Police shooting of 16-year-old provokes protests in New York

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For a third night on Wednesday, protesters confronted police in the East Flatbush neighborhood of Brooklyn in anger over the killing of 16-year-old Kimani Gray by two undercover police officers on Saturday night.

Police arrested about 50 people after a vigil for Gray turned into a confrontation when demonstrators attempted to march to the New York Police Department's (NYPD's) 67th precinct stationhouse. Police detained Gray's sister in a squad car and released her with a citation. According to media reports, the police beat youth as young as 13 with nightsticks, and pepper-sprayed young men and women. Demonstrators threw bricks, bottles and garbage at police.

The police fired 11 shots at Gray at 11:30 p.m. on Saturday night. He was pronounced dead on arrival at the hospital. The two undercover cops, according to the NYPD, were on patrol in the neighborhood when Gray left a group of men who were gathered in front of a house. The officers allegedly identified themselves and told Gray to show his hands. According to media sources, he then pointed a .38 caliber handgun at them. A gun matching that description was recovered at the crime scene.

The results of an autopsy released on Wednesday established that Gray had been struck by seven bullets, three of which entered his body from the back.

On Tuesday, scores of protesters marched from the site of the shooting on 52nd street to the 67th Precinct. The marchers were peaceful but were escorted by a large number of police. The precinct building was ringed with barricades. Demonstrators carried signs that said, "Stop Killer Cops Now."

On Monday, after a candlelight vigil in memory of Gray, protesters had also attempted to march to the 67th precinct but were blocked by dozens of cops in riot gear. A number of protesters, according to witnesses, detached themselves from the group and began to throw bottles and trash at the police. A number of shop windows were smashed, and one city bus was damaged. Some youth entered a drugstore where they knocked items off shelves and disturbed some of the store's displays.

Also in an account published on Wednesday, one witness, Tishana King, told the *Daily News* that, when the police fired their weapons, she is "certain [Gray] didn't have anything in his hands." King added, "Kimani started backing up. The cop took out his gun and started firing at Kimani. I couldn't believe he let off his gun. There was no reason. No false move."

Another witness who was with the group of youth told the media, "It all happened so fast. I didn't even know they were officers. I didn't hear them say a thing."

An East Flatbush resident told the *Village Voice* that her daughter "heard him [Gray] say, 'don't kill me, don't kill me.' And they say, 'stay still' or they going to shoot you again."

While it has been widely reported in the New York media that Gray pointed a gun at the officers, it is unclear what the source of the claim is.

In an agreement with the district attorney's office, the two officers have been put on administrative leave and have not filed statements yet.

Social tensions in New York City are at the boiling point. The question is not why youth have rioted over another police killing, but why the streets in working-class neighborhoods have been relatively quiet for the last several years. Unemployment, particularly among young people, remains at the highest levels in decades, and for those that do have jobs, there are few alternatives besides low-wage and part-time work.

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Social inequality is at some of the highest levels in the United Sates in this city of 8 million, where the wealthiest 1 percent rakes in more than a third of the income and nearly a quarter of the population lives in poverty. The ruling elite, through the medium of Democratic Party politicians, is proceeding with the first steps in privatizing public housing, dismantling public education through school closures, and attacking the living standards of hundreds of thousands of city workers.

The social environment for millions of young people in the poorest areas of New York City amounts to little more than a police state. A daily source of humiliation and tension for the city's black and Hispanic working class youth is the NYPD's unconstitutional stop-and-frisks, which affect hundreds of thousands yearly in ever-increasing numbers. Even when a student goes to school, he or she must often pass through metal detectors to get to class.

Any challenge to the authority of the NYPD can be extremely dangerous. The city has seen a number of egregious police killings in recent months, and it is clear that the NYPD is often reacting to the most casual encounters with violence, and, particularly with minority working-class youth, increasingly with deadly force.

Last year, only a few blocks away from where Saturday's shooting took place, the NYPD shot and killed 23-year-old Shantel Davis when she fled from the police in a car that had been reported stolen. She was unarmed. In October, an NYPD detective fatally shot unarmed 22-year-old Noel Polanco, who was allegedly driving erratically near JFK airport. Police shot and killed unarmed 18- year-old Ramarley Graham in his own apartment in February last year after they pursed him in an investigation. Graham's parents were among those who attended the vigil for Kimani Gray on Wednesday night.

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