

From:

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Subject:

The first thing I want to say today is that I am the proud daughter of Indian immigrant parents, who reminded my brothers, my sister, and me every day how blessed we were to live in this country.

Why is that the first thing I tell you?

You might think it has something to do with the events this summer in Charleston and taking down the Confederate flag.

It doesn't. I have been saying it since long before this past June.

In fact, it was the first line in just about every speech I gave when I started running for Governor of South Carolina in 2009.

At that time, I was a 37-year old minority female who was not well known, running in the Republican primary against a Lieutenant Governor, an Attorney General, and a Congressman.

I tell you that now to say this: long before the racially charged events of this summer, I would not have been elected Governor of South Carolina if our state was a racially intolerant place. And I would not have won the Republican primary if we were a racially intolerant party.

With the grace of the aftermath of the Mother Emanuel church massacre, the world saw South Carolina as we are. What I want to tell you is that we've been that way for some time now -- it's just that a lot of people outside of our state never noticed.

I was born and raised in Bamberg, a small town of just 2,500 people in rural South Carolina. We were the only Indian family in town – not white enough to be white, not black enough to be black.

I remember being a child taking a test, and being asked to check a box specifying my race. I didn't check 'white.' I didn't check 'black.' I checked 'other.'

We were the 'others.' We were different.

In a lot of ways, it didn't matter. My parents always taught us that our similarities were far greater than our differences, that we had far more that united us than divided us.

Here we were, my father wearing a turban, my mother wearing a sari, and while the people of Bamberg didn't quite know what to think about us, they welcomed us anyway.

We made a life there. It wasn't always easy. My parents, who led upper-class, comfortable lives in India, left everything and everyone they knew to come to America. They did it with just eight dollars in their pockets. They started from scratch.

We struggled, but we had each other, and we had the opportunity to do anything, to be anything, as long as we were willing to work for it – the opportunity that only exists in America.

But there were times our differences did matter.

We ended up in rural South Carolina because of my father's job – he was a professor of Botany at Voorhees, a small, historically black college located just a few miles from our home.

I mentioned earlier that my father wore a turban. He still does, to this day. He is a tall, graceful man – not someone who blends into a crowd.

When I was about ten, he invited me to take a trip with him to Columbia. This was huge for a ten year old girl, a road trip to the big city. On the way home, Dad and I stopped at a local produce market, one of his favorite things to do. He loves to support local growers, always has.

As he was putting his produce in his basket, I noticed something start to happen. The couple working at the market was getting nervous. They were whispering. Then they got on the phone.

A few minutes later, two uniformed police officers showed up. They stood there and watched us. My father continued to go about his business, and they continued to watch him. He paid for his fruit. Then he shook the hands of the couple, and of the officers. He thanked them. And we went on our way.

Neither of us spoke the entire way home – Dad was hoping I didn't realize what had just happened. I, who understood exactly what had just happened, didn't want my dad to feel any worse than he already did.

That is what the rawness of racial discrimination can do to us – render us speechless.

The importance of that story, to me, is not in pointing out that my family and I have faced discrimination in the past. My mother always taught me not to talk about the things that are obvious.

It is to make this clear: a lot of people make the mistake of thinking the South is still like that today. It's not. I know. I lived through it.

Think of it this way: while that exact same farmers market exists in that exact same place today, South Carolina does not. I see that market frequently – I drive past it when I head to the airport, in fact, I drove past it this morning.

But now when I see that market, I see it not as a 10-year old girl suffering the humiliation of prejudice, but as the first female, first minority governor of my state.

Today there truly is a New South. It is different in many ways, perhaps most especially in its attitudes toward race. We are still far from perfect. We still have our problems. There's still a lot more to do. But the New South, in many ways, is a place to look toward, rather than away from, when it comes to race relations.

A lot of different things go into racial equality. I'm going to touch on several today.

To me, the single most important thing is the standard of living, and that is mostly driven by the opportunity to find good jobs that pay good wages.

Carroll Campbell, a predecessor of mine as governor of South Carolina, used to say that if you can find a person a job, you take care of a family. The jobs in the Old South were textile mills. The jobs in the New South are aerospace, automotive, and high tech.

We are leading the way in job growth and innovation, and taking care of a lot of families. Just look at South Carolina.

We build planes with Boeing. We build cars with BMW, Mercedes-Benz, and now Volvo. We have five – yes, five – worldwide tire companies with Michelin, Bridgestone, Continental, Giti Tire and now Trelleborg.

The first American-made flat screen televisions? You'll find them in rural Winnsboro, South Carolina, with Element Electronics.

And for those who said bicycles will never again be made in the United States? Look no further than Kent International, a New Jersey bike manufacturer we brought back from China to rural Manning, South Carolina.

More than 70,000 new jobs and almost \$17 billion in investment have been announced in South Carolina over the last five years. Unemployment has dropped from 11.1 percent in early 2011 to 6.4 percent today. We've moved more than 25,000 people from welfare-to-work. And more South Carolinians are working today than ever before in our state's history.

These developments have a clear connection to racial equality.

These jobs are going into places like where I grew up, and many of them will go to African-Americans and other minorities.

We've announced jobs in 45 out of our 46 counties, rural and urban. These are generational jobs. We're creating opportunity for everyone. That makes a huge difference in racial advancement, and I couldn't be more proud. That is the New South.

Another big difference between the Old North and the New South is that we don't have anything like the public pension debts that exist in the north. That means our state budgets don't have the kinds of strangleholds on them like you see in places like Illinois and New York.

It means we don't have the job killing tax increases that are needed to finance those debts. It means our budgets are balanced and our credit ratings are good.

In addition to helping attract companies and generate new start-ups, that healthy fiscal picture also means we have the resources to invest in our future.

There's nowhere that that investment is more important than in public education. In South Carolina, we've lagged behind in education for a very long time. We're still behind. But we're changing that.

My first year in office I received a letter from an eighth grade girl who was contemplating suicide. She was being bullied at school and didn't know where to turn. I'm grateful I got the letter – I was able to talk to this young lady, full of potential, and we struck up a friendship. She's now, I'm proud to say, a happy, fun-loving, hard-working college freshman.

But I realized she wasn't alone, and so I started going to schools around the state to talk about bullying.

It was a wake-up call.

My daughter Rena attends a brand new public high school in Lexington, where every classroom has a flat screen tv and every child a tablet. It would be easy to mistake River Bluff for a small college. Yet when I went back to my hometown of Bamberg, they didn't even have the equipment to play a simple video.

That is wrong. It is immoral. And it is changing.

More than two years ago I started a conversation about education in South Carolina. I met with principals and teachers, superintendents and university deans, business leaders and legislators, Republicans and Democrats.

I listened. I learned. And I realized the biggest challenge facing South Carolina's education system was our failure to acknowledge that it simply costs more to teach a child who lives in poverty.

We acknowledge it now.

We changed our funding formula to send additional state dollars to children who are on Medicaid or receive free-and-reduced lunch.

We now provide reading coaches for every elementary school in South Carolina and we've ended social promotion, because we know if a child cannot read by the end of the third grade, he or she is four times less likely to graduate high school on time.

We are investing in technology: internet to the schools, internet inside the schools, and the tools – computers, tablets, instructional materials – to get every South Carolina child up to speed with the world as it today, not as it was three decades ago.

We did it with accountability. And we did it all without raising taxes.

I didn't choose to focus education resources into high poverty areas for racial reasons. I did it because I firmly believe that every child deserves a great education, regardless of where they are born and raised.

But in doing so, there's no question that it has a racial impact, because of the high correlation between poverty and race. That is the future of education in South Carolina, and it's a bright one.

So there's jobs, and there's education. If we get those two things right, and nothing else, we make enormous progress for all people, most especially for those at the lower end of the economic scale.

But let's be honest. Jobs and education are huge elements for creating opportunity for all. Jobs and education are the keys to the opportunity agenda. But when it comes to African-American communities in particular, there's also an equality agenda that goes further.

There still remain the unfinished goals of the civil rights movement. And the civil rights movement is a critical part of the American movement, and the American story.

It's a movement in which every person, regardless of their skin color is treated equally under the law.

Here again, the New South is an example for the rest of the country.

Before the tragedy of Mother Emanuel in June, there was the tragedy of Walter Scott in April.

Most of you will recall what happened in that case: Mr. Scott, a 50 year old black man, was stopped by a white North Charleston police officer for having a broken taillight. What ensued was caught on video for all the world to see: Mr. Scott began to run from the officer, who shot him repeatedly in the back, tragically ending his life.

Now, in the last year, we've seen similar situations elsewhere. In New York City, in Baltimore, and of course, in Ferguson, Missouri, there were incidents involving white police officers and unarmed black victims. In all three of those cases, there was civil unrest at truly awful levels. The riots in Ferguson and Baltimore were senseless.

You know what: black lives do matter.

Most of the people killed or injured in the riots in Ferguson and Baltimore were black. Think about it.

Most of the small businesses or social service institutions that were destroyed and looted in Ferguson and Baltimore were either black owned or served heavily black populations.

Most of the people who now live in terror because local police are too intimidated to do their jobs are black.

Black lives do matter, and they have been disgracefully jeopardized by the movement that has laid waste to Ferguson and Baltimore.

In South Carolina we did things differently.

After the horrendous death of Walter Scott, we didn't have violence. As a state, we came together, black and white, Republican and Democrat.

We communicated constantly – with religious leaders, with political leaders, with community leaders.

We saw the need for justice and immediately brought charges against the offending officer.

But we went further than that.

Two months, to the day, after the shooting of Walter Scott, our Republican-controlled General Assembly passed a body camera bill. A few days later, Mr. Scott's family stood with me when I signed the bill into law.

South Carolina is the first state in the country to approve statewide body cameras for police.

There's an important lesson in this. In many parts of society today, whether it's in popular culture, academia, the news media, or certainly in politics and government, there's a tendency to falsely equate noise with results.

Some people think that you have to yell and scream in order to make a difference. That's not true. Often, the best thing we can do is turn down the volume level. When the sound is quieter, you can actually hear what someone else is saying.

And that can make a world of difference.

That brings me to the shootings in Charleston and the removal of the Confederate flag.

When I first got word of the shootings, I knew this was going to be unbearably painful for my state. Nine shooting deaths in a church, at Bible study? A state senator and a leading figure in the local black ministry shot to death?

We'd never imagined something this horrifying.

Each new piece of information was another kick in the gut.

The next morning, we captured the killer, and it immediately became clear that this was the act of a racist, motivated not by mental illness, but by pure hate.

Our state suffered a devastating wound. The first thing we needed to do was to lift up those families and celebrate the lives of the victims.

I decided to attend each funeral. I met the families. I heard their stories. And through it all, I had the privilege to get to know nine amazing souls.

After each funeral, I would head home and sit down with my two kids, Rena and Nalin. And I would introduce them to the person I had met that day.

I introduced them to Ethel Lance, who, despite losing her daughter to cancer two years ago, was a woman of love and joy who constantly sang her favorite song, "One day at a time, Sweet Jesus, that's all I'm asking of you, just give me the strength to do every day what I have to do."

I introduced them to Tywanza Sanders, our youngest victim, a twenty-six year old budding entrepreneur anxious to open his own barber shop, who that night stood in front of his eighty-seven year old aunt Susie, and spoke his last words to the murderer: "You don't have to do this, we mean you no harm."

I introduced them to Cynthia Hurd, whose life motto was "be kinder than necessary."

It is now my life motto.

Every opportunity I have, I mention the Nine, as I mention them here today. I don't want it to be just their families who know the love, the compassion, the greatness of those people, I want the whole world to know them, as my children do, as I do.

The second thing that needed to happen was removing the Confederate flag from our statehouse grounds.

Now, like a lot of things about the South, the flag is often misunderstood by people who are from somewhere else. There are many wonderful, decent, honorable people in our state who revere that flag. They are not racists. They are the same people who elected an African-American U.S. Senator, and twice elected an Indian-American Governor.

As I said when I announced my intention to bring down the flag, this was a debate that did not need to have winners and losers. Those who revere the flag for reasons of ancestry and heritage retain every right to do so.

But what happened in Charleston shed a different light on an issue our state had long struggled with.

What we saw in the extraordinary reaction to Charleston was people of all races coming together. We didn't have riots, we had vigils. We didn't have violence, we had hugs.

The Statehouse belongs to all people, and it needed to be welcoming to all people. That was not possible with that flag flying.

When it came to the removal debate, we had legislators who truly listened to each other. They walked in each other's shoes, and that made all the difference.

That willingness to listen allowed all of us to see each other in a way that doesn't always happen - with love and grace and compassion.

It's a love that we learned from the Emanuel Nine, who took in someone that fateful night who didn't look like

them, didn't sound like them, didn't act like them, and they pulled up a chair and prayed with him. For an hour.

It's a grace we learned from their families, who incredibly, stood in front of the murderer just two days after this tragedy and offered him their forgiveness.

It's a compassion we learned from the people of South Carolina, who wrapped their arms around those families, that community, and each other in a way we've never seen before.

The flag came down. And South Carolina moved forward.

So where do we go from here?

Well, I'm going to keep talking about the Charleston Nine, and I'm going to keep talking about how we can improve race relations in our state.

You know, an interesting thing happened during the funerals. At one of them, Reverend Al Sharpton spoke, as did I. I had never met Reverend Sharpton before, but he took it upon himself to try to stir things up a bit.

In his remarks, he made a point of mentioning me, and said that the only time I would have seen him was through the window of my office when he was outside leading a protest.

So when it was my turn to speak, I addressed Reverend Sharpton directly, and I said, "If you were protesting outside my window, if you would have come inside and held out your hand, I would have hugged you."

Communication has to flow both ways.

One of the lessons of the flag controversy is that if we stop shouting and start listening, we get more accomplished. We should all listen to each other more – we will all benefit from walking in someone else's shoes.

A good example in the civil rights arena is in voter ID laws. There are those who act as if any effort whatsoever to maintain the integrity of the voting process is a racist attack on civil rights. Well that's just not so.

Requiring people to show a photo ID before they vote is a reasonable measure. It's not racist. If everyone was willing to stop shouting, and stop trying to score race-baiting political points, we could reach common ground.

I want everyone who is eligible to vote, to vote. I now count Reverend Jesse Jackson as a friend. I got to know him through the funerals. He's a native South Carolinian, who has done some amazing things in his career with voter registration.

I will say this: any time Reverend Jackson wants to do a voter registration drive in South Carolina, I will stand shoulder-to-shoulder with him. I want to make it easy for everyone who is rightfully eligible to vote to do so.

For most people, showing a picture ID is no burden. But I recognize that it is a burden for some. And those people are disproportionately poor, elderly, or disabled – which is why in South Carolina we offered rides to any citizen, anywhere in the state, to get to a local DMV and get a free picture ID.

So let's not throw out voter ID laws – the integrity of our democracy is too important for that. But let's figure out ways to make it easy and cost-free for every eligible voter to obtain a photo ID. That way, everyone who

wants to vote, can vote.

Finally, I want to touch on how all of this relates to the Republican Party. As a conservative Republican myself, I have no doubts that when it comes to jobs, education, health care, and many other policy areas, Republican principles are the right ones for lifting up all people.

The problem for our party is that our approach often appears cold and unwelcoming to minorities. That is shameful, and it has to change.

This is not just a black and white thing. For Indian and Asian-Americans, for Jewish-Americans, for Mexican-Americans, our party and our principles have so much to offer. It's on us to communicate our positions in ways that wipe away the clutter of prejudices.

For African-Americans in particular, whether it's more jobs, better focused educational resources, police body cameras, and the like, Republicans have a great deal to offer. But we have to change our approach.

I recently went to worship with my family at Mother Emanuel Church, off the record. I didn't tell my staff – no reporters were notified, at least not by me. The press was not why I went.

In part, I went to that Sunday service for me – I wanted to be at Mother Emanuel on a 'normal' Sunday. I wanted to see it as it was intended to be, a place of comfort, a place of hope, and most of all, a place of worship.

But I also went for that church community. I went because I wanted them to know that they won't only see me when bad things happen. They will see me as we heal. They will see me as we move forward. Their children will know me as someone they can relate to and feel comfortable around. They will know me.

As I walked in to that service that Sunday, I came to the realization that so much of why this community sees me differently and has accepted me so warmly at the church and other places over the last few months is because I have been willing to come to them. To their places. I was at their church, in their environment, where they were comfortable, where I could listen.

How are we going to develop trust and relationships with each other if we continue to stay in our separate corners?

We can't. And so I won't.

If we are going to be true to this charge of moving South Carolina and our nation forward, the actions have to move through each of us. If we want to bring opportunity to every American, we will have to work together. That requires commitment, open mindedness, and a willingness to think differently by all of us.

If we can do this in South Carolina, under the most trying of circumstances, the sky is the limit to what we can do in our country. If we scream less, and listen more, we can make a lot of progress.

We can do it together.

And I couldn't be more proud that it is the New South – my South – that is pointing us in the right direction.

Thank you.