

My Priorities for our Leaders
submitted by: **Mihika Gokarn**
Asian Pacific Fund Essay Contest – Letter to the Senator

As an Indian-American who grew up in the Silicon Valley surrounded by regionally similar ethnicities, it was hard to imagine myself as a “minority” until I moved to a city where a majority of the population is Caucasian, which is where I really started to notice racial differences.

After the recent racially-motivated shooting of two men of Indian descent in a Kansas bar, it would be foolish to not try and address the lack of gun control in the United States. As of late, the United States has one of the highest rates of gun violence in the world. I wondered whether my family could be next, should we decide to leave California’s liberal bubble. This event also highlights the racial tensions and misrepresentation of various brown peoples as well as the Muslim community, of which many Asian-Americans are a part of as well. President Trump’s quick reflex to talk about imaginary incidents like what happened in Sweden, as well as his lack of a response to the Kansas bar attack and Quebec mosque shooting by a white nationalist is, quite frankly, alarming. Similar to Black History Month, I believe that Asian Americans should have a period of awareness, highlighting the various cultures of Asia as well as the many religions there like Sikhism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam among many others, that often get misrepresented in the mainstream media.

I also propose working with leaders of cultural groups to help make textbooks more accurate with their representation of non-European cultures. Last year, my history textbook emphasized the outdated and offensive caste system as the main takeaway from the ancient Indian cultures. It never talked about the positive, more long-lasting legacies like the number zero, Arabic numerals, Ayurveda (complementary medicine), and yoga. This reform could help to lessen many of the biases seen against people of Asian descent.

I learned early on that my race may interfere with arbitrary parts of my life. I didn’t anticipate that this may also include jobs and promotions, no matter my own merit. The New York Times discovered that the same résumé with more ethnic sounding names were getting less callbacks than ones with more Anglicized names. I propose that, at least in the résumé stage, that the names be replaced with identification numbers, in order to reduce racial bias from the hiring process.

If I were to talk to the senator, I would ask her to put forth a bipartisan plan forward in order to help make these changes. The uniting factor is that this is simply not only an issue of race but also of humanity. The lack of government response to racially motivated attacks on people, as well as statements made by Steve Bannon insinuating that too many Asian CEO’s in the Silicon Valley won’t allow a “civic” society is not okay at any level, much less the federal.

Overall, the changes I’m suggesting would not only help out Asian Americans but other minorities as well, and these issues should be addressed immediately.