

Racism is both complicated and simple. At one point when my children were little, we lived for a year next to an African American couple who had a daughter the same age as one of my daughters. They enjoyed playing together often. And I looked forward to getting to know the couple. I think they were Baptists. But one day early in the relationship, their daughter ran home yelling “racism, racism, racism.” Neither my wife or I knew what had occurred. We didn’t know what to do. We were kind of paralyzed. Neither of us were near the two girls to actually know what had occurred.

Here is a personal example of **complicated**. Our daughter played with Brazilian children when we were in Brasil – before and after this year in the States, without any reaction like this. In questioning our daughter – the best we could figure out was they had a quarrel about who could play with what. Our daughter was around six years old.

In looking back I wish we had tried harder to talk with this girl’s parents to figure out what had gone on between the two girls. Rose did go over to talk to the parents and they supported their daughter's position. It confused us, but then we did not live in their shoes to understand, neither did they explain.

But what immediately struck us after the shock of hearing the accusation of racism, was, it’s normal for children to argue over toys. I have to say that this event made me even more cautious around African Americans. And we were not defending our daughter since we didn’t see or hear what occurred. But racism was not what we were teaching any of our children. These kinds of events are an example of how complex racism can be.

At the same time, racism can be **simple and clear**. By now you probably have heard of the Amy Cooper and Christian Cooper interaction. Hopefully you have seen it because part of it was recorded. If you haven’t, I’d encourage you to look it up. Here is one recording. Please watch before reading farther. You can find other recordings and commentaries.

<https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/26/us/central-park-video-dog-video-african-american-trnd/index.html>

From CNN on Tue May 26, 2020

The white woman who called police on a black man in Central Park during an encounter involving her unleashed dog has been fired from her job, her employer said Tuesday.

"Following our internal review of the incident in Central Park yesterday, we have made the decision to terminate the employee involved, effective immediately. We do not tolerate racism of any kind at Franklin Templeton," [the company said on Twitter](#).

Amy Cooper was walking her dog Monday morning while Christian Cooper (no relation) was bird-watching [at a wooded area of Central Park called the Ramble](#). They both told CNN their dispute began because her dog was not on a leash, contrary to the Ramble's rules, according to [the park's website](#).

Christian Cooper recorded video of part of their encounter and (his sister) [posted it on Facebook](#), where it has since been shared thousands of times and became a trending topic on Twitter. In the video, he is largely silent while she frantically tells police he is threatening her and her dog.

"I'm taking a picture and calling the cops," Amy Cooper is heard saying in the video. "I'm going to tell them there's an African American man threatening my life."

In comments to CNN as the video spread widely, Amy Cooper said she wanted to "publicly apologize to everyone."

"I'm not a racist. I did not mean to harm that man in any way," she said, adding that she also didn't mean any harm to the African American community.

The incident is another example of white people calling the police on African Americans for mundane things.

The New York Police Department told CNN when officers responded neither Christian Cooper nor Amy Cooper was present. No arrests or summonses were made, according to NYPD.

"I videotaped it because I thought it was important to document things," Christian Cooper said. "Unfortunately we live in an era with things like Ahmaud Arbery, where black men are seen as targets. This woman thought she could exploit that to her advantage, and I wasn't having it."

(Ahmaud Arbery, while jogging was cornered, shot and killed, by three white men in trucks. The men have been caught and are facing trial.)
([cnn.com/2020/06/04/us/mcmichaels-hearing-ahmaud-arbery/index.html](https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/04/us/mcmichaels-hearing-ahmaud-arbery/index.html))

What led up to the video

Christian Cooper, who described himself as an avid bird-watcher, was out birding between 7:30 a.m. and 8 a.m. Monday in the Ramble, a section of Central Park full of winding paths and thick greenery that attracts over 230 bird species.

That's when he says he saw a dog off its leash.

"That's important to us birders because we know that dogs won't be off leash at all and we can go there to see the ground-dwelling birds," Christian Cooper said. "People spend a lot of money and time planting in those areas as well. Nothing grows in a dog run for a reason."

Racially biased 911 calls are a huge problem. This isn't a solution

Amy Cooper told CNN she was walking her unleashed dog, knowing that it was against the rules.

"He was running in an open field. This man, he was bird-watching. He came out of the bush," she said, adding that Christian Cooper was screaming at her.

Christian Cooper said the dog was "tearing through the plantings," and he told Amy Cooper the dog needed to be on a leash. He said he was not screaming at Amy Cooper, and "was actually pretty calm."

The two went back-and-forth about the dog leash. Christian Cooper, according to his Facebook post, then told her: "Look, if you're going to do what you want, I'm going to do what I want, but you're not going to like it."

"I didn't know what that meant. When you're alone in a wooded area, that's absolutely terrifying, right?" Amy Cooper said.

Christian Cooper said he then pulled out dog treats. He told CNN he keeps dog treats with him to get dog owners to put their dogs on leashes because, in his experience, dog owners hate when a stranger feeds their dog treats and immediately restrain their dogs afterward.

Amy Cooper said he was throwing them at her dog. Christian Cooper said he never threw any treats. And that's when he started recording the incident, he said on Facebook.

What happened in the video

The video begins with Amy Cooper pulling her dog by the collar and telling Christian Cooper to stop recording.

"Please don't come close to me," Christian Cooper says, as she approaches.

"Sir, I'm asking you to stop recording me," Amy Cooper says.

He asks her again not to come close. That's when Amy Cooper says she's going to call the police. "I'm going to tell them there's an African American man threatening my life," she says.

"Please tell them whatever you like," Christian Cooper says.

The video shows Amy Cooper on her phone.

"There's a man, African American, he has a bicycle helmet," she says. "He is recording me and threatening me and my dog."

While she's on the phone, her dog appears to be straining and trying to get free while she tries to restrain it.

"I'm being threatened by a man in the Ramble," she continues in an audibly distraught voice. "Please send the cops immediately!"

The video ends with Christian Cooper saying "Thank You."

The aftermath

Amy Cooper told CNN that since the video was posted, her "entire life is being destroyed right now."

"I think I was just scared," she said. "When you're alone in the Ramble, you don't know what's happening. It's not excusable, it's not defensible."

She was placed on administrative leave and fired by her employer on Tuesday.

Asked if he'd accept her apology, Christian Cooper told CNN he would "if it's genuine and if she plans on keeping her dog on a leash in the Ramble going forward, then we have no issues with each other."

The National Audubon Society, the country's leading bird conservation organization, said they were grateful that Christian Cooper, a board member of the New York City Audubon Society, is safe.

"Black Americans often face terrible daily dangers in outdoor spaces, where they are subjected to unwarranted suspicion, confrontation, and violence," said Rebeccah Sanders, Audubon senior vice president for state programs. "The outdoors -- and the joy of birds -- should be safe and welcoming for all people."

Amy Cooper's dog has been surrendered to the shelter he was adopted from years earlier while the dispute is addressed, according to a Facebook post from [Abandoned Angels Cocker Spaniel Rescue Inc.](#)

"The dog is now in our rescue's care and he is safe and in good health," the post said.

Correction: An earlier version of this story incorrectly stated when Amy Cooper adopted her dog. The dog was adopted a few years ago from Abandoned Angels Cocker Spaniel Rescue Inc.

(I believe that Amy has her dog back now.

But what was interesting, I heard that lot's of people's reaction when they first saw this video, was not to the racism going on, and using the police to threaten the African American – but how the dog was being treated. If this is true – weird priorities – right?)

CNN's Julie In and Eric Levenson contributed to this report.

Questions:

When is an incident clear racism?

When is an incident not racism?

When is an incident – complicated – racist, but with other issues?

What other questions should we be asking when we run into situations, see situations or hear about them?

And hope you catch the irony that both of these people – have the same last name!