

Dear Dr. Greene, The Council, and Board of Governors of Clifton College,

We are writing following the tragic death of George Floyd in the U.S., and in the spirit of confronting systemic racism, both here in the UK and across the world. As members of the Clifton College community, we feel compelled to ask what the school is planning in the wake of the UK's Black Lives Matter movement, and to explore how we might contribute to this process. This moment calls for us *all* to reflect on how we can use our resources to unravel structural racism in the UK. We ask that, in response to this letter, the school refers specifically to the changes that will be enacted at the College.

Recent protests in Bristol have brought the city's shameful history to a global audience. Clifton College, like many other public boarding schools in the UK, does not have a student body or teaching staff which represents the diversity of Bristol and wider British society. It is, therefore, especially important that the College is proactive in its approach to antiracism as this burden has, for too long, been wholly carried by the UK's BAME population. The school's website speaks of its 'richly diverse and connected school environment', and this is, perhaps, supported by the great number of nationalities catered for by the school. However, antiracism must go deeper than diversity quotas and statistics. As the landmark 1985 Swann Report says, '*multicultural understanding has to permeate all aspects of a school's work. It is not a separate practice that can be welded onto existing practices*'. It is encouraging that the school sees the importance of 'preparing [students] for life in the real world, not a bubble'. However, it is clear that much more can be done, in a material sense, to support this statement.

It has become clear, in this time, that many of us are not equipped when it comes to discussing race and racial injustices. Too often, those of us who are white tip-toe around the topic, for fear of saying the wrong thing. This is a problem with roots in the UK's National Curriculum, which broadly fails to acknowledge the uglier aspects of Europe's colonial history. The findings of *The Impact of Omission Survey*, released earlier this month, lay bare this indisputable truth. Below are listed some of the responses from UK participants:

- 86.2 % were educated on the Tudors in-depth as part of their curriculum, whereas only 9.3% learned about the role of slavery in British Industrialisation.
- 72.2% learned about The Great Fire of London, whereas only 7% learned about Britain's colonisation of Africa.
- 71.5% were taught about the Battle of Hastings, whereas only 5.2% learned about the role of BAME soldiers in WWI and II.
- When asked: "The national curriculum for history aims to ensure that all pupils: "gain and deploy a historically grounded understanding of abstract terms such as 'empire', 'civilisation'"'. During discussions of the British Empire in school, to what extent was the role of slavery discussed?"

5.5% replied 'to a significant extent'

33% replied 'to a limited extent'

34.9% replied 'It was mentioned briefly'

26.6% replied 'not at all'

(This data can be found via <https://impactofomission.squarespace.com/survey>)

As Joshua Bailey writes in his online petition to change the UK History curriculum: “By excluding the evils of British Imperialism from the school curriculum, along with the ways in which members of the African Diaspora contributed to the British nation-state, British children are robbed of understanding how colonialist ideology was implemented. This stunts the growth of racial equality in the UK and hinders the racial esteem of Black British children.”

As the school’s website states, Clifton College strives to ‘lead[s] the way as one of the best Public Boarding Schools in the country’. We believe that, without putting this issue at the very centre of its plans, Clifton College will fail in the example it sets to other schools in the region. We, as members of the Clifton community, do not want to see this happen. As well as asking for the school’s perspective on this issue, the writers of this letter would like to offer our hand in helping with this process. As a starting point, may we respectfully suggest that the following areas are given attention:

1. Diversify Formal Curriculum

As previously mentioned, the National Curriculum in the UK inadequately represents the contributions made by black, Asian and minority ethnic people to our shared history. Unsurprisingly, this is reflected in Clifton College’s internal curriculum (as seen in the year-by-year summary booklets). As one of the UK’s public schools, are we right in thinking that Clifton has *some* flexibility over its syllabus outside of major examination years? Additionally, if the National Curriculum were to be reformed, do public schools have an influential voice in this conversation?

We have included a list of books for library consideration which, of course, is open and incomplete.

2. Generate Conscious Conversation

By way of opening up this conversation, we recommend that a survey is distributed amongst the Upper School and Alumni students, to gain better insight into experiences of inequality or racism at the school.

Furthermore, as a school that prides itself on the fullness of its education, Clifton College has resources to educate its students in antiracism both inside and outside the classroom. Antiracism is about action and education in equal measure. As Angela Davis has said, ‘it is not enough to be non-racist, we must be antiracist’. Through platforms such as the Sixth Form Lecture, Chapel Talks and weekly PSHE classes, the school is in a position of power to actively elevate Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic voices. With the resources it has at its disposal, we believe that Clifton College could set a powerful precedent in antiracism to its students and wider community. However, if its platforms continue to be dominated by the white and privileged, the school could not claim to be anything more than non-racist.

3. Diversify Recruitment

Labour MP Dianne Abbott is recently quoted as saying: “you can’t be what you can’t see”. The dismantling of structural racism is, clearly, a collective struggle. But this letter asks that Clifton College reflect on the diversity of its workforce, and consider how this might affect the worldview of its impressionable students. This is particularly urgent amongst teaching staff, who both directly and indirectly shape the worldview of their students.

Furthermore, if diverse recruitment is a challenge, how will Clifton College positively contribute to diversifying the teaching profession?

4. Unconscious Bias Training

As much as the school must focus on the moulding of its students, it is similarly urgent that its teachers are educated in the prevalence unconscious biases in the classroom. This is especially pressing in schools that afford their teachers more freedom in designing their syllabus. This must be delivered by an external body, and we hope will become a prerequisite to being employed by the school.

5. Additional Suggestions

- Drafting and enforcing an Antiracist Code of Conduct, which offer students a platform for anonymously raising race-related issues.
- Creating the role of Head of Diversity who, together with student representatives, helps monitor the school's diversity initiatives.
- Create awareness days or events that celebrate and share the different cultures of students.

We have collated a list of useful resources (to be found at the end of this letter), which express our desire to work together with the school on this issue.

At the time of writing, the Black Lives Matter movement is gathering momentum in the UK and throughout the world. It is now incumbent on the UK's institutions to put their resources behind it. We hope that Clifton College recognizes the gravity of this situation, and take the meaningful action required in order to be part of the solution. We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Current students, Alumni, and members of the Clifton College community.

Useful Resources

Learning Tools:

[Bristol's Black History](#)

[Bristol and The Slave Trade](#)

[The Black Curriculum](#)

[Justice in June - lesson plan for white people/non-Black POC on becoming an active ally](#)

[The Great Unlearn Learning Platform](#) (membership fees)

[Black in Britain Resources](#)

[Black Lives Matter Resources](#)

['Checking Out Me History'](#) by John Agard (Video)

['What I wasn't taught in school'](#) from Word on the Curb (Video)

Management Tools:

[How to build an actively anti-racist company](#)

[White supremacy culture](#)

[A Framework for Action in Response to Moments of Outrage & Crisis](#)

[Harvard Implicit bias test](#)

[The Impact of Omission: A survey to investigate the extent to which British Imperial history is explored in the curriculum of compulsory education in the U.K.](#)

[The Anti-Racism Guide by Nova Reid](#)

[What If I Say The Wrong Thing? 25 Habits for Culturally Effective People by Vernā A. Myers](#)

Books for Library Consideration

FICTION

Children of Blood and Bone - Tomi Adeyemi

My Sister the Serial Killer - Oyinkan Braithwaite

Queenie - Candice Carty-Williams

Girl, Woman, Other - Bernardine Evaristo

Kintu - Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi

Half of a Yellow Sun - Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

The Private Joys of Nnenna Maloney - Okechukwu Nzelu

Such a Fun Age - Kiley Reid

The Wormwood Trilogy (*Rosewater*, *The Rosewater Insurrection*, *The Rosewater Redemption*) - Tade Thompson

The Bluest Eye - Toni Morrison

Beloved - Toni Morrison (fiction albeit inspired by the life of Margaret Garner)

I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings - Maya Angelou

Americanah - Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

A Map To The Door of No Return - Dionne Brand

At The Full and Change of Moon - Dionne Brand

Freshwater - Akwaeke Emezi

NON-FICTION

Slay In Your Lane: The Black Girl Bible - Yomi Adegoke and Elizabeth Uviebinené
Natives: Race and Class in the Ruins of Empire - Akala
Black, Listed: Black British Culture Explored - Jeffrey Boakye
Don't Touch My Hair - Emma Dabiri
Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race - Renni Eddo-Lodge
What a Time to be Alone - Chidera Eggerue
"Kill the Black One First" - Michael Fuller
There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack - Paul Gilroy
Brit(ish): On Race, Identity and Belonging - Afua Hirsch
This Book is Anti-Racist: 20 lessons on how to wake up, take action, and do the work - Tiffany Jewell
How To Be an Antiracist - Ibram X. Kendi
We Need to Talk About Race: Understanding the Black Experience in White Majority Churches - Ben Lindsay
Taking Up Space: The Black Girl's Manifesto for Change - Chelsea Kwakye and Ore Ogunbiyi
Black and British: A Forgotten History - David Olusoga
Afropean: Notes from Black Europe - Johny Pitts
Me and White Supremacy - Layla F Saad
The Good Immigrant - Nikesh Shukla
White tears, brown scars - Ruby Hamad
Playing In the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination - Toni Morrison
White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism - Robin DiAngelo (white author)
The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House by Audre Lorde
I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou
Swing Time by Zadie Smith
Diversify: Six Degrees of Integration by June Sarpong

OTHER

Still I Rise by Maya Angelou - poetry
Sister Outsider by Audre Lorde - speech, essays and poetry
Black Girl Magic by Mahogany L Browne