

Thousands protest police violence in New York City

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In the face of growing police violence and the firm backing of the police by New York City's Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, several thousand people marched April 5 in Manhattan from Union Square to City Hall to demand justice for the victims of the official brutality.

As has been the case in a number of recent protests, the presence of enthusiastic groups of high school and college students in the racially-mixed crowd was noticeable. The most striking aspect of the rally was the half-dozen or more relatives of individuals killed by police who spoke. This reflects the increasing number of unarmed youth and workers who have been shot down by the police. These family members were of several ethnic groups: African-American, Hispanic and Asian. Several of the relatives broke down crying while they spoke at the rally.

One mother said, "They killed my son Manuel in Crown Heights. Mayor Giuliani doesn't want to do anything. They are the KKK. One [the police] has a uniform, and the others [KKK] don't."

A young Asian woman cried, "My brother was shot in the back of the head on March 24, 1995. If it happened to my brother, it could happen to anyone."

The African-American mother of a 21-year old killed in South Brooklyn raged that he was "not shot in the stomach and chest like they said. He was shot in the back from five feet away. That was shown by the autopsy report. Not only did they kill him, they killed me, my family. I feel like my life is over. I have grandchildren and I want them to safely walk the streets. Get Giuliani out of there."

Theresa spoke about her son, Jose Miguel Sanchez, a Dominican immigrant father of 12 children, who was killed at the restaurant in which he was working. "He wanted to see what was happening. Police would not identify themselves. The officer involved was never

indicted. He is walking the same streets now that Sanchez' children are walking."

The mother of Anthony Rosario tearfully spoke: "First it was the KKK. Now they are lynched by the police—14 shots in the back while lying down. I called Giuliani to confront him. This was no shoot-out. This was an execution." She then led the crowd at the rally in a chant of "Giuliani must go."

Tasheem Brown, another speaker and the father of Kevin Brown, who was one of two youth shot last Friday in the Bushwick section of Brooklyn, told this reporter:

"Police are starting to hold court in the streets. For the past couple of weeks, this is what's been happening. Mostly to minorities. I am going to see justice is served for my son. Whatever they say doesn't justify killing kids. They just shut and closed the case; no investigation pursued. [Police] Commissioner Safir has the nerve to call it 'a good shooting.' His kids, the cops' kids, are not being killed."

Several times during the rally announcements were made about arrests of marchers who tried to shut down the Brooklyn Bridge to auto traffic. It was later announced that 18 people had been arrested in the civil disobedience, including a couple of supporters who were only observing the arrests. People with cameras were not allowed to film the arrests. A speaker warned, "We know what can happen, what the police can do when there are no witnesses." The rally was asked to join a later march to the police precinct where those arrested would be held.

The rally organizers advanced no viable political basis on which police brutality could be combated. At an earlier press conference, Reverend Al Sharpton proposed that people protest by refusing to shop for Easter. A leaflet handed out at the rally called for

people to withdraw their money from their current banks and put it in Carver Federal Savings Bank, “a Black controlled bank.”

This sort of nationalist demagoguery serves the material interests of a thin layer of black middle class and business people. Sharpton is a Democratic Party operative and his activity is aimed at diverting attention from the need to build an alternative to both big business parties. New York City is characterized by a massive gulf between the very wealthy and nearly everyone else. In the final analysis, it is this social gap that is maintained by the “the thin blue line” and guarantees the increase in police violence.



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