The next time someone says ‘all lives matter,’ show them these 5 paragraphs

by [Kevin Roose](http://fusion.net/author/kevin-roose/) posted on Fusion.net

Earlier this week, Democratic presidential candidate Martin O’Malley got booed when, speaking at the Netroots Nation conference, he responded to a group of #BlackLivesMatter activists by telling them that “all lives matter.” He was later forced to apologize.

About Kevin Roose: I'm a writer, an editor, and a TV maker. My two books, Young Money (2014) and The Unlikely Disciple (2009) explored the world of young Wall Street bankers and the world of evangelical Christian college students, respectively. Young Money was a New York Times bestseller, and was optioned for a TV series by Fox Television Studios. By day, I'm a senior editor and co-executive producer at Fusion, the ABC-Univision joint venture. Before Fusion, I was the tech columnist at New York magazine. And before New York, I worked at The New York Times, where I covered Wall Street for the paper and for DealBook, the Times' financial news site. In previous lives, I've worked as a tennis-camp counselor, a juice bar barista, and a Biblical slave. (Long story.) I've also written for magazines like GQ, Esquire, and ESPN: The Magazine. I live in Berkeley, California.

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O’Malley isn’t the first person to fail to understand why “all lives matter” is a tone-deaf rallying cry for a national politician in 2015. Hillary Clinton did the same thing earlier this year, though she has since corrected herself. And lots of white people have expressed confusion about why it’s controversial to broaden the #BlackLivesMatter movement to include people of all races.

The best explanation we’ve seen so far comes from Reddit, of all places. Earlier this week, in an “Explain Like I’m 5” thread, user GeekAesthete explained, clearly and succinctly, why changing #BlackLivesMatter to #AllLivesMatter is an act of erasure that makes lots of people cringe.

GeekAesthete explains:

*Imagine that you're sitting down to dinner with your family, and while everyone else gets a serving of the meal, you don't get any. So you say "I should get my fair share." And as a direct response to this, your dad corrects you, saying, "*everyone*should get their fair share." Now, that's a wonderful sentiment -- indeed, everyone should, and that was kinda your point in the first place: that you should be a part of everyone, and you should get your fair share*also*. However, dad's smart-ass comment just dismissed you and didn't solve the problem that you still haven't gotten any!*

 *The problem is that the statement "I should get my fair share" had an implicit "too" at the end: "I should get my fair share, too, just like everyone else." But your dad's response treated your statement as though you meant "*only*I should get my fair share", which clearly was not your intention. As a result, his statement that "everyone should get their fair share," while true, only served to ignore the problem you were trying to point out.*

 *That's the situation of the "black lives matter" movement. Culture, laws, the arts, religion, and everyone else repeatedly suggest that all lives should matter. Clearly, that message already abounds in our society.*

*The problem is that, in practice, the world doesn't work the way. You see the film Nightcrawler? You know the part where Renee Russo tells Jake Gyllenhal that she doesn't want footage of a black or latino person dying, she wants news stories about affluent white people being killed? That's not made up out of whole cloth -- there is a news bias toward stories that the majority of the audience (who are white) can identify with. So when a young black man gets killed (prior to the recent police shootings), it's generally not considered "news", while a middle-aged white woman being killed*is*treated as news. And to a large degree, that is accurate -- young black men are killed in significantly disproportionate numbers, which is why we don't treat it as anything new. But the result is that, societally, we don't pay as much attention to certain people's deaths as we do to others. So, currently, we*don't*treat all lives as though they matter equally.*

*Just like asking dad for your fair share, the phrase "black lives matter" also has an implicit "too" at the end: it's saying that black lives should*also*matter. But responding to this by saying "*all*lives matter" is willfully going back to ignoring the problem. It's a way of dismissing the statement by falsely suggesting that it means "*only*black lives matter," when that is obviously not the case. And so saying "all lives matter"*as a direct response*to "black lives matter" is essentially saying that we should just go back to ignoring the problem.*

*The phrase "Black lives matter" carries an implicit "too" at the end; it's saying that black lives should also matter. Saying "all lives matter" is dismissing the very problems that the phrase is trying to draw attention to.*

Yep, there you go. Bookmark it, print it out, give it to your friends.