

# “a BIPOC Interpreter’s Humanifesto and Open Letter to the Deaf Community”

Los Angeles 2020

*“The revolution will be accessible.”*



# PRO BONO ASL

*“Pro Bono ASL: a BIPOC Interpreter’s Humanifesto and Open Letter to the Deaf Community” is a product of collective thinking, writing, and editing by Lavender, Risa, Susan, Rorri, Neil, Arite, Ashley R., Gregorio, and Stacy.*

As a collective, we recognize that history is written by the colonizer and oppressor. We pledge to use our collective skill sets to bring to light those stories that history has forgotten, ignored, or altered. We believe in ensuring the accuracy of our lived stories written in history. Additionally, we work to correct the white savior history that has long been perpetrated while holding academia accountable as an accessory to that lie.

Based on our collective experiences as Black, Indigenous, People of Color and Allies, we recognize the common denominator in the injustices done towards BIPOC to be the white supremacist, heteronormative, patriarchal system. We pledge to dismantle those same oppressive systems in order to liberate our Black, Brown, and Indigenous siblings. We are tired yet continue to fight in hopes for a better tomorrow. We believe that those who have power and privilege, have a duty to protect and empower those who have not been afforded them. We work to create a world where access to information, communication, and the social revolution is a priority. We envision a world where the often overlooked inclusion is the norm.

As a collective, the members of Pro Bono ASL pledge to use the privileges cast on us by society to spotlight, center, and uplift our Black, Brown, Indigenous, Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing (HoH) communities at their intersecting identities as LGBTQ+ individuals. We rise together in unison and as community members with oppressed voices to ensure their liberation and success in all endeavors. Our goal is to empower marginalized communities in all matters pertaining to social liberation. Using our collective power, we demand and actively work to protect cultural and linguistic access to the social revolution. Our time, our love, and our hands will fight for what is right.

When we fight, we win!



## To the Deaf community:

The Deaf community has been historically marginalized and actively been denied language access to crucial information and spaces. Most recently, an instance in which there is a lack of access, comes from the current occupant of the White House and their administration's refusal to provide access to their press conferences, withholding crucial information regarding the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic. Although this affects all members of the Deaf community, Deaf BIPOC members have experienced this marginalization and lack of language access tenfold.

To quote an article published by the Galludet University Press, "The Deaf form a society, a large society with its own elite group. These matters are self-evident" (Stokoe, Bernard, Padden 1976). The Deaf elite function under the pillars of white supremacy - accumulating power and authority within the Deaf community. From positions of power within large Deaf organizations to language standardization, the Deaf elite have heavily dominated and influenced Deaf society as well as the interpreting community.

BIPOC members of the Deaf community deserve interpreters who understand their struggles. They deserve interpreters they can easily understand without the need to code-switch themselves in order to level with the interpreter. Language standardization and the influence that the Deaf elite have in matters pertaining to interpreter training programs have been an obstacle in true equal access for Deaf BIPOC. For this reason we value our community-taught interpreters, for they have been fostered directly by the Deaf BIPOC community that we are so passionate in uplifting.



As a collective, we believe in the liberation of all peoples, including the liberation of Deaf BIPOC from the linguistic and societal constraints put forth on them that are rooted in the influence held by the Deaf elite. Providing genuine accessibility and protecting space for the Deaf BIPOC community is our priority. We believe in the power of community care and use that as a guiding principle in our fight against audism and racism that Deaf BIPOC are faced with. We seek to be transparent in our intentions, our work is done without guilt, and we are not timid about our objectives or methods. We will NOT filter messages or intentions to accommodate white fragility any longer.

In short, we believe that Deaf individuals at all intersections of their identities should have a network they feel safe and comfortable reaching out to, knowing that they will be met with cultural competence and care. Collectively, we are interpreters. Individually, we come from a broad range of backgrounds, identities, and experiences that will serve to benefit the services and community care we humbly extend in offer to Deaf BIPOC.

Our courage and relentless spirit of justice will be our guiding light.

