

What's the point of diversity without inclusion?



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I was raised in the rainbow streets of East London, the UK's most diverse region, and possibly the world's. Around me was a wealth of culture, and from that, came a wealth of experience, stories and philosophies that influenced my own identity. "Where are you from?", a simple question, would be enough to start a long road of nostalgia and storytelling with most people you would meet. I never realised that I was taking this diversity for granted. My reality was that I could be whoever I wanted to be, and in the sea of colourful faces, I never had to live up to others' material expectation of me based on my

skin colour. This shroud of comfortable invisibility was taken from me upon arriving in Cambridge.

Driving into town on that fateful October day, I knew not to expect what I had always been surrounded by. Older school friends and enough Cambridge YouTubers had warned me enough of the hypervisibility that I would face, that I would always stick out, even without trying. Sitting in lectures at Sidgwick Site and spending nights out on the town, I came to terms with the newfound self-awareness that I would be dealing with for the next three years in this city. I found myself unwillingly understanding that I was not just 'Natanim' here, but 'Natanim' plus all the identities and perceptions placed on me from people who did not grow up with the same ethnic and cultural diversity that I did.

I threw myself into access work in my first year. I was not naïve to think that my presence here meant that the University had 'fixed' its access problem and so I shouldered the responsibility of being the access point for so many students in whom I saw myself. I would speak to prospective students who looked like me and I would tell them how important it was that they applied and that they came to Cambridge. I would remind them of the legacy

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Natanim at Matriculation,
pictured in Orchard Court.



they would be leaving, the inspiration they would become and space they would be occupying. The future Cambridge that I saw in my head was a long way away, but it started with myself becoming the domino in changing this University from what I saw, and this began by me doing everything I could to make Cambridge accessible. By the end of my first year, I realised the Cambridge I was promoting was not ready for them. I had spent a year dodging awkward conversations with Porters, pursing my lips at constant micro-aggressions, listening to friends' harrowing racist encounters in the same Colleges they are expected to call home. I had been working so hard on presenting Cambridge

as an option, that I managed to forget that I would be welcoming these students into a place that was not ready to make them feel at home. It makes you think, what is the point of diversity without inclusion?

I welcome the new revolution of thought and practise that we have seen this year, spearheaded by the global Black Lives Matter movement. Since the murder of George Floyd, both Minneapolis and New York City councils have pledged to move funding from their Police departments towards other youth and social services, signalling a massive change internationally in how we view the police's role in our communities. Most importantly perhaps, the protests have sparked a revolution of thought; we are now rethinking the historical figures we commemorate and the media we think is appropriate to consume. We are now holding people accountable for their words and actions and accountable for making diversity an after-thought. We have seen the impacts of the movement trickle into Cambridge also, but as an institution, Cambridge still has much to do to account for its racist past and attempt to amend the consequences of its complicity in centuries of black exploitation, whilst also showing current black students that their concerns and real lived experiences of racism will be handled seriously and delicately. While we wait for a genuine commitment to the anti-racist struggle from the University, we must still have hope that the demands for diversity, equal justice and respect – not just for black people, but all oppressed and persecuted groups in the world – will one day be met.