



A Major Request: Please Stop Calling Us Minorities

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When we call Black and Brown people “minor” in the context of major problems, we subconsciously give permission to treat those problems with less energy (or no energy at all).

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This may seem minor, but I wish we’d stop using the word *minorities*. As a Black man living and surviving in the United States, it is belittling. When I hear “minority” expressed with such simple ease during conversations around race, my body spasms sending a sharp pain through my core. I’m not minor. My family is not minor. The Black community is not minor. And, our contributions as Americans are not minor.

A common reaction to my frustration is that, statistically-speaking, “minority” isn’t about diminishing a group of people. It simply describes **segments of the United States’ population**—where African-Americans make up approximately 13% compared to 60% of (not Hispanic or Latino) Whites. This rationale chooses to ignore the fact we use “minority” to talk about race even when the statistics suggest there is a major problem.

Let’s examine three facts relevant to the perfect storm surrounding us at this very moment—the COVID-19 pandemic, police brutality, and education.

Black people **infected with COVID-19** are currently 3.57 times more likely to die than White people who are infected. Black males are imprisoned approximately **five times the rate** of White males. And, as a whole, African-Americans make up one-third of the United States prison population. In school, Black students are **disciplined three times more** than White students (no matter the punishment, what type of school, or what income bracket). Within which of these statistical conversations do we start calling Black and Brown people “majority”?

None.

In fact, we like to remind everyone we are indeed talking about a certain race of people by saying “majority-minority”—where “minority” is no longer reserved for the objective framework of statistical analysis. When we call Black

and Brown people “minor” in the context of major problems, we subconsciously give permission to treat those problems with less energy (or no energy at all). As teachers, leaders, and educators, we have to understand that **the words we use matter**—they not only help us make meaning, but they make us feel.

What I feel when I think about the contributions of Black people

As a proud Black man, I grew up admiring some of the greats I saw, heard, or read about while at home—Muhammad Ali, Michael Jackson, and Marcus Garvey to name a few. My schools did not prioritize cultural relevance in our curriculum, so I had to learn about successful black people on my own. This was a strange reality.

From what I saw (and still see), it seemed that it wasn't just Black folk who were touched by these stars. They were national (and global) favorites across all racial demographics. It didn't matter that their race represented a smaller percentage of the nation's population. What did matter was that they touched the majority of us with their skills and talents.

As I began independently exploring more about the impact African-Americans had on the progress of our nation, I continued discovering there has never been anything *minor* about their contributions. **Since 1619**, the shackles of oppression have tried to hold us down, but we have continued to survive, and even thrive, in spite of it all.

The story of Lucy Terry (Prince) is one of many that highlights the strength of our contributions and resiliency of our work. Terry's 1746 poem, *Bars Fight*, is the oldest poem on record written by a Black person in America. What makes this contribution so powerful? Terry authored this poem at the age of 16 while enslaved in Massachusetts. And, the poem had to survive orally for over 100 years before it was finally published in written form in 1855. I can't help but wonder how that contribution led to the celebrated works of authors like Toni Morrison.

Of course, our contributions go well beyond our storytelling prowess. Thanks to Black people's contributions to science, innovation, and American culture, we can keep our lightbulbs bright, traffic lights right, and peanut butter tasting *so good*. We also created hair products for ourselves thanks to women like Madame CJ Walker—a self-made millionaire.

Our food is so good, it will touch your soul. We turned discarded scraps and unwanted parts into fine culinary cuisine. Just go to New Orleans for a Po'Boy and gumbo if you don't believe me, or try my Auntie's collard greens.

What I feel when I think about the sacrifices of Black people

When we use “minority” to separate Black folk from White folk, we choose to ignore the entangled relationship we've always had together. Black men and women have helped keep this country together since the first slave ships made it to our eastern shores.

In my family, my grandmother was a seamstress, my other grandmother was a nurse, and my great grandmother was a nanny—each of them using their skills and talents to serve their communities, regardless of race. My great grandmother worked in a world where it wasn't uncommon for Black nannies and caretakers to not only clean and feed but also help raise White children—providing them life lessons that came directly from their Black experience. Sometimes they'd give more time to others' children than their own—always making whatever sacrifices were necessary to survive. I'll ask again, what is *minor* about these contributions?

My father was a postal worker, my uncle and both grandfathers served in the military, and my great-grandfather made shoes by hand. Once again, their service knew no race and knew nothing but hard work. For centuries, the “shiftless” Black man has worked the farm, built America's infrastructure, and served the country they call home. Just like Black women, Black men have worked to build this country in major ways.

We wrote, we sang, we cooked, we built, we created, we invented, and we helped give breath and a soul to this nation. All this makes me wonder why we would get such a belittling title. Minority.

What I feel when I hear the word minority

Minority means less than. It's deficit-based. It implies there is something greater than you that you are not a part of. In a world where majority rules, it is implied minorities do not. It puts a stamp on every non-white ethnic group in the nation and feeds into their internal narratives of racial inferiority.

“We are the majority. You are not.” This is what I hear when people say “minority” in reference to who I am in this country. It's what I heard when I was six years old, and it's what I still hear today. This indirectly reinforces the White

supremacist narrative that dominated my history books as a child and remains threaded within the fabric of our flag today, as seen most recently with police and others continuing to commit violence against Black people.

I don't need any indirect messages communicating with my subconscious telling me that I am *less than*. And neither do kids. Nor do any teachers and educators.

As we grapple with difficult times in our country that force us to confront race and the effects of our great disparities, I ask that you remove the word minority (and it's silent partner, majority) from your vocabulary. It's harmful.

What I feel is a powerful path forward

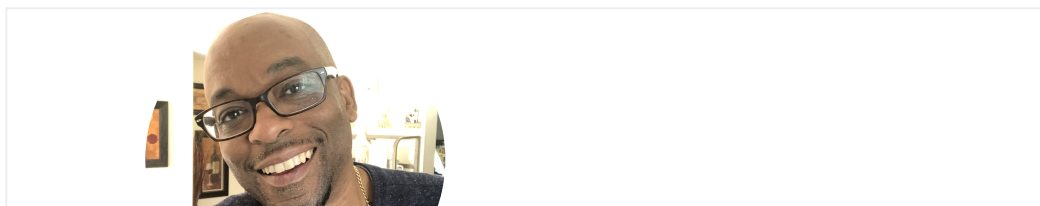
Many people who want to be allies in the cause for racial justice, ask "What can I do?" There's a lot to do, but one of my offerings is to consider eliminating minority from our vocabulary in how we speak about people with non-white skin.

Since we were stolen from our homeland, our names and our identity have not been our own to define and claim until fairly recently. As we continue to reclaim ourselves by protecting our bodies, enlightening our minds, and nourishing our souls, we also want to reclaim classifications more suitable to us.

Minority is minor compared to our contributions, as a people, to this nation. We, as Black folk (and all other ethnicities), have contributed in major ways. We are simply asking for you to **put some respect on our name**. We live in a world where one's gender pronoun is not assumed, it is asked and respected. In that vein, there is nothing wrong with asking someone how they wish to be identified. I also suggest, in conversation and writing, you speak of specific ethnic backgrounds before attempting to classify as a group.

Within our nation, many are enraged. The soul of America is at stake, and there will be plenty of expressing, talking, and sharing in order to take positive strides forward. Educators—regardless of the philosophical approach that one may subscribe to—all need to hear and be heard. An important place to start is eliminating the use of useless words.

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Dr. Danique Dolly recently rejoined Big Picture Learning and serves as the Northeast Region Co-Director. Danique has a love for learning and values young learners being at the very center of their education...families too! A quiet leader who loves to write, Danique has served as a start-up school teacher, start-up school principal, school leadership coach, and partner in education and leadership endeavors. His work touches upon school transformation through leadership development, innovation, and implementation for progressive systems and schools. Danique Dolly is from the Bronx and East Harlem in New York. He's a graduate of Morehouse College, Brown University, and most recently earned a doctorate in education leadership from Harvard University.

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