

EPISODE 3

Melayna: Welcome to a new episode of Black Tea. We're really excited today because we get to speak to former politician, Celina Caesar-Chavannes, and we're really looking forward to having a wide ranging discussion because she's been incredibly outspoken about equity issues and especially framing them, around her experience in Parliament Hill. And it was, it's a pretty specific experience, if people remember the way that she sort of left the Liberal Party and then ended up leaving politics. It's a really interesting story.

Dalton: Oh, for sure. I mean, there are so few Black politicians out there, so, I mean, can you name how many black politicians can you name in Toronto, in Vancouver, in Canada? You know? Like let's, let's be real. It's like, I can count them on a couple of handfuls. So how exciting is it that we, you get to pick her brain endlessly about her journey, you know? And in our show's unfiltered, frank, blunt kind of way.

Melayna: Yeah. Celina is and very outspoken voice, on social media and beyond, a doctor of philosophy student in organizational leadership, Celina's pushing our understanding of equitable spaces further by focusing her studies on ways to improve the numbers of diverse candidates filling senior level positions by conducting research and creating products that can bridge the gaps in literature and an industry. On a personal level, Celina works with individuals, especially women, to encourage them through her own life lessons, to maximize their inner potential and fully live their purpose. From 2015 to October, 2019, Celina was an elected member of Parliament for Whitby and served as parliamentary secretary to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and parliamentary secretary to the minister of international development. While in politics her advocacy and vulnerability helped shape policy related to mental health, equity, and justice. So we just wanted to say, thank you for being here, Celina.

Celina: Well, thank you for having me. I'm excited.

Melayna: We're excited too. And I sort of wanted to, I know that your history is with the Liberal party and then you were later an independent. And so I just kind of want to talk about some of the principles of Liberalism, especially when we see it through governance. They've really been like speaking to the symbolism. And a lot of the things that we've learned now are about genuine tenants of equality and justice and the way that people are living. And we're sort of seeing the separation between values and actions and a lot of Liberals being exposed for that sort of like missing the mark in understanding that. So I sort of wanted to know how that separation impacted the work you were able to get done as well as your experience in Parliament.

Celina: Well, I think you, you hit the nail right on the head. I, when I first entered government in 2015 and in October, 2015, I was elected. And by March, 2019, I had decided to sit as an independent. I actually decided long before March that I wanted to sit as an independent, but I didn't want to send sort of shocked waves through the Liberal party as they were dealing with many other issues. But then it came to a point where I was like, you know, I don't actually have to do this, so I'm out. You're absolutely right. The symbolism,

versus what is actually happening. The values versus their actions that are supposed to demonstrate their values were not aligned. And I think at first, the first time I saw that happen was around the changing of the vote of how we were going to vote. And it wasn't a real issue for me that, you know, how we were going to vote, we weren't going to vote anymore with first past the post, the prime minister said it over and over and over again.

Melayna: And that was an election promise, wasn't it?

Celina: It wasn't just that it was election promise, it was such a prominent election promise. And I went door to door, talking to individuals who were really supportive of it. But also went door to door, talking to people about open, transparent government, about doing politics differently, about bold, transformative-- like these are the things that the Liberals promised in 2015. So they were going to be bold, transformative, do politics different, open and transparent. And then the first thing that you do is not bold, it's not transparent, and it's not politics different. And I was like, Hm. What is happening here? So I immediately started to see some of the cracks. But when it came to things like justice, when it came to things like, okay, we're going to sign on to the international decade for people of African descent, which I brought to the Prime Minister in 2016, and then was excluded from every single conversation until he announced it. When it was announced that we were signing on, I was surprised. I was not involved. I was not involved in any budget discussions around investments to the Black community. Again, I was kind of like, Hm, do they really value Black voices? And then, you know, when it came to mandatory minimums still being on the books, the hesitation and the direct dismissal of expungements of criminal records for marijuana possession, things that I knew disproportionately impacted the Black community in a negative way, or Black communities in a negative way, I just thought this is not what I signed up for.

Melayna: And it's interesting because to be, you know, one person in the room and knowing that you have that power and to have that power taken away when you start being out here spoken about things, I'm wondering about other Black Liberals, and if they thought you were sort of betraying this allegiance that we have, we're supposed to have to the Liberal party when we're really just oftentimes treated as pawns.

Celina: Well, there's two things. So there's the internal factor, of being within a party where diversity is supposed to be our strength and it actually is not diversity. For them, it means checking a box and we have, you know, a Black woman and we have some this, and we have some that, and here we're done. It's not an inclusive space. And I think the more that I spoke out about issues that were-- the problem that I was having was that the issues I was speaking about fit within the Liberal ideology. Like, so I'm talking about equity, I'm talking about justice, I'm talking about, you know, things that are impacting Black communities, but it's like, Oh no, no, no, but not that much.

Melayna: But we can't. Yeah, it's like, we don't actually want to do it.

Celina: Yeah, can you dial it down a little bit? Or, you know, when the funding came out for the Black community in 2018, I was like, first of all, what is this?

Melayna: The \$50 million?

Celina: \$50 million. So you're basically saying that what we're worth is \$50 each, cause there's a million Black people in Canada. For the hundreds of years that we've been here, this is what we're worth? And I lost it. And I was told at a meeting that we had with Black caucus, so this is the internal, that I needed to get on board and stop being disruptive. And that's a tough place to be in when you're one Black woman out of 338 people, and one Black woman in a party that's supposed to say, yeah, we hear what you're saying, Celina, this is what we're doing now. We'll do more later. Or something, something like that. I just, it was baffling to me.

Melayna: But doesn't that speak to like the whole way in which the Liberals fail to challenge themselves and rethink how there is no equity? It's almost as if they-- it's like it has to be like that. They're not going to dissolve inequity. How can they dissolve inequity if they're not even allowing a Black woman to weigh in on conversations that are important to her community?

Celina: But equity was not their goal. Diversity was their goal. Diversity was their strength. That was, they said that. And I feel like when I look at that, I'm like, Celina, you were duped. You thought when they said diversity, they meant equity. The goal was, and even with the voting system change, the goal was to keep the power. And we're not going to change the voting system. We're not going to get rid of mandatory minimums. We're not going to expunge records, because those kinds of things make us appear soft on crime. And we want to keep power. So it's not about what is good for the people, what will create equity in our communities, it's turned into the political will to do what needs to be done. And if the political will is less than the ability to be reelected, then I'm going to keep the reelection. I'm going to keep what allows me to be a reelected. And I'm not going to anything forward that makes me appear that I'm soft on crime because the Conservatives will chew us up and they'll win next election. And who pays for that? Our communities do.

Dalton: Yeah, totally. Yeah. I mean, Celina, it's interesting that you mention that because a lot of, you know, like when I used to cover City Hall, years ago, I used to work at Now magazine and I used to interview like young people, you know, Black youth, racialized youth, and sort of center the conversation around like civic engagement, like to kind of have young people lose those feelings of voter apathy, you know, that can oftentimes creep up, right? And, you know, it's interesting, you know, fast forward to today. And, you know, there's a woke moments happening clearly, not just among hip hop generations, but everybody and, you know, like what do you tell your average everyday, you know, Black person in Canada or Black youth in Canada about, you know, wanting to trust the political process, but then, kind of seeing, in plain daylight, you know, we have a prime minister who has worn blackface repeatedly, and then he still got reelected. You know what I mean? And it's just, and his office has consistently mired in scandal and controversy. Now it's the WE charity thing, ethics committee infractions, like, how do you tell, you know, and you're a mother, you know, I see on socials, you have these lovely children, how do we keep young people to not, you know, not be apathetic?

Celina: So there's two points to that. Number one is I have said repeatedly, I don't know. So I do know the answer to this, but I don't know why we blindly just vote for Liberals. You know, because my parents came here and you're, you know, you're supposed to vote for the Liberals cause Trudeau let us in. And all the, we shouldn't just be blindly voting. We should be paying attention to what's happening. So whether you want to vote Liberal or not is not my concern. The concern is don't blindly vote. The second thing is, for young people is, I want them to get involved. In the letter that I wrote when I resigned I said I wanted young people, I wanted young women in particular to run. But run in packs. I do not think it is possible to change what is happening on the inside, this sort of, the nepotism that exists in politics, without having a critical mass of individuals who are connected to a village of people who will support them and say, we are going to make changes on the inside. Otherwise you're in there as one-- well, I felt like I can't speak for everybody-- like one person in there just banging my head against the wall. And I just didn't think that that was a good use of my time. It's about being outside and saying, you know, let's be engaged in a way-- we don't need a title to be engaged. We need to be understanding of what's happening, vote where we think our vote will best be useful in our community, and then if we want it to get involved, run and run in packs, run like wolves, like you're hungry for something. Because that's the only way that you're going to challenge what currently exists in the establishment.

Dalton: Right. Right. And here's the thing, you know, with where you're concerned is, you know, it's been about, what 17 months, since you resigned as a member of the Liberal caucus and then, you know, went independent. And I find that the quality of the conversation amongst even the young women, and Black women, racialized women and men, is they're feeling even more jaded and cynical, you know what I mean? Because you were kind of like that beacon, you know, that shining light beacon of hope, you see what I mean? So, that's where that question comes from, you know? Yeah.

Celina: So I don't, I hope that that doesn't, I mean, I'm kind of seeing a different kind of-- a different kind of conversation happening. I'm seeing people sort of challenging things a little bit more. And it may be coming across as jaded. But I think it's coming across as, hold on a second. We actually, the people have always had the power. And we need to hold our elected officials to account. We are the ones that should be challenging them. We should be the ones that-- I don't know what happened with blackface to be quite honest with you. I was in a very interesting position where, you know, you just resigned. I'm still not working. And I actually believe that I will never work-- I won't work a day in Canada again for a very long time because of how outspoken I was with the Prime Minister. And that's all well and good, but there were a lot of people that said that without question, they were going to forgive the Prime Minister without reservation. That was nonsense. When those kinds of things happen, it sets us back. How can you without question, without reservation, forgive something where somebody hasn't even told you what they're going to do to account for what they've done. What are you-- this is, we're not talking about some little kid who works in a coffee shop. We're talking about the leader of a G7 country. What are you going to do? There was no holding him to account. There was no sort of, you know, accountability framework for how are you going to make this better? There was no, these are the lessons learned. Remember when he did blackface, he was in the prairies. Minstrel shows were running rampant. He didn't even say nothing about that. And, what makes it even worse, I

sent a note to PMO saying, this is the three things that you need to do to make this right. None of them were done. The last conversation I had with the prime minister, I said, look, I don't know if you understand the impact that this last year has had, that was the Globe and Mail where he sort of blew up. You know, I don't know if you understand the impact that this is going to have on my family. And he said, yes, this will have an impact on your family. And, you know, I thought about that for a while and I kept thinking, Hmm, what does that mean? And that's a scary feeling. But at this point, I was at the point where you give zero bleeps, and what am I supposed to do now? I already know that I'm likely not going to work. So what am I going to do? Be quiet. You know, it just didn't-- you just have to keep going, but it comes at a cost. And that's why it goes back to the previous question, you know, run, but run in packs. I don't care how you feel about AOC and Congresswoman Presley. They're like a unit. Whatever they're doing, whether you like it or not, they're protecting each other. And we need that sort of unit protection in Canadian politics, especially as people of colour, especially as Black women.

Melayna: And I see, I sort of see the connection between, cause I know when you did that Globe interview, there was a recounting of Trudeau sort of saying, you know, look at all the things that I've done for you. And I think that that is also connected to the way that Black people, like we pressure each other to just sort of give into these neoliberal policies that don't help us, in the same way that like white people and non-Black people constantly are forgiving white people for performing racism and just saying, okay, well, look at their record, look at this, but nobody really actually knows what it means to not treat Black people as if they're lower than everybody else. It's just about who treats us better in this negative framework.

Celina: And when did that become acceptable for us? I'm trying-- and to be honest, for the first couple of years I was in politics, I actually, and I wrote this in my book, I actually just sent back the manuscript of my book. And one chapter, I said to the editor, I said, one chapter, I sound whiny. I want to like remove the whole chapter. But I kept it in there obviously. It's at the manuscript stage, nobody's changing anything. I kept it in there because it speaks to that point. It speaks to like, you know, we sort of accept this sort of, oh, my God, I think this is happening, but I'm not sure. I really believe that this is the way I'm treated. I feel I'm being treated-- but it's okay. You know, I'll just accept it for now. And then in September, 2017, I just said, you know what? Forget this. Like, it was actually killing me. I'd come home and I'd say to Vidal, my husband, I'd say, you know, this job, something about this job is killing me. And it wasn't until I like really just said, This place is racist. It's sexist. It's like, it's all these things that you don't expect it to be. And I just said, forget it. I'm just going to talk about the things that are important, that I know are important to people in my communities. And that's, I'm not running it through no Liberal filters, nothing I said was run through filters. And that, if you want to piss off a party, start speaking off the cuff.

Melayna: Well, it's interesting because I mean, that's sort of how I came to get to know you. I know you've had many viral moments, particularly the one where you spoke about your hair and you really spoke about, you know, the ways in which black women specifically are treated in the workplace and that it's not acceptable. And like, I sort of want to talk about how social media has impacted your voice, you as a politician saying these things. But

outside of politics in general, in this direction you've taken as an advocate. Do you find that you're more connected to engage with people more freely?

Celina: So for sure. So I think after September 2017, when I decided that, you know, this is-- I'm not following the script anymore and I started changing a lot of the things that I was, what I was saying to fit a narrative that was particular to Whitby, that was particular to Black communities, and that were particular to women of colour. So I kind of mixed the three together, in certain instances highlighting one more than others. My following in social media started to increase. And I think I got to the point where I had enough of a following that I was sort of untouchable. So before 2017, every time I'd post something, that again was in line with what the Liberals were talking about, but maybe posting something against someone that they knew you, a friend of theirs, a board member that they knew of, they would ask me to take it down. And I wish I had snapshotted all the stuff that they asked me to delete off my social media. Because I would post it talking about feminist issues, talking about racial issues, and they'd say, Oh, Celina, take that down, you can't post that. It'd be why? It's the truth. When the Prime Minister went to Washington on his first visit, they had a round table with women, with Trump's daughter, I can't remember what her name is, it's-- Melania's in the news right now so I can't remember any of the other names, but-- Ivanka. And it was around barriers to women in business. The table was only white women. How you gonna talk about barriers to women in politics, without women of colour, without women with disabilities, without--and I got, you know, take that down. Actually, my daughter posted it, and I retweeted it. They asked me to unretweet it. They asked me to tell my daughter to take it down. I said, hell no, my daughter's not taking that down. And I said, furthermore-- then I get the, well, there was an Asian woman there. What exactly is your point? So these things were happening. So once I had that sort of galvanizing social media and I did it, I did social media differently. So I was talking about lipstick, as much as I was talking about politics. And it was very strategic, because I wanted to engage people that were not really engaged in politics. So I wanted to engage the Celina that wasn't interested in politics before I got into politics. So I talked about things that I liked, building up that crowd. And then every now and again, I'd slide in some policy stuff. But that's how you engage people who are not really engaged. You present yourself as a human being, not a politician.

Dalton: I mean Celina too, you know, outside of the political realm, you know, you've been sort of commemorated, celebrated in our community for example. You know, you've been on this mission to sort of shed more light on the mental health issues, because you came out, you said you'd been diagnosed with Depression in 2015. And I think the reason that we in the black community doubly or triply commended you for your work in this area is that it almost feels like to this day, it's just something that does not get talked about enough, if at all. You know, I have immediate family members, you know, as far as me at health issues, we all do. It's widespread. But in the Black community in particular, it's still very much treated as something that's taboo. I mean, I remember growing up, you know, I come from a Caribbean background, and I would hear things like, I'd always hear these statements, you know, if there's somebody around you that is affected by mental health issues, you know, back home, you would just sort of send them off to the quote unquote madhouse, you know? And a lot of people from throughout the Caribbean would hear this and the quality of that

kind of conversation leaves an impression with you, you know? So can you speak on some of the work perhaps you might be doing that's happening in this area? And is it enough, you know, how do we gauge if it's being successful? If you know, these conversations you're having are happening more and more in our community or not?

Celina: So there's always two sides to this conversation. One is the community aspect. I think that the conversation needs to be elevated in our communities. Especially for Black women who are told they have to be twice as good, twice as fast, work twice as long, do everything twice, and it's not as bad sustainable model for living. And if we're not talking about what the impact of that is on our health, on our sanity, on our physical well being, then we end up paying the price in other ways. So from a community's perspective, I think we need to change the way we have these conversations. I'm not saying that we need to-- that we should let up and be relaxed and assume that, you know, we're going to get equity by not working twice as hard. What I'm saying is that we just have to have the other side of the conversation and understand that if we're not speaking about our mental health challenges, that we are going to pay the price at some point for it. The other side of that though, is if we're not talking about the impacts of racism or microaggressions on our mental health, the systemic racism that we deal with every day that impact our mental health, we will never have an opportunity to truly change systems that impact us. So if we're not having these elevated conversations about health outcomes around how the racism in our education system kills our kids' opportunity by the thousands because they are, they're told all sorts of things in school, by administration, not just by students. And the employment opportunities, you know, all of these things impact our mental health. We know that, we know how racism impacts our mental health. If we as a community are not going to raise the alarm on these issues, how do we-- and we keep conforming to fit into societal's narrative of what is quote, unquote acceptable or not, how are we going to change a system that is fundamentally flawed? We have, as a community, need to be talking about it. We need it to be raising the alarm and it just can't be some of us raising the alarm. It has to be all of us raising the alarm. And mental health is one of the areas that is tied directly to racism. And it's a way that we can push this agenda forward in terms of system change.

Dalton: Right. Right. Yeah. And, you know, this idea of, you know, that you just touched on, this idea of feeding this narrative, that we have to work 10 times as hard to receive half the results. That is just insane. That I do not agree. I don't want my kids, you know, that kind of feeling, that kind of thinking. Cause it's so tragically unfair and ridiculous. Like we know that the playing field is not level, due to the, you know, pervasiveness of, you know, anti-Black racism and sexism, misogyny. Like we know this, but that messaging is scary. It's dangerous, you know?

Celina: It is dangerous and it's BS. So right now, in North America, the most educated demographic are Black women. And yet we won't receive pay equity until 2119. Like, so how are you working twice as hard? We're getting our degrees, we're getting our postsecondary-- I'm actually really thinking about dropping out of my PhD program because I just think it's-- I'm having a challenge about thinking of continuing. I have two MBAs, I'm doing a PhD, how much? And I still can't find a job. I've been out of work for 17 months. Right? It's the principle of it, it's not like, you know, I'm going to be kicked out of my house anytime soon.

But it's the principle of the matter. If this continues to happen, where we keep thinking, Oh my God, it's just about getting more education. Y'all stay in school. It's just about you doing this. It's just about you doing this. It's just about you doing this little bit more, this a little bit more, this little bit more. Well, you know what? That little bit more is not adding up to anything. When did we get the equals-- what does it equal? What are we adding up to? To not getting equal pay until 2119, a hundred years from now? I'll be dead. So what am I adding up anything for?

Dalton: Yeah, that's right. Yeah. This is what, you know, I posted on my socials that, you know, James Baldwin, you know, the late great author, and he just, summed that up. You know, I am not going to quote him verbatim, but just this idea of a waiting around, you know, this idea of you outperforming, out thinking, outwitting, being more highly educated, and still scraps, you know? So he said, Hey, I've waited 60 years of my life. And you've said wait around for progress. And my parents and my aunts and uncles and children, and nieces, and nephews, they've been waiting forever. You know, like when is this progress going to come? Can we like expedite this process, please? You know?

Celina: Well, I think the thing is too, that we don't need to wait. I think what happens, I think one of the things that politics has showed me, especially leaving politics and hearing a lot of our community say, and I don't want this to be an indictment of our community. I will say a few people say to me, well, you've left the table. You no longer have power. You're no longer at the decision making table, things like that. And I'm like, the power is not in the title. The title is not the power. We have a lot of power as a people, as Black people in particular, to shift the dynamic, to change the way things work. But there's so much work to be done. What are we supposed to do?

Melayna: And it's like, why would you be at the table accepting crumbs? You might as well create your own table.

Celina: Well, that's just. That's just it. So my response is, first of all, I had the guts to actually get to the table. So, let's not start by dissing me. Number two, I know how the table is made. I could sit right in my house, and send messages, and poke everybody at that table in a way that'll make them respond. I sent a message to PMO two weeks ago. Within two hours, there was a response. One hour for Katie Telford, another hour for the response to happen. It's not that the power disappeared without the title. The title is non consequential. It's about the ability to understand how much power you actually have to make things move. We, as communities of Black people across this country, have that power. I think one of the issues is once we start letting our ego get in the way of our ability to actually leverage and capitalize upon that power, that's when we get into trouble. So I don't need a title. I don't need to sit at the table when love is no longer being served, according to Nina Simone. I could get up and walk away and still know exactly what to do with that table. Cause I've sat there. I've been there. I know what it looks like. And unfortunately being there had my hands tied, and I was muzzled where I was not saying anything, I was not allowed to do a lot of the things that I want to do, and sitting on the outside, I could send off tweets that says exactly what I need to say.

Melayna: Well, we so appreciate you sharing these gems with us, Celina.

Celina: Thank you.

Melayna: Okay, so welcome back. And right now we're going to spill the tea. Something I thought was really interesting, it was recently announced this week that Tyler Perry and his foundation have been selected as a recipient of the Television Academy's 2020 governor's award, and he'll be presented with an Emmy statue on September 20th. And the release says he's being recognized for his achievements in television and his commitment to offering opportunities to marginalized communities through personal, and the Perry foundation program's of inclusion, engagement, employment, and other philanthropic initiatives. And in the article, they sum up his achievements like this, they call him a self-made actor writer, producer, director, and philanthropist. Perry is behind 22 feature films, over 20 stage plays, 13 television shows, two bestselling books, and the sprawling Tyler Perry studios in Atlanta, Georgia. Perry's entertainment enterprise has generated more than \$2 billion to date. So, you know, everybody knows Tyler Perry, he's a household name. I wanted to get that good stuff over with before we kind of drag him. You know, he's a very, very like A-list, I guess you would say mainstream artist. But you know, we have some questions about his art. I feel like a lot of people, ever since the beginning of his career, has had questions about how he continues to create almost the same story over and over again. And nobody says anything. Like how many Tyler Perry movies have you actually made it through?

Dalton: Maybe not nearly enough. I mean, but here's the thing, you know, is Tyler Perry now, you know, above criticism? I mean the guy, how do you talk to somebody who owns, like, what is it, 300 acres of land, you know, this massive studio? The largest of its kind in America. Like nobody has anything near this. Black, white, South Asian, Asian, this guy is just balling out of control, you know?

Melayna: And I guess that's why he feels like he doesn't have to listen to his Black critics who want to hear more than, you know, religion, morality through this lens of a long suffering black woman in every single story that he tells?

Dalton: Yeah, I mean, you know, what I find interesting about Tyler Perry is that he makes no qualm, no bones about the fact that he appeals to this like super low brow, nonacademic, super lowest common denominator, kind of, you know, content, audience, like that's what he does, you know?

Melayna: Yeah. He doesn't pretend that it's high art. But he, I mean, he pushes back and calls people bougie who want to see more out of his work, but I think there's something to that. I mean, he was applauding himself. I mean, he got dragged on Twitter earlier this year for saying he had no writer's room, but shouldn't someone like him want the perspective of, I don't know, for an example, Black women, if he's writing about Black women? Is that not his responsibility?

Dalton: That's his super responsibility. That's like me doing a show on like a, I don't know, producing a show about mechanics and I'm not a mechanic. There's no one on my team that's a mechanic, we don't know what mechanic means, it just doesn't make-- it's illogical, it's irrational, it's extremely-- like the guy, one of the reasons he's become, I guess, one of America's favorite whipping boys, like, you know what I mean? Outside of his audience? I

think he's just, he might be like an egomaniac, you know? He might be just the extreme like we love the fact, you know, eh Mel? Like I love the fact that he's a boss, right? He doesn't have to report to anybody, he's mega loaded, but it's almost like dude is almost too much of a boss? As crazy as that sounds. You know what I mean?

Melayna: Well, yeah. I think he, I read it somewhere that he stresses ownership over the actual art. Like it really does seem like for him, he wants to own all of everything. Over producing the kinds of stories that people-- but the whole thing is, he would argue that people do want to see it because he's commercially successful.

Dalton: Yeah. But here's the thing. You can't write a show-- like he has a show called Sistas, you know what I mean? And he's not a Sista, that's--

Melayna: Yeah, four Black women.

Dalton: Yeah, but that's impossible, you know?

Melayna: Yeah, apparently it's horrible.

Dalton: It's horrible, and it's illogical. It makes no sense. It's a show called Sistas and he's not a sista. And he produced, wrote it, everything. It's a table of one. Like who does that? Tyler Perry does that.

Melayna: But you know, there's critiques of colorism with all of his shows. Black-ish, Mixed-ish, Grown-ish, and now Black AF, where it's this, the way that he presents Black identity through multi-racial and mixed race people, it's just undeniable. And I feel like he just refuses to engage in that criticism. And he really flattens the way in which dark-skinned people want to see themselves represented on screen. Like that's what colourism is all about. It's about the erasure of dark and people and the uplifting of light-skinned people. And there are real consequences to it. And when he pretends that it doesn't matter, but once to talk about out of every other Black issue he feels like in the show, it's just sorta like really?

Dalton: Yeah. His excuses, I think he's giving some just very, really poor excuses. Like he's essentially just sloughing it off. Like he doesn't even want to engage that dialogue.

Melayna: Well, he's saying that's what my family looks like and it would be, I think he said it would be more, it would do more harm than good. Hold on, let me just find the quote. So, he goes, This is based on my family, so there's a version of, you know, she's playing a version of my wife, who's biracial my kids, what Rashida Jones and I would produce look like these kids who are amazing. I think that everyone's experienced and everyone's opinion in terms of colorism are real. And I understand that. But do you understand that? Like, does he understand that he's a gatekeeper in the industry and like, He knows what sells. He knows what doesn't. Like if he had like a dark skinned Aunt Viv as his wife on the show, would that do harm?

Dalton: It would do no harm. But then again, you know, this idea of putting a mirror to reality. So if that's his reality, you know, and it's a mockumentary kind of thing, and his

reality is being around, you know, it's miscegenation and a biracial, you know, people. His family, perhaps that's his reality. I don't know. You know, then I think he's feeling like it would be disingenuous to not present that and kind of, you know, tick off boxes, you know, to kind of put like, Hey, I'm going to put someone who is on the, you know, darker complected and then someone who's sort of a more mocha, caramel complected. And then, you know, someone who's passing, you know? Like, you know, sort of white appearing that's Black. And I think perhaps he doesn't want to engage that, you know?

Melayna: Yeah, but he knows exactly who bears the brunt of that and who doesn't get the jobs because of that. And it's not people that look like his family. That's what I think is interesting because he's not just an actor, he's an industry insider. He's been in the industry for like 20 years.

Dalton: Yeah, yeah. The challenge for him, he better like low key be, you know, hiring, you know, Black producers, writers, actors that, you know, run across the colour spectrum. You know, our community is so rich and diverse. We come in all complexions, shapes, sizes speak different languages, multilingual. So I'm hoping that behind closed doors in the shadows, he is doing that. He is supporting the real Black community, you know? And in all of its beauty and grander, because he's certainly not doing it on screen. And that is, that is super problematic.

Melayna: Yeah, and he's he called his show Black AF. And I think people are just sort of sick of this, like racially ambiguous way in which he presents Blackness, because he's saying this is a black story.

Dalton: Yeah, no. I think if you name your show Black AF, it probably means it's not Black AF.

Melayna: Yeah.

Dalton: Yeah. I think, the Kenya Barris's of the world of Tyler Perry's they will continually be, you know, constantly taken to task for, you know, I think it's just a very linear one dimensional approach to Blackness, which is not Black AF, and the mere fact, you know, this idea of cashing in on buffoonery, it's just like, I'm sorry, Mel. That's where I'm like, I can't. Tyler Perry, you know, that, guy's just questionable at best. But I love his business acumen, but outside of that, I'm not the biggest fan. I gotta be honest. Yeah. So thank you for tuning into another episode. It was another cultural awakening, another glorious woke moment. But first of all, we'd like to thank you our listeners, for listening in, tuning in weekly, and subscribing to our podcast. So we'd like to thank our super producer, Ryan Clarke, our guest this week, Celina Caesar-Chavannes. She was awesome. So you can find us on socials. Melayna Williams, my cohost she's on Twitter at @MelaynaWilliams, and you can find her on Instagram at @theonlymelly. To track me down if you want to stalk me, drag me, cancel me, stan me. I'm at @DaltonHiggins5, and don't forget to leave a five star review in your favourite podcast app. Wink, wink, hint, hint. We love ya. Muah.