

RAISING KIDS > BIG KIDS > TEACHING RESPONSIBILITY & VALUES > RACISM

Why We Need to Go Beyond Not Seeing Color—Even for Little Kids

Trying to understand the troubles with "color blindness" in a way kids can understand? Try one of these six metaphors.

By [Maressa Brown](#) | Published on July 2, 2020



PHOTO: JOHN GIUSTINA/GETTY IMAGES

From pointing out the importance of saying "[Black lives matter](#)" versus "[all lives matter](#)" to [identifying white privilege](#), parents all over the U.S. have been tackling anti-racism lessons with their kids. And as they do, they're learning why certain concepts are inherently problematic. One such idea: racial "color blindness," which the [American Psychological Association](#) defines as "the view that the U.S. has moved beyond race and racism and that the color of someone's skin does not matter in today's society."

[Doyin Richards](#), the author of a bestselling children's book about diversity [What's The Difference?](#) and founder of the [Anti-Racism Fight Club](#), says, "Being color blind is a form of polite racism—an oxymoron if I've ever heard one before—that needs to be exposed for what it is."

"On the surface, saying that you don't see color may come off as 'I view everyone equally,' but in reality it means, 'I'm not going to let myself become uncomfortable by thinking of all of the ills society brings to you due to the color of your skin,'" he explains, "so I'm just going to dismiss it and tell you to stop talking about it."

Teaching children that everyone is currently equal, regardless of race, is problematic for multiple reasons, explains [Ayesha Bell Hardaway](#), a law professor at [Case Western Reserve University](#) in Cleveland and co-director of the [Social Justice Institute \(SJTI\)](#), a nonprofit that provides development and learning opportunities to social justice educators. "Teaching children to be color blind is not only an ineffective way to redress the societal injustices prompted by racism, it actually serves to reinforce the marginalization and stigmatizing of Black and Brown people perpetuated by racism," says Hardaway. "Attempts to reduce people of color to having no color is essentially whitewashing. It ignores not only our beauty but also our rich—and sometimes painful—history. We cannot promote social change and justice with a 'color blind' approach."

A variety of explanations of the importance of seeing color have gone viral. Here, six helpful examples.

1. "When You Don't See Color, You Can't See Patterns"

[#BlackLivesMatter pic.twitter.com/KKwf0DeLK7](#)

— Dr. Maurice Sholas (@docmosho) [June 3, 2020](#)

Commenting on a photo of protest signs that went viral, Maurice Sholas, M.D., Ph.D., who is a board-certified in pediatric rehabilitation medicine, explained not seeing color demonstrates willful ignorance and privilege. The signs themselves caught the attention of people on social media, as they pointed out that by not seeing color, you fail to see how Black people and other people of color are disproportionately murdered by police, while white people are often respected by law enforcement.

2. "What Do You Do at a Traffic Light?"

[@TomiLahren](#): "I don't see color!" [@Trevornoah](#): "Okay, so what do you do at a traffic light?"



Never gets old <https://t.co/3TtXK7Bs9D> pic.twitter.com/5cKzpLH4yL

— "Kwa Ground" (@robi_chacha) [February 15, 2020](#)

In a segment from late 2016, *The Daily Show* host Trevor Noah replied to conservative commentator Tomi Lahren's assertion that she's color blind by asking what she does at a traffic light. He then stated, "I don't believe in that [concept] at all when people say that. There's nothing wrong with seeing color; it's how you treat color that's more important."

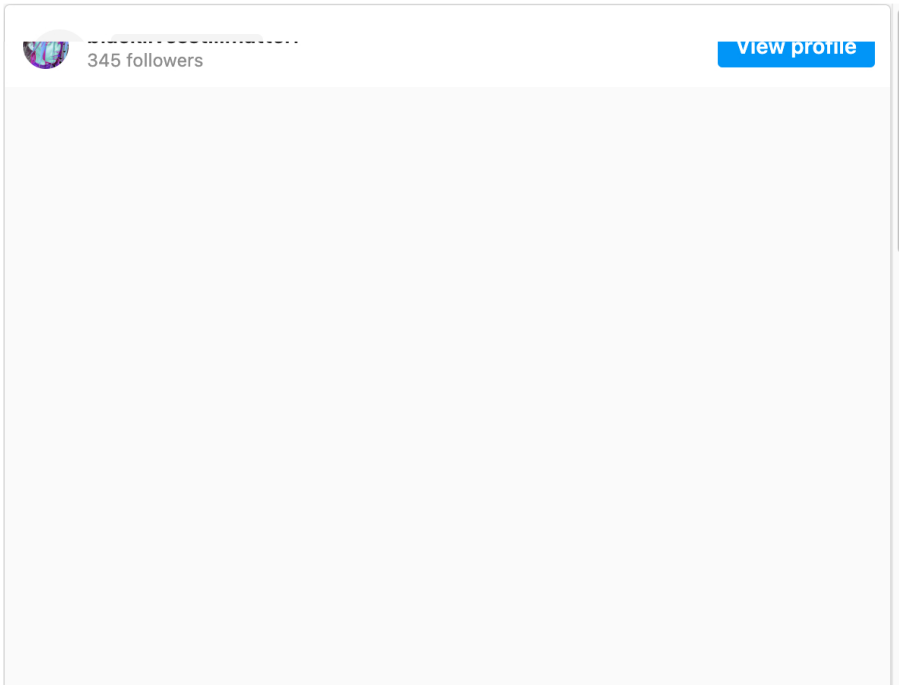
3. Privilege & Denial



This illo, popular on Instagram and Pinterest, explains how the issue with color blindness is two-fold: It turns a blind eye to the present suffering of those who do not have white privilege while ignoring Black and Brown people's past personal and cultural history.

4. Ignoring Race Doesn't Erase

Racism



As this Instagram illustration points out, seeing color is integral to actively working to address racism and create change. Alongside the post, artist, creative writer, and performer Alexis Maxwell wrote, "Those of us who can see, see race first and make judgments before we have a second to process them. That's not a bad thing, it's a human thing! Instead of pretending it doesn't happen, let's learn to keep ourselves in check when it



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45 likes

blacklivesstillmatterr



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The colour blind mentality is nice in theory but truthfully it's impossible not to notice someone's race. Those of us who can see, see race first and make judgments before we have a second to process them. That's not a bad thing, it's a human thing! Instead of pretending it doesn't happen, lets learn to keep ourselves in check when it does. Notice any biases we have and always be conscious of them ❤️ The world's full of diversity, let's not pretend it doesn't exist. Saying we don't see colour doesn't stop the struggles that come with it! .

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[#artistsoninstagram](#) [#idontseerace](#) [#idontseecolor](#)

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pretending it doesn't happen, let's learn to keep ourselves in check when it does. Notice any biases we have and always be conscious of them."


5. See Color, See the Oppression, See the Struggle



mimimoffie
Amsterdam, Netherlands

[View profile](#)

~~"I DON'T SEE COLOR"~~



[View more on Instagram](#)

♡ 💬 ↗ 🔖


34,106 likes

mimimoffie

Saying "I don't See Color" disregards the existence of anti-blackness. -
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#sandrabland #tamirrice #georgefloyd #saytheirnames #trayvonmartin #icantbreathe #tonymcdade #sayhername #regiskorchinski #stopkillingblackpeople #nojusticenopeace #useyourprivilege #dionjohnson #staysafe #ericgarner #emmittill #seemycolor #ahmaudarbery #breonnataylor #mikebrown #coreyjones #blacklivesmatter #justiceforgeorgefloyd #bothamjean #justiceforahmaud #jordandavis #justiceforbreonnataylor

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Netherlands-based artist Mimi Moffie created and shared this powerful piece, writing her post, "Saying 'I don't see color' disregards the existence of anti-Blackness."

6. "If You Don't See Color, You Don't See Me"

carli_withaneye
1,039 followers

[View profile](#)

[View more on Instagram](#)

584 likes

carli_withaneye

I am bowled over.
Thank you @misanharriman for beautifully capturing powerful moments in black British history.

Thank you @london for using your platform to share the movement with millions and joining in solidarity.
Thank you @britishvogue for amplifying this #revolution by sharing it with your audience
Thank you @selmablair for taking your followers on this journey
<https://www.vogue.co.uk/news/gallery/black-lives-matter-protest-6-june>

"I don't see colour" is something us black folk hear all the time.
A dismissal of our heritage. Our struggle. Our pride. Our beauty.
It's intended as a compliment.
It isn't.
A friend put it perfectly for me when talking to a group of colleagues recently.
We were sharing our experiences as black people.
Exposing our pain and visiting dark places to help people understand the reality of daily life.
He said, we all see colour.
We ALL see colour.
What matters is what you feel.
When you see colour...
Please take a second to absorb that.
If you've said it before, don't beat yourself up.
Use this as an opportunity to educate others, share your own journey of learning.
I was getting upset this morning.
Reading the comments on the @london post I was told about my response to not seeing colour
"we're not gonna sit here and be told how to support BLM. That's not how it works.
Sometimes I think BLM is ungrateful for the support of white people. Maybe we'll stop supporting who knows"
Despite being supported by 1000's on @london's account. Despite @britishvogue showing their support.
The words of an uninformed few still cut deep...
The exhaustion kicks in.
A deep fatigue at not just peoples 'colour blindness'
But their blindness to humanity.
We need everyone to share this load.
To take on the education. To hold the mirror up to the privilege...of not seeing colour.

#blacklivesmatter
#idontseecolor
#whiteprivilege
#protest
#nojusticenopeace
#georgefloyd

[view all 47 comments](#)

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Carli McBean, Inclusion & Diversity Project Manager for Retail EMEA at Apple is featured in this image taken by Misan Harriman. "I don't see color' is something us Black folk hear all the time," McBean wrote on Instagram. "A dismissal of our heritage. Our struggle. Our pride. Our beauty. It's intended as a compliment. It isn't. A friend put it perfectly for me when talking to a group of colleagues recently. We were sharing our experiences as Black people. Exposing our pain and visiting dark places to help people understand the reality of daily life. He said, 'We all see color. We all see color. What matters is what you feel. When you see color.'"

She continued, "Please take a second to absorb that. If you've said it before, don't beat yourself up. Use this as an opportunity to educate others, share your own journey of learning." She concluded, "We need everyone to share this load. To hold the mirror up to the privilege of not seeing color."

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