



1st December 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

We write in support of Gloria Daniel's timely and important Black Lives Matter blue plaque project.

Longstanding calls to acknowledge racism as part of the continuing afterlife of transatlantic slavery and colonialism, and Britain's historical role in these atrocities, are currently receiving mainstream political and media attention in the UK. The ways in which slavery and colonial rule are memorialised is one focus of scrutiny and concern, and the question of what should be done about statues and commemorative plaques that express national or civic pride in white Britons who actively profited from their involvement slavery and/or colonialism (Edward Colston is one of many examples) is being debated.

Some are demanding the removal of such monuments and plaques on grounds that their continued tolerance in public space symbolically expresses the continuing devaluation of black life; some assert that their removal would be an act of "vandalism" and/or represents an attempt to erase history; others attempt to steer a course between these two opposing views. English Heritage, for example, which is responsible for many statues and monuments in London as well as the city's Blue Plaques Scheme, states that it is working to "[better recognise those groups who have been traditionally unrepresented in history, including the black community... \[And\] with the statues in our care, we need to ensure that the stories of those people already commemorated are told in full, without embellishment or excuses.](#)"

Gloria Daniel's BLM plaque project takes such developments in a powerful, alternative direction. Instead of using plaques to celebrate achievements, it will place them on buildings built, owned or maintained by plantation owners and merchants who, on abolition, were compensated by the British government for loss of their human property. This is an important intervention for three main reasons. First, by identifying the individuals who profited from slavery, and illustrating where the some of the wealth extracted from the misery of the enslaved went (i.e., into businesses, lavish residences, cathedrals, theatres, etc.), it will inform and educate the passing public about the extent to which the growth and prosperity of particular cities – like Bristol – and Britain as a whole, depended on slave trading and slavery. Second, identifying plantation owners and merchants by name will be of special interest to the descendants of those they enslaved who still carry their names or have who ancestors did, opening up the possibility of conducting further research on their own family history. Last but not least, since the wording of the plaques will also honour the memory of the enslaved, the project will make a tangible contribution to reparatory history.

Yours truly,

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