



Students walk past Black History Month posters on the Boston College campus, Wednesday, Feb. 17, 2021, in Boston. Harassment by white male students targeting Black and Latina women housed in a Boston College dormitory has revived concerns about racism on campus. (AP/Michael Dwyer)

Collin Binkley

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The Associated Press

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Boston — February 18, 2021

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Students are demanding a stronger response from Boston College after two recent cases in which white students were accused of harassing Black and Hispanic students in a campus dorm.

The incidents, which took place three days apart, have revived longstanding concerns about racism on a campus where most students are white and just 4% are Black. Some students say the recent cases are part of a pattern of bias that seems to be tolerated at the Jesuit Catholic school.

"We have been dealing with this since our freshman year," said senior Kathryn Destin, 20, who is Black and a member of a campus anti-racist group called FACES. "I've sort of lost that sense of safety."

Both recent incidents took place in a stretch of dorm hallway that mostly houses Black and Hispanic women. Known as the Multicultural Learning Experience, it's part of program intended to foster diversity on campus. Men in the program are housed in a different area of the dorm.

Residents of the hall say they were awakened by an eruption of noise Jan. 30 as rows of trashcans lining the hall were upended and tossed around. Litter was left scattered everywhere. Farther down the hallway, past the end of the multicultural section, trash bins were left untouched.

Three days later, students reported that two white, male students walked down the hall singing about "colored girls." A staff member was notified and found the two men, but they denied using the language, officials said.

The hall's residents say it follows other cases in which they have been threatened or harassed by white students this school year.

College officials said they're responding to "several incidents" of alleged student misconduct in the hall last month. They have identified and disciplined two students found responsible for the Jan. 30 vandalism, said Jack Dunn, a college spokesperson. Officials declined to disclose the discipline, citing privacy laws.



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The two other students accused of singing racist lyrics are going through a school discipline process this week, Dunn said.

"BC has zero tolerance for actions that make any student feel unwelcome, and will hold students accountable for their actions," he said in a statement.

In a message to students, Michael Lochhead, the school's executive vice president said he will review campus diversity efforts "so that they can be improved and have greater impact." He said officials will develop new campus events to help students understand the harms of bias.

"I recognize that the university has more work to do so that all BC students feel welcomed and valued," he said.

To many Black students, however, the message fell flat. They say the college's response has failed to connect the latest cases to a string of racist incidents on campus in recent years. And they say nothing is being done to show that students will face stiff penalties for carrying out racist acts.

"Boston College does not see racism as an emergency. It does not see it as a threat to its student body," Destin said. "The priority is protecting Boston College and the image it presents." In 2017, two Black Lives Matters signs were defaced in a dorm, with the word "don't" added so they read "Black Lives don't Matter." A year later, a student was barred from campus after officials said he scrawled racist graffiti in a residence hall.

Ellana Lawrence, a leader of the Black Student Forum campus group, said the administration has failed to acknowledge that racism is a problem at Boston College. Without stronger action — and transparency around discipline — it sends the message that racism is tolerated, she said. At the same time, it leaves Black students with "a feeling of not being welcomed, of being an outsider or excluded," she said.

Some students see a stark contrast between the school's response to the incidents and its attempts to crack down on violations of COVID-19 restrictions. Amid a recent uptick in infections, the college sent a tough message threatening punishment if students violated rules against gatherings. Students say the harassment cases drew a delayed and much milder response.

Some residents of the multicultural floor are demanding changes including a new process to report racial violence to the college. Other students want the college to divulge sanctions against students who are found to have committed acts of racism. Some are calling for more training and other efforts to fight racism among students and faculty.

Among some seniors, the latest cases have contributed to a feeling of exhaustion and defeat. Among some younger students, there's a sense of loss. Typhania Zanou, a sophomore, said her feeling of security is gone, replaced by the stress of wondering if she'll be targeted next.

"It made me realize this campus is not a safe place for me or anyone who looks like me," she said. "I'm still kind of grappling with that."

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