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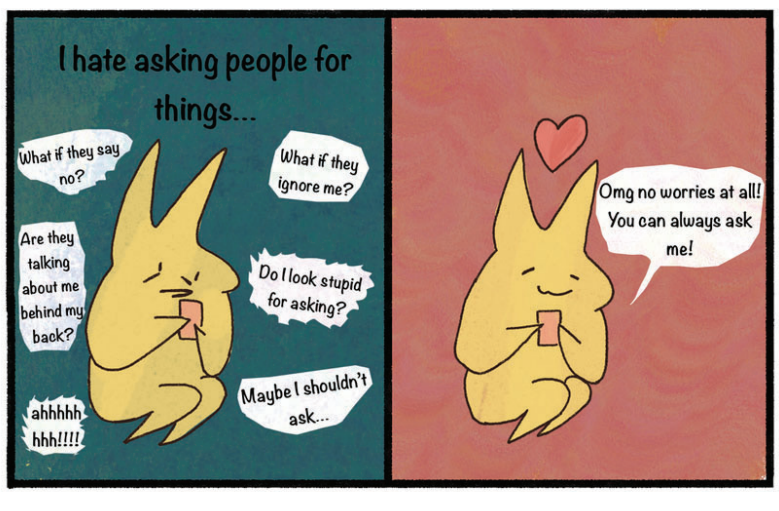
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Daily Opinion

Social media turns "Indian" into a punchline

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In September, Republican candidate for the Texas Railroad Commission Bo French posted a photograph of students from the University of Texas at Austin celebrating a football victory, most of whom appeared to be South Asian. The caption was not anything about football, though.

"I heard UT graduation this year looked like this," he wrote, adding that "the problem is now obviously far worse than anyone imagined."

The "problem?"

As an Indian American, I have watched the online attitude towards Indians with increasing concern. Indians have always been stereotyped as dirty, unsanitary, unintelligent or another undesirable trait — take your pick, racists — but the normalization of Indian racism through younger people on social media in a time where people have become more mindful of their words, is contradictory and disappointing.

On TikTok and Instagram reels, it is not surprising to encounter jokes about how filthy Indians supposedly are, often on videos that have nothing to do with cleanliness. Oftentimes, the mention of India is enough to warrant a barrage of comments about street food, body odor or personal hygiene. The subject is inconsequential as long as the punchline is just being Indian.

With the prevalence of AI-generated content on social media, it has become easier than ever for people to manufacture the stereotypes they mock — to fool people who cannot tell the difference. I recently came across an AI-generated video passing itself off as a social media reel, depicting a half-clothed Indian man rolling out rotis on his giant, bare stomach. This is something I didn't think I would ever need to say, but in case anyone would like clarification — no one in India is rolling out rotis on their giant stomachs. Regardless, the video was presented as authentic, and the comments were full of people accepting it as another example of Indian hygiene.

This is not a new phenomenon either. I remember being a tween on the internet during the internet "subscriber war" between YouTuber PewDiePie and Indian music channel T-Series. His "diss tracks" freely incorporated racial stereotypes about Indians into what was supposedly a competition over subscriber counts. What did poverty and Hindi have to do with subscriber counts?

The consequences of the selective normalization of racism extend far beyond poor jokes and internet feuds. Following the Air India Flight 171 crash in June 2025, which killed more than 260 people, comment sections reporting on the tragedy had a large number of people celebrating the deaths as fewer Indians being alive or immigrating abroad. Some took it as another chance to make racist remarks about the same stereotypes. Hundreds of people lost their lives but somehow, for some reason, people found an opportunity to make the same jokes about smelling bad.

More recently, in October, authorities arrested a 19-year-old white supremacist accused of planning a mass shooting at a Hindu temple in Aurora, Illinois. The suspect allegedly expressed his desire to kill Indians and arrived at the temple armed with a rifle and body armor.

Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi, who was at the temple with his family, became emotional recalling how narrowly they escaped the attempted attack, warning about the environment of hatred: "Babies are not born to hate. Children are not born to hate." The suspect reportedly told a co-worker that he "could not wait to kill Indians."

Of course, offensive jokes on TikTok are not equivalent to attempted mass shootings. However, when people are continually encouraged to regard an entire nationality as inferior or disgusting, it is unfortunately unsurprising that those attitudes get taken further. The distinction (and the fact that one exists at all) between what racism is acceptable or not online seems increasingly arbitrary.

I know that Indians are not the most historically marginalized group in America, nor am I suggesting that our experiences differ from every other minority — that other groups do not face their own stereotypes and attitudes — because they absolutely do. But I struggle to understand why for young people on social media a line has formed between what racism is OK.

Discrimination is not a competition, and acknowledging prejudice against some groups does not mean it is okay to overlook the other and give it a pass.

The most ridiculous example I have encountered was the trend of white people on TikTok creating so-called "Indian alt accounts," impersonating Indians with normal Desi profile pictures. I still do not understand the joke. There is no commentary, stereotype or even an attempt at humor beyond the concept of being Indian.

And that is the problem. It seems we have become so comfortable treating Indians as a punchline that nobody needs to explain what is funny — "Indian" is enough. If we are serious about confronting racism, we need consistency in how we recognize prejudice, especially from a generation that prides itself on its supposed social consciousness.

UMAS IN US? THINK AGAIN, THANKS TO BUREAUCRACY

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This past week, Cygames Inc., the organizer of the "Umamusume: Pretty Derby — 7th Event World Tour: The Stage in Los Angeles" had to cancel the concert after failing to obtain visas for workers to enter the United States. The concert was intended to have the voice actors of different Umamusume sing and perform in character. The organizers attempted to get the necessary visas but were unable to before the preset date and decided to cancel the concert and refund tickets. This comes at a time when many international workers and students find it difficult to obtain visas for any purpose. So that brings up the question, "When does America's red tape become too much?"

The US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) have a backlog of nearly 12.1 million pending cases for visas, despite receiving fewer filings this year. This 12.1 million is a 7.2% increase from last year. These fewer filings can be attributed to the increased pressure from the Trump administration to restrict immigration. So, something isn't adding up: less filings but a larger backlog. That is because the policies that make immigration harder also prolong the review period for the USCIS.

The USCIS isn't the only place feeling the pinch of the administration; higher education institutions and international students have been under fire since 2025. The latest is the Trump administration's probe into the J-1 visa program, which allows international students to attend U.S. institutions. The administration states that universities and higher education institutions are committing visa fraud and undermining US students. Many institutions argue that they have filed all necessary papers and vetted all candidates in accordance with the J-1 visa regulations. Institutions also say that it is important to keep the J-1 visas open because of the value of a global effort to focus on science, along with the arts, history and many other fields of study.

The backlog can also be thanks to the period of pauses of applications this past August which ended in late September. The State Department paused all immigrant visa applications while floating the idea of rejecting applications based on if the recipient would be a drain on public services. This idea would add yet another step to the visa application, slowing down the process of obtaining visas for immigration, business or tourism.

These restrictions hurt the American economy, especially in places that receive a high number of tourists. These restrictions also cause headaches for travelers who must begin applying for visas months ahead, then book hotels, activities, travel and much more without knowing if their visas will be ready by the date they need them.

The restrictions also impact the economy by driving away foreign business. It would make no sense for a business to expand to the U.S. if this administration is restricting and revoking visas. Why would an international business expand to or meet in the U.S. if they have to wait six months or more just to be able to travel? Why would a company put their non-U.S. citizen workers at risk just to be in America? These are the questions that make companies cut out the common denominator, the U.S. The U.S. should strive to be attractive to both businesses and tourists. That starts with cutting that red tape and not allowing politicians to weaponize bureaucracy to slow immigration. This policy might slow immigration short-term, but it damages all visa applications in the long run.

Immigrants, tourists, businesses or even Umamusumes should not have to jump through hoops and bend over backwards just to be able to touch the soil of the U.S. If the U.S. won't even let in anime horse girls, how far will this administration take it? Today, it is the voice of Rice Shower, tomorrow it might be the entire world.

American bureaucracy will always be a hassle, but it doesn't need to be this impassable wall. It should be used to vet, not to further a political agenda. So, the Trump administration might hate Umamusumes but, I say "neigh" to bureaucracy for political gain.