

## Black Lives Matter

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Year 2020.

Definitely a challenging year, full of events, experiences, lessons, and many conflicts; there were many things happening at the same time.

First, there was an unexpected and terrifying pandemic. In my personal experience it was quite frightening. My biggest fear was that my parents would be infected—since they are no longer young, the risk of complications was much higher. However, my fear came true, and we all got COVID. Luckily, both my parents were asymptomatic, and I was the only one that showed symptoms.

In addition to this, on May 25, 2020, we all received news that shocked the world, impacted many hearts, filled others with rage, and unleashed the anger of many people. A terrifying video surfaced that showed the tragic and inhumane final moments of George Floyd's life. Floyd was detained and killed during an arrest after a local store employee reported him for allegedly using a counterfeit twenty-dollar bill.

After this terrible event occurred, the video began to boom and go viral on social media, and at the same time unleashing people's anger, rage, resentment, and sadness. From here, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests in Minneapolis and then in other cities began. Many influencers, celebrities, and powerful people spoke out about the events, and what until now was a terrible event, became much more than that.

This protest movement served to raise awareness, touched many hearts, and opened many minds, however, it also had the opposite effect, as it was used as a form of banditry, destruction, and crime on all sides.

What started out as a protest for justice against a totally unjust murder, a form of awareness and a way of empathizing, ended up becoming a battlefield between police and protesters. Instead of serving as a rallying point, it became more of a war between sides, in which in the end, the losers were the most vulnerable.

Speaking a little more from my perspective, from a very personal point of view and only and exclusively from my experience, I would like to express my opinion regarding what happened during and after this event. To do so, I think it is important to emphasize that for me it was a cultural shock, that although I had already been warned, I had never experienced it as close and painful as this one.

I am from Venezuela, a country where racism is experienced in very different ways than it is in the United States. In Venezuela it is not an offense at all to call someone a "negro," in fact it is seen as a *cariñosa*, not derogatory. You don't feel a hostile atmosphere when talking about it, because we have a different history, we were conquered by the Spaniards, so we have a mixture of African, Indigenous, and Spanish. Being so mixed, we all have ancestors on all sides, so to speak, so slavery was not lived in the same way as here.

It wasn't until 1865 that slavery was completely abolished in the United States, but still by 1940, almost a century later, brutal discriminatory treatment of Black Americans continued just because of their skin color—to such intense levels that if a White person got on the bus, they had to give up their seat; they had unequal access to education; and they were even excluded from sports. For example, Black baseball players were not accepted in the MLB and that led them to have their own league and emigrate to other countries, for example Mexico, where doors were opened to them. There, they were treated as idols, as stars, and as people (something that did not happen in the USA).

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With this as a reference, we can understand that the resentment and pain of these people has not been so far away, since it was only a few generations ago that they received this treatment. And there are many wounds, pain, and memories that have not yet healed—and honestly it is not just about healing, since even today in many places they must deal with racist attitudes and beliefs.

If to all this historical context we add a video in which the brutality of this history is literally shown in thirty seconds—the consequences that you could experience just because of your skin color, and the fact that it was the authorities who did this—you can understand the anger that led to the protests in question.

For me this was totally new because I had never seen anything like this in my country. In fact, I had been fleeing from protests slightly similar (the curfew, the tear gas to intimidate, and the Molotov cocktails of the protesters to defend themselves), so in this way I was totally terrified. And if I learned something in my country, it is that many times when you are right, and the authorities know it, they use force to silence the weakest, which in this case were the civilian protesters.

At this moment I was with a mix of feelings. Between anger, sadness, confusion, importance, and fear.

In my house, my mom is White, and my dad is Black, and I never felt any difference in treatment towards either of them, but as I said before, we come from very different historical contexts.

After the protests started and had been going on for a few days, a brutal banditry began. Which I was and am in total disagreement with because I didn't see how that was in any way related or helpful to the cause or reason that initially led people to protest. Business owners, small business owners and new business owners alike, were the most affected. Many with all their dreams, savings, and source of income lost.

Many of them with no insurance to replace them.

On the other hand, a social war began to be created, which for me was very difficult to understand and assimilate. Honestly, I was very afraid to talk about it because I felt that every possible opinion that I could think of was totally out of place. I did not want to offend anyone or sound unempathetic. I did not want it to be misinterpreted that I did not agree with certain things, such how the protests were handled. Because they had every right and reason to protest.

In conclusion, 2020 was a difficult year, frightening, but with many lessons for all of us who lived through it and survived it.