Racial hatred is wrong and its consequences can blight a whole community. Those who believe in racial justice need to take a stand and take back their community from those who mean it harm. Liverpool, Southall, Bradford, Birmingham, Brixton and…the place where I lived, went to church & brought up our young family.

In 1993 Eltham, the place I called home, became synonymous with one of the worse race hate murders in our history- the killing of Stephen Lawrence.

As usual the early news stories and rumours on the street got it all wrong- a gang fight had seen the death of a young black youth. ‘Well if they will fight and carry knives what do they expect’ was the early prevailing judgement. Little did we know then a teenager had been set upon in a racist attack just because he happened to be waiting for a bus with his mate at a particular time when a particularly vicious group of white youth decided to cross a road and commit murder.

It wasn’t long before my wife came home that week to tell me that the young man - Stephen Lawrence- was a pupil she knew well. The last person that would be caught up in any gang fight- a promising student hoping to study architecture at university. The first glimmers of truth serving to cut through the speculation and misplaced early narratives of what had happened. We were comforted to know that in his final moments Stephen’s hand was held by a couple coming home from their Bible study session and they took the trouble to whisper words of love to the stabbed young man they found brutally attacked on their streets. Unlike Jesus’ story of the Good Samaritan, however, there was to be no recovery and healing for this young man.

Thanks to the determination and dignified tenacity of Doreen and Neville Lawrence’s campaigning the murder of their eldest son became a national symbol for the need for racial justice. In Eltham Stephen’s memorial was desecrated and those living in fear on the Well Hall estate would fail to provide the evidence necessary to deliver up the convictions we all wanted to see. Eltham the seat of an ancient royal palace and the birthplace of Bob Hope was now a place seemingly of no hope of a successful prosecution. We went on marches and vigils, our MP spoke movingly in parliament, endless column inches were printed in the press and many TV documentaries were made. We rejoiced when Stephen Lawrence day was inaugurated and our own daughter, who’d worked locally as a volunteer youth worker, tried to make a difference by joining the Met police after university.

Throughout all this we discovered that if people had heard of Eltham it was often linked with Stephen, the young man who never lived here but died here in brutal and unnecessary circumstances. A place in south London he should’ve simply been passing through had taken him for all eternity. So the racial murder of Stephen Lawrence had a profound effect on so many lives. Throughout all of this people of faith and church communities in Eltham never stopped remembering, never stopped praying and never stepped hoping that proper justice would be served and we know that Eltham can never move on until that day finally comes

 **Amos 5:24**: “But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Reverend David Coleman