

STREETSBLOG

IN THEIR OWN WORDS: Black New Yorkers Talk About Their Fear in Public Space

By Steven Vago | Jun 2, 2020 | 1 COMMENT



The day's protests started at Foley Square. Photo: Steven Vago

Many are walking the walk — but only people of color are feeling the fear. Thousands of protestors marched through Manhattan on Tuesday amid the seemingly endless string of police killings of unarmed black people — George Floyd in Minneapolis being the latest, but almost certainly not the last. But only protesters of color

truly understand what it means to be afraid to stride through what is labeled on maps as “public space.”



“We don’t need you to take a knee with us,” City Council Member Donovan Richards of Queens said an hour before the day’s protests began. “We need you to take your knee off our necks.”

Streetsblog talked to protesters to get their personal experiences with racism — of police, of white people, of institutions — in public space and to better understand what it feels like to live in a city where [90 percent of social distancing arrests](#) and [99 percent of jaywalking summonses](#) involved blacks and Latinos.

Stop and frisk? If you think it’s been completely eliminated, you’re not talking to its victims. Here are six stories (photos by Steven Vago):

Pierre Voltaire, 31, Inwood, artist/entrepreneur



My race is always an issue and slight, minor things can turn into something serious. It’s been like this since I was a kid. The first time I was brutalized by police was when I was 13 -years old. I was going to hang out with my friend to play videogames on the Upper West Side in broad daylight when five undercover officers rushed me and threw my face against the wall. They scraped my face up, put me in cuffs and told me I was someone I wasn’t. Fucking had me on the ground for 15 minutes after that and right after that they realized I wasn’t the right person. I had my ID on me and they let me go.



I had to go upstairs to my friend's crib and just live with that shit. Things like that happen all the time.



Diondre Francois, 20, Canarsie, sales rep



I have a young son, so I want to see that his future is better than what I have to go through today. I don't want my son to be riding his bike through Manhattan like I do when I go to work and he gets cut off by a squad car right in front of his front tire.

I ride with my friends and they are mainly white, but they are standing on the side while I am getting interrogated. I want to see change.

Afua, 30, Bronx, partner in a human resources business





Every time I see the police, it's a negative experience because of the way the country is set up. I don't think it's right that I walk out and see police and I either feel angry or I'm scared – so that enough is a negative experience.



I don't like walking around from fear of seeing other people. I should feel free and comfortable enough to live my life as a normal human being and not worry that it's in jeopardy every day.

Black lives matter. Period. The end.

Nzinga Starnubia, 23, Fort Greene, YouTuber



It's very concerning. It's something that I have become immune to. Just being a woman period is a dangerous thing.



It definitely concerns me. I can walk down the street and be looked at a certain way because the way my hair is styled. I am also very loud and animated and that scares people.



Believe it or not, it scares people to be black and love yourself and stand in yourself fully. It's very intimidating to some people.

Maiya Wright, 21, Montclair, college student



I have the usual fear of walking around while being black.



A lot of people have said that before, but every time I pass by a cop, I'm just weary of what I'm wearing and what I'm doing and how I'm moving. It's everything with the system.

It's just the usual with racial profiling.



A.A., 24, Inwood, college student

You always have to watch your back: first, as a woman; second, as a Muslim woman; and third, as a black woman. It's a scary world we live in. I'm always conscious of the fact that anything can happen to me on the street. How about they don't police open spaces? Usually when they police anything, it's minority populated areas, so I think the police have an idea of what a threat looks like and they go to those places and they sometimes agitate situations where there really isn't anything.

The NYPD is heavily on Upper Broadway. Why is there so many of them? Where I live it's a family area. There is hardly any trouble, so I'm curious as to why they are heavily populated in that area because there is nothing going on. I mean, we know the reason — because it's a predominantly poor and a community of color.

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By Steven Vago | Jun 17, 2020

The tale of two cities is right there in Hizzoner's backyard.



Pedestrian Mall Revolution

By Aaron Naparstek | Mar 18, 2006

The other day, the NYC Department of Transportation unveiled a proposal to build a new pedestrian-only plaza with tables, benches, greenery and bike racks in Downtown Brooklyn along two blocks where Willoughby and Adams Streets intersect. According to a New York 1 report, the bottom two floors of the city-owned building at 345 Adams will [...]

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By Sahra Sulaiman | Nov 10, 2016

"Where do things stand now?" I asked Adonia Lugo as we organized potential discussion themes ahead of this Sunday's Untokening event. Election results were just starting to roll in from the East Coast, she replied, and they weren't looking good for Hillary. Perhaps we should relabel the event 'The UnTrumpening,' I mused. We were already [...]



Op-Ed: It's Time to Legalize Public Drinking for All New Yorkers

By Shabazz Stuart | Jun 28, 2020



Those with fair skin in affluent ZIP codes will continue to drink with their friends in the streets, while minorities will be subject to arbitrary harassment and summonses for doing the same. This needs to stop.



‘Mad as Hell’: Mayor Edits Statement By Minority Leaders, Silencing Their ‘Narrative’

By Gersh Kuntzman | May 31, 2020

Hizzoner left out two key sentences that framed the full events of Saturday night in the context of the minority community’s seemingly endless fight for basic human rights.

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Thanks Streetsblog for lifting up these voices. Its important for the livable streets movement to be inclusive and hear our brothers and sisters.

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