

# MU'Y Aglfcbca Yfg Ei Ygh]cbYX GmghYa ]W F U]ga BYWU gY H Ym< ]fYX CbY B`UW 9a d`cmYY 35 MUfg A[ c, 9a U]`g G\ ck

3'HHSO\ HQWUHQFKHG V\VWHPLF UDFLVP H[LVWV LQ HYHU\ V  
<DOH DQG LQ WKLV GHSDUWPHQW ' D JURXSS RI XQGHUJUDG

UDFLVP LQ VFLHQFH <DOH DVWURQRP\ SURIHVVRUV H[LVWV LQ  
V\VWHPLF UDFLVP ' H[LVWV by pointing to the hiring of a Black  
Black employee in 1985

3:H KDYHQ]W VHHQ PDQ\ (OOD \*UHHQH V ' ZURWH 5LFKD  
email to the astronomy department on the day of the strike, referring to the administrative  
employee whom he said was its first, and so far on %ODFN RIILFH VWDIIHU  
an ambitious and self PDGH SHUVRQ DQG VKH GLGQ]W UHFHLYH  
KHOS IRU EODFN SHRSOH '

In the email exchange, which was obtained by BuzzFeed News, Larson also questioned a  
FROOHDJXH]V DVVHUWLRQ WKDW V\VWHPLF UDFLVP H[LVWV  
WR VD\ DERXW μGHHSO\ HQWUHQFKHG V\VWHPLF UDFLVP  
LW '

Students and researchers condemned these remarks in response, saying that the hiring of  
RQH %ODFN SHUVRQ GRHV QRW FDQFHO RXW WKH GHSDUWPHQW  
and that the racist emails were indicative of how Black people are systematically  
excluded from science.

3,I SHRSOH RI FRORU GR QRW IHHO FRPIRUWDEOH LQ WKH  
representation indicates they do not sit in GXH WR RXU ODFN RI WU\LQJ ' D  
undergraduates wrote to the email chain.

Another SURIHVVRU HPHULWXV :LOOLDP YDQ \$OWHQD DUJ  
Black students and faculty members was due to the fact that those scholars had less  
interest in the physical sciences compared to the social sciences. QRW GXH WR LQKHH  
racisP LQ RXU 'HSDUWPHQW '

, Q -HGLGDK ,VOHU EHFDPH WKH ILUVW %ODFN ZRP  
astronomy department. Now an assistant professor of astrophysics at Dartmouth, Isler  
told BuzzFeed News that the emails from the Yale professors were  
DOO VXUSULVLQJ ' EHFDXVH <sup>3</sup>VWUXFWXUDO DQG LQWHU



Xama Señal UNSJ / [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)  
William van Altena

<sup>3</sup>7KH IDFW WKDW VHQLRU PHDQFHU Raking such GHSDUWPHG  
intellectually dishonest and violent comments about Black people given the historical  
practices<sup>2</sup> at Yale<sup>2</sup> LV LWVHOI D GHPRQVWUDWLRQ RI VWUXFWX  
email.

The chair of the Yale astronomy department, Sarita Basu, declined to comment on any of the emails cited in this story and did not address the concerns raised by Isler.

37KH OLVWHQLQJ VHVVLQR \RX PHQWLRQHGLQ \RXU LQ students and faculty. It served as one of multiple forums in which students, postdoctoral DVVRFLDWHV IDFXOW\ DQG VWDII DUH H[SUHVVLQJ WK VDLG WKURXJK D VSRNHVSHUVRQ 3:H WDNH WKHVH FR feedback to help inform and enlighten our ongoing work to increase diversity in the VFLHQFHV .

The heated discussion has roiled the prestigious department at a time when academia, along with virtually every other institution in American life, is scrutinizing its role in perpetuating discrimination against and exclusion of Black people.

The recent police killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and other Black Americans have galvanized weeks of protests against police brutality and racism in all 50 states, triggered a flood of funding and support for the Black Lives Matter movement, resulted in teardowns of Confederacy leader statues and prompted the resignations of corporate executives with histories of racist behavior.

'XULQJ ODVW Strike for Black Lives' 3WKRXVDQGV RI VFLHQWLUV research to protest anti-Black racism, come up with ways to address inequalities within their departments, and fill social media with hashtags like #ShutDownSTEM and #ShutDownAcademia. And hundreds of Black scientists used the hashtag #BlackInTheIvory to describe the racism they have experienced in their careers. That afternoon, PHPEHUV RI <DOH\ DVWURQRPL GHSDUWPHQW SODQQH hall meeting to discuss racial equality.

Astronomy as a field is overwhelmingly dominated by white men, and research shows that women, especially women of color, face greater risks of gendered and racial harassment on the job. A 2018 survey of the American Astronomical Society, which includes undergraduates, graduate students, faculty members, and retired astronomers found that 82% of members identified as white and only 2% as Black or African American. The same year, an AAS task force deemed lack of diversity 3XQDFFHSD\ D\ QMXVWDLQDEOH .

Basu, the Yale astronomy department chair, did not answer questions about how many Black graduate students have graduated from the department, or how many Black faculty and staff it has employed. Across the university, 77% of the student body identifies as Black or African American.

%HIRUH <DOH\ WRZQ KDOO /DUVRQ WKH SURIHVVURU of history on the department mailing list. (His emails, and the others mentioned in this

story, were sent to BuzzFeed News with names redacted. BuzzFeed News has confirmed  
VHYHUDO RI WKH VHQGHUV† LGHQWLWLHV DQG RWKHU

Larson recounted that when he was department chair in 1985, he hired a woman named  
(OOD \*UHHQH <sup>3</sup>WKH ILUVW DQG VR of the staff of any EODFN E  
NLQG LQ WKH <DOH \$VWURQRP\ 'HSDUWPHQW '

\$ <DOH VSRNHVSHUVRQ GLG QRW DQVZHU TXHVWLRQV  
News was not able to reach Greene or a relative for comment.

<sup>3</sup>)URP DOO WKH LQIRUPDWLEPQZ the that the most qualified LW VHHP  
candidate was Ella Greene, the only black candidate, who was then the assistant business  
PDQDJHU RI RQH RI WKH ELJJHU GHSDUWPHQWV LQ WK  
FRQWLQXHG :KLOH KSUZHGRWHVWRDWRUHHQG†DER  
ZRUN RXW LI WKHUH ZDV RQO\ RQH EODFN SHUVRQ LQ  
FDSDEOH MXVW DV ZH KDG EHHQ WROG DQG LW DOO

+H ZHQW RQ <sup>3</sup>\$UH WKHUH DQ\ OHVV Rseem many Ella WKLV OLV  
Greens. But Ella was an ambitious and self-EDGH SHUVRQ DQG VKH GLGQ†  
GLGQ†W QHHG DQ\ VSHFLDO KHOS IRU EODFN SHRSOH

<sup>3</sup>:KLWH SHRSOH QHHG WR EH FDUHIXO QRW WR EH SDW  
FRQFOXGHG <sup>3</sup>(QFRXWLOHPIHWWZHDWHU UHWXUQV '

Later that morning, van Altena, another professor emeritus, who retired in 2007 after 34  
\HDUV LQ WKH DVWURQRP\ GHSDUWPHQW FKLPHG LQ W  
business managers.

<sup>3</sup>, ZDV QHYHU DZDUH RI DQ\ GLVFULPLQDWLRQ RU QHJD  
\$VWURQRP\ 'HSDUWPHQW ' YDQ \$OWHQD ZURWH <sup>3</sup>0\ RQ  
invitations for many years she never came to our Christmas parties so she must have felt  
some aspect of non acceptance sic @ EXW LW ZDV QRW GXH >WR @ RX

Throughout the rest of Wednesday, others in the department echoed that sentiment. An  
administrative employee called Greene a mentor and said she had only attended one  
party, perhaps due to a medical condition. And professor emeritus Pierre Demarque, who  
retired in 2001 and said he was on staff when Greene was hired, thanked Larson for his  
FRPPHQWV SDUWLFXODUO\ <sup>3</sup>DERXW WKH OHVV RQV WR

To a postdoctoral fellow, however,

3 > 7 @ KH VWDWHPHQW WKDW μZH KDYHQ¶W VHHQ PDQ\ ( HQWUHQFKHG V\ VWHP LF UDFLVP SUHVHQW LQ RXU VRF more productive to acknowledge that our department (and astronomy in general) remains highly non-representative of the overall population and instead focus the conversation on how those of us in positions of privilege and power can educate ourselves and do better in the fXWXUH ´

Larson took offense at this suggestion.

3 : KDWHYHU \RX ZDQW WR VD\ DERXW μGHHSO\ HQWUHQ GHIHDWHG E\ LW ´ KH ZURWH ³\$QG , VDZ QR HYLGHQFH or elsewhere at Yale. Yes, of course there are inequalities in our society and we all want to see them reduced. But I think you will do more good by helping and encouraging IXWXUH (OOD \*UHHQH V WKDQ E\ UDLQLQJ DJDLQVW UDF

A graduate student then threW KHLU VXSSRUW EHKLQG WKH SRVWGR UDFLVP LV XQLYHUVDO LQ RXU FRXQWU\ ´ WKH\ ZURWH certain places more than others (but even this is debatable), it is unfortunately pervasive everywhere, eHQ DW <DOH ´

That afternoon, in a cosigned letter to the department at large, a group of undergraduate VWXGHQWV FRQGHPQH WKH SURIHVVURUV¶ UHPDUNV D ³WRNHQLVP ´

3 > % @ RWK RI WKHVH SKHQRPHQD For Over the Gas Zink they H SHR have adequately addressed racism in their place of work, while the deeper foundational LVVXH V UHPDLQ LQWDFW ´ WKH\ ZURWH UDFLWUWH V LQQW MW VLPSO\ μQRW UDFLVW ¶´

3 7R VD\ WKDWUHQFDYHG DQG¶W LGQ¶W QHHG DQ\ VSHFLDQ completely ignores the larger systemic issues that have for centuries barred it on





Larson told BuzzFeed News that in retrospect, his comments questioning systemic racism  
VRXQGHG ³GLVPLVVLYH´ DQG WKDW KH VKRXOG KDYH ³

³> & @ OHDUO\ IRU PRVW WHUPLWV KH DOXPHV, HQWV L V Q  
vehemently antiUDFLVW ´ KH VDLG E\ HPDLO ³7KDW LV QRW P

+H QRWHG WKDW ³EHFDXVH RI UHFHQW HYHQWV WKH D  
so superKHDWHG WKDW LW¶V LPSRWEHQG JDRWDDFDQV K LZ  
FOLPDWH KH VDLG UHPLQGV KLP RI WKH \HDU ³7K  
years, but not as much as the activists of 50 years ago would have liked, and of course we  
VWLOO KDYH ELJ SUREOH RevúreKtactizhRshlthy, and WkwisQ N WKD  
LW VXFFHVV ,I \RX GRQ¶W VHH PH RXW WKHUH PDUFKL  
FDXVH ´

³(OOD \*UHHQH KHUVHOI ZRXOG SUREDEO\ EH PRUWLILH  
ZKHWKHU KLV HWR Wü2\$Hd®-ÀPH P@IVH KHLVWLOV KHG K