

CWS Departmental Response to BLM

Dear all,

We hope this finds you safe and keeping as well as can be during this challenging time. We are writing today, at a moment of intense personal and communal pain in the wake of the murders of Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, Riah Milton, Dominique Fells, and George Floyd, which have spurred renewed global rage and solidarity in defence of Black lives. These recent events, and the consequent Black Lives Matter protests taking place all over the world (including in York on June 3, where CWS students, alumni, and staff participated), have both directly and indirectly impacted on all members of our community--especially our Black students and students of colour, who we know bear the burdens of systemic and historical racism at all times, and for whom these events would be particularly triggering.

As a Centre, we want to take this moment to express our unequivocal support and solidarity to our students, staff, and alumni of colour, update you on what actions CWS has been taking in support of Black Lives Matter in recent weeks, and open up a space for communal dialogue and mutual support as we take this action forward.

As you know, CWS is not only an academic community, but we are also a community of activists, artists, and politically conscious individuals. Dismantling systemic racism and gender-based violence is work that we do continuously, both during and before the recent events; and this is work we are committed to continuing now and in the future. As the Black Lives Matter movement has been gaining renewed momentum in recent weeks, CWS students and staff have been taking tangible action in defence and support of Black lives by speaking out, protesting, donating to activist organisations fighting police brutality and systemic racism, and volunteering our time and skills to community groups and initiatives supporting the most vulnerable in our communities. The CWS community has been taking this action in the midst of the COVID pandemic, often from within complex and extremely challenging personal circumstances. We want to take a moment to recognise the tremendous courage and resilience so many members of our student, staff, and alumni community have displayed during this trying time.

As a Centre, we have also been reflecting on our activism and positionality as individuals and as a department in this context. On June 11, CWS held a core staff meeting to discuss the work undertaken thus far, the issues raised by our students both informally and in the Open Letter sent to the Centre last week, and the best ways to take meaningful action as a department going forward. The outcomes of this meeting are outlined below.

Anti-racist Action within CWS

Fighting the insidious and multidimensional violence of racism on our communities and systems of learning is work that needs to be tackled on many fronts: in 'real life', the wider university, as well as in CWS. As a Centre, we want to create a space where the

tremendous work and knowledge of our students, staff, and alumni can be recognised, while encouraging and facilitating a continuous constructive dialogue. In recent weeks, this has involved working with and consulting students to gather suggestions for how we can move forward as a Centre, to engage with recent events in diverse ways--both inside and outside the academy--and think through anti-racist strategies we can collectively share and act on.

Some ongoing CWS initiatives include:

- **Reviewing and decolonising our curriculum**, ensuring that it is inclusive and representative of Black voices & histories. De-westernising our curriculum and reading lists by building on the diverse expertise and experiences of CWS staff, as well as encouraging student contributions and voices in the building of reading lists, for example in modules such as Gender & Migration, Feminist Cultural Activism, and Feminist Histories.
- **Building a collaborative resource list** on dismantling systemic racism and decolonising our pedagogical practices & learning. CWS students and alumni are invited to contribute to this resource list on an ongoing basis. A growing Anti-racism & Black Lives Matter Resource List has been included at the end of this letter, and we welcome further additions from students, staff, and alumni.
- **Establishing a Race & Equality Working Group**, comprised of CWS students and staff and reporting within the CWS Board of Studies. The group will liaise with the wider CWS community and consult on key issues pertaining to dismantling visible and invisible racism within the department, its pedagogy, and curriculum.
- **Hosting a CWS community forum**, where we would like to create a space for the sharing of ideas and experience on constructive action we can take, both as a community and as individuals, to fight systemic racism. We are hoping to hold this forum in the coming weeks, so please keep an eye on your university email for updates.

Meanwhile, members of CWS have been, and will continue to, engage with other University offices and teams such as the Library, the Inclusive Learning, Teaching and Assessment (ILTA) special interest group, and the Academic Support Office to foster inclusive teaching and learning practice, including decolonising the curriculum both within the Centre and in the wider University community.

Critical (self-)reflection, mutual care, & solidarity with people of colour in CWS

While recent events, coupled with the COVID pandemic, have impacted on our whole community, as a Centre we want to take a moment to explicitly acknowledge the particular weight of the impact of racist violence and ongoing engagement with Black Lives Matter activism on the people of colour in our community. This is a prime opportunity for us to put our thoughtful seminar discussions and ethically minded feminist research into practice: It is imperative for each member of our community to consider our particular positionality, especially our racial positionality, in relation to recent events and how we, as individuals and a community, should respond to them in the most careful and caring ways possible.

We urge everyone, students, staff, and alumni, to unequivocally support and listen to people of colour within and outside of our community. We must continuously discuss and take charge of our own learning about the impact of systemic racism, as well as the best ways each of us can fight it constructively, to the extent that our individual circumstances, abilities, and positionalities allow. We want to urge each member of our community to truly listen to and support each other during this tremendously challenging and, for many members of our community, traumatic time.

Our Black students and students of colour: we are here for you and we are listening. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us. If you need support but are not sure where to look for it, just reach out to CWS staff and we will offer advice and every support that we can.

We also want to remind all students to take advantage of the host of mental health and well-being services and resources available to you through the University and listed on the [Help and Support pages](#). Do reach out to your pastoral supervisor if you have any questions or need any help or advice.

Volunteering & activism outside of CWS

CWS has close links and staff volunteering with a number of local organisations that support the most vulnerable in our communities, including [RAY \(Refugee Action York\)](#) as well as groups supporting migrant women, young people, and children beyond York. If you would like to take tangible action but have a limited capacity to get involved (especially during the lockdown), you may consider getting involved with some of these initiatives, and/or perusing the growing list of Anti-racism & Black Lives Matter resources we have compiled below.

- **The Shpresa Programme** is currently looking for volunteers to read with children from the Albanian Speaking Community in London, who are not currently in school because of the pandemic. [Find out more about Shpresa here](#). And please email rachel.alsop@york.ac.uk if you are interested in volunteering.
- **Bloody Good Period** provides services and sanitary products to some of the most vulnerable women and girls in our communities, including migrant, asylum-seeking, and refugee women. Period poverty is a problem for many women and girls, and in particular for asylum-seeking women who are having to exist on under £6 a day or the many migrant women who have No Recourse to Public Funds. Many women are in a position where they are having to make a choice between food and sanitary products. During the lockdown, there are options to fundraise, donate to, and raise awareness about the organisation's work. After the pandemic, there will be further options to get involved, which you can explore on their website.

As you are reflecting, mobilising, and engaging in dialogue with each other, please do feel free to share your knowledge, activist/volunteering experience, and anti-racism resources via CWS spaces like the [CWS Student Community Mighty Network](#), the weekly CWS online socials (currently taking place on Tuesday evenings), and the [CWS Student & Alumni Facebook group](#). Please use these spaces for constructive and positive community action and discussion; educate each other and share information about important organisations and activist groups that you feel need more support, volunteering, and involvement; listen to and learn from each other.

Thank you for taking the time to engage and listen, for your patience, and for your willingness to work with us in dismantling racism, gender-based violence, and inequality in our communities, our learning, and our activism. We look forward to listening to your ideas at the forthcoming community forum and taking this work forward as a community.

With well wishes and solidarity,

Bobby, Clare, Evangeline, Giorgia, Rachel, Stevi, Vicki and Victoria

Black Lives Matter & Anti-racism Resources

1. [Practical ways to support BLM in the UK](#): a checklist compiled by members of the Feminist & Women's Studies Association. As it says in the document, please check things yourself and educate yourself on the organisations and/or initiatives you want to support. The owner of this resource list did not author these resources or start the petitions, they have just compiled them to enable people to take tangible action. If you're unsure about anything, please double check things yourself: read up on the latest developments of the cases, and make sure that the organisation/s you want to financially support are legitimate.
2. [List of anti-racism resources compiled by the Centre for Applied Human Rights](#)
3. [Free syllabus on Institutionalised Racism on JStor](#)
4. Rutazibwa, O. U. (2020). Hidden in Plain Sight: Coloniality, Capitalism and Race/ism as Far as the Eye Can See. *Millennium*, 48(2), 221–241: [A review essay on four monographs on systemic racism and anticoloniality](#)
5. [The Northern Police Monitoring Project](#): an independent campaigning and advocacy organisation to educate, empower and organise the people of Manchester and the surrounding area in the face of increasing police harassment, violence and racism. Donate, learn & get involved. Dr. Katy Sian from York's Department of Sociology is actively involved in this organisation.
6. [Inquest](#): the only charity in the UK providing expertise on state-related deaths and their investigation to bereaved people, lawyers, advice and support agencies, the media and parliamentarians. Donate, learn & get involved.
7. The University of York's [pages for Reporting Hate Crime or a Hate Incident](#)
8. [Black Minds Matter](#) (making mental health topics relevant and accessible for all black people in the UK).
9. The [Black Lives Matter](#) website collates a number of resources and petitions
10. Sage Publishing have made freely available a number of [resources on Structural Racism & Police Violence](#)
11. [Black Cultural Archives](#): the only national heritage centre dedicated to collecting, preserving and celebrating the histories of African and Caribbean people in Britain.
12. ['Being Anti-Racist'](#) (National Museum of African-American History and Culture)
13. Ellie Gore, ['Covid-19 and Racial Capitalism in the UK: Why Race and Class Matter for Understanding the Coronavirus Pandemic'](#) (University of Sheffield)
14. David Olusoga, ['Britain is not America. But we too are Disfigured by Deep and Pervasive Racism'](#) (*The Guardian*)

15. Layla F. Saad, '[Do the Work: an Anti-Racist Reading List](#)' (*The Guardian*)
16. Amia Srinivasan, [Under Rhodes](#) (London Review of Books)
17. Petition for [Racial Justice in UK Higher Education Institutions](#)
18. Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Duke University Press, 2012)
19. Jason Arday and Heidi Safia Mirza (eds), *Dismantling Race in Higher Education: Racism, Whiteness and Decolonising the Academy* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018)
20. Heidi Mirza, *Race, Gender and Educational Desire: Why Black Women Succeed and Fail* (Routledge, 2009)
21. Katy Sian, *Navigating Institutional Racism in British Universities* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019)
22. [The Black Curriculum](#) (Schools)
23. [The Angelou Centre, Newcastle](#): provides support, refuge & advocacy to women and girls, and especially BAME and refugee women, girls, and children. They also offer tailored services to those with no recourse to public funds; those who are survivors of domestic and sexual violence; those who live in insecure or unsafe accommodation; those who have underlying health/mental health conditions; those who are elderly and isolated; those who have disabilities or learning differences.
24. The new, local initiative York Anti-Racist Collective, organized by CWS friends and students Amy Bullard and Imogen White. Contact them via email: antiracistcollective@gmail.com
25. Tips on finding anti-bias children's books
<https://www.embracerace.org/resources/where-to-find-diverse-childrens-books>
26. Imkaan. UK based women's organisation dedicated to addressing violence against Black and Minority Ethnic women. <https://www.imkaan.org.uk/>