

"Stop and Frisk": A Road to Disaster

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Many of us as parents, caregivers or just plain bystanders have had the experience of watching with horror as a toddler does something sure to hurt himself -- approaching an electrical outlet with a metal fork comes to mind.

I am having the same reaction watching the New York Police Department's "Stop and Frisk" policy, with over [600,000 stops](#), with around 85% of those stopped black and Latino men, virtually none of which led to an arrest.

I am troubled by this policy as a violation of civil rights. But I am more worried by the real dangers to civil order, because of the "Great Recession's" impact on this precise population, with [unemployment rates for black teenagers](#) at nearly 40% and labor participation rates at less than 25% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, November 2011). And as we found in our most recent survey of low-income New Yorkers ([The Unheard Third 2011](#)), 56% of the unemployed who are actively looking for work reported that they've been unemployed for more than a year; 18% said they've been unemployed for three years or more.

And things aren't going to get much better any time soon. "The recovery here will be sluggish. Right now, sectors leading the national economy aren't really big for New York City," according to a [recent article](#) in *Crain's New York Business*. Factor into that the possible outcomes of the NYPD's Stop and Frisk policy.

I was 16 years old when six days of [riots](#) occurred in Harlem, Bedford Stuyvesant, and Rochester, touched off by a police killing of a 15-year-old. In New York City, the violence resulted in one death, over a hundred injuries, and more than 450 arrests. Those disturbances came against a background of years of chronic unemployment, a sense that the police unfairly target black young men, and deep racial divisions. I am not claiming the situations are the same, but I do get the sense that every one of these mindless "Stop and Frisk" incidents is the equivalent of tossing a lighted match at an open gas can.

Mayor Bloomberg last year [raised his own fear](#) of the possibility of civic disturbances because of the chronically high unemployment rate, particularly among young people. But plainly their boss's message is not getting through to brass of the NYPD, who have vigorously defended their Stop and Frisk policies as the ultimate in crime fighting.

The outlook for improved employment opportunities for black and Latino young men is increasingly bleak for the foreseeable future. Particularly for young men in the South Bronx, Harlem, Bed-Stuy, and Brownsville, without a high school diploma or skills, many will never

find full-time work without a significant government investment in training and job development. Now isn't the time to inflame an already desperate condition with police practices that are likely to further embitter those who are facing a possible lifetime without hope.

For those New Yorkers who think this doesn't really matter to them, I would say that in light of New York City's precarious fiscal position, its high rate of mortgages foreclosures -- particularly in the outer boroughs -- and its need to continue to attract both tourists and new businesses, the surest way to derail the city's future is civil disorder prompted by police abuse. The 1964 riots destroyed real estate values particularly in and around poor neighborhoods -- a repeat could drive the entire real estate market under water and set back the entire recovery in the city for years.

A return to community policing, which assigns officers who actually get to know the neighborhood on foot and the young people on the block by name, could at least give the city breathing space in which to come up with the political and economic will to prepare more of our unskilled young people for a job rather than being repeatedly told to "spread em."