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Downtown Brooklyn Rally Protests Cops' Stop-and-Frisks

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March Over Bridge Ends at City Hall

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DOWNTOWN BROOKLYN — Chanting “NYPD, keep your hands off of me!” roughly a thousand Latino and African-American residents rallied Wednesday in Cadman Plaza Park and marched over the Brooklyn Bridge — waving signs and a giant effigy of a police officer — to protest “discriminatory policing” in New York City.

Statistics show that members of these communities are nine times as likely as whites to be stopped and frisked by the NYPD, even though they are no more likely to be arrested. Make the Road New York (MRNY), a nonprofit advocacy group that sponsored the march, is calling for the city council to pass legislation that will put an end to this discrimination.

“I’m here because living in Bushwick, it’s the norm to get stopped and frisked,” Jesus Gonzalez, one of the organizers of the march, told the Brooklyn Eagle. “It’s unjustified, and it’s not addressing crime efficiently. The people who get frisked are principally black and Latino youth. As a 24-year-old Latino, I know from personal experience how humiliating it can be.”

“Stop-and-frisk is a flawed policy that has disproportionately affected immigrant and minority communities,” said Councilmember Letitia James. “The NYPD should ensure that their protocols build a climate of trust with young black and Latino New Yorkers, and make it a point to work with young people and immigrant communities to directly address their experiences during police interactions.”

Councilmember Jumaane Williams and other community leaders also joined in the march, which ended with a rally at City Hall Park. “This city is now compromised by a majority that are threatened every day by the stop, question and frisk tactics of the NYPD,” said Councilman Williams. “Black and Latino New Yorkers are routinely violated on the street, publicly embarrassed and deprived of their basic civil liberties. Stop, question and frisk is one element of an unjust police culture that has led to events like what happened to Kirsten John Foy and I at the Labor Day Parade. This is not a question of safety, this is a question of right and wrong. More and more New Yorkers will take to the streets until this practice is changed.”

Numbers Show Discrimination

According to the Center for Constitutional Rights, a record 576,394 people were stopped by the NYPD in 2009 — 84 percent of whom were black and Latino residents — although they comprise only about 26 percent and 27 percent respectively of New York City’s total population. In 2010, more than 600,000 New Yorkers were stopped. Less than 3 percent of all stop-and-frisks have yielded weapons or contraband.

In October 2010, Jeffrey Fagan of Columbia University released a study that found that the main factor for

determining who gets stopped, even after controlling for crime rates, is race. Additionally, black and Latino New Yorkers are treated more harshly, more likely to be arrested rather than issued a summons and more likely to have force used against them than white suspects, according to the study.

According to MRNY, these policing practices have a chilling effect on police-community relations, make community members less likely to report crime and make many community members feel less safe.

“I have been stopped, questioned and frisked about 20 times, and all that it has done is make me dislike the NYPD. I don’t believe in them to keep me safe. I feel they are quicker to lock me up than to help me,” said MRNY member Romale Johnson in a statement.

Members of the LGBTQ community reported discrimination as well, especially transgender women. “They arrest us because they assume that we are all engaged in sex work,” Kimberly Dukenso said in a statement.

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