

5/16/2018 Sarah Braasch called police on black Yale graduate student Lalade Siyonbola for passing in dorm common room. The Washington Post Siyonbola is a first-year graduate student in the African Studies department at Yale. She had papers and books spread out in a common room while writing a paper Monday, but had flipped off the lights and went to sleep, she explained in her Facebook Live video.

Another graduate student, Sarah Braasch, walked in, turned on the lights and said she was calling police. The common room was off-limits for sleeping, she added.

What followed was a racially tinged, police-involved dispute between neighbors that aired live on Facebook — then spread.

Agitated, Siyonbola went to Braasch's room, aiming a cellphone camera at her, and demanded to know why she had called the authorities.

"I have every right to call the police," Braasch said after snapping a photo of Siyonbola. "You cannot sleep in that room."

"Continue," Siyonbola said, then taunted her. "Get my good side."

Instead, Braasch shut the door and Siyonbola waited for the police, who became the subject of her second live video.

"Once we verify that you belong here, we'll be on our way," an officer said. The officer told Siyonbola that he doesn't know either woman, is simply trying to quickly sort out what's going on and needs to check her identification.

Ultimately, but unhappily, Siyonbola relented. She did not immediately respond to Washington Post messages seeking comment.

As the police tried to sort out who she was (Siyonbola's given name in a Yale database conflicted with her preferred name on the card, a spokesman said.), she told them Braasch had called police on her friend about three months ago "because he was in the stairwell and he was black."

She claimed that she is facing the same kind of harassment, from Braasch and from the four police officers who responded to her non-crime.

Later, a supervising officer told Siyonbola that she wasn't harassed, at least not by the officers.

"Every time there's an interaction with police officers doesn't mean there's harassment," the supervisor told her. Then the officers bid her good night.

"You have a good night," she said. "I'm not going to have a good night after this."

Braasch, a graduate philosophy student, could also not be reached for comment. She had reportedly deleted social media accounts or set them to private in the wake of the incident.

5/16/2018 Sarah Prescott called police on black Yale graduate student Malade Siyonbola for passing in dorm common room. The Washington Post On Thursday, the Yale University Police Department posted its [account of the incident](#), which it says began when a caller told the police a woman “she did not know” was sleeping in the common room. After checking identification, police said they told the caller the woman was an authorized resident and “had every right to be there,” adding that this was “not a police matter.”

“Racism is an unqualified evil in our society,” Yale President Peter Salovey said in an email late Thursday to the university community. “Universities are not utopias, and people of color experience racism on our campus as they do elsewhere in our country. This fact angers and disappoints me. We must neither condone nor excuse racism, prejudice, or discrimination at Yale.”

Kimberly M. Goff-Crews, Yale’s vice president for student life, said in an email to students that the officers admonished the student who called 911 and that “the other student had every right to be present.”

Goff-Crews said she had discussed the incident with other Yale leaders, trying to figure out “how we can work together to avoid such incidents in the future.” She said they were planning “listening sessions” with the Yale community and encouraged students to share their thoughts.

The issue is, of course, much bigger than Yale. People have [picketed coffee shops](#) and [received apologies from CEOs](#) and college presidents over viral issues of bias that spread at the speed of the Internet, giving institutions an instantaneous black eye.

And with the “while black” incidents piling up, the aggrieved parties have begun to point out the similarities — sometimes in the very videos they post.

“Folks done made it okay to be publicly racist, and do and say what they want,” a tearful Kimberly Houzah said [after being kicked out of a Victoria’s Secret](#) in 2016.

Black people who had tense conversations with police said they felt as if their race made them more likely to be treated with suspicion by the white people around them. In some instances, they felt as though celebrating their blackness was being treated as a crime.

Nafeesah Attah, who [graduated too boisterously while black](#) last week (she was shoved off a stage while trying to flash a sorority sign) told The Post that her incident “speaks to the bigger and larger issue of race relations in the United States at this time and making sure that black students feel comfortable at these universities.

“This is the time to highlight black excellence; instead we were treated like criminals at our very own commencement.”

In a post [on her Facebook page](#) a day after the incident, Siyonbola also acknowledged that other black people have endured similar treatment.

“Grateful for all the love, kind words and prayers, your support has been overwhelming Black Yale community is beyond incredible and is taking good care of me. I know this incident is a drop in the bucket of trauma Black folk have endured since Day 1 America.”

5/16/2018 Sarah Prescott called police on black Yale graduate student Lalade Simabala for reading in dorm common room. The Washington Post
Then she invited anyone reading her post to share similar stories.

By Friday, nearly 10,000 people had commented.

Read more:


[‘I was just reading a book’: Canadian cops called on black man reading C.S. Lewis in his car](#)

[A teen spread a racist video of a black classmate eating chicken. Both face criminal charges.](#)

[Police say a black man was shot after pulling a blade on officers. A new video raises doubts.](#)

[Private school teens held an Instagram debate on the n-word. It went as well as you’d expect.](#)

 **3847 Comments**

Cleve Wootson is a general assignment reporter for The Washington Post. He was previously a reporter for the Charlotte Observer.  Follow @CleveWootson

The story must be told.

Your subscription supports journalism that matters.

Try 1 month for \$1

5/16/2018

Sarah Braasch called police on black Yale graduate student Lolade Oiyenbola for napping in dorm common room | The Washington Post