

La Nueva Mayoría

By David R. Jones



“Stop & Frisk” – A Self-Defeating Tactic

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New York City Councilman Jumaane Williams and Kirsten John Foy, community affairs director in the Office of the Public Advocate, were stopped by police at the West Indian Day parade for walking down a block that was supposed to be off limits. Both men are black. They said they showed police their city-issued identification, and explained that they had permission from a high ranking officer to skirt a barrier and walk on. In response, officers forced Foy to the ground and both men were handcuffed. After being brought to the local precinct, they were released.

Williams and Foy, of course, were in a position to secure their own release, demand an explanation, and be taken seriously by Police Commissioner Ray Kelly. But what about the thousands of anonymous New Yorkers without “juice” who are stopped by police, especially young black and Latino men?

In 2010, the police made 601,055 stops; more than 80 percent involved blacks and Latinos, mostly young men. Many were stopped multiple times over the course of the year. Over the years, there have been millions of people stopped by the police; on average, 9 in 10 were not even accused of any crime or violation, no less charged and convicted. A gun was found in slightly more than 0.1 percent of those stops.

Last year, Governor Paterson [signed legislation ending the Police Department’s policy of storing the names and addresses of people police stop and question on the street](#) but who ultimately have done nothing wrong. The police database will still include the reason for the stop as well as the person’s race, age, and location of the stop. The law applies only to New York City.

The numbers continue to paint a disturbing picture. Last year, the police [made 93 stops for every 100 residents in a neighborhood in Brooklyn](#). This is not just an abuse of police power; it is the sort of activity that could be expected of an occupying force. And, in fact, that’s how the NYPD is viewed by many in communities of color. Repeat stop and frisk encounters foster an antagonistic relationship between the police – who are ostensibly there to protect residents – and the community, which sees itself under siege.

The police contend that the practice is a necessary tool in the fight to reduce crime, and that the racially disproportionate results simply reflect evidence that black and Latino men commit a disproportionate number of crimes. But do they? The majority of those incarcerated in New York’s state prisons are black and Latino drug users. This is true even though we know that drug usage by whites is greater than by blacks or Latinos. But arrests that reflect this reality don’t follow. Stop and frisk numbers support the sense that the NYPD engages in racial profiling.

The recent civil disorders in Philadelphia and several English cities have been attributed by some to excessive policing tactics in neighborhoods of color where jobs are scarce. The city’s official unemployment rate for black and Latino young men is hovering near or above 20 percent – with thousands more not counted because they have given up looking for a job in an economy with one opening for every four unemployed. Stop and frisk operations do nothing more than sow distrust and hatred of the NYPD in communities where real policing might actually be welcomed.

David R. Jones is president and CEO of the Community Service Society (CSS), the leading voice on behalf of low-income New Yorkers for over 165 years. For over 10 years he served as a member of the board of directors of the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund. The views expressed in this column are solely those of the writer.