



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on June 19, 2020

Oakland Investigates “Hate Crime” of Ropes in Trees — Black Man Says He Installed Them for Exercise

Oakland, California, police have launched a hate-crime investigation into ropes found hanging from trees in a public park because some people thought they resembled nooses, but a black man claims to have put them there as exercise equipment.



According to the [Associated Press](#), social-media posts claiming the ropes, which were near Lake Merritt, looked like nooses spurred police to investigate. “The Police Department provided five photographs of trees, some of which showed knotted ropes and one that appeared to have a piece of plastic pipe attached to a rope, hanging from tree limbs,” the AP reported. The ropes were removed Tuesday.

The next day, Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf, a Democrat, announced that the city was launching a hate-crime investigation into the alleged nooses despite the fact that, as the AP noted, “police said several community members came forward during their initial investigation to say the ropes were used for exercise and a man came forward to say he put them up several months ago.”

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That man, Victor Sengbe, just happens to be black. He told [KGO-TV](#) that “the rope is part of a rigging used by him and his friends as part of a larger swing system” and even showed the station video of the system in action, which the station included in its broadcast report.

“Out of the hundreds, thousands of people who walked by, no one even thought it looked anywhere close to a noose,” said Sengbe. “Folks have used it for exercise, it was really a fun addition to the park that we tried to create.”

“It’s unfortunate that a genuine gesture of just wanting to have a good time got misinterpreted into something so heinous,” he added.

Nevertheless, Schaaf said city officials must “start with the assumption that these are hate crimes” and only consider the intentions behind them when deciding whether or not to charge someone with a hate crime.

“Intentions don’t matter when it comes to terrorizing the public,” Schaaf said. “It is incumbent on all of us to know the actual history of racial violence, of terrorism, that a noose represents and that we as a city must remove these terrorizing symbols from the public view.”

“Reports that these [ropes] were part of exercise equipment do not remove nor excuse their torturous and terrorizing effects,” she said in a [statement posted on Twitter](#). “Objects that invoke such terror will not be tolerated in Oakland’s public spaces.”



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Likewise, Oakland Parks, Recreation, and Youth Development Director Nicholas Williams declared, “The symbolism of the rope hanging in the tree is malicious regardless of intent. It’s evil, and it symbolizes hatred.”

Not to be outdone, the Oakland Police Department issued a statement saying, “We remind and ask our community to be mindful when using this equipment in a recreational manner. These acts may send an unintended message. We recognize especially at this time, that any ropes on or attached to trees, limbs or other objects can be associated with hate crimes and racial violence.”

In short, no matter how noble your intentions are, don’t do anything in public that someone else could conceivably misinterpret as a threat to black people.

Schaaf also tried to cast differing views on the ropes as a matter of white privilege. “What a privilege for those of that don’t feel complete fear and terror when we see a rope in a tree,” she said. “That is a privilege that so many of our African-American residents do not enjoy.”

“We have got to stop terrorizing our black and brown citizens, and as white people, we have to become knowledgeable and educated about the impacts of our actions,” she continued.

At least in this instance, Sengbe is fortunate that he is one of those “black and brown citizens.” As the *American Conservative*’s [Rod Dreher](#) observed, “If a white man had done it [install the ropes], he would already be facing war crimes charges, and would be on a flight to The Hague.”

Meanwhile, taxpayers are the ones really being hung out to dry. The Oakland police are increasing the number of officers patrolling the Lake Merritt area, and they have turned over their evidence to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) for further investigation.

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