

The following is an op-ed piece denouncing the ideology of color blindness as a solution to racial tensions.

By Garrett Lloyd

Color Blindness Introduction

Color blindness is the ideology that race should not be noticed, nor focused on, in any encounter amongst people. Evan Apfelbaum, Michael Norton, and Samuel Sommers describe racial color blindness in *Racial Color Blindness: Emergence, Practice and Implications* as “the belief that racial group membership should not be taken into account, or even noticed, as a strategy for managing diversity and intergroup relations.” It is the idea that people should not include race in their perception of others. Color blindness is a strategy, formed by Caucasians, for the purpose of preventing the notion that they are racist. As well as eliminating any type of racial or bias involvement they may possess towards someone of a different race. A common phrase linked with color blindness is “I don’t see race, I see people.” Eduardo Bonilla-Silva explains in “New Racism,” *Color-Blind Racism and The Future of Whiteness in America*, color blindness has emerged as a way for whites to justify modern racial inequality. Instead of describing someone using their race, people will often just avoid the topic altogether. Moreover, Carmen Nobel, in *The Case Against Racial Colorblindness*, says people do this in attempts to be “politically correct.”

Op-Ed Color blindness is problematic because it ignores the fact that people are of different races. It underlies the history and progression of racism. There is a long history of racism in the world and particularly the United States. People were once, and still are, discriminated against merely because the color of their skin or where they came from. The solution, in order to avoid or overcome this problem, is not to ignore the fact that people are of different races and come from different places.

According to Apfelbaum, Norton, and Sommers, color blindness is problematic simply because people do see race when identifying someone. They mention a study conducted that found perceptual differentiation of race occurs in less than one-seventh of a second. Yet people have discovered this strategy to act like they do not. These authors also mentioned that this differentiation happens as early as six months of age, meaning this is a natural act. This is not something people are taught. Carmen Nobel reiterates this fact by quoting Norton, “...research shows that it simply doesn’t work. We do notice race and there is no way of getting around this fact.” There is absolutely no way of getting around it, and to ignore that creates an issue.

Bonilla-Silva describes the concept of color blindness as tying into “new racism.” He mentions the idea of naturalization. He also focuses on the phrase “that’s the way it is”, a phrase often used to normalize or validate controversial occurrences regarding race. He uses an example of racial segregation in neighborhoods, which leads to segregation in friendships, relationships, and in school. A quote from one of the interviewees was “...that’s not a problem as far as I’m – see, we have black friends, but it just happens to work out that way” (referring to his neighborhood being all white). This is why color blindness is problematic. People don’t even see the problem. They see a lack of racial mix in their neighborhood as “natural” or “that’s just the way it is.” By avoiding the acknowledgement of the difference is what causes the problem.

My view of race relations at work and in general may be very different than others. I have attended very diverse and cultured schools throughout my life. Fortunately, my experiences with different workplaces and schools have been very positive with regards to integration. Interacting and socializing with people of all races has always been very normal and natural for me. However, as I’ve gotten older and have started to see more of the world I’ve noticed people tend to stick to their own “crowds.” And a tool they often use, to define who fits into their “crowd”, is race. This could be for many different reasons. For example

as an alum, UMass Boston is an extremely diverse institution. We have international students, who are in the United States just for college. As well as students, like myself, whom are children of immigrants who moved to the United States for a better life. My father was born in Jamaica. I am very proud to be Jamaican and I absolutely love Jamaican culture. However, I would identify myself as an American because I've lived in the U.S. my whole life. When I meet another Jamaican or person of Caribbean descent, it usually is an instant click and bond. Most of my friends are of Caribbean descent or African American. I'm not racist and I don't solely pick and choose my friends based off where they are from. However, as humans we tend to socialize with people we feel we can relate to, and often times I notice people hang around people of the same race because it is where they feel comfortable. I have friends of all races and I would say my experiences with different races are all positive. However, I have witnessed/encountered racial discrimination. I believe a lot of it is based off of ignorance and fear. I don't believe color blindness is the solution to those problems.

The most important example used by Bonilla-Silva is an interview with a female college student, Sue. Sue was asked if minorities should be offered benefits and certain opportunities to be admitted into schools. Sue does not believe minorities should be provided unique opportunities. Part of Sue's statement was "I think that they should have the same opportunities as everyone else...I don't think that just because they are a minority that they should, you know, not meet the requirements, you know." This example is extremely important because it is in sync with the logic that goes behind certain ideologies like colorblindness. The article doesn't state Sue's race but it can be presumed that she is white. It can also be presumed that Sue is a student in the United States. Sue's statement isn't racist. Sue may even follow colorblindness in attempts to come off as "not racist". However, what Sue fails to realize is the history of racism in the United States and the lingering effects of it. Sue fails to acknowledge "white privilege". "White privilege" is real. A sentence from Sue's statement is "I think that they should have the same opportunities as everyone else." Sue is right, minorities should have equal opportunities. However, they don't, which is why organizations like universities/colleges put forth unique opportunities for them.

Sue represents how many Americans look to tackle racial issues. This reassures why I believe colorblindness is not only ineffective, but more importantly, dangerous. Ineffective because it is proven that it takes less than a second to notice someone's race. Dangerous because it is based off ignoring our differences, instead of embracing them. I'd like to see colorblindness become a thing of the past. When it comes to something like race, I'd like to see progression in the United States. I'd like to see acknowledgement of our negative past and effort towards our positive future. Colorblindness hinders growth and excludes social awareness. In order to grow as one, we must educate people like Sue instead of bashing them. This is the only way to move towards a future with no inequality.