

After shooting of Kimani Gray

Police occupy New York City neighborhood

By Sandy English
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The New York City Police Department (NYPD) has stationed hundreds of police officers in the Brooklyn neighborhood of East Flatbush since protests erupted after the shooting of 16-year-old Kimani Gray on March 9.

Over the weekend, WSWS reporters in the area saw horse-mounted officers waiting alongside dozens of police motorcycles. Police were stationed at every corner of East Flatbush's Church Avenue and nearby Nostrand Avenue, close to the location where the killing took place.

Mobile command centers with sophisticated surveillance equipment were stationed in the area, and convoys of squad cars and vans filled with police could be seen speeding along the streets. Groups of officers congregated in the side streets, and in adjoining neighborhoods metal police barricades were stacked on sidewalks.

While the police presence was heightened because of the funeral of Kimani Gray on Saturday and another protest march on Sunday, heavy police presence has been constant since March 10. At that time, protesters began a series of marches to the NYPD 67th Precinct building in the neighborhood. Youth confronted the police and ransacked a store that night. Police arrested nearly 50 people at a protest the next evening.

Protests began after two undercover officers from the Brooklyn South Anti-Crime Patrol shot Gray on March 9, a Saturday night, after he left a group of young men who were congregating in front of a private residence.

The police allege that Gray pulled a gun on the officers, and that the officers warned him and then fired. Witnesses have contradicted the NYPD version, and told the media that no weapon was visible. An official autopsy revealed that of the seven shots that hit Gray, three entered his body from behind.

Hundreds of mourners attended Gray's funeral on Saturday while police officers stood nearby and were stationed on a roof across the street. Police also had a substantial presence at Sunday's protest.

Carol Gray, Kimani's mother, has called for an independent inquiry into the shooting of her son.

According to a report in the *Daily News*, one of the police officers who shot Gray, Sgt. Mourad Mourad, had at least three suits brought against him when he was a plainclothes officer on Staten Island. The other officer involved, Jovaniel Cordova, had two suits brought against him while he was stationed at Brooklyn's 70th Precinct. All of the suits alleged civil rights violations surrounding false arrest and illegal stop-and-searches.

The police occupation of East Flatbush is an intensification of the decade-long stop-and-frisk policy. Initiated by Mayor Michael Bloomberg in 2002, this policy directs officers to randomly stop passersby on the streets and in front of residences, question them and pat them down for drugs or weapons. As a rule, only the poorest neighborhoods in the city are affected.

More than 5 million people have been stopped in 10 years. The vast majority of these are black and Hispanic working-class youth. Studies have shown that stop-and-frisk does nothing to lower the crime rate, as Bloomberg claims, and few of those stopped have been engaged in illegal activity.

Nevertheless, police take the names and addresses and often Social Security numbers of those they stop and store them in local databases in police precinct stations. Names were logged into a central electronic database until the New York State legislature outlawed the practice in 2010.

Stop-and-frisk has provoked anger among millions of workers and has caused the NYPD to be regarded with contempt in much of the city.

Testimony is currently being given in *Floyd, et al. v. City of New York, et al.*, a class action suit initiated by the Center for Constitutional Rights, which alleges that NYPD is violating constitutional rights by stop-and-frisk.

Police officer Adhyl Polanco recently testified about the intense pressure that the NYPD brass puts on police to make stops. Police in his precinct in the Bronx were told to issue a minimum of 20 summonses and make one arrest a month. "We were handcuffing kids for no reason," he said.

Another police officer, Pedro Serrano, made clandestine

recordings of comments by his supervisors at the same Bronx precinct. One deputy inspector was recorded as saying that police should stop “male blacks. And I told you at roll call, and I have no problem [to] tell you this, male blacks 14 to 21.”

Stop-and-frisk is not the product of some innate racism by the NYPD, although racism is certainly a factor; it is essentially a preemptive response by the ruling elite to the deteriorating social conditions of the working class and the ever-widening social inequality that is so present and vivid in New York.

Bloomberg and the political establishment, and the thin layer of the billionaires and multimillionaires that it represents, are gambling that a social explosion can be contained in advance by police-state measures.

The seeds of that social explosion continue to grow. One in five families in East Flatbush, for example, an area with a population of about 125,000, lives in poverty, and 75 percent of young men are unemployed.

In the city as a whole, the top 1 percent of the population takes a third of the income of the city’s 8 million people, and lives a life of almost unimaginable luxury. A few miles to the north of East Flatbush, for instance, Chelsea Clinton, the daughter of Bill and Hillary Clinton, and her husband recently purchased an apartment for \$10 million.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has spoken to workers in the East Flatbush neighborhood many times in recent months, particularly during the election campaign of the Socialist Equality Party.

In conversations this week, workers and young people connected the shooting of Kimani Gray with the increasing poverty and unemployment in the neighborhood.

Tyre William, a student, was talking to a friend about the police when he spoke to the WSWS. “I am not surprised. There is violence here. This is not the first time it happened, but this will make it worse. In their mind, the police think it’s right.”

We asked Peter Pierre, a maintenance worker, how he saw the Kimani Gray events relating to broader issue of social inequality. “There are only the rich and the poor, and the money is sitting in all the billionaires’ pockets,” he said. “They believe poor people should just lie down and die. This is supposed to be the richest country in the world. It is a shame the president is just trying to get minimum wage to \$9. It’s nothing.

“I do maintenance for realty firms. They have billions of dollars, but they won’t even give me five days’ work. They cut me a day so I wouldn’t qualify for health insurance. We live below the poverty line here. If I save every penny, I still can’t pay my rent of \$1,000.

“The government is not working. The police shoot people

unnecessarily sometimes. Nothing positive is happening. This is turning into a police state.”

Mell Harrison, 19, was passing by when he heard Pierre’s remark. He added: “There are not enough jobs. Everybody needs jobs. Kids are looking to make money. Some of them will do illegal things. What are we going to do? I am a student at City Tech, and I’m job-hunting right now. I have been looking for two weeks. They say they will get back to you but never do.”

One young woman told the WSWS: “I was coming home from school and saw a lot of police. I was not interested to find out what was going on and kept walking. Why are police all over now when they were not here like this before? The cops don’t really know the kids here. In the Bronx, my friend had a friend who ran from police and was shot. He may have had drugs, but he was not armed. The police out here now, they are killing the voice of the people, literally.”

Nicole Debequille, 39, who described herself as a stay-at-home mom, also lives in the area. “I am very saddened about this very unfortunate incident. The killing of this young child by the police was just not justified,” she said.

“I feel that he was targeted. He was leaving a group of friends. The cops were trying to make an example of him. It doesn’t make sense that he would be trying to shoot at the police. He was shot in the back.

“Not enough is being done to make an independent investigation. The government is taking the word of the police, and that is not right. There is something definitely wrong with this. “The police are supposed to be employed to protect the people. The police, however, really work for the welfare of the big boys—that is, the corporations.

“It hurts my heart when I hear such stories. Where is there hope for the poor people? The mayor supports the police commissioner who supports the police. But how can someone shot in the back be a threat to the police?”

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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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