

Is this the right way to fight racism?

We don't advance the cause of fairness if we see prejudice at every interaction



Cathy Young

In recent years, controversies over black men and women being singled out for police harassment in everyday situations have become common — especially after the arrest a year ago of two men at a Philadelphia Starbucks for not making a purchase while waiting to meet with a business contact. Now, the issue has erupted at Columbia University, where a video shows a black student being manhandled by campus security in what has been described as a racial profiling incident on April 11. The story has made national headlines and sparked protests on the campus. But is this a case of insidious racism or of misguided outrage?

The student, 23-year-old senior Alexander McNab, was headed to a free canteen at a student center at Barnard, the undergraduate women's college, shortly after 11 p.m. He walked through the gate without show-

ing his student ID; when a public safety officer followed him and asked for his ID, he refused to comply. Several more officers arrived, and in the ensuing dispute McNab ended up being physically restrained and pinned against a countertop. Eventually, he produced his ID and was released — but not before a Barnard student shocked by a scene that she found “reminiscent of police brutality” had filmed the confrontation.

The next day, Columbia students demonstrating in response to the incident chanted expletive-laced slogans against “racist police.” Three days later, Barnard president Sian Leah Beilock issued a statement apologizing to McNab and calling for “conversations about race, racial bias, and racial profiling.” Six officers involved in the incident are now on administrative leave pending an investigation.

But was McNab, a writer for the Columbia Spectator who has focused on racial issues in his work, targeted because of his race as he claims — or was he refusing to follow common rules?



ISTOCK

Barnard policy requires anyone entering college buildings after 11 p.m. to show an ID. However, McNab claims that it's enforced inconsistently and that black students, in particular, are singled out. He says his noncompliance stemmed from being fed up with being racially profiled.

Some white Columbia students, mostly women, say they have not always had their IDs checked after hours. Yet others say the policy is universally enforced, without regard to race or

gender.

Among those who believe the incident has been overblown is Coleman Hughes, a black Columbia undergraduate who has written critically about progressive ideology on race. Writing in the online magazine *Quillette*, Hughes accuses Columbia officials of cowardice for suspending the public safety officers and treating the incident as racist. He argues that the ID policy is reasonable, especially on an all-female campus in an urban area,

and that allowing people to defy it would be tantamount to abandoning it.

Hughes' article also points out that McNab has given contradictory statements: In the video of the incident, he claims he didn't know about the ID policy; in a Columbia Spectator interview, he says he knew about it but was frustrated with racially biased enforcement.

We can hope that Barnard's investigation will be fair and based on facts rather than politics — and that, in the meantime, Columbia's “conversation” about race will make room for voices like Hughes'.

Few would deny that African-Americans, especially males, are often singled out for suspicion; while these patterns reflect not only racial prejudice but also actual crime demographics, there is no question that such treatment is demeaning and breeds understandable resentment. Finding solutions is not easy. But no one is helped by zealotry that sees racism in every interaction and, in effect, demands special treatment rather than equality.

Cathy Young is a contributing editor to *Reason* magazine.



JIM MCSAAC

Islanders right wing Josh Bailey celebrates a goal in the second game of the team's playoff sweep against Pittsburgh.

Two views of Gillen's request of the NHL

Although a New York Rangers fan and ticket subscriber, I say good for Hempstead Supervisor Laura Gillen in petitioning the NHL to keep the New York Islanders at the Nassau Coliseum for their playoff run [“NHL ices Gillen's Islander request,” *News*, April 20].

Why should the Islanders not play at the venue that gives them the best home-ice advantage? I believe NHL commissioner Gary Bettman overreaches by dictating to the Islanders where to play. If the Islanders felt that playing at Christopher Morley Park gave them the best shot at a Stanley Cup, that's their business, not the NHL's.

Richard LePetri,
Rockville Centre

Hempstead Supervisor Laura Gillen should stop looking to score political points by pandering to Islander fans by

asking the NHL to allow more playoff games at the Coliseum. (Kate Murray already took care of that when she was supervisor by rejecting a plan then to rebuild and develop around the arena.)

Instead, Gillen should take a lesson from Alfonse D'Amato, who took care of the roads as town presiding supervisor before he became a U.S. senator. Do your job and repave I.U. Willets Road in Searingtown.

Gary Bravstein,
Searingtown

Why Trump should release his tax returns

I am astonished that a letter writer is so dismissive of the fact that President Donald Trump has decided that he's too important to be held accountable for his true financial situation by releasing his tax returns [“Demand for Trump returns is nonsense,” *Letters*, April 17].

If there's nothing to hide, why is he hiding this information? Apparently, both he and his advocates have decided that he has no obligation to constituents who do not support him.

Certainly one nation under God is newly defined as one nation under Trump. Shame on those who think the rule of law and the protocol of the presidency can be ignored without doing serious damage to this great country. Here's hoping we get answers — and if those answers are not damaging, even better for all of us.

June Zeger,
East Meadow

The reason Americans want to see the president's tax returns is to know how his policies and proposals affect him personally. How did the tax-law overhaul affect him? Did his lawyers and accountants help craft a law to save the president and his family mil-

lions, or tens of millions, of dollars in taxes?

I would like to know the private sources of the president's income. If it's from foreign investors, and he changes U.S. policy to favor those investors' countries, I would like to know that.

The motives of our leaders should be exposed for all to see. Why would anyone oppose knowing whether the president pushed through tax changes to benefit him and few others, while the rest of us get stuck holding the bag?

Eric Gemunder,
Huntington Station

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