

**The
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C o M M e n t a t o r**
Commentary, analysis and investigations
on issues affecting African Americans
www.blackcommentator.com

July 23, 2009 - Issue 334

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**Living While Black in Cambridge
Inclusion
By the Rev. Irene Monroe
BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board**

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None of us African-American residents of Cambridge are surprised or shocked by the humiliation and harassment Professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr., 58, of Harvard University encountered at the hands of Cambridge police.

My partner, Dr. Thea James, an Emergency Room physician who would drive from home to work was stopped all the time for "driving while black." And when the Cambridge cops realized she's a woman, and a lesbian one at that, their unbridled homophobia surfaces. Thea now takes the bus.

My girlfriend's kids and their friends hang out at the Cambridge's Galleria Mall like kids do. The Cambridge police in the mall stop my girlfriend's kids and their friends; one white and two Asians are not, because "shopping while black" is always mistaken as shoplifting.

These constant shakedowns of us have been deliberately on the down low to the public because Cambridge, proudly dubbed as "The People's Republic of Cambridge, is ranked as one of the most liberal cities in America. And with two of the country's premier institutions of higher learning - Harvard and Massachusetts Institute of Technology - that draw students and scholars from around the world, Cambridge's showcase of diversity and multiculturalism rivals that of the U.N.

Cambridge is also proudly known for a lot of firsts in this country. For example, it was the first city in Massachusetts to issue a legal application for same-sex marriage. It's the first major city in the country to elect an African American openly gay mayor - Ken Reeves. And Cambridge elected its first African American openly lesbian mayor in the country this year with E. Denise Simmons. Deval Patrick is the first African American governor of Massachusetts.

Cambridge is no doubt a progressive city. However, when you scratch below

Cambridge's surface there is also a liberal racism that is as pernicious, vile, and intolerant as Southern racism. But unlike Southern racism that sees race and tries to keep blacks in their place, liberal racism claims it does not. Ironically, however, Cambridge's liberal ruling class maintains its racial boundaries not by designated "colored" water fountains, toilets or restaurants, but rather by its zip codes, major street intersections known as squares, like the renown Harvard Square; and residential border areas that are designated numbers, like the notorious Area 4, a predominately black poor and working-class enclave.

It did not matter that the call to police by a white woman, who doesn't live on the block let alone the area, stating that two African-American men were breaking and entering into one of the expensive homes on a tree-lined street was not only false but actually Gates's home. The woman's call was her civic duty in preserving the neighborhood's integrity. because after, all this was happening in the zip code area of 02138, which is Harvard Square.

And it did not matter that once Gates validated his residency to the cop with a legitimate Harvard I.D., that the whole incident should have, at that very moment, ended. But instead, the arresting officer called the Harvard University police to once again verify Gates occupancy in his own home.

Also, it did not matter that the suspected robber is a Harvard professor, public intellectual and recipient of the MacArthur Foundation "genius" award. (Some say this incident serves as a cautionary tale to those who want to now define America as being post-racial with the election of Obama.)

What was of great concern for both the white woman who called the police and the arresting officer who eventually had to handcuff Gates? Was it the shock and perhaps outrage they experienced seeing this unknown black man in this well-known, high income, and professional area of Cambridge, breaking and entering into someone home's and not in the city's known and expected troubled spot - Area 4?

Segregation in this city is not only along race lines but also class. And poor working-class whites and white immigrants do not experience the fullness their white skin privilege would abundantly afford them if they, too, were part of Cambridge's professional and/or moneyed class.

Area 4 has been labeled a troubled area of Cambridge, an area plagued with all the problems of urban blight and very little resources to ameliorate them. As a densely populated area, its average household income was \$34,306 according the 2005 city census. Harvard Square, on the other hand, in the same year its average household income was \$79,533.

Area 4 use to house the city's police station. And white Cambridge police officers assigned to this area unabashedly target and harassingly patrol neighborhood blocks and activities of black male residents - young and old. And their reasons for doing so can easily be attributed to the Cambridge Police Department's lack of funds in its budget to do cultural sensitivity trainings. But their reason is just as much about this country's horrific racial legacy between the two groups as it is also about Cambridge's liberal ruling elite exploiting these tension by their claims to not see race, until of course, an unknown black man appears in their neighborhood.

The tension escalated between Gates and Sgt. James Crowley when Gates flipped the script on him. As the person-in-question, Gates exercised his legal right to also question:

“Is this happening because you’re a white cop and I’m a black man? Is this why this interaction is still taking place?”

The charges against Gates have been dropped. But many white Cantabrigians chiming in on this incident felt that Gates was being uppity, feeling entitled, and exploiting the race card.

And who would know better about this than them.

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The BlackCommentator Readers' Corner Blog

BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board member, the Rev. Irene Monroe, is a religion columnist, theologian, and public speaker. A native of Brooklyn, Rev. Monroe is a graduate from Wellesley College and Union Theological Seminary at Columbia University, and served as a pastor at an African-American church before coming to Harvard Divinity School for her doctorate as a Ford Fellow. Reverend Monroe is the author of [Let Your Light Shine Like a Rainbow Always: Meditations on Bible Prayers for Not-So-Everyday Moments](#). As an African American feminist theologian, she speaks for a sector of society that is frequently invisible. Her website is irenemonroe.com. Click [here](#) to contact the Rev. Monroe.

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