

# Want to help defeat racism? Here's how you can use your power for good

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**A**s a black person, sometimes it's hard to know whether to laugh or to

cry. From what I could see, most of the men pulling down the statue of Edward Colston, placing their knees on its throat and then pitching it into the River Avon were white. It's a similar story in protests across the United States. Sure, TV reporters went out of their way to interview black demonstrators but on the face of it, it seems that even in a global outcry against black subjugation, people of colour aren't allowed to control their own protest.

Don't get me wrong. I am glad that people of every colour and background are peacefully making their voices heard. I can even swallow the Instagram post of an impeccably middle-class white couple "taking the knee" in front of their Aga without laughing; I know it's meant well. But let me address myself directly to our white supporters: if you really want to help, do something that matters.

I don't care too much about statues: a relative of mine was once jailed for allegedly participating in a (successful) plot to blow up a statue of Queen Victoria during the independence campaign back home in what was British Guiana. But if you're going to target the likes of Edward Colston, where does it stop? What about the statues of William Gladstone in Manchester, Liverpool and London? The Gladstone family were one of the British Empire's largest beneficiaries of compensation paid after the abolition of slavery, despite having opposed abolition

in 1834. Two years before in his maiden speech in the Commons, the future prime minister made a staunch defence of the West Indian slave owners. We know that there are hundreds of thousands of living monuments to the legacy of the Gladstone plantations walking the streets of British cities; I am one of them.

But dancing around the symbolic corpse of a long-dead slave trader or even a Victorian prime minister is never going to bring about meaningful change. The impressive mayor of Bristol, Marvin Rees, did not succumb to the temptation to praise protesters; nor did he condemn them. But in interviews you could sense his exasperation at the focus on a single incident at the expense of his painstaking work on improving education and job opportunities for ethnic minorities.

So, I hear you say, you keep telling us that the point about racism is that black folks don't have the power to make things change and we do. But you sneer at us when we try to help and you condemn our inaction when we cheer humbly from the sidelines. It's a fair challenge; so let me try to answer it in practical terms.

First, use your own power to make change happen. Most senior professionals often bring a team with them when they move jobs. They insist that the organisation they join has the right values and that it lives by them. So, next time you sign a contract, insist on an "inclusion rider" giving you the right to make sure that your own hiring policy guarantees diversity. If they really value you, they'll say yes. And by the way, that goes double for the bosses of our increasingly diverse civil service, led by a largely white cadre of senior Whitehall mandarins. The Commission for Racial Equality described the top ranks of the public service as the "snowy peaks" back in 2004; I'm afraid the joke still works.

Second, hire decent headhunters. Hardly any senior people in our big firms, public bodies or key charities are black. I am chairman of an executive recruitment firm; I'm proud that last year we placed hundreds of senior individuals in roles; half of them were women and a quarter were people of colour. The talent is there. Some of

our top recruitment firms promise diversity but deliver the same-old, same-old. They need to raise their game.

Third, if you don't know what the problem is, you can't solve it. Britain's oversensitive data protection regime is one of the biggest obstacles to cracking minority disadvantage. We are told by the authorities that they won't let companies collect ethnicity data because of privacy concerns. But explain to me, or anyone else who looks like me, how on earth they think I'm keeping my ethnicity a secret from my workmates or, frankly, anyone I run into on a bus. It's time the bureaucracy got out of the way and let us get to the facts.

Most of all, stop treating the topic of race as though it is a dead rat: to be touched only while wearing latex gloves and preferably to be removed from the premises as quickly as possible before people start to feel queasy and it turns toxic. We will never solve this problem unless and until we are ready to talk, talk exhaustively, and talk with honesty, generosity and courage. We're waiting for the call.