

An essay at [quora.com](#)

[Quora.com](#) **Do black people really fear police, even if they are an upstanding individual in the community?**

Yes, we do. What you have to understand is that the experience of interacting with the police while black in America is fundamentally different from anything else.

A lot of non-blacks are genuinely curious about this. They assume that blatant racism must be a thing of the past. *Surely, a police officer in the 21st century isn't going to mistreat you just because you happen to be black! That's ridiculous.* Yes, we think it's ridiculous too. But it's simply something you live with as a Black person. I don't know a single educated Black person who hasn't experienced this to some extent.

I was skeptical. I, too, thought that this was a thing of the past. I arrived here as an immigrant 16 years ago, and I thought American blacks needed to shut up about the racism thing already. I really did. In response, I was told that I was black, and that no matter how much I tried to forget about it or to deny that it was important, society would teach me.

Well, society did teach me. A few years ago, a black professor was arrested for having broken into his own house because he didn't have his keys. He was arrested *even after making it clear to the officer that he was in his own house*. Obama said the police acted stupidly. Conservatives in America were more concerned about Obama supposedly disrespecting the police than they were about the fact that a professor had been arrested *on his own property* for... what exactly?

When white people see something like this, their assumption is that this is a really rare event. Some are so attached to the idea that racism no longer exists that they will immediately start coming up with justifications for the police officer's behavior. I see this in the comments of YouTube videos all the time.

These events are not aberrant. They are part and parcel of normal policing in America. Not all of these make the news, but they're not all that rare. I live in a very progressive community, home to a world-famous university hospital. A black doctor was arrested by the police because, in the words of the police officer: "he looked like he didn't belong in his neighborhood." When he told the police that he was the Chair of Internal Medicine at the University, *they laughed at him*. Well, he is the freaking chair. Apparently, these officers were not aware that being black does not preclude one from being able to become a physician. It's infuriating. But, more than that, it's just sad.

I'm very fond of dressing up. Part of it is because I like what I see in the mirror. But part of it is also that it serves as something of a shield. I find that people are more likely to give me the benefit of the doubt when I dress up. But you can't expect black people everywhere to look like they're on their way to a business meeting at all hours of the day. Sometimes, I want to wear sweatpants. And it would be nice to think that I can do that living in a nice neighborhood without having to worry about whether one of my neighbors will call the cops on me. And it would also be nice to think that the cops wouldn't immediately assume that I was a criminal.

Unfortunately, that's not the world we live in. I'm a physician. I have black friends who are physicians and pharmacists. *We have all been racially profiled.*

It sucks. When we tell you about this, it's not because we are lazy or trying to make excuses. It really sucks. It's like being told that you will always be suspicious because of your color. It's like being told that you're

a second class citizen. It's like being told that your complexion is a stain on your character. It's like being told that you're an inferior species, not worthy of the common respect due to every human being.

We can't fight this fight alone. We need people who are not black to understand that this is a reality, right now. I'm not expecting *you*, a random reader who happens to be white, to fight this all on your own. But this behavior persists because it has the passive sympathy and tacit non-disapproval of most citizens. All I'm asking is for your sympathy. All I'm asking is that the next time you hear the story of a black person being mistreated or shot by a police officer, you remember that being black does not make someone a criminal, and that officers don't have the right to be judge, jury, and executioner.

Thank you.

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