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GATES CASE ONLY THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG IN MASSACHUSETTS:
Legal Figures in Massachusetts draw parallels between

Gates and local grassroots movement

As the media spectacle of the arrest of Henry Louis Gates continues, prominent legal figures and community organizations in Massachusetts have drawn alarming parallels between the Gates incident and less well-known cases of racial profiling in the state. In her July 22 op-ed in the Boston Globe, Massachusetts American Civil Liberties Union Director Carol Rose stated, "The arrest of Harvard scholar Henry Louis Gates Jr...while trying to open the front door to his home is the latest reminder that racism is alive and well even in the most wealthy and progressive enclaves of Massachusetts." (i)

Rose goes on to wryly suggest that, "Maybe the Cambridge police officer was instead following the example set in the case of Jason Vassell, a former student at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst." Rose explains that Vassell was "charged with aggravated assault and battery in the stabbing of two men inside his dormitory. The incident started when the two men, both white, reportedly smashed Vassell's window while hurling racial epithets at him, then entered the building and attacked Vassell. The two white attackers got off lightly, while Vassell is facing serious jail time."

Over the past 17 months Mr. Vassell's Lawyers (ii) have made the case that Jason was selectively prosecuted on the basis of his race, citing the history of racist violence of his attackers and the shocking racial bias of the UMass Police during their investigation of the incident (iii). Having been asked to withdraw from the University, Jason's case is still in the pre-trial stages.

The unfortunate pervasiveness of racial profiling in this country has led to the introduction of such phrases as "driving while black" into the cultural lexicon. The cases of Gates and Vassell suggest that perhaps a new phrase might soon take on cultural meaning - "being home while black."

Members of a student and community organization, The Committee for Justice for Jason (iv) cite the case of Andre Dewdney (v) – as an example of the many cases in Western Massachusetts alone – where the alarming racial bias of the police, prosecutors, and courts have gone largely unnoticed by the media and the public. "Jason's case is huge,"

states one member of the Committee for Justice for Jason, "While it is just the case of one man, his lawyers are setting legal precedent in their effort to have his charges dropped by petitioning the court for the files of similar cases of interracial assault. They are really threatening the illusions of the progressive Northwestern District of Massachusetts by attempting to make visible the years of racial bias on he part of the courts."

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Reporter's Notes

i.) "Racial Profiling is Alive and Well" by Carol Rose 7/22/2009
http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2009/07/22/racial_profiling_is_alive_and_well/

ii.) Sasoon, Turnbull and Hoose (<http://www.sthlaw.net/>)

iii.) On Monday December 29th 2008, Jason Vassell's defense submitted a 'Motion to Dismiss' Vassell's indictment, No. 08-56, "on the ground that the defendant has been selectively prosecuted because of his race, in violation of the rights guaranteed him by the Sixth and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution and Articles I and XII of the Massachusetts Declaration of Rights." The Motion to Dismiss details;

- a. Jonathan Bowes history of violence and Civil Rights violations.
- b. Possible felony and misdemeanor charges that could have been brought against Jonathan Bowes and Jonathan Bosse.
- c. The racially biased actions of the UMass Police Department.

To read the full motion visit: <http://www.justiceforjason.org/motion>

iv.) Committee for Justice for Jason (<http://www.justiceforjason.org>)

v.) "Who Becomes a Cause" by Greg Saulmon in the Valley Advocate
http://www.masslive.com/localbuzz/index.ssf/2009/03/who_becomes_a_cause.html