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How to build bridges between diverse communities in modern Britain

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About the author

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My name is Darian Murray-Griffiths, and I am 18 years old. I was born in Newham, east London but when I was two years old my family moved to Worcester, which ever since I have called home. My heritage is mainly Jamaican, Vincentian and English; I am of the fourth generation of my family to reside in the UK. I currently am a fresher's undergraduate student at Oxford University studying History and Politics at Christ Church. I have attended state comprehensive schools all of my life and been actively involved in my local Cathedral, led a mental health campaign for young people's services in Worcester, spoke at the Worcester Black Lives Matter rally and helped to organise Black History Month in Worcester, as well as speak out and learn more about social justice issues and the improvement of our world. I intend to become a barrister. I embrace and am proud of my heritage and skin colour, but never shall let it suffocate me. Being of mixed heritage could mean that I must choose between the two identities, but instead I embrace both, because to deny one identity would be to deny half of myself and of my family. I proudly identify as a mixed-heritage *British* person in this country which I have forever and will always call home.

Abstract

This essay focuses on a broad vision for building bridges between diverse communities in modern Britain, more specifically black and mixed-heritage communities who feel antagonised, left behind, or misunderstood by the systems of the state. This broad vision is one of promoting education, level-playing fields, and equalities of opportunity for many who begin life with several natural accumulated disadvantages that limits their ability to succeed. The vision is premised on the belief that there are certain communities in need of state guidance and support to unleash their potential, and that the failure to reach out to these communities may not just further alienate them from the state, the nation and society in general but also turn them towards a life of criminal activity and adoption by gangs, perhaps resulting in imprisonment or contact with knife crime etc. The vision is one of peace, justice and concord among all races and communities in this country, in the belief that, with commitment, energy and determination, all with the responsibility and authority to do so can make this one nation, united at last. This essay predominantly focuses on the black communities of Britain, but these are not all specific only to black communities, there are crucial principles and lessons that apply to all, especially those from similarly disadvantaged communities such as that of white, working class boys who themselves must not be left behind either. I write from a position of personal experience and observations, as well as of informed reading and discussions with those affected or knowledgeable about this topic. Hard lessons will be needed, but the task, uphill though it may be, is not one which is impossible or unrewarding. In brief, the substantive recommendations of this essay are:

- **Speak less, listen more** – now is the time to hear with empathy and maturity the stories and pleas of those communities which have long felt neglected and left behind by successive governments at different levels

- **Prevention is better than cure** – forcing absentee parents to, where they can, pay maintenance payments for children which they have neglected to bring up. Also, target state resources on excluded-from-school children who are becoming the latest victims of unscrupulous gangs and criminals and whose potential is being neglected. Often, these excluded-from-school children are those who have unstable family backgrounds or have not had access to the necessary support to stabilise them and focus them on education and conventional standards of behaviour. Ensuring social services are directed towards those families where parents are absent (for whatever reason) and children are being brought up by elder siblings who need more support and guidance as to how to parent, despite being young themselves.
- **Increased representation and diversity in key industries and fields of work** – this is crucial not as a measure of tokenistic 'shop-window diversity' where any black person will do, but is necessary to provide a means of inspiration and hope to children and young people growing up today that the possibilities are not limited by skin colour or affluence of background. It is also necessary to break glass ceilings and challenge stereotypes through promoting people of colour and giving them a chance, so to speak. This should not become a means of promoting black people, but black people with genuine talent and merit – tokenism and window dressing will not do.
- **Addressing the socio-economic difficulties of those with low wages, long working hours and who are seemingly 'trapped' in low-skills employment** – this can be done by targeting certain welfare support schemes to those families which constantly seem to be in the bottom 20% and who need a hand up, not a hand out. Similarly, providing skills retraining schemes or adult lifelong learning schemes to allow for night-time or weekend classes and the like which provide a chance for those 'trapped' in low-wage employment to be more socially mobile and prosperous.
- **Understanding more the backgrounds of those seen as the enemy or as miscreant youth** – not being too hasty to criminalise young people by being more understanding of their backgrounds and their (troubled) world-views, and how the state can remedy their experiences. One must always ask the question if criminalisation and imprisonment, while not distorting the basic principle that justice must be served, is the best way of rehabilitating or supporting young black people in contemporary society. As my mother has always believed, we must suspend assumptions and prejudices and enter into dialogue with understanding mindsets.
- **Reversing the closure of, and cuts to, youth services**
- **Working with established pillars of the black community** such as churches, mosques, black start-up businesses, charities, and childcare facilities to better understand and address the issues at hand – an approach of true partnership working and joined-up thinking
- **Education, education, education** – providing education of black history, of a curriculum that prepares young people for the necessities of life such as personal financial management

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- **A 'second-chance society'** – not just choosing the binary alternatives of rehabilitation or retribution, but a concept of 'smart justice' where we do not unnecessarily criminalise or antagonise those who have committed crimes or activities against the state. Repairing police-community relations is also key. '
- **Addressing the past in order to forge the future** – being more commemorative and honest about our shared history, ***good and bad***, in a way that is healing, acknowledging and empathetic, without opening old wounds or paying mere lip service.

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Introduction

It is amidst the turbulence, uncertainty, and unpredictability of this most eventful year that I write about a challenge which, beneath the surface, haunts contemporary society in modern Britain. It is a challenge which numerous crises and events expose, and which numerous politicians mention but never seemingly fully address. It is the challenge of race, inequality, and community relations in our country. It is a challenge which, unless properly addressed in full, will not go away. The solutions do not lie in simply more money, in soundbite electoral slogans or in wilful ignorance. The solutions lie in empathic understanding, in tolerance and respect and in those perhaps decidedly British values of decency, common sense, obligation and responsibility. The matter at hand is about how to reconcile the 'two nations' within our country, not just that Disraelian concept of 'rich and poor', but our more modern concept of 'black and white', of 'them and us'. Several events of recent years have proven how serious and how deep-rooted these issues are, be they the perceived and real inequalities exposed by the awful fire of Grenfell Tower in 2017; be they the anger, the hurt and the disbelief of the 2011 riots in the aftermath of the shooting of Mark Duggan; be they the dismay at the perceived racially aggravated criticisms of the Duchess of Sussex since her marriage into our royal family; not least the actions of recent governments over the Windrush deportations scandal which created a 'hostile environment' for loyal and fellow Commonwealth/British citizens; be they the sense of alienation created by 'stop and search' and the rise in knife crime and 'county lines'; or be they what brings us to this latest of many racial disparity and inequality government commissions and reports: the death of George Floyd, a man in the United States, not in Britain.

It is perhaps ironic that the latest ferment and commotion is a result of an action that occurred in lands far away from our shores – but that in itself is testament to the perceived inaction, the lack of responsibility, the lack of change in our country by successive governments over many decades - that it took the death of a man who perhaps never visited our country to make us, as one, look in on ourselves at what needed to change and what 'George Floyd moments' occurred within our own borders. There will always be those with megaphones and with social media platforms who, from the fringes and the extremes of national conversation, will argue for radical and impracticable ideas of 'Back to Africa' 'repatriation' or of dismantling the state as we know it, or of vengeful race war or simply of ignoring the issue because it is the action of hooligans, bored youths and the typical suspects. That is, one hopes at least that they are the views of those at the fringe and at the extremes.

But, in today's increasingly polarised, uncertain and divided world, it is time to pay heed to the sensible views of the silent majority, of those who wish to do good but perhaps know not how. This is not about deciding whether our country is racist or not, but about ensuring that it acts fairly and honourably towards all. It is tempting to fall back into lazy habits or to seek to misunderstand what is at stake here, but we only do disservice to the country and to the people we love. It is time to address age-old issues with bold answers, with moderation, decency and empathic understanding. Gone are the days when many could appreciate or

settle for tokenistic superficiality; the age of soundbites, of short-termist quick-fixes and dashed hopes is one that desperately needs to pass. It is not a matter of addressing the concerns of one community or of persistent gadflies; it is a matter of stopping the corrosive rot in our society. To seek and achieve anything but a full, comprehensive and long-term strategy to root out inequalities, eradicate systemic racism, attack 'burning injustices' and provide a balm of unity and healing to those who feel alienated and outcasts in their own country, one they call home, is to be nothing more than a serious dereliction of duty and a display of arrogant contempt for those who are, whether we like it or not, fellow compatriots, our neighbours, our very own 'kith and kin' who help to make Britain what it is today, and could make Britain what it is in the world of tomorrow. Papering over the cracks, if ever it was a solution, is instead comedic if it could be proposed as a serious solution today. No matter the change of government or leader, 'burning injustices' continue to burn every more brightly – we must be weary of being so negligent that such burning turns our beloved country ablaze.

The past decade has exposed this country in a way that leaves many disaffected and untrusting in the institutions which are there to serve the common good. Of course, there is a long and complicated history that stretches back many centuries, filled with moments of glory and of tragedy, but the events of recent years has meant that, far from being a matter of apologising or acknowledging our history, many still feel that there are issues which plague the here and now, that make the concerns of distant history feel all too present. If we are to create 'one nation' truly, it does not serve for any state to have within it a large minority who feel no ties of loyalty or affection to the country they call home. But all is not lost. Simply put, now is the time for real hope, indeed for real change. We all must be aware that change is slow, change will take time, and no one is proposing that, by tomorrow, a new utopia shall arrive in which the problems of this imperfect world are immediately remedied. But we must not take refuge in excuses and in idle 'justifications'. We must ourselves be the change we wish to see; we must lead by example and be fully committed. In doing so, we heal our country and repair its image which has been badly tarred over numerous years by the scandals and injustices which continue to afflict, embarrass and shame a country which rightly deserves to stand at the apex of honour on the world stage.

To heal and unite, it will take maturity and dignity to accept that no one side has all the answers, or that one community above the others has a monopoly on good and bad. Life is so rarely Manichaean or binary. The government needs to be emboldened to take the necessary and correct decisions for the good of all; others need to be prepared to take responsibility for their own actions and morality. All will need to work together – much easier it is to demand solutions, than it is to provide them. This new 'cancel culture' of echo chambers and speaking only to those who agree with oneself is destructive and dangerous – it shall get us nowhere. In times of strife, discord and uncertainty, it takes leadership, initiative and maturity to know when the time is to speak and when the time is to listen. I believe that now is the time for all to listen, to hear, one another and seek the common ground for what surely must be a common cause. It has taken many centuries for various modern-day problems to accumulate, it need only take a few years or decades to put them

right, to put Britain back onto the right road. Atonement will be in order, but so will forgiveness, from all sides. Wisdom, steadiness and justice too must prevail. It will not be easy, it will not be simplistic, but it will be so very much worth it when, indeed, so much is at stake.

Now is not the time to don the armour of civil strife and of binary absolutism, nor is it time to act out of fear, mistrust and suspicion. Instead, now is the time to be strong, to be encouraged, to be motivated to make a true difference to build permanent, long-standing bridges between those two nations which clash with such saddening ferocity and ardour. If we are to move forward as one, we must address with firmness and courage the issues of the past, and not let our present rage and prejudice distort our efforts to seek peace and concord once more within this country, for the common good of all who live within it. We stand now at a crossroads – it is up to us all, rulers and ruled alike, to ensure that we go forth in the right direction. This essay seeks to contribute towards those efforts.

The neglected youth: How 'problem children' become 'lost children'

Let us start with the future – the youth. In today's society, we have many young people from our black communities who are growing up hungry, mentally ill, with anger-management issues, in single-parent (often single-mother) households and increasingly drawn towards illegal employment and criminal activity as a way out of poverty. It is my belief that so much of this is due to a crisis of identity and a desire for a sense of belonging in a society that too often treats them as miscreant, problem children, as 'yoots', thugs and hooligans. Many writers from a black background have often attributed many of the problems experienced by young black people to the twin stigmas of race and class – there is some truth in this proposition, in that many, rightly or wrongly, feel some sensitivity and alienation not only on grounds of skin colour from figures of authority, but also on grounds of class, in terms of the often in-work poverty many children from black backgrounds are being raised in. It does not bode well if many grow up with financial and emotional instability where they are one wage packet away from potential eviction or that tragic choice between heating and eating which no person in today's civilisation should have to make.

In single-parent households, one can perhaps empathise with those children conscious enough of any financial difficulties or emotional stresses and pressures who feel powerless to intervene or be of anything more than moral support, and who from that resultant sense of powerlessness, helplessness, even disenfranchisement feel that, by any means necessary, they would like to be of assistance, of usefulness, to their family. One cannot applaud the decisions which are pregnant with consequence that many take, one that leads them towards criminality and quick-fixes, but one must feel able to empathise and even salute that notion of solidarity, love and family-mindedness which exists in so much of the black community. It is surely a solid foundation from which many can make something of themselves, and from which they can contribute positively and rewardingly to their society. But we are in danger of these 'problem children' becoming 'lost children' if by the time they

are 18 or even much younger, they believe that certain career paths or lifestyles are for the rich and affluent, for those of certain backgrounds or skin colours, or simply just not for them. So much of the solution lies in addressing the psychological matters at hand, as much as the concrete of the educational, the economic and the societal. It is certain that releasing many from the burdensome weight of low incomes, low skills and low household security can help to remove, at a stretch, the emotional and psychological pressures which can damage and impair children from such a young age.

The sense of identity which many young black people need and crave is often the result of the lack of paternal role models in which they can see themselves and the lack of wider (often, male) or societal role models. It is hard for those growing up in modern Britain if most of the news coverage or societal conversation is about black prisoners or racism, rather than shining examples of black success and excellence, such as successful actors, writers, politicians, lawyers and the like. Of course, this links to black representation in the media and in many fields of work – it is a problem that needs rectifying, not just for the good and cohesion of society, but also to provide genuine role models and exemplars for those who lack motivation or inspiration towards the bottom of society. However, one must avoid tokenism – people need to be inspired by genuine examples of merit, hard work and dedication, not by people being raised up in the world by virtue of the 'colour of their skin' not the 'content of their character'. But, arguably, there is now a need to promote more black people, to give them that chance to inspire many and address age-old inequalities through providing their unique perspectives and insights into issues, as well as demonstrating their talents and potential. This is not an experiment where black people should be promoted to see if they pass the test, or if they miserably fail – this should be a direct means of inspiration to many by making fields of work more representative and inclusive. It is equality of opportunity rather than tokenism which should be the goal.

Too often, for those who are from troubled families or poor single-parent households, those who are parents and guardians are working multiple jobs with long hours and poor pay, or guardians who are barely out of adolescence or of maturity themselves. Children cannot raise children. Social services must provide increased support for those parents and guardians of children with mental ill-health, in-work poverty, or even low educational attainment, especially where guardians are those who are older siblings with low parenting skills or experience. They immediately become, whether they like it or not, role models of a sort to young, impressionable and vulnerable children and young people – it is standard for them to be, on the one hand, trying to live their own lives and, on the other, trying to simultaneously raise children before their time. This can lead them to be providing unsuitable, anti-social influences around their dependents, be it with substance misuse, alcohol or unreputable company. Without the support and guidance of social services, we (as a society) help to raise children born to be 'lost'. The importance of psychology and emotional vulnerability should definitely be explored further by experts in the field of research into the very root causes and foundations of structural inequality and patterns of behaviour for those at the bottom of society, who seem to contribute little positively to society. This is important because it is exactly these people raised in unsociable, perhaps

insufficiently educated, deprived and vulnerable households and 'families' who are preyed upon (a word I use deliberately) by gangs, criminals and unscrupulous people who will later use them for their own nefarious ends. It is most definitely a showcase of the necessity of 'Prevention is better than cure'.

For those who only know insecurity, vulnerability and 'social exclusion', it is perhaps natural to seek security, identity and belonging in whatever structure offers it with warm inclusivity. It is easier when one feels that there is no alternative, for one to believe manipulation to be kindness and generosity. We see this continually with those children from single-parent households, who are excluded from school, who are criminalised too early by the criminal justice system, who then turn to gangs, criminals and suspect groups to feel their 'warm' embrace and partake in group activities which not only bolster identity but materially raise their prospects. Certainly, if it can be proved that one can materially prosper and benefit from the latest Nike shoes or a fashionable wrist-watch, faster than if one secured a lawful job and knew that everyone must start from the bottom, then it is no wonder that so many ill-fated young black people turn out of desperation (of whatever kind) to the groups which many of us from more affluent and stable backgrounds would dare not consider. In such institutions, there are then threats and coercive measures which make it hard for one to leave, especially if it seems like the gift that keeps on giving. We, as a society, should be careful not to dismiss or denigrate such peoples who are very often the product of instability, of deprivation and of psychological damage. Empathy, time and understanding is called for – values often instilled from young age by wise parents and figures of authority such as the Church and philosophers. Even more, we should be weary of walking on the other side when we all know that to allow such fallacious philosophies of life and outlooks, such as a criminal life is easier and more beneficial than a law-abiding life, to take root and be disseminated throughout fragile and disadvantaged communities, because there is eventually a heavy price to be paid, either with imprisonment, criminal records or even (as multiple stabbings demonstrate) premature death on the streets of our cities.

It is important to do what is (morally) right for our society and our country, not necessarily that which is popular or to the advantage of one's party or faction. The common good of the state should and must always take precedence. A recent example of how the truth must out, how it must take precedence, is over that of the recent closure of youth services. Difficult decisions are not (hopefully) taken lightly, but this is one that is borne of short-sightedness and short-termism which returns in unforeseen ways to blight a country and a community. Youth services are not simple extravagances of state which are hangovers of universalist philosophies or the like, but part of the social fabric and the *institutions* of society which uphold morality, decency, and community interaction for those of our youth. For those without gardens, without large homes, who are not of age for pubs or who want somewhere warm for the night, and who don't want to be isolated on their games consoles or social media, youth services (which provide indispensable functions of societal interaction such as safe spaces for gatherings, youth parties, fun activities and trips) are the only or the main destination, especially for those who live in urban settings. It is easy for those who have never had to want for anything to think that such services can be provided at home,

that they can be offered elsewhere, but that is to assume that there is an 'elsewhere' to go to when so many of the broken and disadvantaged communities from which our 'lost children' originate are often unable to provide such services without a helping hand, or who (quite rightly) wish not to give cramped spaces over to many youths. It is a hope that even that is not too far a stretch of the imagination for those who have only known security, affluence, and material prosperity to understand.

The youth services being cut mean that, outside of school hours, the state loses oversight of its young and releases them into the feral wild too early, a place unfortunately filled with the unscrupulous, the dangerous and the criminal. What could be publicly funded innocent leisure can easily be turned into hedonistic pleasure and substance misuse in the hands of the wrong people. Youth services are a form of social investment and institutional infrastructure, especially for the vulnerable, the poor and the impressionable. One must ask ourselves if the spate of knife crimes, of 'county lines', of anti-social behaviour (particularly in places like east London) is, in part, due to the closure of youth services and the effects of the austerity programme. Even initiatives such as the Kids' Company, which was forced to close several years ago, provided certain outlets of safety, fun and much-needed (not to say, much-trusted) support for children of all backgrounds. Of course, like any organisation, it had its faults and its serious failings, but to close it down entirely without any alternative was, and is, not the wisest of decision making when so many depended on it. Certainly, any responsible government would have consulted the people affected to ensure that quick decisions were not taken in a void or without respect to the wishes or best needs of the people. Again, one must ask if those with the power to make decisions that not just affect but can radically change lives for the bottom 20% of society and more, are still living in the hangover of the days when atomistic individualism and the fixated prioritisation of self still reigned as the overarching philosophy of public services. The passage of time and the spate of tragic and fatal incidents has surely revealed society to be more complex than such a philosophy would allow: while we must never forget that individuals have a duty to themselves to act in noble self-interest, they are not islands alone. Each and every one of us has a duty, an effect, a link to those who are our neighbours and fellow citizens; without gravity, duty, dedication, responsibility or obligation, our society will fail under the weight of its own contradictions, selfishness and lack of charity.

There is a modern-day scourge of single-parent households where parents, often fathers in the case of black communities, are wilfully absent and negligent. This is immoral. It is damaging and it is corrosive on the children who have the potential to be the leaders and workers of tomorrow and it is an assault on the principles of the family unit, the most foundational social unit of society. While each household will have their own story to tell, it is a principle that, just as it was in many years gone by, so it must be now that, for any truly functioning society to work, there must be the ties of obligation, duty and responsibility which bind us closely, which allow for children not to be the victims of divorce, separation and family breakdown, with all the consequences that such instability entails. It is a truism that single-parent households are likely to be poorer financially as much as in anything else, as a result of negligence or the demands on single parents to be all things to their children

whom they love, care and protect. No one should underestimate how hard their lives are, regardless of the varied and complex choices and decisions which, rightly or wrongly, have led them to their present situation. But it should not be that the state, in the form of welfare payments and the like, picks up the tab (so to speak) for the wilfulness, negligence and moral irresponsibility of absentee parents. Laws should be introduced which force those who can pay to pay maintenance payments up to a certain age for the children which they helped to bring into the world, even if they are not prepared to raise them in this world. The idea that circumstances alone can explain the situations in which many find themselves in is only the latest example of an imported belief that individuals have no direct agency or responsibility in their own lives and that they are simply all victims of life. Life is not easy, something even an eighteen-year-old himself knows. The idea that those more than twice his age should be allowed to get away with excuses and idle explanations and justifications makes a mockery of even the most basic principles of charitable forgiveness and empathy. Maintenance payments will help to alleviate poverty in single-parent households, and their enforcement will, in itself, enforce the idea that if we are to live in a 'shared society' or a 'big society' then we must act with responsibility and obligation. If it is the choice of parents to abandon their families (for whatever reason), then so be it. But it should not be a choice that those parents can escape and abandon their obligations, their responsibilities, their duties. The age of selfish individualism and feckless irresponsibility must end before it adversely affects any more lives of promise.

How do we provide alternative, better role models for our 'lost' and our ordinary young black people? Of course, part of the solution is in *making* those role models rather than exhaustively searching for any that will do. But, in the meantime, we must turn to those traditional pillars of the community who can save our young people from lives of wasted talent, crime and unfulfillment. Each must fulfil their potential; each must be able to live lives free of fear and wrongdoing. In black communities, it is often the places of worship such as the church or the mosque who provide that stability, moral rectitude and guiding support which can so enrich and inspire the lives of the young, indeed the lives of many. Faith is a healer because it consoles, it advises, it rebukes, and it gives the hope of better days to come. Regardless of the state of the country's faith, we must accept that there is much to be learned from faith, even if some do not partake in it. Indeed, for many, faith has been the saving of them and we should never allow personal, private prejudices and snobberies to obscure, denigrate or diminish the countless good deeds, acts and examples that so many of our faith leaders and practitioners provide to many up and down our country. The churches and mosques which can provide institutional strength and support to our broken and disadvantaged communities should be encouraged to continue their good works and spread the net further, as well as be enrolled in opportunities to provide stability, comfort and support networks to our youth and to our adults as well – for none are too self-sufficient to stand entirely alone.

Similarly, role models in the community include those who pursue lives in the service of others, through charitable enterprises, start-up businesses and other ventures that provide fulfilment, leisure and employment for many who may not be adequately qualified or

employable by firms outside of their communities. These role models need to be encouraged and supported, more of which is detailed later.

To prevent children growing up hungry, a consistent scheme of free school meals should be on offer to those from disadvantaged or struggling backgrounds, not least because breakfast, lunch and dinner are not always a given at home for whatever reasons. Not only does having food in their stomachs help to narrow the natural inequality gaps between them and their school peers when it comes to attainment and to the actual ability to succeed and learn, but it certainly ensures that (regardless of circumstances) each young student from a disadvantaged background can have a guaranteed nutritious and warm meal throughout the day. For it to be otherwise is for us to have to question seriously whether we can proudly boast of being a 'developed' country if such basic needs cannot be catered for in what still remains one of the wealthiest countries in the world. From a historical perspective, it is certainly those who long for full stomachs who are the cause of revolutionary change and upheaval.

Finally, schools in affected areas should tackle head-on the idea that an easy, criminal life pays or that the means of artifice, such as substance misuse, can alleviate problems of a serious or even unserious nature. Drugs awareness classes should not only teach the health consequences of drugs, but also the moral and practical consequences of drugs, such as the effects of 'county lines', of human trafficking, of the exploitation far away which we tend not to think about, and of the dangers that are too apparent for those who are close to the drugs trade, such as knife crime, gang warfare and the effects on bereaved parents and friends when loved ones are lost due to the misguided beliefs, or the desperation, that led them towards lives of crime and immorality.

Education, education, education: How to secure a brighter future for the black community

If we are to end the vicious circle of low-paid, 'lower-skilled' jobs and lives for many within the black community, it would be advisable for the government to assist the raising of the material prosperity and ambitions of those affected by certain business support and incentivisation schemes to provide the capital and infrastructure to 'level-up' communities who traditionally lack the support and networks to do so themselves. But perhaps more urgently, the government should inquire into the provision of an adult lifelong learning service which would provide low-skilled workers with classes (perhaps night-time classes) to 'upskill' themselves to make them more fit for higher-skilled jobs and to equip them with the knowledge and additional learning support which can allow them to aim higher. This may help to break the vicious circle of low paid jobs by providing a realisable alternative which shows that legal employment and hard work can pay off. It is a position not solely specific to the black community but to many disadvantaged communities, such as those of the poor, white, working class boys with whom low levels of educational attainment may bias them or alienate them from the state and the nation, turning them to the dissatisfied ultra-Right who provide them with identity, animus against an 'other' and a useful

scapegoat for their own woes and dissatisfaction with the world around them. In addressing issues of race, it is not right to see them as standard-bearers of 'white privilege' when they too suffer, it is a false dichotomy, for all in need of help should receive that help which they so need. The real issue is when it becomes an excuse for inaction or further negligence – the black community needs to be heard and responded to, just like so many other communities.

Similarly, the government should really begin to focus on the provision, not just for black communities but for all communities, of a curriculum that prepares young people for the practical realities of life, such as supposedly simple tasks such as opening bank accounts, investing etc, because it helps to account for the deficit in knowledge which may or may not be filled in by those who have parents or family members who can supplement what is learned in school. Indeed, that often requires there to be stable family units in which the parents are not only intellectually equipped for the task of education about the necessities of life, but also that parents have the time and the confident inclination to do so. What is standard practice for some in society is not for all – this is not some experiment in universalist philosophy, but a raising of standards so that true equality of opportunity can be provided for all within society. After that, many can go as far as their talents can take them, but that is not possible when they are handicapped by accidents of birth and fortune and none shall dare to remedy their situation to give them the best start in life. For me, it is reminiscent of that 'second-chance society' which some politicians have sought to make their political philosophy – education is certainly a means towards that end.

Another way of raising the ambitions and standards of our young black people is by encouraging regular ambassador programmes between those with stories of inspiration and achievement to tell, to encourage the idea of 'black excellence' and 'black success', away from the media narratives of crime and suspect behaviour. To those who grow up in a country where they see little of people that look like them, speak like them, feel like them, it is so undeniably important to be able to recognise oneself in others to provide that inspiration and motivation, especially when the going gets tough. Of course, there will be those who believe that they must be the change they wish to see in the world, that they must be the pathfinders and the innovating pioneers themselves, but it is human nature that not all are possessed of such strength of character, foresight or determination. For those unpossessed of these qualities, there will need to be those who can raise their sights higher. It is not just about providing positive examples to those who may feel they grow up in a world without many at hand (after all, how would one feel about wishing to become a barrister or doctor if one is constantly confronted with 'stop and search' by the police or the fatal stabbing of a friend or the intimidation of gang culture as a daily existence?), but about showcasing to a wider audience that the misguided narrative of starving African children and malignant black criminals is a gross distortion and misinterpretation of the wealth of character, experience and talent of the black community.

The history of black people is more than just slavery or victimhood – and perhaps to those who are not educated enough about their own history and culture, it may seem easier to define oneself constantly as a victim when there are no contrasting counterpoints put

forward to demonstrate why it is indeed otherwise. Ambassador outreach programmes, such as are now the case at Oxford, should be established between certain (prominent) fields of industry, academia and the arts to provide alternatives to lives unfulfilled. In my own high school experience, there were special girls-only events to encourage high school girls to set their sights higher by encouraging and informing them of the STEM subjects – it is entirely possible for schools to do the same with their black students to encourage them to careers unrelated to that of the red carpet, such as the music industry. It is possible to be black and academically studious, or to be black and in a white-collar or higher-level career. This is not about raising alternative powerbases of communities or about establishing new threats to certain careers, but about 'levelling-up' communities which have, for far too long, been neglected or left-behind. Their prospects are not more or less important than any other community in the country, because they are not 'special cases' to be treated with aloofness or kiddy gloves, but instead to be treated as the equal, full and fellow citizens and compatriots which they are. 'Black excellence' and 'black power' is 'British excellence' and 'British power' because we all succeed when every one of us succeeds – there can be no moving forward if a substantive proportion of the population is left behind. That way, we create the patriots and fully identifying citizens of the future who can be proud to call this country home.

To encourage equality of opportunity, it would be advisable for certain schools in particularly deprived areas or with certain amounts of students on free school meals to be provided with government or charitable grants to enable poorer students to be able to attend school trips and special programmes – this will ensure that they are not, by virtue of their socio-economic position in society, ones to miss out on vital opportunities for mental and spiritual growth and enlightenment. That way, we contribute just raised ambitions but to the potential for long-term increased diversity and representation in certain fields of industry, if we expose our youth to what were previously closed-off opportunities.

To foster a sense of responsibility and dutiful obligation, schools should make time in their schedules for students to be actively beneficent to the society around them, to not only bolster and practise skills that will be of use later in life but also to give many a sense of purpose and responsibility. For example, scheduled visits to be volunteers at charities and care homes, or even to participate in valuable extra-curricular activities or job work experience placements would help to develop students into more rounded people with the ability to discern their talents and what 'makes them tick' and content in life. That way, their horizons are broadened, and their experiences deepened, especially as it will be of beneficial advantage when they reach the careers interview and CV stages.

Similarly, to encourage talent and serious considerations of one's future, schools should more firmly sponsor and encourage work experience placements and more directly involved careers services to ensure that young people are constantly refocused onto life after school. For those who lack motivation or who believe that education is a waste of time or not something that should interest or bother them too heavily, this constant streamlining of them to critically assess their future before its too late is so very important. Without it,

those who are denied a second chance will simply be either the criminals and miscreants of tomorrow or the numerous few who live lives unfulfilled and unrewarded. Life is not easy, and some will naturally need a shove more than a push, but the consequences for society as much as for the individual are dire if there is not that person to continually encourage and guide them. We are not, and cannot act like, we are atomised individuals and islands unto ourselves, with no knock-on effects or tail-end consequences. One way or another, we will all pay for the failure of foresight to let the ill-disciplined and uninspired oscillate throughout life, careless of the consequences.

Turning one's life around – the creation of a 'second chance society'

To create that 'second-chance society', we must surely look to those who, after contact with the criminal justice system, need active assistance to turn their lives around. Too often, those within the black community are criminalised or come under suspicion from those with police authority. I ought to make myself noticeably clear at this point. It is an awfully hard tightrope to walk when one understands that the police do see their job as simply to keep the public safe, to tackle criminals and to prevent crises or fatal accidents from developing. No one should be under the impression that the police are the enemy or the entirety of the problem. It is, and should be, self-evident that the police are our defenders and protectors. But one has to also accept that the methods used by the police in certain areas of the country, the tones adopted by the police, and indeed the 'coincidental' 'stop-and-search' practices used by the police has very often fallen short of the high public standards and codes of honourable conduct that we expect of those who are there to serve *all* of the community. It is by no means an easy subject for all concerned.

When it comes to the police, the actions of a rotten few distort and undermine the hard work of many decent and upstanding police officers. But there must be zero tolerance of institutional racism, unpromising unconscious bias and of a deterioration in the standards of decency and politeness towards any community, but especially the black community. All will understand the difficult nature of examining police-community relations; we all know of how certain policies to reduce 'stop-and-search' have then led to increased knife crime incidents, yet many within the black community who are innocent and going about their ordinary daily lives have been uncomfortably forced into the public humiliations of being stopped and searched and effectively criminalised by the police. Of course, the police are 'just' doing their job, but the idea that they can do their job with impunity as to the behaviour with which they conduct themselves is something that makes one question their suitability for the role. The police are the hard arm of the state through whom many of the public encounter, or are more familiar with, most frequently. Therefore, the police have a duty to the state and people whom they serve to ensure that they never bring it into disrepute. Incidents of unnecessary and excessive police brutality inflame existing poor relations between the police and black communities.

To me, it is clear that there needs to be more outreach and more atonement from the police to those communities. It cannot be that the police are seen as the aggressors or the 'enemy'

of these communities – not only does it then make unrealisable any of the police's duties in such communities but it also renders futile any meaningful investigations into certain crimes and incidents because of the unwillingness and hesitancy of those who seek justice.

The police must always be aware of their duties to the state, but the wearing of the badge is a matter of honour and pride, not of power or of status. The police have a history of poor relations with the black community for which it serves no one and no purpose to outline here or to remember in any greater detail than necessary but it should make us all aware to be more empathically understanding and more sensitive when treating with police-community relations. Guidelines ought to be drawn up for the use of stop-and-search with the active consultation of those wrongfully caught up in the exercise of duty – collaboration and partnership working between the police and community needs to replace tension and antagonism. Harmful racial profiling needs to end. It may be that unconscious bias training is necessary for police, especially those who work with diverse or challenging communities. It is my firmest hope that peace and concord, more than anywhere else, can be the future of relations between these representatives of the state and these citizens of the state. Then the phrase 'F*** the police' can be consigned to history.

The criminal justice system should offer so much more to its inmates than mere imprisonment or criminalisation, but it should offer stern warnings and rehabilitation too that a life of crime never pays. For those who are so young and fresh-faced, it makes no sense for them to be merely locked up with the keys thrown away, it is a waste of talent and, in so many cases, is often attributable to circumstances beyond their control which weakness of character or lack of positive role models led them into. They should be offered a chance of genuine rehabilitation, not of escaping the consequences but of a look-in to a different world, where they can make true successes of themselves and where they can prosper without artifice, without criminality, without the fear or paranoia that stalks those who engage in such miscreant behaviour. There is more to life than that of money, the flesh and violence. There are higher, nobler ideals such as family, community, hard work and peace. For someone to be the same age as me and spend so many years in prison, while their flower of youth wilts, is something that is chilling.

Education and rehabilitation are the way forward – of course, this won't be for everyone and there will be some who cannot be saved from themselves, who will escape all chance of rehabilitative redemption, but it is a cause our criminal justice system must strive for nevertheless. Indeed, to redeem those who are young, redeemable and willing to undergo personal change, the government should cooperate with civil society to reintroduce former convicts into civilian life, with special guarantees or incentives for certain businesses or charities to employ ex-prisoners, and with those with genuine turnaround life stories to present them to those at risk of a life of criminality, whether it be in school assemblies or in focus groups of those whose lives can still be saved by avoiding jail and turning to the right path. We must not forever criminalise those ex-prisoners who have served their sentence, who have paid their debts to society – forgiveness, compassion and *justice* should be our response, not retribution or contempt for those who are, like all of us, imperfect and able to

make mistakes. And for a black population heavily forming the backbone of the incarceration and criminalisation statistics, we ought to beware our contempt obscuring our desire to address the issues at hand. A second chance society is what helps to improve life chances for all affected, not consign them to the streets or the outer orbit.

The importance of rehabilitation through education, through faith, through contemplation and the like cannot be misunderstood. It may appeal to some who look purely at statistics or focus groups to simply look and act hard and tough on crime, but we must always be careful not to assume the mantle of superiority, of judgement and of contemptuous condescension – if we do so, we may then ask ourselves perhaps why some precisely turned to crime at all. We are all responsible for our actions and our words. It is a false binary choice between compassion and 'strength'. Never has it been truer than in today's bleak setting that those responsible for the criminal justice system must be 'tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime' – prevention really is better than cure.

As a society, we ought to be mindful of the fact that, as we strive to level the playing field and to 'level up' the left behind, we should remember that a meritocracy also has its demerits in that it too can promote individualism, condescension and disregard for those who seemingly don't 'make the grade' or whose talents take them only to a certain level in the socio-economic pecking order. A meritocratic society is simply a recreation of gross inequalities in a different form – a fairer society is one that will benefit and *include* all, meaning that those who miss out on their first chance shall have that crucial second chance to stay in the game, rather than be consigned permanently to the bench.

Addressing our past and forging our future

It is axiomatic that the relationship between Britain and her black community is one that is influenced, to some degrees, by the complicated and intertwined history stretching back centuries of trade, imperialism and post-imperialism, one that is a tale of subjugation, shared sacrifice, violence, partnership and tragedy. It is not the place of this essay to arbitrate on that relationship, but it is important, if bridges are to be built, that history is acknowledged and respected. One does not have to adopt a take-it-or-leave-it approach nor one of excessive shame or disassociation – simply respecting facts, acknowledging errors but also shared celebratory moments will suffice. We cannot and should not rewrite history, ignore history or overtly politicise history because it is all of our shared inheritance, often context-dependent and related to the vicissitudes of human nature. The past year, 2020, has shown how binary absolutism from both sides of the argument have attempted to utilise and distort history towards their own ends, most noticeably in the arena of statues and public monuments. It is definitive that statues glorify and pay respect to an institution or a particular person for their contributions to society, history or the nation. It is safe to say that there are statues which will need to be reviewed in the course of time, but spur-of-the-moment tokenism or hasty decision making will not be the building of bridges but the creation of new artificial divisions and tensions to be stored up for the future. This conversation is sensitive and it will not reach uniform conclusions that appease and satisfy

all – if none are satisfied, perhaps that in itself is a consensus that may hold. Certainly, it is a conversation that will, in time (when passions are quietened and perspectives regained), absolutely need to occur. Statues are our way of commemorating and celebrating the past; definitions of racism are very often differing, but we must be do better. Silence is not an option. Statues are not going to alone solve inequality or structural injustice, they are not going to feed the hungry or raise up the poor. But there is another, more utile way which will help create the circumstances for informed, mature and nuanced debate: that is the proper teaching of history.

It is, I hope, self-evident that black history is not just history for black people but indeed the history of all of us, the history of the world and of humanity. Black history should not be consigned to one month, but be all year-round. The teaching of black history, of imperial history and of related histories should be one that is encouraging of unity and of concord, not of division, of artificial separation or of historical jealousies. History should act as a guide from which we can learn lessons from and inform our present and future decisions, not as the means to stoke divisions, jealousies and hatreds – that way we repeat history, we do not learn from it. Having chips on our shoulders or arrogant and contextually deaf pride in the deeds of those that went before us will not aid the creation of a society in which we all feel at one, or feel at home. History may make us feel uncomfortable, embarrassed and even ashamed, that is natural. But history should absolutely not be weaponised or corrupted to serve hidden agendas – they are the very foundations for an unequal and divisive society, for history so very quickly becomes the means for which we preserve differences, for which we preserve hatred in our heart and contention in our lives. The history of black people should be taught because, frankly, it is crucial to our own national and international story, but also on a less sublime level because it is the history of our multi-cultural modern nation – it is important that those of differing or mixed heritages can learn in our educational institutions about their own cultural past and influences, and how they can reconcile that with being a citizen of this country. We have nothing to fear from diversity or from difference. The teaching of history can help to inspire us all, one can learn as much from the grasping ambition of Clive as they can from the duality of the golden oratory and sunken infidelity of Dr King – history is the story of humanity as much as it is of races and peoples, something we are collectively prone to forget from time to time.

Already, there have been significant progresses in the last few years, with the 'Black and British' series on the BBC from 2016 which dedicated several programmes to the promotion of a black narrative that was inclusive, educational and inspiring. Efforts such as those should continue to take place, for the good of all.

A full and rich curriculum that teaches people about truth but does not strip them of cultural or national pride is one that we should teach all our students. To be patriotic, as I and so many are, is not to be blindly accepting or dismissive of the more disreputable acts our shared ancestors have indulged and engaged in, but it is to be aware and understanding, even firmly condemning, of the faults, as well as the successes, that are an inevitable part of humanity, of history and of the world around us and the world around our

ancestors. To believe this is not to excuse, but to explain. To believe this is not to deny pain, it is to share the pain, to atone and acknowledge the faults of this country and many other civilisations. It is not to treat with equanimity or with dismissive indifference, but with respect and understanding that while we cannot change the past, we can influence our future. We should never run scared of who we once were and accept as if it was a different universe. Nor should the issues of so-called 'white fragility' be a barrier to the exposition of truth, but it is true to say that for those many loyal and upstanding citizens of the Windrush generation who came to this country and for whom many never returned to their country of origin, it is a place we call home, a place we accept warts and all, a place where it is illogical and wrong for those of different skin colours to feel more passionately or more heatedly about the injustices and wrongs which have been committed against those that have looked like us, spoke like us, thought like us and felt like us, than we do ourselves. In our collective hearts and conscience, we can atone for the wrongs of yesterday by making right the problems of today and of tomorrow – acknowledge the past, atone for the past, learn from the past but never be consumed or distracted by the past. We have come a far way and have further yet to travel, but let us make good on the hopes and promises of those who strove to make life better for themselves and their descendants, who gave thanks to higher powers that the bitter, dark days of subjugation and servitude are, at long last, at an end. Now is the time to make good the halted progress, to make proud those whose lives were spent under the thumb of oppression and human greed.

It is important to learn history together – it is often the case that we learn history through our own eyes and perspectives, and so we fail to understand the concerns of others who view history through a different lens, breeding intolerance or scepticism towards the concerns of others. As one correspondent of mine wrote, 'If and when we read history through another's eyes – a white person reading 'their' history through a black person's eyes – maybe we begin to gain a more nuanced, more accurate sense of history, and so a better sense of how history may shape our joint futures'. As always, learning from both sides of the discussion helps to make us more informed and more aware as we forge our future together.

A bit of moderation, of decency, empathy and of nuanced balance goes a long way to understanding the world that went before today, the world we now inhabit today and the world that will arise in the days that lie ahead.

Darian Murray-Griffiths
Christ Church, Oxford
October 2020

Conclusion

'So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.'

Matthew 20:16

'Though with great difficulty I am got hither, yet now I do not repent me of all the trouble I have been at to arrive where I am. My sword I give to him that shall succeed me in my pilgrimage and my courage and skill to him that can get it. My marks and scars I carry with me, to be a witness for me that I have fought his battles who now will be my rewarder'

The Pilgrim's Progress

It is a much harder task to make peace than it is to make war – amity and concord requires persistence, understanding and compassion to reach the intended goal. The same has been true throughout history, and the same is true now. As this essay has attempted to demonstrate, the solutions to the problems of community tensions, racial inequalities and disparities are ones that are within reach, that are practicable. It will take common sense, determination and moderation. Perhaps, most of all, it will take time, but it will be time well spent if and when one remembers that we treat with known entities, with neighbours, with friends. These are not the days when we dealt with issues, with people, as mere 'problems' and 'burdens', or as simply the 'enemy within'. In a world increasingly divided, fractured and uncertain, it will be of immense benefit to us all to remind ourselves of the common cause and interests that unite so many of us, of the reason why we endure and prosper because we are all of one nation. Differences and distinctions need not become divisions and separations, for a house divided against itself cannot stand.

It is my firmest hope that this commission takes seriously the recommendations and perspectives I have outlined, indeed that it informs a government who will make substantial progress towards making one nation, towards that more cohesive, peaceful and stable society which we all long after. The past year has proven that it is easier to destroy and harder to build. From all sides of the debate, there will be calls to dismantle, to destroy, to tear down whichever institution or programme or symbol, but they are calls which will satisfy emotions but not hard-headed practicalities. Writing this report has only cast my mind back to those who go to school hungry, to those who feel that prestigious universities and institutions are not for people like them, to those who feel outcasts or exiled strangers in their own home and to those who know nothing but lives of crime, intimidation and fear. In writing this report, I hope that I speak for them, but more importantly, that I hear them. For, if the past year has taught us anything, it is that government and those in positions of authority needs to speak less and listen more. No one side has all the answers; no one side has a monopoly on truth or on compassion or on good or bad. The world is full of complexities and oddities, so the problems of centuries and of decades will not be solved in days or months. Realism is needed, but so is hope and fortitude.

Slavery, imperialism and discrimination are facts of our history which we cannot ignore or pretend have not influenced our cultural mores of today. But nor should we ignore the

voluntary sacrifices of many black subjects of the Empire and Commonwealth who felt loyalty and allegiance to the ideals of this country and who felt simultaneously part of this tradition and of their own cultures' tradition. Even today, in multicultural Britain, there are many who very often feel conflicts of loyalties, who feel mixed emotions and divided allegiances but who proudly feel no obligation to make binary choices. That is the way of many. That is the way I too adopt. To choose one side against the other would be to deny a part of oneself. There is a silent majority in this country, I believe, who pine for truth, stability and peace, and who know that there is much more work to be done to make this country more equal, fairer and more amenable to those who have for so long felt like strangers in the place they call home. Already the views of bigots, racists and preachers of hate are combated on a daily basis by the kindness, friendship and simple goodness of millions of people up and down the country who interact with people who look or sound different to themselves in ways which would be unimaginable to those of our grandparents or great-grandparents' generation. We have made improvements, but for many it is not enough. There is systemic racism still, there is unfulfillment still, there is inequality and disparity still. Change is not just needed, but real change. There can be no tokenism or synthetic window-dressing. What we need is an unleashing of potential and a levelling of the playing field for those at the bottom and especially for those who have always felt pushed to the bottom, unable to escape or ascend.

For many in this country, life goes on. We live not in a dystopia or in a hellish place, but many will live in fear, live lesser lives, live incompletely or untrue to self. That just cannot and will not do, not in this day and age. It is my hope that this commission is not an attempt at firefighting or at naked and disingenuous appeasement of the commotions of earlier this year – arrogance and contempt will not heal wounds; it will only inflict them. It is time to put away the shield and the sword and time to build bridges, to extend the olive branch and the helping hand that heals all.

A second chance society should not only be our aim but our guiding principle – that, in spite of all the heartache and tragedy of our history's less proud moments, we still present ourselves with a second chance to put things right, to serve the common good of all and to atone for the sins and faults of previous governments both long ago and not so long ago. Systemic racism needs to be eradicated; people's lives, from whatever backgrounds, need to be ones that are fulfilled to the utmost of their ability. No one should live in fear; no one should feel persecuted because of the skin colour they cannot change; no one at all should feel shame or embarrassment because of their culture or background. There is hope and light at the end of the tunnel but we must continue that long walk on the road to freedom, happiness and concord.

Nearly six decades on from the 'I have a dream' speech of Martin Luther King, we have seen a mixed-race woman marry into our royal family, we have seen black people increasingly attend Oxbridge universities and break the glass ceilings of traditionally exclusive institutions and citadels of privilege. But we still live in a society where certain authorities and people treat others based on the 'colour of their skin', not the 'content of their

character'. We need more representation from diverse communities in various fields of industry and academia, but the solution is emphatically not to manufacture diversity or to be led into the realms of tokenism or 'shop-window diversity' but to tackle the root causes of inequality and social injustice and make anew. To assume that mere statistics and numbers will solve or alleviate inequalities is to believe that merit and hard work are secondary to the seemingly most important thing: skin colour. The last thing any person of colour wishes to be told is that they are successful because of their skin colour, not because of any merit or talent. In our rush and our deep desire to be 'allies' or to be actively 'anti-racist', we must not slip into the realms of reductionism or patronising victimisation of people who are strong, talented and intelligent – it is a tendency all too prominent in this and many other years. The black community is varied, beautiful and awe-inspiring – it is most emphatically not monolithic or homogenous, and any attempts to treat it as such are only revealing of limited outlooks of people who, quite frankly, do not 'get it' as much as they would like to think they do.

Now is the time to bring the cast-out and ignored into the mainstream; now is the time to bring into the warmth those who have shivered for too long in the cold. Because, as always, the solution lies in speaking less and listening more to those who wish to tell their stories. That way, we can make that dream that Martin Luther King spoke of six decades ago – one that was carried throughout numerous generations of toil and struggle for equality and fairness from our social superiors, and kept so, so many discriminated-against and persecuted peoples hopeful of better days to come – we can make that famous and inspiring dream at long, long last a reality. A reality for all who call this great country home.

Appendix 1: 'Making the Dream A Reality: Towards a Better Tomorrow' – Speech by the Author (Darian Murray-Griffiths) to the Black Lives Matter rally in Worcester, June 2020

"Six decades ago, the world saw everyday people become heroes as they left the tedious humdrum of their ordinary lives to become involved in the fight for change, in the struggle for freedom and in the name of justice and equality. Though we, and even the magnitude of our issues, may be much smaller than those great heroes and titans of the Civil Rights Movement, today it is in their footsteps that we walk. But I don't do so happily. I don't do so excitedly. Because I didn't think that, 60 years on, the phrase 'Black Lives Matter' should be a controversial topic, or that inequality based on race and the colour of skin, should still exist. Frankly, I don't want to be here, out protesting. I'd much rather be doing something else. But like so many of you, when I first heard of the death of George Floyd, I was struck with the same profound sense of indignation and disbelief that we perhaps know all too well when we hear of cases of excessive police brutality and conduct. The reaction that often starts with *'Not again?*'. *'Not another unarmed black man dead?*'. And yet we see the same scenes, the same scenarios and the same outcomes time and time again. A vicious circle of self-perpetuating fear and mistrust, of anger and aggravation, of pain and inconsolable loss. That same vicious circle has brought us here to today. Where we say

together with one voice 'We are sick and tired of being sick and tired'. When we say 'Enough is enough'. Because now, more than ever, is the time for a change. Now is the time for our generation to pick up the torch of freedom and justice left by those that went before us.

From what we know, George Floyd was a man, not a black man, but a man, who struggled, as so many people do, to turn his life around after his run-ins with the law. He was not a hero or a martyr, but an ordinary man of African-American descent who deserved justice, who deserved to be treated with decency, dignity and the fair-minded benefit of the doubt. At the very least, he deserved to reach the courtrooms. In short, he deserved to be seen by those four police officers as innocent before proven guilty. Floyd, like every one of us would expect, did not deserve special treatment or special privileges. He deserved to be treated like any other person about to be arrested by the police. He deserved a show of humanity. On that day, those four police officers took the law into their own hands, and through excessive force and a flight from their senses, shamed and stole the dignity not only from George Floyd, not only from people of colour, but from every well-meaning police officer across the world. I'm going to be honest and say that 'I support our police', what I do not and can never support are those few rotten apples who persevere in a rotten and wrong culture that reserves brutality and prejudice for a certain section of society. Our police are there to keep us safe; but just as we condemn Derek Chauvin for using ignorance and prejudice about black men towards Floyd, so must we ensure that we don't prejudicially and ignorantly condemn all police because of the cruel actions of a rotten few. Because we should all know that 2 wrongs will never make a right. We too must not take flight from our senses. It was Gandhi who said 'An eye for an eye and the whole world goes blind'.

Speaking today as a young mixed-race man, I know that in my life I wish to be seen as Darian, who happens to be black, not as that black boy called Darian. Because if today is truly to matter, it should surely be that society, all of us, see each other as people, that we are not exclusively defined by the colour of our skin or the places our ancestors hailed from. It saddens me that, nearly 6 decades on, I feel a need to repeat MLK's words from his 'I have a dream' speech, that we view each other based on the 'content of our character' not the 'colour of our skin'.

It is in the small things that the rot starts. It's in the overuse by people of colour of the n-word as if it could ever be a term of endearment when we should all by now know that it was only ever a term of supremacy, abuse and disempowerment, a foul word that was the last thing to be heard as blacks were lynched and suffocated to death in the Deep South of the USA. The rot starts when race is used as a form of everyday comedy or tasteless humour, when we feed on that which separates us. The rot starts in the glorification of violence, gangs and hateful music rather than in the glorification of a decent education and a well-meaning career. It starts with the rot of substance misuse and alcoholism becoming a way of life.

We should know that true liberation, true freedom, starts from within, starts with the person you see in the mirror. Success and opportunity can never be handed down as a gift,

but earned and worked for. It's not glamorous but, with education, tolerance, self-respect and hard work, then we as a people can open up the path of success and equality. Floyd was turning his life around, and perhaps he too realised that his earlier life's misdeeds were fruitless, worthless and unnecessary. Though it wasn't always a straight road, Floyd saw that the way to success, the way to happiness, lay in doing what was right. It makes his death more tragic. Let us learn from his example, not repeat his mistakes. And draw the right lessons.

If anyone here today seriously believes that the answer to his death, and to his life, is to spread more division, more hate, more blame, I say think of what George Floyd left behind: a 6 year old daughter, now fatherless. Is the world, in the aftermath of Floyd's death, in which she grows up, to treat her based on the colour of her skin, or the content of her character? Is that world to be one of opportunity, or lost hope? Love or hate? Suspicion or trust?

A change is gonna come. A change MUST come. For those countless peoples across the world, wherever they may be, who walk and live in fear and who see life as devoid of meaning or security, we protest for them. Here, in the UK, we know that there is still much more work to be done. And yes there are racists and there is racism within this country, but I refuse to believe that the UK itself is a racist country, because I and so many others have prospered and taken opportunities precisely *because* I live in this country and this place.

It is because I love this country that I am resolved to be part of the fight to uproot evil and injustice and discrimination wherever it may still reside or exist. In these coronavirus times, this renewed sense of community spirit inspires me to hope that this realisation worldwide *that there is so much more that unites us than that which divides us*, will lead us all to be more vigilant, more aware, and more emboldened to call out those injustices or wrongs which affect our neighbours, our friends, our fellow humans, whatever the skin colour or nationality may be. I, for one, am sick and tired of division and confrontation.

I hope for a day when all lives really do matter. The very essence of Black Lives Matter is NOT because black lives only matter or because black lives matter most, but because to so many around the world, there is a feeling that certain inequalities persist, that the world is perhaps biased against them, that the forces of law and order are not on their side. And from that, they believe that their life is worthless. Today, we proclaim that MLK's dream is not a dusty, long-lost hope, but an inspiration that we in the world of today may strive to make into the world of tomorrow. In doing this, our anger will not be futile. When we proclaim 'no justice, no peace', we aren't issuing threats, we are issuing prophecies. Prophecies that until there is justice, until there is equality, until there is fairness, then peace shall never reign. Because peace can only triumph when there is no longer fear and no longer mistrust. It's not just peace in our life and in our own time, but peace of mind, which we all deserve to have.

It is through that peace that we may finally begin the hard work to heal the fractures and wounds of history and move forward as one. It cannot be done by violence, by hate, by

having a chip on our shoulder. In America, we are seeing anger, but we are also seeing signs of friendship between police and protester.

Across the *world*, we see an uncontainable outbreak of more than sympathy: we see people *connecting* to the tales of woe and injustice. Now, we must think what signals, what messages we wish to send to *anyone anywhere* in the world about who and what we are and stand for, and about whether if we allow such miscarriages of justice and abuses of power to prevail, how anyone can sleep easy or feel safe if such actions are deemed tolerable. Whether it be Minneapolis or Hong Kong, we must be prepared to call out the evil and ugly injustices which dare to show their face.

Right now, for many, the world is a scary and a dangerous place where the temptation is, for fear of the unknown, to become something you're not or to accept a lesser place in life. For many, Floyd's death, hot on the heels of Brown and Garner's in 2014, and many others since, has made them cowed, made them walk in fear, made them feel lesser. For many, the social contract between citizen and state has been damaged; for many, their trust in the system has been damaged too. They may even ask 'What is the point anymore?'.

Now is a sad moment in our lives, in history. It is normal to feel despair, anger, hopelessness, confusion and pain. But now is **not** the time to lose faith or hope. Now is the time to be strong, to be *encouraged*. I, for one, have refused to be intimidated or diminished by the events of recent days because I know that the justice and peace for which I long for so very much will only be made possible by acts of courage, acts of forgiveness and acts of responsibility. Violence can never be the way. Violence will not bring back Floyd from the dead. Violence will not make our pain any less. This movement is not about revenge, not about following current social media trends and not about proving that the louder or angrier you are, the more anti-racist you must be. Now is the time to heal, to reflect, to send a message to the world that our peaceful protest today is not an irrational outburst of uncontrolled fury but a demonstration that, all of us here today and across the world, are determined to finally be the change that we wish to see in the years that lie ahead. That our belief in democracy is only stronger as a result. That Floyd's death will not be in vain. That these protests are not the end of the matter, but the beginning of something much more beautiful, much more fruitful, much more positive, much more hopeful.

Through coming together, let us lift the darkness to reveal the light of humanity and of harmony that is long overdue its time. Let our words be the precursors to action. And let our actions speak for those whose voices are oppressed and stilled by the ugly forces of racism, ignorance, and prejudice.

As Floyd struggled to turn his life around, so must we endeavour to turn our world around. To turn it away from the forces of racism, of division, of injustice, inequality and misguided revenge. And to turn it into a world of love, of peace, and, most of all, of unity. Then, and only then, will that famed dream and persistent hope, spoken in whispers and in shouts, that has inspired and carried numerous generations of embattled peoples, at long last become a reality. Only then will we be free, living in peace, living in justice, living in

harmonious security. And, until then, I pray to God Almighty that that day comes ever closer to the present time."

Appendix 2: How the times are changing – Oxford University undergraduate students from the black community in October 2020 – this is how black success can and should look like

Darian Murray-Griffiths
Christ Church, Oxford
October 2020

Bibliography/further reading

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https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/teenage-knife-crime-how-the-harris-academies-are-fighting-back-rg7k8dm6t

'In Black and White: A Young Barrister's Story of Race and Class in a Broken Justice System' – by Alexandra Wilson

'Will Britain Ever Have a Black Prime Minister?' – BBC documentary by David Harewood

'Black and British: A Forgotten History' – book and accompany BBC documentary by David Olusoga