



## It's the end of the World as we know it: Racism as a global killer of Black people and their emancipatory freedoms

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## It's the end of the World as we know it: Racism as a global killer of Black people and their emancipatory freedoms

That's great, it starts with an earthquake... are the famous opening tenets to REM's anthemic stream of political consciousness, *'It's the end of the world as we know it'* and within this treatise, the track is appropriated to metaphorically signal the global reverberation and impact of George Floyd's horrific death at the hands of four United States (US) police officers in Minneapolis. This tragic and racially-charged moment has created a tectonic, global shift in anti-racist activism, as the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement reacts to the latest laceration on Black liberty and human rights. The violent, oppressive symbolic image of Derek Chauvin and his officers nonchalantly re-enacting a public lynching synonymous with the historical, social and racial submissive control of Black Americans has shocked the world and soured the taste of all those who yearn for the emancipatory liberties and human rights of all global citizens particularly Black people.

Within the United Kingdom (UK) our own disgraceful and oppressive past remains the pride of many Britons who herald British Imperialism as a symbol of Britannia's enduring greatness, regardless of the colonial and debilitating impact upon Black communities. The populist symbolism associated with valorising and eulogising Britain's racist past is perhaps embodied best in its immortalisation and commemoration of these colonial oppressors in spun bronze. Sadly, this historically celebratory act continues to be replicated all over the world unremittingly, while inconsiderately reminding global citizens of past, oppressive transgressions, which centuries on are still keenly felt by Black communities universally.

The wave of protests and acts of solidarity that have been globally triggered as a result of Mr Floyd's death have spoken to the continued racial injustice faced by Black Americans and Black communities around the world. The inevitable rejection of racial equality in favour of characterising and ascribing anti-racist protestors as 'unlawful degenerates' and 'terrorists' in relation to this and other abhorrent racialized episodes by the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, Donald Trump, represents no attempt to strike a unifying or introspective tone at such a critical juncture in the history of race equality.

Trump remains one of the greatest political phenomena's of our time and a supreme, unethical opportunist. For Trump supporters, his inability to provide leadership and direction during the Covid-19 global pandemic, and his non-committal condemnation of the brutal death of Mr Floyd, will do little to deter or impair their judgement of a person who is unscrupulously pushing for a second term in the White House. As perhaps the most powerful political force in the world Trump's Presidential tone sets the rules of engagement for the rest of global politics.

While overt cases of racism are prevalent throughout American society, this festering disease is more insidious in the UK. Boris Johnson, is the current incumbent of the UK political Premiership, the latest in a long line of xenophobic Conservative Leaders. Similarly, under Conservative rule Sheku Bayoh, another Black citizen died in suspicious circumstances under police custody in Scotland. Significantly, there still remains no investigation into his death which bears all the unlawful hallmarks of foul play at the hands of the police. With the eternal wisdom being that imitation is the most sincere form of flattery, Johnson continues to replicate the Trump mantra of bluster and incompetence, having so far demonstrated feeble leadership for

the entirety of his short tenure. This has best been exemplified in his mismanagement of the Covid-19 pandemic and his inability to respond decisively and effectively. Despite this, many of his supporters' remain nostalgic and proud about Britain's disgraceful and abhorrent past, something he has often eulogised about and similar to Trump, the tact taken by Johnson has focused upon framing and stigmatising the left as problematic or 'the radical left'. Both populist leaders reject race equality, social cohesion and egalitarianism in favour of reverberating, pernicious messages of division which often sort to demonize the BLM movement and the left more generally.

The recent killings of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Tamir Rice and Tony McDade in the US have echoed the deaths of Sandra Bland, Michael Brown and many others. Such moments continue to momentarily paralyse while triggering feelings of numbness and desensitisation that become difficult for Black communities to verbalise and often hard for White people to fathom even for those that would stand as 'allies'. The residual effects beyond physical and mental altered state also lead to a suppression of feelings which remain contained and restrained within the confines of Whiteness and the omnipresent power and privilege that accompanies this supremacist phenomena. This all pervades in the face of overwhelming structural and institutional racism, which remains state sponsored and endorsed. This has been enshrined through policies, laws, institutions and judicial systems which sought to continually subjugate Black and indigenous communities around the world. The intergenerational trauma which repeatedly resurfaces when such violent racial episodes occur reminds us that the contours of racism will continually camouflage and reinvent itself through various tools of Whiteness.

Global resistances to racism and the Whiteness that sustains it must now consider the unrelenting labour, suffering and burden of this plight on Black communities continually tasked with the responsibility of extrapolating themselves from the inequitable stranglehold of White supremacy. As anti-racist groups continue to mobilise and respond to the ever-changing face of racism, acts of solidarity and defiance will manifest in a variance of ways which will require continual endeavour from all global citizens. Often, the alliance of allies can be 'seasonal' and momentary for the anti-racist causes that maybe in vogue at the time. For Black communities they are not afforded such luxury in these critical, inequitable and divisive times, as their existence alone is an embodiment of the racial landscape they traverse on a daily basis.

In Britain, immortalised oppressors oversee the Empire on plinths that not only immortalise them but symbolically place them aerially above Black people as a permanent reminder of the overarching reach of Whiteness and its ability to generationally penetrate and disrupt efforts towards egalitarianism and dismantling the oppressive, colonial past. The bringing down of the any of these colonial oppressors represents an attempt to resist against the proffered virtues of the Empire and acknowledge its role in maintaining the historical and continual oppression of Black people. On Sunday June 7<sup>th</sup> 2020, this resistance culminated in a seminal moment in British history, where in Bristol, England, a city famed for its maritime history and shameful colonial past became the temporary epicentre of the resistance movement for racial equality. The statue of slave trader Edward Colston whose name adorns every building within the city, was removed from its plinth and thrown into the nearby harbour. This solitary act of resistance has reverberated around the world as a symbolic gesture of global solidarity and colonial non-compliance.

In many ways the racialized episodes of the last three weeks may signal '*the end of the world as we know it*' or the beginning of something seminally significant. The line that proceeds this title lyric in REM's anthemic offering states that 'it's time ... I had some time alone'. Conversely, it is my belief that concerted and collected efforts remain our best form of resistance in the face of a terminal societal cancer ... racism. Racism is not a Black problem to be solved by Black people, it is an historic and hereditary disease, and its continual infestation must be solved by everyone. Invariably, this means dismantling White supremacist structures that have been complicit in fuelling pseudoscientific ignorance and racist ideologies at the expense of Black and indigenous communities.

In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends. Throughout civil rights history, Martin Luther King's words have simultaneously offered comfort whilst being the catalyst for many social justice causes and once again his words strike a chord with regards to our global, collective responsibility to dismantle racism in all its insidious manifestations.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Jason's research focuses on Race, Education, Intersectionality and Social Justice. He sits on the following trade union equality committees; Trade Union Congress (TUC) Race Relations Committee; University and College Union (UCU) Black Members' Standing Committee and the UK Council for Graduate Education (UKCGE) Working Group on BME Participation in Postgraduate Research. Jason is also part of the Universities UK Advisory Group on tackling racial harassment of students. He is a Graduate of the Operation Black Vote (OBV) MP Parliamentary Scheme, a scheme focused on unearthing the next generation of ethnic minority Parliamentarians.

Jason is the author of the following titles: *Considering Racialized Contexts in Education: Using Reflective Practice and Peer-Mentoring to support Black and Ethnic Minority educators* (Routledge); *Being Young, Black and Male: Challenging the dominant discourse* (Palgrave); and *Exploring Cool Britannia and Multi-Ethnic Britain: Uncorking the Champagne Supernova* (Routledge). He is the Co-Editor of the highly acclaimed *Dismantling Race in Higher Education: Racism, Whiteness and Decolonising the Academy* (Palgrave) with Professor Heidi Mirza (Goldsmiths, University of London).

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