



Diversity, Inclusion, and Cultural Competence

June 5, 2020

Our Work Is Urgent: A Message from the Chief Diversity Officer

Dear Students, Faculty, and Staff,

It is only 11 days ago that George Floyd died in police custody. And I, like the nation, am still trying to process my response, emotionally and intellectually. With support from the Presidential Advisory Council on Diversity and Inclusion and the Coalition to Undo Racism at Baruch, I, like you, am compelled to take action.

George Floyd lived to die a painful death. I owed it to him to see the video that recorded his death, not because I am a chief diversity officer, but because I am a human being striving to live a moral and ethical life. I was repulsed, shocked, pained. What I witnessed was not George Floyd's death. But his murder.

I am not black. I am from India. My skin is brown. I live in the U.S., and yes, I have experienced and will experience racism as a nonwhite. But this moment is not about the experiences of people of color. It's not about what has happened to a man who happened to be black. What happened to this man happened *because* he was black. I know that I would not be murdered today for trying to buy something with a counterfeit \$20 bill. None of my male relatives would have been murdered under these circumstances either.

I know this because I have looked at statistics of incarceration for black men. With the Baruch community, I have watched the powerful Netflix documentary *13th*, which shows how our society continues to enslave black men through the prison system.

I know this because unarmed victims of police shootings are more likely to be black (see [Vox's "There Are Huge Racial Disparities in How US Police Use Force"](#)).

With the Baruch community, I read *Slavery's Descendants: Shared Legacies of Race and Reconciliation* and listened to Dionne Ford, one of the co-editors, tell the story of two sisters, one descended from slaveholders and another from the enslaved, and felt the real-life impact of slavery on the descendants of slaves and the lives of the descendants of slaveholders.

We saw Richard Rothstein at Baruch discuss the forgotten history of government policy that reinforced segregation policies, forcing black people to live in “urban ghettos” or the “inner city” more than 100 years after the Civil Rights Act of 1866 was passed.

And, we have discussed Robin DiAngelo’s *White Fragility*.

There are times that I feel I have so much more left to read and to understand. But today, I feel that there is nothing left to understand. After watching George Floyd being murdered, I understand. I empathize with the pain, anguish, and exhaustion that black people suffer over the recurring violence to which they are subject. They have voiced their hurt through protests and letters and, last night, at Baruch’s Virtual Town Hall meeting.

Our work is urgent. As a campus, we will continue to undertake open, painful discussions about what we must do to change the structure that fosters racism and hatred.

Sincerely,

Mona Jha, Esq.

Chief Diversity Officer, Title IX Coordinator, and Section 504/ADA Coordinator

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