

Deconstructing the ‘Karen’ meme | Harvard Law Today

By Carolyn E. Schmitt

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It’s a scene we unfortunately see too often now: A white woman pulls out her phone to call the police to patrol Black people in public spaces. The woman is captured on video, occasionally with her phone to her ear. Her image spreads on the internet as a meme, her actions satirized, a humorous take on an otherwise dangerous situation. Recent examples include “Barbecue Becky” and “Central Park Karen,” who are among the memes studied by Apryl Williams, a faculty associate at the Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society.

Williams, an assistant professor of communication and media at the University of Michigan, explained the history and implications of the images during a recent Berkman Klein event. In conversation with BKC fellow Allissa Richardson, she deconstructed the role of Karen memes today and the systems of racial inequality that have formed the building blocks for these confrontations.

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