

DAAILYNEWS

NEW YORK'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER

Why stop and frisk? Here's a better way

BE OUR GUEST

BY THE REV. DAVID BRAWLEY
and GRANT LINDSAY

Mayor Bloomberg recently invited a group of clergy for a discussion of the Police Department's stop, question and frisk procedures and their impact in the African-American and Hispanic communities. We attended and appreciated the opportunity to hear the mayor's views and to share our own.

We have always lauded the vastly improved state of public safety in our neighborhoods – a trend that began in the mid-1990s and has persisted. But we are deeply troubled by the stopping, questioning and frisking of young minority males, a tactic that occurs nearly 1,900 times each and every day in our city.

The question the mayor and police commissioner keep asking is: What other alternatives exist to rid the streets of guns and apprehend the criminals in our midst?

There are credible answers. Here are ours:

- Use Compstat the way it was used by Police Commissioner William Bratton and Mayor Rudy Giuliani: focus on the diminishing number of serious serial criminals, not the vast numbers of innocent young minority males who go to school, work, church or the gym, as every other group does.
- Teach precinct commanders to work more closely and collaboratively with groups like East Brooklyn Congregations and South Bronx Churches and Manhattan Together – organizations deeply committed to public safety and handgun control.
- Redeploy officers from tourism duty in Manhattan to the remaining high-crime areas – particularly the New York City Housing Authority developments that remain dangerous to so many of their decent tenants. Use them to proactively police, not indiscriminately stop young people.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, our organizations painstakingly identified and documented criminal patterns, met endlessly with precinct commanders – and waited and waited for a response.

Once Compstat was developed by Giuliani and Bratton, the information we provided was put to use immediately. The real criminals who had been terrorizing our neighborhoods were arrested and

taken off the streets. Local commanders called and asked for our evaluation of the situation and how best to keep the pressure on.

This is what we wanted. In effect, the NYPD stopped treating every street, group and individual equally – and zeroed in on the small number of criminals who committed the vast majority of crimes. Precinct commanders who used to give lectures on the global nature of drug crime and the dysfunction of our families and communities skipped the rationalizing and false sermonizing and responded professionally and reciprocally to responsible leaders and clergy.

Neighborhoods began to see the police as an ally performing a public service, not as an occupying force that never seemed to be around when needed.

Sadly, we've lost so much of that progress today: Due to the relentless and overreaching nature of stop-and-frisk tactics – which have grown by leaps and bounds in recent years – even as crime

We can work together

has continued to decline, many of the positive developments that began in the mid 1990s have begun to erode. Some local commanders have become more defensive and more remote.

One in Manhattan recently told us that he would only meet with one leader, not with a small group of brave community residents. He acted as if he had to protect himself from the very people who were stepping forward and pointing the police to the real criminals in their midst.

During the recent Occupy Wall Street protests, or when the UN is in session, we see fewer police officers on our streets – and see and feel the consequences.

Yet at the very same time, every day, far too many of our young people are subjected to humiliating treatment whether or not they've done anything wrong.

Mr. Mayor and Mr. Commissioner, reengage constructively in our communities. It is not too late.

Brawley is the senior pastor and Lindsay is lead organizer at East Brooklyn Congregations/Metro Industrial Areas Foundation.