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Improper Race and Religion References in Adnan Syed Trial

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Hae Min Lee, a Woodlawn High School senior, went missing in 1999. Her body was found nearly a month later. Adnan Syed, classmate and ex-boyfriend, was arrested and found guilty of her murder, though he claims he is innocent. The trial that culminated in the 2000 conviction of Adnan Syed has been a hotly debated subject in recent weeks, largely because of the popular "Serial" podcast that examined the case. That debate will no doubt intensify in light of a brief that Mr. Syed's current counsel filed this month with the Maryland Court of Special Appeals seeking to overturn that conviction. But the debate has largely focused on the question of Mr. Syed's factual innocence or guilt.

While that question is an important one, we, the South Asian Bar Association of North America, write this not to opine on whether Mr. Syed is innocent or guilty. Instead, the issue that has troubled us is one that has received far less attention: The fact that Mr. Syed's ethnicity played a major role in the trial, in which he was accused of murdering his former girlfriend, a fellow Woodlawn High School student.

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