

From slavery and colonialism to Black Lives Matter: new mood music or more fundamental change?

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Abstract

Purpose – 2020 has proved to be a challenging year. In addition to the challenges of COVID-19, yet again, the USA has witnessed police brutality leading to the death of a Black man, George Floyd. The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, founded in the US but now an international organisation which challenges white supremacy and deliberates harm against Black people, mobilised hundreds of thousands of people to take to the streets across the globe. Increasingly, the protests focus not only on George Floyd's murder but also the continued failure to challenge the celebrity of those involved in the transatlantic slave trade and European imperialism. In this article, the author will contend that many organisations are now reexamining their association with these historical wrongs against Black Africa and its diaspora. Further, the author will contend but that the failure to highlight the role of Black chattel slavery and imperialism in the accumulation of economic, commercial and political benefits reaped by the global north is a source of shame not only for many firms and institutions but also for universities.

Design/methodology/approach – The author has reviewed the online media for the latest developments in response to Black Lives Matter's George Floyd campaign in 2020 and reviewed the literature on the link between European global ambition and its impact on the Americas and sub-Saharan Africa.

Findings – Internationally, there is a discernible change in outlook towards the importance of the evils of slavery and colonialism on the Black experience today. These small steps will require scholars to embark on a fresh reexamination of race, society and work.

Originality/value – For decades, the slave trade and colonialism were issues rarely raised in government, firms and business schools. This will inevitably change especially in those countries that are the main beneficiaries of Black chattel slavery and colonial exploitation. Much Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) practice is fundamentally tokenism. A root and branch reappraisal will be needed to create more effective EDI policy and practice in support of race equality and anti-racism.

Keywords Developing countries, Black people, African Americans, Multicultural societies, Racial discrimination

Paper type Viewpoint

Personal tragedy and the liminal made visible

A recording made on a smart phone, by a 17 year-old teenager, allowed the world to watch abuse of power. The international outrage that followed (unfortunately, by no means universal) was in part at least, empowered by the global lockdown. COVID-19 meant that in many countries where citizens were closely following the media for “what next?” as the global pandemic spread its deadly course, the world, from the humble to the powerful, rich and poor, could watch a man literally have the life squeezed out of him. For nine minutes. We were all able to bear witness to a *black man* whose life ebbed away as his pleas, that he could not breathe, were ignored. A literal silencing by those who felt they had the right to do ignore his pleas and take his life.

The protests in the US were swift and vocal, with the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement at the forefront. The BLM movement was founded in the US in 2013 after the acquittal of



George Zimmerman a white man, for the killing of Trayvon Martin in 2012, a 17 year-old African-American, who was visiting his father's fiancée's townhouse. On returning from a trip to a grocery store to the townhouse, Zimmerman, a member of the local Community Watch group, shot and killed Trayvon. The many protests and calls for justice across the US led to an online movement, BLM, now an international movement, that challenges white supremacy and violence against Black people. On their website, one of their stated objectives is "*We are working for a world where Black lives are no longer systematically targeted for demise*".

The protests were not just in the US: they were on every continent and reported widely in the media. Protests were made from the Americas to Asia. A memorial service for George Floyd was held in Nigeria. Street protests took place in Japan, Paris, São Paulo, London and Cape Town. From a national issue in the USA, BLM has become a global rallying call, recognised universally by sub-Saharan Africa and its diaspora. The Parliament of the European Union voted to denounce racism and police brutality, condemning the murder of George Floyd and declaring, in the context of "renewing Europe", that black lives matter. However, there was another kind of protest that emerged as part of the BLM protests, not only in the US but also right across Europe. The identification of historical figures and institutes, associated with slavery and colonialism.

Black Lives Matter and challenges to the legacy of exploitation

An article in the Financial Times of London [CGTN Online \(2020\)](#) noted the street protests and calling out of historical injustices. But they also noted their legacies, for sub-Saharan Africa and its diaspora, internationally.

Many demand an end to the structural discrimination faced by people of African descent in Europe and North America and changes in the way the history of their subjugation is remembered (or, more accurately, not remembered). The focus has been on the struggles of black people in white-majority societies for rights, dignity and equality. Less has been said about the racism inherent in the existing international order and the obstacles faced by black-majority nations.

With US and European executives now eager to show themselves sensitive to the value of black lives, naming and shaming companies that minimise the taxes they pay in Africa could prompt them to change their behaviour. It is ironic that even as European countries sanction US groups for failing to pay taxes in Europe, and large European companies operating in Africa are accused of doing much the same thing. Last year, the Tax Justice Network's Corporate Tax Haven Index listed the Netherlands, Switzerland and Luxembourg as well as four British territories and dependencies among the top ten countries "that have done the most to proliferate corporate tax avoidance and break down the global corporate tax system".

What is highlighted in the FT article is the legacy of subjugation and a resultant racial hierarchy with white nations at the top and black nations at the bottom. Firms operating in sub-Saharan Africa continue to treat it as space apart, outside of the normal rules of corporate governance. In total, 193 million people and 53 members of the UN but no representative from the UN Security Council. Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for less than 1% of global wealth although they hold one-fifth of the world's gold reserves. It is a very long list. The civilising mission of the global north and the entitlement to sub-Saharan Africa's wealth, perpetuated through the petrostates' historical connections with oil companies, largely the indigenous elites. The picture painted in the FT article is the world as a legacy system built on centuries of Black exploitation and global positioning of Black peoples as subaltern. The conclusion was the need for a robust scrutiny of the role of the global north in the challenges facing the Black diaspora and the legacy of subordination of sub-Saharan Africa economically and politically to the global north.

In addition to the protests, online and on the streets, there was also a wide scale desire to challenge the valorisation of those who had profited from, and were willing to fight and to defend, the misery of others. In the US, statues of confederate champions, erected as a cold, calculated response to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, were defaced and attacked. Across Europe, there were calls to make visible the legacies of slavery and colonialism that had bedevilled Black people. In France, the “colour blind” approach, attributed to republican values of *liberté, égalité and fraternité*, is seen as silencing the challenging experiences of people of colour and shielding its colonial past. In the Netherlands, bronze statues of colonial icons have been spray-painted. BLM protests have broken out. The Dutch Parliament has backed a petition by three teenage women requesting the addition of racism to the school curriculum. In the UK, online communities’ produced mapping of the statues of slave owners and also colonialists. Many statues were also defaced. The legacies of European slavery and colonialism are now being challenged more strongly than ever. The UK response to BLM is especially illuminating.

The UK and its historical links to slavery and colonialism

The entire continent of Africa has been subjected to exploitation and slavery. North Africa has its own, violent stories of French colonisation (France had colonised in North and sub-Saharan Africa), articulated most famously by Franz Fanon. His works are on the hardships and brutality of colonisation (Fanon, 2001), decolonisation (1994a, b) and ongoing challenges for people of colour (Fanon, 2018, 2020). His works are well known, incisive and continue to influence thinking on colonisation, the post-colony and the experiences of people of colour. For the former French colonies in Africa, in the North but also sub-Saharan, there is ongoing exploitation of a very distinctive kind. The Central Africa France (CFA) and the West African Franc both are in effect allowing France to maintain control over key monetary policy of 18 countries, and it has been argued as channelling more money to French than these countries receive in French aid (Sylla, 2017).

Fanon’s works resonate strongly with the many accounts of colonisation across Africa though, of course, each experience of colonisation and the preoccupations of colonisers differ. His observations of the collapse of world views, for the colonisers and the colonised, in the last days of colonisation by France of Algeria (Fanon, 1994a, b) bring to life the reconstruing of the colonised of life without the colonisers, what constructivist psychologists is the reimagining of what is possible (Cornelius, 2003; Kelly, 1991), sufficient understanding of what are no longer constraints, what is possible: a shared view of how to project a whole society into the new, decolonised future. However, there are lingering consequences not only for the formerly colonised but also their diaspora. For this article, the focus will be on the UK, its historical links with sub-Saharan Africa and the resonance of these links today.

University College London’s ongoing project, *Legacies of Slave Ownership*, includes a large data base. This includes maps of the location of past slave owners and their properties as well as public buildings supported by the profits of slavery. Across the UK, organisational archives were hastily consulted.

Institutions such as [Lloyd’s of London](#) and the [Bank of England](#), the Church of England among many others are not only stating publicly their rejection of racism but also stating publicly their links to slavery and colonialism. What was for decades, centuries, unsaid or ignored is now acknowledged formally. On the Lloyd’s webpages, the following appears:

Recent events have shone a spotlight on the inequality that Black people have experienced over many years as a result of systematic and structural racism that has existed in many aspects of society and unleashed difficult conversations that were long overdue.

At Lloyd’s we understand that we cannot always be proud of our past. In particular, we are sorry for the role played by the Lloyd’s market in the 18th and 19th century slave trade, an

appalling and shameful period of English history as well as our own. In acknowledging our own history, we also remain committed to focusing on the actions we can take today to shape our future into one that we can truly be proud to stand by.

Over the last week, we have listened carefully to our Black and Ethnic Minority colleagues in the Lloyd's market. We have heard their frustrations, and it is clear that we must commit now as a market to take meaningful and measurable action.

Building an inclusive culture is essential to the market's future success and that is why the culture sits alongside performance and strategy as one of the Corporation's three strategic priorities.

And we are not alone-through initiatives like Inclusion@Lloyd's and Dive In, the wider Lloyd's market has in recent years thrown its collective resources behind the drive for greater diversity and inclusion across the piece. We have made progress but not enough. Therefore, today we are announcing a number of initiatives to help improve the experience of Black and Minority Ethnic talent in the Lloyd's market. We will

- (1) *Invest in positive programmes to attract, retain and develop Black and Minority Ethnic talent in the Lloyd's market, including launching our "Accelerate" Programme – a modular programme to develop Ethnic Minority Future Leaders across the market.*
- (2) *Review our employee and partner policies, as well as our organisational artefacts, to ensure that they are explicitly non-racist.*
- (3) *Commit to education and research. We will educate our colleagues and continue our research into the experiences of Black and Ethnic Minority professionals working in insurance and share what we learn with the market.*
- (4) *Provide financial support to charities and organisations promoting opportunity and inclusion for Black and Ethnic minority groups.*
- (5) *Develop a long-term action plan in collaboration with our Culture Advisory Group, Black and Minority Ethnic colleagues and White Allies who will inform our journey and hold us to account.*

We are grateful to our Black and Ethnic Minority colleagues who have helped to shape our conversations and actions to ensure that we create an environment free from injustice for them and for all. Our commitment is that we will continue to listen and learn as we act and to measure our progress. There is a long way to go but we are determined that we can and will create a culture in the Lloyd's market in which everybody can flourish.

Lloyd's well-documented part is in the insurance of slave ships, including their "cargo" of Black Africans: difficult for Lloyd's to argue otherwise, and it is clear that a programme of work is now in place to attempt to move things on: it is their form of reparations for past wrongs. Another City institution, The Bank of England's statement, however, is far more circumspect. *There can be no doubt that the 18th and 19th century slave trade was an unacceptable part of British history. As an institution, the Bank of England was never itself directly involved in the slave trade, but it was aware of some inexcusable connections involving former Governors and Directors and apologises for them. The Bank has commenced a thorough review of its collection of images of former Governors and Directors to ensure none with any such involvement in the slave trade remain on display anywhere in the Bank. The Bank is committed to improving diversity and is actively engaging with staff, particularly with our BAME colleagues, to help us identify and shape concrete steps that can be taken now to progress the Bank's efforts to be as inclusive as possible.*

No real evidence of what the "efforts" comprise or "engagement" with BAME staff, and there is no articulation of what the "concrete steps" are. Not only is the apology difficult to

locate online but also the media has called out the BoE as not engaging sufficiently with the responsibilities it needs to face, given its shameful legacy.

The Church of England confirms its shame at its involvement in the slave trade but also points out prominently the work of William Wilberforce, a slavery abolitionist, with no mention of the Black British activists who also helped the cause. They make no mention of the substantial reparations they received on the abolition of the slave trade and slave ownership.

Further, social media is “calling out” those that seem to be jumping on a damage limitation band wagon: corporate statements supporting anti-racism against hard evidence of racism in many of the very same organisations and very little evidence of any attempt to address it. There are many other examples in the UK, but it could be anywhere in many of the nations in Europe. Many companies are also minding their language: identifying and removing terms explicitly associated with slavery. Social media makes it impossible to easily “manage the message” of corporate rhetoric of support for BLM in the absence of authentic, sustainable action and hard evidence of commitment for people of colour.

Suppression and repression: what has been “forgotten”

The call in the UK for the removal of statues, the admittance of the benefits gained from the sweated labour of the Black African Diaspora, is an important point of progression in the call for anti-racist organisations. However, as I have already suggested, what needs to be tackled, in order to tackle anti-racism, runs very deep.

The literature can often capture the complex in ways that make clear the challenges persuasively.

In Italo [Calvino's](#) novel, *Invisible Cities*, an imagined recalling by Marco Polo to Kublai Khan of his travels along the Silk Road, he tells stories of the cities he claims he has visited along the way. Khan is dubious but entertained. An excerpt from one of Marco Polo's stories, about the city of Zaira, is one that may help us connect to the challenge.

Cities and memories: 3

As this wave from the memories flows in, the city soaks it up like a sponge and expands. A description of Zaira as it is today should contain all Zaira's past. The city, however, does not tell its past but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corner of the streets, the gratings of the windows, the banisters of the steps, the antennae of the lightning rods, the poles of the flags, every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scrolls. (My bold)

The phrase, “*The city, however, does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand*”, is an important element at the heart of the scourge of racism. The roots of anti-Black sentiment are deeply embedded, not only within societal norms and practices but also crucially, are the foundations of economic, geopolitical and commercial past “achievements” and the foundations of current economic wealth and international influence in much of the global north. Until recently these roots have rarely been discussed openly and widely in the public sphere.

The societal challenge of making visible and obvious what needs to be understood in order to make substantial progress on race equality should, of course, incorporate the systematic disadvantages experienced by Black people now and how they might be addressed. But, in my view, a wider “denial”, indeed suppression, of past wrongs, combined with a lack of understanding of the wide-ranging grasp of slavery and imperialism within many European societies, including the UK, makes it difficult to appreciate how deep rooted the challenges are and how embedded racist norms are within the society. In research conducted by Blanchard and his colleagues, published as a book, “*Human Zoos Science and Spectacle in the Age of Colonial Empires*” (2008) now completely repressed in an attempt to erase it from collective consciousness highlights the use of people of colour as spectacle. In Europe, North America

and Japan, people were taken from their homelands to be displayed and to be subjected to the scientific enquiry of anthropologists, ethnographers and scientists. The zoos were places of entertainment and learning, the learning, fundamentally, about the primitive nature of those subjugated through imperial endeavour and the rightness of the racial superiority of imperial powers to rule over others.

The role of the subordination of black people in European state rivalries

Mercantilism and economic prosperity, at any cost, built on the foundations of the lands and labour of Black Africans remains at the beating heart of the success of many global north economies (Evans, 2016; Hatt, 1997; Hazelwood, 2005; Pettigrew, 2016; Walvin, 1992; Williams, 2013). The Seven Years' war (1756–1763) was a conflict that largely centred on the colonial rivalry between Britain and France for imperial supremacy in the Americas but involving many European nations (Baugh, 2011). The conflict was not only about who would rule India and the Americas, but these colonial objectives were at the conflict's heart, with the slave estates that created enormous wealth a central consideration. Nations involved in the colonisation of the Americas also the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Knights of Malta, Norway, Russia, Sweden and Scotland. Most notably, the latter in their failed colonial project, the Darien Scheme (New Caledonia) in Panama, leading to financial ruin of much of the lowlands of Scotland and accelerating the Act of Union between England and Scotland.

To suppress and colonise requires designating a different status to the conquered. The colonial ambitions of European powers, fuelled in part by the transatlantic slave trade a global, colonial ambitions, led to millions of people of colour to be designated “inferior”. By the late 19th century, colonial domination of the global south was central to the growth of the economic and military aspirations of the global north. The Italians and Germans made unsuccessful attempts at colonisation in the Americas but succeeded in Africa. The “scramble for Africa” (Pakenham, 1992; Rivers, 2017), the invasion, occupation, division and colonisation of African territory by European powers bargained for and agreed at the Berlin Conference of 1884. State and economic imperialism has been at the core of rivalries between Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Belgium. Europeans had also divided up Latin America and the Caribbean, between Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands and Denmark (and eventually, the USA). Black Africans were at the heart of European colonisation and economic aspirations.

A total of 12.5 million Black Africans were shipped as chattel slaves, as goods, to the Americas with four million sent to Brazil alone: shocking statistics but reasonably well known (Hochschild, 2010; Walvin, 1992; Williams, 2013).

What perhaps is less well known is that almost a century after slavery was abolished in the UK, in northern Nigeria, three million slaves were made available to the British colonial authorities as a part of the drive of Frederick Lugard to lower the cost of “native” labour in the early part of the 20th century (Lugard, 1922; Salau, 2011). Forced labour also was widespread across British sub-Saharan Africa, up until calls for independence in the 1950s (Branch, 2009; Cornelius *et al.*, 2019). Adam Hochschild's account of the atrocities and genocide that underpinned the private empire of King Leopold II, and resulted in the deaths between two and ten million Africans, excessive cruelty even by the standards of the time, is scarcely known of today (Conrad, 1902/2020; Hochschild, 2019). Also not widely known is that Lord Leverhulme, British head of the imperial company Lever Brothers, set up a rubber plantation in the Belgian Congo, a location with the advantage of widespread forced labour, with violent consequences for non-compliance, including mutilation, flogging and death (Marchal, 2010). Unilever, the company emerging from Lever Brothers, and like many former imperial companies, remains as a global firm, quoted on the London Stock Exchange.

Violence was the means to control, to silence and to subordinate, with the assertion of white superiority and the “natural” inferiority of Black people, the societal norm across

Europe and the Americas. Imperialism continues to this day of course: the close relationships established during the colonial era with elites in petrostates extended into a neo-imperialist relationships between traditional leaders and oil companies; economic imperialism, established in the 19th century by European states wishing to extend their colonial reach without military support, is now the imperialism of choice by powerful nation states, with Sub-Saharan Africa firmly in their sights.

The suppression of historical negatives and the promotion of false positives

The legacies of the transatlantic slave trade and European colonialism of sub-Saharan Africa remain front and centre of understanding the antecedence of the struggles of Black people and the perpetuation of White privilege in the countries of the global north. Racism is at the heart of both. Chattel slavery and colonisation are viewed as normal and desirable, even generous in their day (and sometimes, even now) as the graciousness of a civilising project of white superiors – the bringing of the railways, democracy, Christianity and order – to the racially inferior peoples of empire (Bowle, 1974; Perlham, 1952).

The current focus on the luminaries involved historically in the exploitation of Black people, however, also needs to be challenged: it was never the endeavour of small elite only.

There is plenty of hard evidence from research conducted in the UK that not only plantation owners, owned slaves. Those of modest means could buy shares in slave estates, and also own slaves, from the comfort of their homes. Legacies in wills included the passing on of slave ownership (Amussen, 2007; University College, University of London, 2020; Olusoga, 2017). Slavery was of financial benefit to the middle classes as well as the slave estate owning superrich.

Slave estates were clearly sites of absolute control, rule and punitive punishments for the most minor “offences” and brutal punishments for insurrection that went well beyond what would have been acceptable the abject poor or traitors in Europe usually the recipients of the most draconian state punishments (Sherman, 2009). They were also sites which lay at the heart of the international spread of conquest and empire and national prosperity.

Money generated by the slave trade was at the heart of the financial success of the City of London, (University College, University of London, 2020; Cornelius and Pezet, 2020) with merchant venturers and the establishment, financing and insurance of slave related activities not only the work of the crown and state but also enriching City institutions [1]. British government reparations to British slave owners on the abolition of slavery (the latter replaced by widespread “apprenticeships” and indentured labour across the British Empire, a more acceptable form of slavery), was one of the biggest bailouts in British financial history. Much of the British slave trade and African colonialism was supported by the Crown and state, with Royal charters, financial backing and the protection of the Royal Navy, British army and privateers.

Reparation money fuelled many of the major investments in the Industrial Revolution. The fruits of empire – cotton, tobacco, minerals, agricultural and other goods – provided jobs for millions in docks, factories, shops, enterprises and much else in the UK (Levine, 2019; Puri, 2020). The raw materials extracted from the colonies could be taken to the UK, processed in UK factories, to created added value and then exported globally, in particular to the British Empire: a captive market. The very architecture of many towns and cities, including university buildings, was financed through the monies of slavery and colonial exploitation. The benefits of sub-Saharan Africa’s labour and resources extended well beyond the highest echelons of society, and these benefits were built on racism and a sense of entitlement for the exploitation of the peoples of colour across the Empire. Colonial administrators, security forces, commodity traders, judiciary and businesses were staffed by British citizens, often from relatively modest origins.

Seats of learning are not excluded, with universities historically reluctant to speak about their links to historical exploitation of Black people. Universities educated the administrators of empire, and their science not only evaluated its raw materials but also gave scientific credence to the inferiority of people of colour. Many institutions are revisiting long-established ties with beneficiaries of slavery or who were brutal colonialists. Cass Business School will be renamed as Sir John Cass was a notorious slave owner. [Imperial College London](#), established as the Royal College of Chemistry in the 19th century and which analysed manner of the minerals and natural resources found in colonial territories in order to advise government and business on the feasibility of extraction ([Imperial Institute, 1906](#)) and the financial benefits that could be reaped, will no longer display their historic motto, “*Scientia imperii decus et tutamen*”: “Scientific knowledge, the crowning glory and the safeguard of the (British) Empire”. However, for people of colour, this will need to be much more than an exercise in the management of corporate identity and reputation.

Black Lives Matter: shifting collective memory and societal norms

Historically, the “benefits” of empire to colonised people were triumphed; resistance to empire by local people was brutally suppressed. The media of the day would report resistance to imperial control as wars, uprisings and insurrections. Until recently, in the public consciousness, slavery and empire were evils that could not be spoken of from the perspective of the transported and the colonised. Nonetheless, terms of abuse against Black people, globally, are often rooted in slavery and colonialism. The N-word being called a slave or monkey. All are founded on a sense of white superiority and entitlement. Slavery a source of shame for Black people not for the white perpetrators.

The recognition by the public of the beneficiaries of racism, whose names resonate across the centuries as statues, street names and financial legacies recognised solely for “the good” they did, is crucially important. But the recognition of a different kind of wrongdoing, widespread and embedded in all levels of the society is crucially important also. As colonies became independent in the second half of the 20th century, the legacies did not disappear either in the post-colonies or for the Black diaspora.

In the global north, the lower expectation of Black children in schools, the reluctance to view Black people as worthy of senior appointments and the violence meted out to Black women and men (Europe has its contemporary *parallels with George Floyd*) are the “*lines of the hand*” that suggest strongly that accounts of the Black experience today in the nations of the global north should in understood in the context of the global north’s past relationships with the Black peoples of sub-Saharan Africa, its evolution, reconfiguration and resonance and legacies in societies today. Subaltern status for Black people continues today of course, albeit in a different form in the post-colony but also for Black diaspora in much of the global north.

Black Lives Matter and intransigent, racist behaviour

In the media recently, there was another and less reported story again from the US. A white woman, Amy Cooper, exercised her dog off its leash in the Ramble area of Central Park, New York City, where dogs were required to exercise on a leash: there were many notices posted in the area, making this clear. A black man, Christian Cooper (no relation) a well-known and well-regarded bird watcher, asked her to ensure that her dog was on a leash, offering the dog treats to sit still long enough for the leash to be attached. Her response was to call 911, and her message was as follows:

I’m in the Ramble, – a wooded area in Central Park – “there is a man, African American, he has a bicycle helmet and he is recording me and threatening me and my dog,” as her tone rose in apparent distress. I am being threatened by a man in the Ramble, please send the cops immediately!

The response from the media, her employer and others was to view the actions as racist.

Ms Cooper's actions were widely condemned as racist. She was fired by the investment firm where she managed an insurance portfolio. The pet adoption agency that gave her the dog seen in the video took it back after criticism that the way she held its collar seemed to strangle it.

She is due to appear before a judge on 14th October.

A white woman, working as an investment analyst, making the claim that she was being attacked by a Black man, in an act of what appears to be hubristic. *The heart of her message to 911 was that she was being threatened by a black man.* Historically, indeed until recently, she would have been believed, he would have been prosecuted or lynched. If you were white and privileged, the law was there to protect you. The challenge by Christian Cooper was to her "natural authority". She expected to be believed: this was the norm of her class, her workgroup and possibly her family.

But things are changing, and the murder of George Floyd has moved things on. *Black Lives do Matter* is the moral of this particular story. But for every Amy Cooper (whose actions were recorded on Christian Cooper's smartphone, then broadcasted on social media), there are actions, unseen, where the outcome is likely to have been different. Caution and reinvention of white privilege and racism against Black people will also be an outcome of the death of George Floyd. Were the actions taken by her employer and the law, a response to implicit her wrongdoing or response to the social media storm around her wrongdoing? Social media is also a convenient hiding place for racists. Most recently, Blake Neff, a writer for Fox News, was sacked after an investigation by CNN found that under the moniker *CharlesXII*, he was posting racist and sexist comments. Television networks are increasingly scouring social media to establish whether its stars have posted hate posts of this kind. This may well follow for senior appointments to many organisations too. Pressure is mounting on social media companies to challenge cyberracism and its impact on organisations (see also [Daniels and Thornton, 2020](#)). Currently, economics has triumphed over ethical action.

More mundane, but equally of note, is that only a few days after the George Floyd murder and BLM protests in the UK, a plane flew over the Manchester City Football Ground with banner unfurled stating "*White Lives Matter*". A similar sentiment was etched into Miners Welfare Park turf in Bedworth in Warwickshire, with the police reporting that the perpetrator was seen in "In a Ku Klux Klan type outfit". Statues of notable Black people were defaced. The police viewed both actions as an attempt to disrupt community relations. In many parts of the society, across all races, the actions were viewed with horror. It is clear, however, that there are those in society who do not share this view.

White supremacists and right-wing groups in the USA and Europe continue to racialise their cause and undertake racist acts against Black people.

Black Lives Matter – new mood music or more fundamental change?

It has long been seen as socially unacceptable to be publicly support overt racist in most organisations in the UK. Now, it is increasingly viewed as unacceptable to be associated with historical racism. This is an important step towards acknowledging past harm consequences that resonate across the centuries for Black people. The author and activist James Baldwin's sentiment that "*not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced*" has never been more relevant' ([Baldwin, 1962/2011](#)). Many Black individuals faced and suffered for their civil rights in the US in the 1960s [2]. BLM, matters, as it continues the struggle: the need to make visible the lived experience of black people, and the wrongs that many have experienced.

It should be remembered that there is a substantial literature on informal actions, micro-aggressions, which sustain the privilege of historically advantaged groups at the expense of the historically disadvantaged, including *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion* journal. However, the identification of racial differences that are discussed in relation to the labour market and work organisations and the persistence of racial inequalities is difficult to address without first, addressing their origins.

The roots of contemporary discrimination run deep and span the centuries. They are difficult to challenge as much is now embedded in societal norms and structures. The hope is that this increasing recognition of the need to disassociate from historic racism will enable organisations to understand better the consequences of this legacy today. Importantly, it will not do to locate this as merely colonial history or a history of slavery, though both clearly matter. *It is shared history* and will need to be understood as such.

The important question for academics and organisations is whether this fresh perspective on racism will enable fresh challenge in a manner that is paradigm breaking.

Black people who have experienced racism at work, formal or informal are speaking to their lived experience. Their voicing opportunities were unfairly denied, rules and policies applied differently, not being viewed as leadership potential, being side-lined again and again for promotion. These experiences are rooted in a view of what a Black person is, what they can achieve and often an expectation of a lesser role in society and in the workplace.

There have been many reviews of race at work in the shadow of the latest challenges through BLM, but there has been little robust action taken in their wake. The fear is that public declarations of historical wrongdoing will be viewed as drawing a line under the matter: of course this will not do.

More robust ethical and pragmatic frameworks will be needed than the ones that have created movement but a slow, often painful change. The need to question our assumptions, fundamentally, paradigmatically and morally, has never been greater. We need to act not merely react. Racial equality is not merely a problem for Black people, indeed all people of colour. It is a stain on societies who fail to acknowledge the wrongness of racism and that the past informs the present.

Notes

1. Christopher Codrington, governor general of the Leeward Islands, who ran estates on behalf of the [Church of England](#) in the Caribbean in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, is a personal connection. In Antigua and Barbuda, the twin island state in the “West Indies” (the original British term used for the Caribbean) my sister was given privileged access to the Codrington papers from the former slave estates on the island. The name “Cornelius” appears: a slave name used with a biblical reference, Cornelius the centurion, a Christian convert, part of the civilising mission lauded on the slave estates. Probably my ancestor. Black slaves largely replaced the indigenous First Nations people, all but wiped out through disease and acts of genocide.
2. Alexander Zephaniah Looby, attorney-at-law, defending the rights of Black people during the civil rights movement *pro bono*, his house was bombed. He and his wife escaped but sustained permanent injuries. A great-uncle of mine, and evidence that abuse and violence against Black people is not only intergenerational but has been, and continues to remain, front and centre of racial discrimination for the Black diaspora linked historically to the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

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