

A Diverse City? In Some Ways, Anything But



RACIAL HARMONY? Cornel West in Harlem on Friday calling for the end of the police stop-and-frisk policy. (Michael Appleton for The New York Times)

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New Yorkers take an imperious pride in the belief that our city is better than other cities — fairer, obviously, and more embracing than a place like, let's say, Kansas City. New Yorkers don't actually need to visit Kansas City to convince themselves of this. These beliefs are self-sustaining, fed by a collective egotism and impervious to contravening realities. In matters of race, our arrogance increasingly seems misplaced.

Among the most recent events that ought to intrude on our self-perception was the arraignment last week of a young police officer, Michael Daragjati, who was accused by federal prosecutors of atrociously biased misconduct. Assigned to the Police Department's anti-crime unit on Staten Island, Mr. Daragjati stopped a black man for no apparent reason last spring, pushed him, the government says, and then, when the man complained about his treatment, arrested him without cause.

Mr. Daragjati was said to have gone on to file a police report that falsely claimed the man kicked and flailed during his arrest. Apart from all of this, prosecutors contend, Mr. Daragjati is a known dispenser of horrid racial slurs.

The arraignment came a few days before a protest in Harlem on Friday demanding changes in the Police Department's notorious stop-and-frisk policy, which has resulted in the wildly disproportionate selection of blacks and Latinos for "furtive movements," among other actions.

Led by religious figures and the Princeton University professor and activist Cornel West, the protest began at 125th Street and Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard and moved quietly around the corner to the 28th Precinct at Frederick Douglass Boulevard and 123rd Street, where a number of protesters, including Mr. West, were arrested for blocking the entrance to the police station. The previous week, more than 400 activists marched over the Brooklyn Bridge for the same cause. They were accompanied by Councilman Jumaane D. Williams, who was handcuffed and briefly detained during the West Indian Day parade last month, in what he argues was a case of racial profiling.

Concerns about the Police Department's overreach prompted public officials, including a state senator, Eric Adams, and the Manhattan borough president, Scott M. Stringer, to come forward with new calls for a federal civil rights inquiry into the department's practices.

The occasion marked the second time in a month that challenges were made to the Bloomberg administration's ability to parent itself in the realm of racial discord. On Oct. 5, a federal judge, Nicholas G. Garaufis, ruled that a court-appointed monitor was needed to oversee diversity initiatives in the Fire Department, because of what he viewed as a persistent and shameful pattern of discrimination against black candidates.

The ruling was the latest chapter in the long legal struggle to change the racial composition of the department. The Bloomberg administration objected to the ruling, as it objected to the call for an investigation of the Police Department — in each instance sounding as if it had been schooled in the politics of defensiveness by the same mentors who brought us Dick Cheney.

Anyone seeking to interpret these recent events as proof that racial bias is simply the province of working-class whites was prompted to reconsider that presumption last week when a longtime history teacher at the famously progressive Ethical Culture Fieldston School in the Bronx was fired for making remarks to his ninth-grade students that some deemed as racist. The teacher, Barry Sirmon, popular and known for his sarcasm, has said that the context of his comments was completely misinterpreted; his dismissal will be considered at an arbitration hearing in December.

The institutional forms of bias that remain in the city, as well as the more subtle expressions of exclusion that occur every day, would seem to have their roots at least partly in the way New Yorkers live. Familiarity makes us more accepting.

In many neighborhoods, the city's heralded diversity hardly manifests itself at all. Earlier this year, the US 2010 research project directed by John Logan, a Brown University sociologist,

ranked the 50 American cities with the largest black populations in terms of how segregated blacks and whites were. New York was ranked the third-most segregated city, behind Detroit and Milwaukee.

The measure used, the index of dissimilarity, evaluates how evenly two groups are distributed in relevant areas that make up a larger territory. The score indicates what percentage of the members of one group would need to move to a different neighborhood in order for the two groups to be equally distributed. New York's index has fallen a mere 2.6 points since 1980, suggesting how poorly the city has managed to integrate blacks and whites over the past three decades. Comparatively, Chicago's segregation rate has fallen more than 10 points during the same period. (As it happens, in the past 10 years, Kansas City's rate has fallen 11 points.)

More tellingly perhaps, the research showed that from 2005 to 2009 blacks in the New York metropolitan area, regardless of income, lived in neighborhoods that were 50 percent black. Middle-income Asians, by contrast, lived in neighborhoods that were a quarter Asian. Additionally, blacks and Hispanics making more than \$75,000 a year tended to live in poorer neighborhoods than whites making less than \$40,000 a year.

Shifting these patterns requires a greater interest in fair housing policies, not to mention a more concerted effort at marketing. Neighborhoods that imagine themselves as welcoming should present themselves as welcoming. Real integration doesn't happen organically; it needs a guiding hand. "New York has had really poor leadership on this issue," said Craig Gurian, executive director of the Anti-Discrimination Center. "There's been a gentlemen's agreement, not only in white communities, but among people who hold themselves out as leaders in other racial and ethnic communities, not to deal with this.

"There hasn't been a push to make change."

Until there is, we won't have as much to brag about as we think.