

*Skin color still matters, despite any denial; Laws have not eliminated implicit bias
and bigotry*

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Body

"It breaks my heart that my kids are being taught that skin color matters," said Michele Tafoya.

Surely, she can't be serious.

Tafoya, who recently retired as a sportscaster, is too old to be that naive and too smart to be that ignorant. But that's what she said on a recent installment of Tucker Carlson's Fox News program, embarking on her new gig as co-chair of a Minnesota Republican gubernatorial campaign.

If she thinks skin color doesn't matter, here's the natural follow-up question: Since when?

I presume her short answer would be since America passed laws banning racial discrimination, roughly six decades ago. There's no way to argue that skin color was inconsequential during slavery, Reconstruction and Jim Crow, although Tafoya pushes back on the latter two periods.

During an appearance on "The View" last year, she said white people have been fighting for racial equality "since the Civil War."

Just this month

To folks like her and Carlson, we spend too much time on history and not enough on the present, where Black people sit up front on buses, eat lunch at any deli counter and even land high-paying jobs. She told Carlson that we should appreciate "the progress that we've made in this country" instead of "looking in the rearview mirror."

Unfortunately, we don't have to look back far to see how skin color remains relevant.

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I wonder what Tafoya would tell her children about the two boys who fought at a New Jersey mall this month. Bridgewater police arrived seconds into the fight and threw the light-skinned teenager onto a couch. The male officer tackled and pinned the Black young man to the ground, and the female officer appeared to have her knee on his back as he was handcuffed.

Children: "Mommy, why was the Black kid placed in cuffs and not the other kid?"

Tafoya: "I don't know, but skin color doesn't matter."

The teen who wasn't restrained has an explanation, which he shared with NJ.com: "That was just plain old racist."

Initially identified in news reports as white (his mother is Colombian and his father is Pakistani), the 15-year-old said that he "even offered to get handcuffed, I offered to get detained after (the other teenager) was detained, and they turned my offer down. I even asked why they detained (the other young man) and not me, and they said because (he) was resisting."

The viral video shows no sign of resistance from the Black teen. New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy said the "appearance of what is racially disparate treatment is deeply, deeply disturbing."

At least that wasn't a life-or-death situation. For examples such as those, Tafoya could try explaining what happened to a Black FedEx driver in Mississippi last month.

D'Monterrio Gibson said he was delivering packages - and in full uniform - when two white men chased him in a pickup and fired at least five shots at the Hertz van he was driving.

"They came out of nowhere," Gibson said at a news conference.

He said he believes the father and son, Gregory and Brandon Case, shot at him because they thought he didn't belong in the neighborhood. (If that sounds familiar, look up the murder of Ahmaud Arbery.)

The Cases were arrested.

Police Chief Kenny Collins, who's Black, rebutted allegations that skin color matters in his municipality: "Brookhaven is not a racist, prejudiced town. You can't judge a town by the actions of two individuals."

That's similar to what Tafoya would probably tell her offspring.

Kids: "Mommy, why did the white men shoot at the Black FedEx man?"

Tafoya: "Those are just two bad guys, but skin color doesn't matter."

See: Voting Rights Act

We wish it didn't matter, and we're striving to ensure that it doesn't always matter. But denial doesn't change reality, and healing is impossible without acceptance. Skin color has been an open wound in America since Africans were

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imported to be enslaved, including the past half-century or so when explicit racial mistreatment became illegal (and some of that legislation is under siege; see: Voting Rights Act).

Regrettably, laws haven't eliminated implicit bias and blatant bigotry in education, employment, housing, banking, urban planning, health care -- virtually every aspect of American life. Pick a field, and there are numerous studies to prove it.

The truth is heartbreaking, not the fact that kids need to learn it. Teaching them anything less hampers their ability to create a society where skin color truly doesn't matter.

We're not there yet.

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