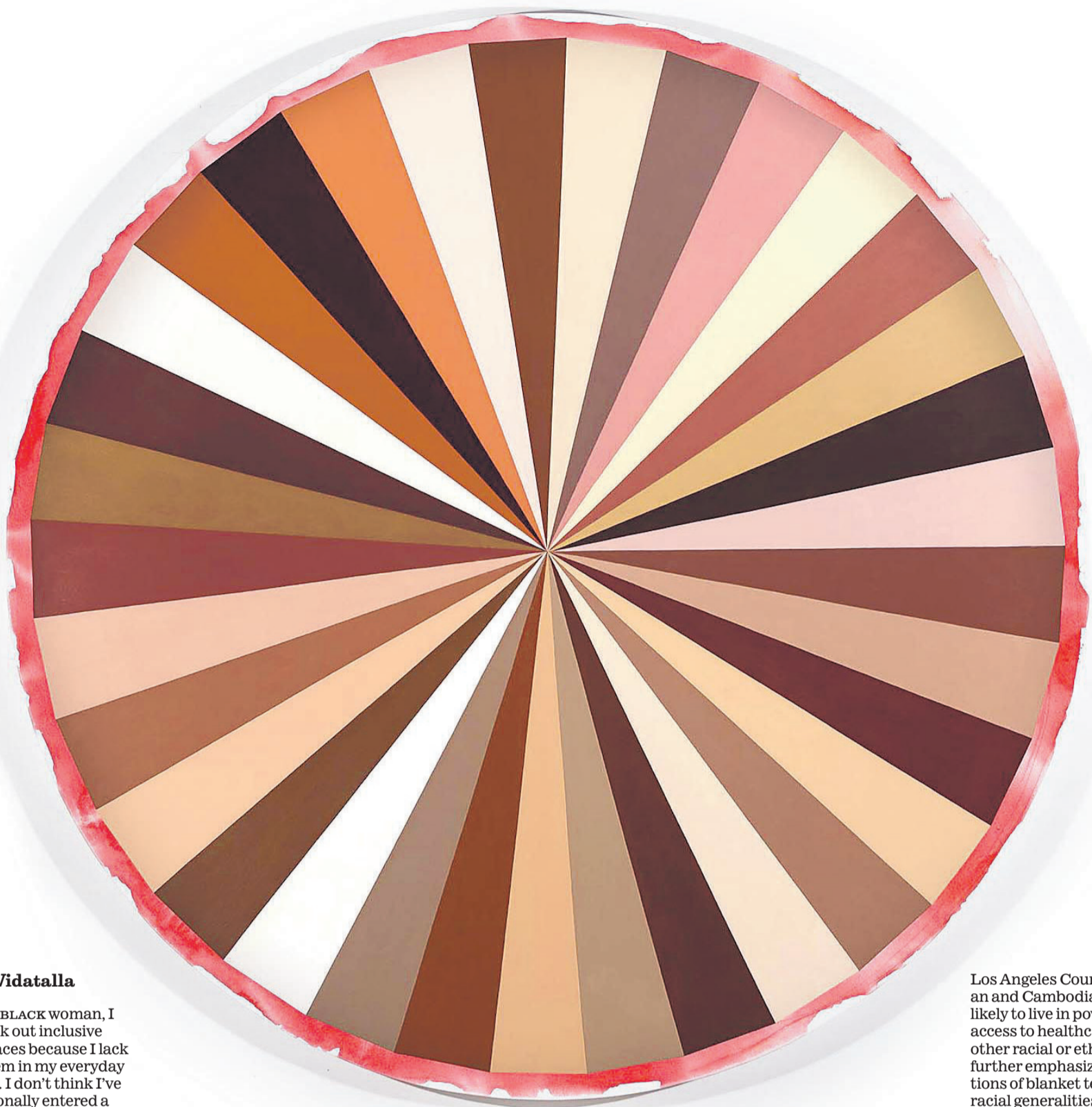


OP-ED



ADRIANA VAREJÃO
Big Color Wheel V, 2018
Oil on canvas
70 2/3 inches diameter
(180 cm)
© Adriana Varejão.
Photo: Jaime Acioli.
Courtesy Gagosian.

By Nadra Widatalla

AS A BLACK WOMAN, I seek out inclusive spaces because I lack them in my everyday life. I don't think I've ever unintentionally entered a space and immediately felt like I was a part of the majority. I remember when I joined my first women's group. I went to one club meeting, and never returned. I felt like every issue these women were struggling with affected me more intensely because of my race. It wasn't empowering, just depressing.

No one looked like me. I didn't expect to be in a room filled with black women, but I also didn't think I'd be the only one. And while the others went on about empowerment, sisterhood and freedom, I was met with, yet again, a feeling I knew only I could understand. In a room full of women discussing ways to be heard among men, ironically, I was grappling with how to do just that in the room we were in.

I should have known better when I saw the group advertised as "women of color-friendly."

The terms "women of color" and "people of color" are meant to be inclusive. But from my perspective, they only help to leave black people behind — specifically black women. While every minority group faces its own challenges in America, a "one size fits all" mentality toward diversity erases the specific needs of the most vulnerable communities.

Just look at the fashion industry. According to the Fashion Spot's annual "Diversity Report," one out of every three models in 2018 fashion ads were women of color. That certainly sounds like progress. But editorials and magazine covers lean heavily toward non-black women of color, and the terms non-white and women of color are used repeatedly to bolster the analysis.

To see for myself, I picked up a

random high-end fashion magazine. Out of hundreds of models it had a total of 12 black women in it, admittedly better than the one or two I was expecting. Looking closer, however, I noticed that these women were either all extremely light-skinned, very dark skinned or highly established in their careers, like Lupita Nyong'o.

This was highly conditional inclusivity. Your everyday black girl was missing.

While that's perhaps not surprising for an industry that's never been particularly hospitable to everyday anyone, uncritical boasts about more "women of color" in fashion are allowing an exclusionary industry to rehabilitate its image without actually doing the work — at black women's expense. The industry gets to decide and

control what type of black woman it deems fit and more importantly, tolerable.

Nonwhite does not mean black. Women of color does not mean black either. Too often, when a person or brand uses these descriptors, it papers over an absence of black people. Bella and Gigi Hadid are among the non-white models contributing to Fashion Spot's misleading statistic. Though half-Palestinian and half-white, both women racially pass as white.

The reality is that not all "people of color" suffer equally from the effects of institutional racism. Black women are least likely to be promoted and supported by their managers in the workplace. Police kill unarmed black people at higher rates than other races,

especially black women. According to the Sentencing Project, black women represent roughly 14% of the female population of the United States, but 30% of all females incarcerated. Black children are also almost nine times more likely than white children to have a parent in prison while Latino children are three times more likely. Research also suggests that black women are more likely to be publicly objectified, harassed and dehumanized.

Meanwhile, in 2016, Asians were the highest-earning racial and ethnic group in the U.S. The median annual income for Asian adults was \$51,288, compared with \$47,958 for whites and \$31,082 for blacks.

Of course, Asians aren't a homogeneous block, and not all of them are thriving. For example, in

Los Angeles County, elderly Korean and Cambodians are more likely to live in poverty and without access to healthcare than any other racial or ethnic group. This further emphasizes the limitations of blanket terminology and racial generalities, which can hamper the ability to identify the specific problems facing specific communities.

None of this is to say that the interracial and ethnic solidarity implied by the earnest use of "people of color" isn't important. Of course they are. Our struggles share commonalities. But even more important is doing the hard work of understanding and fighting to overcome the distinct layers of injustice that face people of different identities — and different layers within those identities. A black person has different challenges than someone who is both Muslim and black, and a black, Muslim woman has different challenges still. Parsing the implications of these differences, instead of flattening them, is what it means to be "intersectional," an important but widely misunderstood concept — even by the liberals who use it most. Intersectionality is not about building the biggest interracial team possible. It's about catering to the individual needs of different communities to make sure no one is left behind.

The idea of different groups of minorities working together to fight racism of all sorts is fantastic, but any effort that sees the struggles of all minorities as a single movement is actually harmful. Black women, for example, are a minority within a minority — and we're being left behind. Rectifying that means the work of inclusivity has to go beyond being friendly to "women of color." Perhaps the best place to start is to retire that term altogether.

NADRA WIDATALLA is a writer and producer living in Los Angeles. Follow her on Twitter: @nadrawidatalla

Let's retire the term 'people of color'

In Poway, as in Pittsburgh, we are grieving once again

By David Shribman

And so, once again, shots rang out in a synagogue, worshippers were dispersed in horror, death was in the air where, moments earlier, blessings and chants had filled a sanctuary.

The sad truth is that in our age the word "sanctuary" has lost its meaning. And the sad truth — in the wake of this latest shooting — is that the phrase "Chabad of Poway" will have an entirely new meaning, just as the phrase "Tree of Life" no longer denotes a place of worship at the corner of Wilkins and Shady avenues in Pittsburgh, three blocks from my house, but a shooting rampage exactly six months ago that killed 11 congregants and horrified the world.

Chabad of Poway, Tree of Life, Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, S.C. The Islamic Cultural Center of Quebec City. The names of these sacred places and too many others have taken on tragic meaning because they are the sites of tragedies.

Today my Pittsburgh neighbor-

hood remains scarred, with signs on every other lawn bellowing "No Place for Hate." People walk past the kosher Dunkin' Donuts in shirts with the famous Steelers logo altered to include a gold Star of David and the legend "Stronger than Hate." The synagogue itself is boarded up, with no one quite sure whether it will be leveled, reopened or converted into housing for the elderly.

Right now Tree of Life, so massive a structure that it was home to three congregations, sits empty, a monument and memorial that, like all of us who pass by it on the way to the gym or the grocery store, remains a symbol of all the questions we have asked but have been unable to answer.

In these last six months, there have been vigils, multi-faith sessions, rallies, forums, examinations of the roots of hate, and, this being the age for such things, political recriminations.

None of it — not the services, not the essays, not the memories, not even the declaration of community unity across faiths, always with a rabbi, a priest, a minister and an

The sad truth is that in our age the word 'sanctuary' has lost its meaning.

imam present — stopped the shooter in Poway.

There was standing room only in the massive Soldiers and Sailors Memorial and Museum in the Oakland section of Pittsburgh shortly after the synagogue shooting. The outpouring of sympathy, sadness and support gave some succor to a grieving community, to be sure. But it did not stop the Poway shooter.

For days Pittsburghers of all faiths, and then Americans of all regions, and finally people of all nations, strolled in silence along the sidewalks outside Tree of Life. One woman played the violin, its plaintive notes wafting across the street to the tents where television reporters recorded the quiet expressions of sadness and shame. The grassy

partition in front of Tree of Life was choked with flowers, and then all of Wilkins Avenue was full of hand-made memorials, some by children, some by adults, whose labors came with tears. But that did not stop the Poway shooter.

And throughout it all, the Heinz History Center, a few miles away, began collecting poems, tributes, news articles, sermons, photographs and drawings, all part of an effort to create an archive to ensure Tree of Life would not fade from memory. But all that curating and collecting did not stop the Poway shooter.

No communities are alike — just as no mass shootings are alike — but it is almost certain that men and women across faiths, across creeds, across California and across the nation will gather in the next several days the way we did in Pittsburgh. It wasn't only a pilgrimage of Jews to the pews of synagogues that following Friday, filling row upon row. It was people of every sort, black and white and Latino and Arab and Asian.

In the Jewish faith the phrase "never again" has special meaning,

linked as it is to the Holocaust and the death of 6 million. The leitmotif of those Pittsburgh gatherings was, quite plainly, "never again," the phrase revived for a new era of disbelief. And yet it has happened again.

Shortly after the assassination of President Kennedy, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, not yet a senator from New York, tried to comfort Mary McGrory, not yet a Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist. Both were devoted to the martyred president and overwhelmed with grief that they carried to their graves. At that moment she said to him that they would never laugh again. He said to her that they would laugh again, but that they would never be young again.

It is that kind of moment again, because the view from Pittsburgh, and soon from Poway, is that we are growing old with grief.

DAVID SHRIBMAN, executive editor emeritus of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, led the paper's coverage of the Tree of Life shooting that this month was awarded the Pulitzer Prize.