

# Color blind



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The idea of color blindness can often become the Trojan horse in discussions on racism. The inclusivity of the sentiment, “I don’t see color,” when making friends, hiring employees, promoting leaders, etc. is tempting yet empty. It hides a deeper misunderstanding.

“I don’t see color,” implies that factors such as merit, compatibility, like-mindedness, attractiveness, celebrity, philosophy, or other qualities of a person would be bigger drivers for figuring out social and professional circles. It implies that race is a static descriptor, and, as such, does not factor into the moral and practical compass that guide day-to-day interactions.

Removing color from the equation also assumes that other traits exist in a vacuum. Achieving merit is a factor of what opportunities are available to be considered, either due to existing laws or existing biases. Different colors have different physical characteristics and markers of attractiveness that can only be equally respected after noticing and then valuing the differences. Recognizing that celebrity comes with a great degree of assimilation and mirroring of the dominant culture adds depth to the conversation; negating race leads to hollow praise. That there is a dominant color, and with it a dominant culture, should be the incontrovertible place to start the discussion.

In the same bucket as “All Lives Matter,” “I don’t see color,” appears to be inclusive and progressive when it actually negates the very reasons why race is an important metric. These are half-baked slogans more than solutions, implying that everyone has struggles and obstacles regardless of color so why not remove color as a checkbox. Hoping that if we collectively remove race from the equation we will magically erase the disparities that seem to follow.

In all likelihood, the message is meant to be, “I don’t use negative components of racial stereotypes in my decision-making about a person.” Instead, the intended message should be, “I not only see the entirety of that person, including their race, but I also feel it adds to my friendship/organization/child’s education, etc.”

Being non-racist or anti-racist cannot be possible if an entire characteristic of a person is erased from the social decision-making algorithm. Instead, the algorithm should be recalibrated to accept, to be non-judgmental, to give weight to a heavy identifier of a person.

Every time we celebrate the one who succeeds, we need to remember not only the ones who tried and failed, but the hundreds whose world could not allow them to even envision what it would look like to try, let alone try and fail. Many times, that failure was due to obstacles related only to color.

Color blindness negates integral building blocks of a person while allowing for tokenism to bubble up as surrogate moral markers of how broad-minded or unbigoted an individual or society is.

In removing race from the algorithm, the impact of the collective struggle, the cultural influences, the origins of that person’s moral compass, the societal status and historical context of the evolution of that race is negated. In addition, positive factors—the art, music, food, dialect, history, religion, etc.—are also negated. Each individual of color will put a different weight on how much race factors into their personal identity. For some it is the defining characteristic, while for others it is merely a supporting actor in the entire identity puzzle. In either case, race is still a factor. Dismissing race dismisses the inherent conscious and unconscious struggle a person has overcome, the collective body of experiences, the richness of their personal history, and ultimately dismisses the person.

I am an Indian-American woman. I bring to the table a skill set and approach to life/work that another may not—growing up in a time when Indians from Asia were still mistaken for Native Americans to now being considered part of the model minority, all the while navigating race through the added weight of being a woman.

In imagining the future for my daughter: I hope for a world where her upbringing, cultural roots, family structure, femininity, emotional quotient, and sensitivity are acknowledged, owned, exalted, and seen as assets rather than as liabilities to be erased.

I want to be accepted including my color, not despite it. My color is not an inconvenient fact.

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