

Calling all Wine Industry folks, especially those located in California's Central Coast —

Our names are Simonne Mitchelson and Justin Trabue. We are Black women working as professionals in the Central Coast's wine country. This is a rarity, not only here in San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara counties, but across the state, the nation, and the world. We are both truly passionate about wine and its power of cultural connection, but due to recent events and events we have seen throughout history, we must now speak up about the lack of representation that plagues this industry and so many others.

Ten days ago, a Black man named [George Floyd was murdered](#) in the streets of Minneapolis for alleged 'forgery'—another victim of police brutality and racism. Black and brown communities that were suffering pre-pandemic are suffering even more [disproportionately due to COVID](#), but also bear the burden of yet again having to protest for basic human rights — and for survival. Public outcry has been heard loud and clear and protesters worldwide have been showing solidarity through videos, viral posts, and donations.

Unfortunately, it has been incredibly disheartening to see minimal, if any, engagement from the wineries in our area, state, and country.

We are reaching out today due to the lack of response from our industry counterparts. Your silence is deafening. The wine industry is one of great power in this country, but has always been out of reach for Black people and people of color. This is changing, albeit at a glacial pace, but moving nonetheless because we are making spaces for ourselves and demanding accessibility to an industry that historically has been associated with the white upper class.

While writing this, we tried researching what percentage of Californian wineries were Black-owned and we garnered some alarming results (or lack thereof). Out of [3,700+ wineries in the state of California, only 4% are female-owned](#). We could not find what percent of that 4% are Black/People of Color (POC) females, but we presume it would be an upsetting fraction of that fraction. Black people and non-Black people of color are the least researched sector in the wine industry and hospitality industry overall. Our buying power is overlooked even though we collectively spend over \$1 trillion yearly and more specifically are "241% more likely to spend \$20 or more on a store bought bottle of wine compared to the average adult", states a [study](#) from Purdue University.

In order to diversify this space, we ask that you share your resources (i.e: money, social media awareness, donating a percentage of monthly bottle purchases to a BLM cause, etc.), promote Black businesses on a local and national scale, and donate to or partner with organizations, such as [Association of African-American Vintners](#) and [Radical Xchange](#). These will accelerate accessibility for us in a variety of industries but specifically our own. This is especially critical in this moment, when the eyes of the world are upon us.

In 2017, the National Association of American Wineries released a [study](#) finding that the impact of the wine industry in all 50 states generates close to \$219.9 billion dollars in that

year *alone*. It has been on an upward trajectory since. We collectively, as an industry, have the power to make a difference. We invite you to do so with us as allies.

I, Justin, hold this organization very near to my heart. R.A.C.E Matters SLO gave me the opportunity to share my voice earlier this year during their *Belonging* series in February, so how could I be silent now? I moved to San Luis Obispo in 2013 to study wine and viticulture at Cal Poly. I left Washington, DC, once fondly referred to as Chocolate City, to live my dreams and follow my passions. I was met with microaggressions and more at every step of the way. I have been able to find my community of supporters but the accessibility was hard to find initially. Listen to our stories on the blog [Belonging: The Interview](#) & [Stories Matter: A Story Telling](#).

I, Simonne, am a South African immigrant who moved to the United States with my family when I was a child. After years of travel, I relocated to the Central Coast and continued to further my career in the wine industry. I was fortunate enough to meet the organizers of R.A.C.E. Matters SLO at an event a few months before Covid-19 hit. I expressed to them how isolated I felt living in the Central Coast. I expressed how I am not only living in an area where I rarely see another person of color, but the industry that I have contributed to for several years does not support people who look like me. R.A.C.E. Matters SLO showed me that I am seen, I am heard, and that I have a community here.

We have supported and plan to support multiple organizations, but are focusing on a local grassroots organization at the moment. [R.A.C.E. Matters SLO](#) is a “Black-led, multiracial organization formed in response to the killing of unarmed Black men by law enforcement.” This organization prioritizes Black voices (and other POC) as well as all marginalized communities by leading initiatives, such as the most recent BLM protests and rally, and groups, such as [Noire SLO](#) and [Raise Up SLO](#). R.A.C.E. Matters SLO actively spotlights Black people and people of color in various industries throughout San Luis Obispo including the arts, academics, and music.

You can make a difference by contributing to this organization and directly impacting the local community. R.A.C.E. Matters has a web page that includes a Black business directory and anti-racism resources. They include stories from those in the community on a listening blog, enabling you to hear about our experiences firsthand.

We are hoping to start by raising **\$5,000** to donate to this cause via a GoFundMe page, but would be overjoyed to exceed that goal if at all possible. Please send any amount that you feel comfortable donating to:

[https://www.gofundme.com/f/race-matters-slo?utm\\_source=customer&utm\\_medium=copy\\_link&utm\\_campaign=p\\_cf+share-flow-1](https://www.gofundme.com/f/race-matters-slo?utm_source=customer&utm_medium=copy_link&utm_campaign=p_cf+share-flow-1)

Our words are meant to be that of creation. To create dialogue between people of all colors, to create space for Black people and all POC of our generation and the next to have a seat at this table, and to inspire others to do more for Black and marginalized communities. We are asking that you feel the gravity of the moment we are in, how imperative it is to stand up

now to this disparity, and help us create a future of real equality in our industry. We have stood with you and your businesses, will you now stand for us and our futures?

Now is not the time to be silent. It never is.

Signed,



Simonne Mitchelson



Justin Trabue

For more information on the Association of African-American Vintners, please see the link below:

<http://www.aaavintners.org/support-us.html>

To listen to *Belonging: The Interview & Stories Matter: A Story Telling*, please see the links below:

<https://www.racematterslo.org/listeningblog/2020/3/24/stories-matter-recorded-live>

<https://www.racematterslo.org/listeningblog/justin-trabue>

Another resource working to diversify the Hospitality Industry:

<https://www.diversityinwineandspirits.org/>