

Black Lives Matter

AN INFORMATIONAL LETTER TO THE SOUTH ASIAN COMMUNITY

Hello Aunties and Uncles,

We hope you are doing well during these difficult times. My friends and I would like to bring awareness and educate our community around the topics of Black Lives Matter, especially in light of recent events. In this resource, we hope to shed some light on this topic: why we should care, as well as provide additional resources to learn more, and actionable items to help make a difference. Please read this email in its entirety. We have attached links under each category for further learning.

A Brief History

Black Americans have been oppressed in our country for centuries. Even after slavery was abolished in 1865, racist policies known as the Jim Crow laws were enacted throughout the south which aimed to prevent political and economic gain by Black Americans. Under these segregation laws, Black Americans were supposed to receive “separate but equal” treatment under the law – this was not the reality. Through the Civil Rights Movement, some of the effects of these laws have been reduced. However, systemic racism (how racism affects society through intentional laws and social systems) hasn’t stopped and slavery is not just a thing of the past, it has just taken a new form, namely police brutality and mass incarceration. Conservative politicians have purposefully come up with ways to keep Black Americans oppressed.

Modern day policing evolved from slave patrols which were used to help slave owners recapture and punish slaves who had escaped. Unfortunately, not much has changed as Black men have a 1 out of 1000 risk of being killed during an encounter with the police. In most of these encounters, police are shown to use excessive force, yet face little to no consequences. 99% of killings by the police result in 0 accountability. And we don’t see all of the instances of Black men being

brutalized but not killed by the police. Police violence against Black people is not new, it has just started being recorded. In several states, barbers require more training hours to start working than police officers. Going beyond that, Black Americans are also oppressed by being six times more likely to be incarcerated than White Americans, for the same crime. The War on Drugs in 1971 was a tactic created to target black communities. It was an excuse the government could use to throw black people in jail. White supremacists benefit from mass incarceration as 1 in 4 black men go to jail and cannot vote. Those who aren't imprisoned are stripped of other basic rights such as housing and the ability to vote. This is blatant racism and should not be tolerated. Please watch these short videos as they do a wonderful job explaining this!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4e_djVSag4

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uWU6ZfnqNHM&frags=pl%2Cwn>

<https://mappingpoliceviolence.org>

Why Do We Care?

1. South Asians Benefit from the Civil Rights Movement

The Civil Rights Movement began to and still fights against these horrible instances of racial inequality. We as South Asians in the US, benefit from this movement everyday. In 1927, the Asian Exclusion Act was passed that barred South Asians like us from coming to the United States. The purpose of this law was to preserve the idea of "American Homogeneity" or in other words they wanted to keep America white and untainted by what they believed were lesser cultures. The work of the civil rights movement brought awareness to racist policies and pushed Congress to pass the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 which allowed Asian immigration into the U.S. If it wasn't for the work of Black America, we would not be in the US living the lives we have been. Furthermore, without the efforts of Black America, we would face severe employee discrimination and be openly segregated on the basis of our skin color today.

<https://www.facingsouth.org/2017/02/how-civil-rights-movement-opened-door-immigrants-color>

<https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/segregation-united-states>

2. If we do not support other oppressed communities, who will help us?

While police brutality and hate from white supremacy is mainly directed at Black Americans, it could just as easily happen to us. In 2015, the police assaulted an Indian grandfather named Sureshbhai Patel simply because he looked suspicious. The officers slammed him to the ground and he became partially paralyzed as a result. Charges were dropped against this officer. It is in our best interest to help change these policies and mindsets around policing.

“First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out — Because I was not a socialist.

Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out — Because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out — Because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me — and there was no one left to speak for me.”

- Martin Niemöller

3. Do Black people deserve this? The Model Minority Myth

Now you may be thinking, we South Asians have worked hard to get where we are, why can't other groups do the same? We absolutely have worked very hard and we do deserve our accomplishments. We, South Asian Americans have some of the highest rates of education and median family incomes compared to other ethnic groups. Some use the fact that there is a dark-skinned race that is successful in America as an argument to show that America is not biased to skin color. This model minority narrative is designed to use the successes of our group as weapons to hurt other racial groups, and sometimes our own group. White supremacists know that if people of color come together, they could fight the system, so they support this idea in order to keep us apart.

We must acknowledge that we have certain privileges that allow us to succeed while Black people struggle. Many of us had the opportunity to receive quality education and were selectively recruited to immigrate to the US. Our education levels and work ethic may not be reflective of South Asia as a whole. While many South Asians struggled under the colonial era, Black Americans can be thought to be similarly colonized in the US and they have experienced two centuries of enslavement followed by more persecution. We may face day to day personal racism, but Black Americans face systematic racism on a whole different level as the system is designed to oppress them and keep them struggling. We must not use the model minority idea as a way to differentiate ourselves from Black Americans.

[https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2017/04/19/524571669/model-minority-myth-again-used-as-a-racial-wedge-between-asians-and-blacks?](https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2017/04/19/524571669/model-minority-myth-again-used-as-a-racial-wedge-between-asians-and-blacks?fbclid=IwAR38YDHnNt1r0NiEX63m31BKkeQ_GAsnlXJ8CxPijA0WRvrTDL6ydrEcufs)

[fbclid=IwAR38YDHnNt1r0NiEX63m31BKkeQ_GAsnlXJ8CxPijA0WRvrTDL6ydrEcufs](https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2017/04/19/524571669/model-minority-myth-again-used-as-a-racial-wedge-between-asians-and-blacks?fbclid=IwAR38YDHnNt1r0NiEX63m31BKkeQ_GAsnlXJ8CxPijA0WRvrTDL6ydrEcufs)

4. For those who say, “I am not racist and I think that ALL lives matter”

We are glad you do not actively contribute to racism, but being a non-racist does not change the current institutional framework. Furthermore, we all have inherent biases we should recognize and we benefit from a system that oppresses Black people. In order to make a change, we must rally to be anti-racist and vocal. By staying silent, not talking about this with your family and community, we are helping the oppressor. If you saw the video of George Floyd and felt pity for him, that is not enough. While all lives should matter, currently, some lives are treated as if they do not matter. That’s why we say Black Lives Matter – they have gotten the shortest end of American society’s stick. Saying and supporting Black Lives Matter does not take away from the value of our or other lives. If your leg was mangled and you go to the hospital and say “this leg matters” please treat it, but the doctor says “no, all of you matters” and begins treating the small cuts on your arm, the root of your pain goes untreated.

Rioting

When you see the rioting occurring on the news, please remember that they are not rioting just because of what happened to George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor. They are protesting because this is the tip of the iceberg after hundreds of years of persecution and abiding a system that exists only to hurt them. They no longer want to be silent to a system that oppresses them.

They want to make oppression an issue for the oppressors. Prior to this, Black Americans participated in many examples of peaceful protests, but they have never made a difference. Even so, most of the protests occurring right now are organized to be peaceful. However, there are two sides to the story and some of violence and looting is instigated by the police themselves, looting opportunists, and white supremacist groups that aim to undermine the efforts of Black organizers and want to vilify the protesters. In these protests, people will die and go to jail - this should show how far they have been pushed by systemic racism if they are willing to risk everything. Riots are not the issue, riots are the byproduct of an even worse problem. Furthermore, America is a country built on rioting and looting and that is how we obtained our freedom from our British colonizers.

<https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/clarissajanlim/protesters-violence-george-floyd>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AB6LmkmLnUI&feature=youtu.beDvW_Kd-Ng4wxcwmyraSDgVXo

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/31/us/police-tactics-floyd-protests.html>

<https://www.instagram.com/tv/CA1qAyKBE47/?igshid=12wm29ty77uel>

Colorism & Casteism

Through advertisements for skin-lightening creams, songs that compliment light skin, and praise of lighter-skinned celebrities, Indian media often sends a flawed message that light skin is better. By supporting this idea we also perpetuate anti-blackness. This sentiment is deeply harmful to our culture and to black culture. There are countless stories of young girls in India who have had their self-esteem destroyed after being told that they are not good enough, that they will not get married, and that they will not be successful because of their dark skin. It is time to stop accepting that light is better and spread that dark brown skin is beautiful too. Our worth should not be determined by the melanin in our skin! Please actively deny this idea when you encounter it. Be aware that accepting compliments for light skin, buying skin-lightening products, joking about dark skin and glorifying light-skinned celebrities contributes to this idea.

While it is no secret in our history that skin color has played roles in dangerous ways - this has also played a role in caste. If we look farther back into our history, the relationship between casteism and colorism originated from Aryans who held a systemic ranking according to degrees of color, segregated by 'pure' versus 'polluted' or light versus dark skin tones. Although caste is an outdated and frankly,

demeaning, concept, it has evolved as a notion that is connected to skin tone. It follows the sentiment that the lower your caste, the darker your skin, the more inferior you are. This ideology adds to the overall racism that is being displayed in America today: we should not be worshipping lighter skin, and we should not believe that lighter skinned people are more worthy in all aspects of life. When we stop subconsciously believing these toxic ideologies, that is when we will truly break free from our inner biases and begin treating everyone equally and fairly. This change begins within each of us.

<https://www.theguardian.com/inequality/2017/sep/04/dark-is-beautiful-battle-to-end-worlds-obsession-with-lighter-skin>

<https://www.teenvogue.com/story/colorism-as-an-indian-american-woman>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BLOHSbf9XGI>

If you have read this far with an open mind - thank you. We understand that some of you may be staunchly in agreement while others are not and I know we may appear as too bold for sending this. We only hope to bring awareness and start an important discussion in our community.

Sincerely written by the daughters of this community,
Kavya Balaji, Shilpa Bhat, Shefali Mangtani, Audreela Deb

Additional Resources

Every Indians Debt to Black America:

https://www.huffpost.com/entry/indians-debt-to-black-ame_b_9418972

Trevor Noah explaining BLM:

https://m.youtube.com/watch?feature=youtu.be&v=v4amCfVbA_c

Black Parents teach their kids about dealing with the police:

<https://www.instagram.com/tv/CAYbo9lpCOd/?igshid=174vhoekmqhht>

Systemic inequality:

<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/race/reports/2019/08/07/472617/systemic-inequality-displacement-exclusion-segregation/>

The Black on Black crime argument:

<https://www.vox.com/2016/7/12/12152772/rudy-giuliani-black-on-black-crime-police>

What can you do to help?

DONATE

Black Visions Collective: <https://www.blackvisionsmn.org/>

North Star Health Collective: <https://www.northstarhealthcollective.org/>

Reclaim the Block: <https://www.reclaimtheblock.org/home>

National Bail Out for protesters:

<https://secure.actblue.com/donate/freeblackmamas2020>

Impacted Businesses/NonProfits/Individuals and Where to Donate:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1BQYr->

[O6wWy_JmYWyjv4ELbxY6e8VfmlDqDAtyFZ_Lv8/edit#gid=0](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1BQYr-O6wWy_JmYWyjv4ELbxY6e8VfmlDqDAtyFZ_Lv8/edit#gid=0)

National Police Accountability: <https://www.nlg-npap.org/donate/> or

<https://www.joincampaignzero.org/#vision>

****DO NOT DONATE TO SHAUN KING****

DISCUSS Talk about this issue with family and friends & share resources like this email.

READ If you are in a book club consider choosing books such as Just Mercy, The Hate you Give, So You Want to Talk About Race, The New Jim Crow, Americanah, The Color Purple, The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks, How to be an Anti-Racist

WATCH 13th, The Hate You Give, American Son, Just Mercy, Selma, When They See Us

REFLECT In what ways have I engaged in behaviors that promote stereotyping of Black people? Become aware of your biases, correct your behavior and keep educating yourself.

AVOID CALLING THE POLICE If we can handle the matter ourselves or with better suited organizations we must. By bringing the police into our areas we automatically put Black people at risk. Consider going directly to the station if you need to.

VOTE We need to elect officials who are going to make the changes in our country that will benefit ALL Americans, not just the 1%. So if you are able to, please vote!