

No charges against New York police in Ramarley Graham shooting

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A grand jury in the New York City borough of the Bronx has declined to press charges against New York Police Department (NYPD) officer Richard Haste for the fatal February 2012 shooting of unarmed 18-year-old Ramarley Graham.

Federal prosecutors will now review the case to see if the NYPD violated Graham's civil rights. Haste remains on duty with the NYPD pending an internal investigation.

The young man's killing occurred after an NYPD narcotics squad had staked out a corner store in Graham's neighborhood where they believed drug sales were occurring. Police followed the youth from the street to an apartment rented by Graham's grandmother.

Private video surveillance footage shows officers with guns drawn attempting to kick down the front door. When they could not enter, they went around to the back, kicked down a door there, and gained access to the apartment. They entered without a warrant. Haste, a member of the narcotics unit, shot Graham once in the chest in Graham's bathroom. A small amount of marijuana was found in the toilet.

Haste alleged that he had seen Graham make a motion that led him to believe he was reaching for a weapon.

According to media reports, Graham's grandmother has insisted that the cops did not announce their presence when they entered the apartment and that Haste did not warn her grandson before he shot him.

Jeffrey Emdin, the attorney representing Graham's mother, has told the media the presence of a large number of police at the apartment made it unlikely that Graham would escape and that they could have waited to obtain a warrant.

In May, a judge dismissed manslaughter charges

against Haste when he ruled that an earlier grand jury had not heard evidence, later made public, of a police radio call that indicated Graham may have been armed.

At a protest in front of the Bronx district attorney's office, Graham's mother Constance Malcolm, said, "Haste broke into our home and murdered my son in cold blood." She added, "The criminal justice system has failed us, just as it failed the family of Trayvon Martin." Both of Graham's parents had appeared last month at protests against the acquittal of George Zimmerman, Trayvon Martin's killer.

The killing of Ramarley Graham sparked widespread protests by workers and youth in the Bronx and throughout the city. There is widespread public sentiment that the youth's killing is linked to the frequent shooting of minority youth by the NYPD. Under the department's notorious stop-and-frisk program, hundreds of thousands of mostly minority working class youth have been stopped and searched by police with no probable cause.

The practice was the topic of a suit, *Floyd, et al. v. City of New York, et al.*, brought by the Center for Constitutional Rights this year. It alleges that the practice includes racial profiling and violates the constitutional rights of those stopped by the NYPD. The trial ended in June and a ruling is expected soon.

Police in New York City kill with impunity. No officer has been brought to trial for a shooting of an unarmed person since a group of undercover officers fired 50 bullets at unarmed Sean Bell and his friends on the eve of Bell's wedding in 2006. Those officers were acquitted.

The frequency of police shootings and the practice of stop-and-frisk are an indication of the deep social tensions that pervade New York City. Chief among these is the staggering degree of social inequality: one

percent of the city's population takes in 44 percent of the total annual income. According to city estimates, half of the New York population was poor or near-poor in 2011. A three-bedroom condo can sell for \$30 million while 50,000 people are homeless.

It is no accident that the number of youth stopped under stop-and-frisk has increased dramatically in the 11 years Mayor Michael Bloomberg has been in office. Bloomberg himself is a multibillionaire and has implemented a whole range of policies to serve the interests of the tiny elite that rules the city.

The behavior of the NYPD is only a concentrated expression of the rise of police state forms of rule in American society that have been exposed by Edward Snowden. Like the NSA, the NYPD's special Intel Division engages in online surveillance. Information from youth who are stopped and frisked is stored at police precinct headquarters, and a substantial set of data about these youth (who are innocent of any crime) also remains on electronic systems.



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