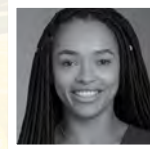
These thoughts and questions, rightly, permeated various aspects of our society, including our profession. That reflection has led to an energy, which is being harnessed to begin the work of re-thinking and re-defining the collective and mainstream understanding of what racism is and whose responsibility it is to combat it.

We have seen the tide start to shift. People looked beyond the passive as being 'enough'. Transitioning from the passive to the active has been important. It has led to a collective shift in approach in the form of: taking issue with tokenistic efforts; bringing others together to discuss, share reflections and encourage new ideas; pushing racism up the agenda and guaranteeing that it is considered and discussed; and increasing communications around the need to take an *active* approach to effect equality of opportunity for people based on the colour of their skin, as the idea of racial allyship has become increasingly normalised.

This energy catalysed leaders who had traditionally not been active in issues relating to race, culture and ethnicity. In our profession, senior GCs, Partners and Boards became engaged. Firms and clients collaborated. Professional bodies acknowledged the new importance that this issue had. The way in which these organisations speak about race has started to change.

It is no over-exaggeration to say that the attention the issue has received in our profession in a single year, was greater than that from the previous ten years combined. You could see it in firms' internal and external recognition of how much work had to be done, and importantly, in the work that had been started.

The catalyst for this new energy was an absolute tragedy. There is no getting away from that. However, we are hopeful that lasting positive change comes from this. It isn't enough for the dust to settle, for people in our profession to move onto the next issue leaving this one behind. It is time to ensure that this new energy is here to stay.



Nic Patmore and Tanisha Onyenaoha are Co-Chairs of HSF's London Multiculturalism Network, which focusses on the firm's commitment to developing its understanding of diverse ethnicities, religions, faiths and cultures, as well as improving the representation of these groups in the demographic of the firm. Nic is a Senior Associate in the firm's Disputes team and Tanisha is an Associate in the firm's Technology, Media, Telecommunications and Data team. Both Nic and Tanisha have also been involved with, what is now, HSF London's Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Committee – Nic, since its inception, and Tanisha more recently during her training contract.

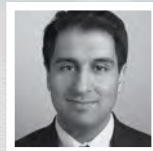
DINESH BANANI

A NOTE FROM A LONDON MULTICULTURALISM NETWORK SPONSOR

In last year's inaugural Black History Month publication, many of us wrote about the importance of community and how it can help us become better allies to our black colleagues. As I look back on the past year, the word that permeates us is 'isolation'. We have all felt isolated in some shape or form. In some ways, this isolation has forced us to come closer together and renew community bonds through technology. However, that has not always been the case, and I think that maintaining a sense of community spirit with our black colleagues is one of the most important things we have to do over the next year.

I have not had many opportunities to read books this year, but I recently read *The Underground Railroad* by Colson Whitehead. It tells the story of a black slave, Cora, in the pre-Civil War South of the United States and her attempt to escape slavery through a series of underground railroads and safe houses leading to the abolitionist North. As Cora and her companion Caesar make their tumultuous journey, they receive the help of those who have escaped slavery and those who support its abolition. At the same time, though, they are stymied or abused at nearly every turn by institutions and individuals who have a strong interest in maintaining the status quo. Cora never felt as if she was part of a community that supported her and wanted to see her flourish as an individual.

Community is the condition of sharing or having certain attitudes and interests in common. As an organisation, a sense of community is something we normally take for granted but I do not think that is any longer the case. We have come to find that a group of individuals who work together in an organisation does not necessarily represent a community, and to form a community with our black colleagues, we need to develop shared attitudes and interests. In my mind, this means continuing to show empathy, support and encouragement over the course of many months and years. As we break from our isolation, renewing these community bonds is something to which we should all look forward.



Dinesh Banani is a Partner at HSF in London. He was born in India, grew up in Massachusetts, USA, and has lived in the UK for the last 16 years. He remains keenly interested in learning about black history.

SOME FINAL WORDS

We hope you have enjoyed reading this collection of pieces, the firm's second Black History Month publication. We also hope you have come away with the overarching message that in order for the events of last year to act as a catalyst for meaningful and lasting change, we all need to play an active part in being anti-racist.

We hope to produce many more editions in the future to honour Black History Month, which will provide an opportunity for those in the Black community, both within and outside HSF, to share their experiences and thoughts with us all.

Putting this publication together would not have been possible without the efforts of a large team. First and foremost, we would like to thank our authors for their honesty, and for letting us into their worlds. Our heartfelt gratitude also goes out to the contributors from last year's publication on 'Community', for their incredible pieces which motivated us to create this second edition. We are grateful to Tessie Orange-Turner for creating the beautiful artwork you have seen while turning these pages. We also sincerely thank Eni Owolabi, the wider BAME Committee, Paul Vaughan from HSF's Design team, the firm's Diversity and Inclusion team as well as the Communications team. Thank you all for your support and enthusiasm, and we look forward to working with you all again in the coming years.

Onwards and upwards!

Vrinda Vinayak and Corinna Cherrie
HSF London BAME Committee

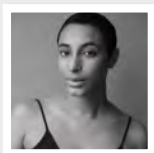


TESSIE ORANGE-TURNER AND PAUL VAUGHAN

ARTISTIC CONTRIBUTORS

Tessie painted the artwork which features throughout the publication.

Paul is the graphic designer who put together the publication.



Tessie Orange-Turner is an illustrator and painter from London. Her work focuses on the African diaspora, especially women. As a mixed-heritage person of Moroccan, South African & Zimbabwean descent, she seeks to combine traditional Northern and Southern African artistic aspects in her work. She is keen to capture ups and downs, triumphs and failures, and the concept of self-love in her work.

Paul is a graphic designer and illustrator producing creative work in various formats. He has become interested in pushing past print, towards animation and mixed media. Paul has been a member of the HSF graphic design team for 18 months.



