8/6/20

#Black Lives Matter

Message to SPIR Students (cc staff)

Dear SPIR Students,

I am writing as Head of School to affirm SPIR’s solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement. Racism is murderous. We have seen it repeatedly over centuries of oppression and injustice and we are seeing it now directly in the homicide of George Floyd, and indirectly in the radically unequal effects of the global Covid-19 pandemic experienced by people of colour.

The majority of our students in SPIR are people of colour, the majority of staff, and particularly of academic staff in leadership positions, are white. It is particularly vital for those of us who have benefited from systematic racial privilege to take responsibility for addressing these deep injustices. We remain deeply committed to challenging racism in SPIR and supporting anti-racist actions that seek to push back against the criminalisation and devaluation of black lives in our own campus neighbourhood and elsewhere. In this vein, many members of our school have donated to local and national anti-racist campaigns in the UK. These include Black Lives Matter UK, The Runnymede Trust and The Stephen Lawrence Fund. You can find out more about the important work carried out by these organisations and others by following the links at the bottom of the page.

SPIR students have asked me not only to make clear the School’s support for Black Lives Matter, but also to explain what actions the School is taking to address racism and structural racial inequality in higher education. Essentially there are two main areas of work: 1) improving the diversity of our curriculum in terms of substantive content and sources; 2) monitoring, measuring and researching reasons for patterns of inequality in things like student attainment, staff appointments and promotion so that we can improve our systems to eliminate such inequalities. One pressing current example of this is the differential effects of the current pandemic on people of colour, and the need to make sure our systems for dealing with ECs are sensitive to all student circumstances. One of our SPIR Professors, Rainbow Murray is leading on an equalities impact assessment of the effects of Covid-19 for the university as a whole.

Racism and structural racial inequality must be eliminated. As a school we have a responsibility to ensure that our students feel both safe and welcome when they come to study with us. Our staff body has become more diverse in recent years in a concerted effort to overcome entrenched bias and hire excellent colleagues of all backgrounds. As researchers and teachers of Politics and IR we have a particular responsibility to ensure that the material we deliver to our students does not further entrench racialised hierarchies. Any progress we have made so far in tackling racism and structural racial inequality has been at best partial and inadequate, and we continue to try to improve. The SPIR Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Committee leads this work, along with the Teaching and Learning Committee, and the Education Conversation that started in SPIR in 2019.

It is SPIR policy that any new modules give full consideration to how proposed module content and reading lists avoid entrenching racial hierarchies. It is also SPIR policy that existing modules are subject to review by the Teaching and Learning Committee. We very much value participation of students in helping to improve what we do. Please do communicate your concerns through your representatives on the Student Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC) or the EDI Committee, or if you prefer send them direct to the Co-Directors of the EDI Committee (see contact email addresses below). We are also planning to hold a Coffee and Politics session soon for staff and students to explore and reflect on these issues. At the same time, SPIR is clear that it is not the responsibility of Black, Asian and minority ethnic/global majority colleagues and students to bear the burden of this work. It is, rather, a collective endeavor for all of us, and should be a key responsibility for those of us entrusted with leadership positions.
Useful SPIR Contact Addresses

SPIR EDI Committee Student Representatives

spir_ug_edi@qmul.ac.uk (to contact UG EDI student reps)
spir_pgt_edi@qmul.ac.uk (to contact PGT EDI student reps)
spir_phd_edi@qmul.ac.uk (to contact PGR EDI student reps)

SPIR EDI Committee Co-Chairs: k.hutchings@qmul.ac.uk; c.gabay@qmul.ac.uk

Links to relevant NGOs and campaigns

- https://www.runnymedetrust.org/
- https://blacklivesmatter.com/
- https://www.stephenlawrence.org.uk/
- https://netpol.org/
- http://www.tmg-uk.org/
- https://www.4frontproject.org/

Learning Resources

We know that recent events have had a deep impact on many members of our SPIR community. As academics, we also understand that this is a moment for listening and learning. If you have been moved by the events of the past week and wish to learn more about the issues of discrimination, racialised violence and empire that have been amplified by the #BLM protests here in the UK, the SPIR EDI committee recommend some e-readings below.

- Khalwant Bhopal “White Privilege” (Bristol: University of Bristol Policy Press, 2018)
- Paul Gilroy “There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack” (London: Routledge, 2002)
- Nadine El-Enany, *(B)ordering Britain: Law, Race and Empire* (Manchester University Press, 2020)