

THE FLATBUSH REBELLION



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**R.I.P. KIMANI "KIKI" GRAY
GONE BUT NEVER FORGOTTEN**



If there is no struggle there is no progress. Those who want freedom but will not fight are people who want crops without plowing up the ground; they want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters.

This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle.

--Frederick Douglass, from a speech in 1857
supporting violent slave uprisings

1. “DON’T LET ME DIE.”

This much we know: on a chilly Saturday night, cops in an unmarked car rolled up on a group of young people on a quiet block in East Flatbush. At the end of the encounter, 16-year-old Kimani “Kiki” Gray lay dying on the concrete, hit by seven police bullets.

Kimani’s friends say everything happened fast. They had no idea the men who rushed at Kimani were police officers, because they never identified themselves. Another woman saw the incident from her window. She insists that whether or not Kimani had a gun on him, his hands were empty when the officers shot him. The same witness says officers kept shooting even after Kimani was on the ground. When she cried out in shock and grief, one of the officers pointed his gun at her, and told her to get back from the window or he would shoot her too. An autopsy has since revealed that Kimani was hit seven times, twice in the back. News stories uncovered that both of Kimani’s killers have faced lawsuits in the past, for illegally stopping, frisking and beating up innocent people--in each incident, the NYPD paid off the victims to make the cases go away.

Police spokespeople told the usual bullshit story to the news: Kimani was a member of the violent Bloods street gang, with a criminal record. As their car approached, Kimani adjusted his waistband suspiciously and walked away from his friends. When officers exited their car and approached him, Kimani spun around, drawing his gun, and they were forced to fire on him. They recovered the gun at the scene, a .38 revolver. For the cops, and for most of the mainstream media, Kimani was just another young thug, a criminal to the bone, who had to be erased for the common good.

In situations like this, reporters and newspapers usually take the police's story as truth. But most black and brown people in NYC know better than to do that. In the past year alone, there have been plenty of stories of police murdering unarmed young people, such as Ramarley Graham in the Bronx. There have been many cases in recent years of police planting guns and drugs on suspects to guarantee arrests, and of corrupt officers covering up for one another. The NYPD regularly bends and breaks the rules to its advantage, and its members cover each other's backs. Regardless of how "good" or "bad" individual officers are, this is how the police force works as an institution.

So to an informed observer, the cops' story doesn't add up. Even if Kimani had a gun on him--and that's a big if--why would he start a gunbattle with police for no apparent reason, when he was trying to leave discreetly? Common sense tells a different story: the cops killed Kimani because they view anyone who is black, poor or working class, as a threat. And for them it's easier to shoot people like Kimani than to treat them like full human beings.

This was surely the thought in many people's minds the week after Kimani's murder, when young people in Flatbush took to the streets. As Kimani was bleeding on the pavement, he had pleaded with the officers: "please, don't let me die." Sadly, he was pronounced dead that evening at Kings County Hospital. But young people in East Flatbush soon made sure he would never be forgotten.

2. FLATBUSH STANDS UP

Monday, March 11th: A Rebellion Breaks Out

A vigil was held for Kimani the Monday after his murder. But the young people of East Flatbush wanted more. Before the vigil could be shut down, 100 young people took the fight to the cops. They waged a daring raid on



the 67th precinct, flinging garbage and bottles at the windows. When cops moved to contain the crowds, others threw bottles down at them from rooftops. At one point a large crowd trashed a local Rite Aid.

On his Twitter account, councilman Jumaane Williams lamented that a peaceful vigil had "devolved into a riot." On "Thee Rant," a blog for retired cops, users said that 67th

SOME THINGS TO LOOK AT:

Bastards of the Party (movie)

Can't Stop Won't Stop by Jeff Chang

Our Enemies in Blue by Kristian Williams

Autobiography of Malcolm X by Alex Haley

Revolutionary Suicide by Huey Newton

Monster by Sanyika Shakur

Assata by Assata Shakur

Jailbreak Out Of History by Butch Lee

Soledad Brother by George Jackson

Capital for Beginners by David Smith

A History of Negro Revolt by CLR James

Modern Politics by CLR James

A Study of Walter Rodney's Intellectual and Political Thought by

Rupert Lewis

The Making of Haiti by Carolyn Fick

Hubert Harrison: The Voice of Harlem Radicalism by Jeffery Perry

Black Panther Party Reconsidered by Charles Jones

Radicalism and Social Change in Jamaica by Obika Gray

Women, Labour and Politics in Trinidad and Tobago by Rhoda

Reddock

Revolutionary Rehearsals by Colin Baker

Strike! by Jeremy Brecher

precinct cops were reporting the rebellion was “pretty bad.” A second Twitter user posted that Flatbush sounded “like a war zone.” Across the city, activists followed the rebellion on Facebook and Twitter, and wanted to join them in the streets.

Tuesday, March 12th: Activists on the Scene

The next day around 100 people from across the city came out to East Flatbush. They were all kinds of activists and revolutionaries: Occupy activists, organizers from the Stop Stop and Frisk campaign, anarchists, members of socialist parties, communists and others unaffiliated with any particular group. Many were white, but some were Black, Asian, and Latina. They were all outraged that another young black man had been gunned down by the police. Some felt the rebellion was understandable but regrettable, and hoped it would not happen again. Others thought it was a righteous, necessary act of resistance, and hoped the youth of the neighborhood would bring it again, this time with outside support. They wanted the cops to pay a heavier price for taking Kimani’s life.



The police also anticipated that the rebellion might continue. They came out in large numbers with riot police, mounted officers, scooters, cars, vans, and a helicopter. Against these forces, little could be done. The march that night scuffled with cops, briefly took to the streets, but was soon split in two by a line of police scooters and forced onto opposite sides of the street. The NYPD used a typical protest tactic: split and immobilize the crowd, and wait for people to get bored and leave on their own, rather than suffering the bad publicity of arresting lots of people or firing pepper spray.

Unwilling to start a fight with the police without local initiative, the activists closed out their action with a series of speakers. They called for the usual: justice for Kimani, an end to police harassment and brutality, a movement against the system.

Wednesday, March 13th: The Rebellion Continues

The largest rebellion was the following night, March 13th. All the players came to play. Politicians like Jumaane Williams and many others wanted to

maintain peace and quiet. Large crowds of young black militants gathered. Few whites were around. A few activists were present, but most of the revolutionaries in the city didn't know what would happen that night, so they didn't come.



You could feel the tension in the air. Politicians and many activists talked about keeping the march peaceful. Everyone spoke for the young people, but the young people didn't speak for themselves. Their actions later that night would speak louder than words. For two hours,

speakers lectured the young people. It felt like school. Speakers gave lectures about the need for peace. Soon a march broke out, though it wasn't clear exactly how this happened. The cops followed behind it like vultures.

As the march spread out down the side streets along Church, brave people picked up bottles and rocks, and flung them at the police cars. The rebellion had begun. From that moment onward, crowds of young people engaged in running battles with the police. The cops made arrests, and the crowd reacted. At one point a father tried to free his daughter from the clutches of the police. Other women were arrested and brutalized, angering the crowd.



But people kept fighting. Fury at the police had once again boiled over, and come into the open. Street battles raged for hours.

Eventually, the crowd was split into many smaller pieces. The night was over. Forty-six had been arrested, but Kimani's spirit lived. He was not forgotten.

That night, the forces of order began a counterattack. Councilman Jumaane Williams posted on Twitter that the rebellion had been started by outsiders who did not live in Flatbush, and he urged them to stay away.

Thursday, March 14th: The Rebellion Contained

The next night, the forces of order came out in full force. Jumaane

9 STEPS TO DEFEAT THE NYPD:

1. Gather all the brothers and sisters who took part in the rebellion.
2. Study our enemy: the NYPD.
3. Understand ourselves, including learning the history of gangs, Afro-Caribbeans, and the United States.
4. Spread the message to other hoods.
5. If anyone gets killed in any hood, we show up, ready to rebel.
6. Build support among workers that make the city run: subways workers, cab drivers, fast food workers, nurses and more. If we do not have their support, we will lose the bigger struggle.
7. Learn better street fighting strategies against the police.
8. Encourage gangs throughout the city to transition into revolutionary organizations.
9. Plan for a general insurrection against the NYPD and the city of New York.

has happened before, and it is happening right now in places such as Egypt and Greece. Revolution doesn't just happen on its own. It happens when you and many others get involved in solving the biggest problems of our world. It might sound crazy. Many of us are unemployed, students or workers, and we're taught that we have no power. But that's what the system wants us to think. As individuals we are weak, but together we have the ability to change the world.

The rich and powerful in the U.S. are terrified that people here will unite, as they have in other countries, and in the past. That's one of the reasons NYC has so many cops: to prepare for the possibility that big rebellions could break out, and turn into revolution. If that were to happen, the police, the FBI, the national guard, and the U.S. army would all move to crush it. It's the job of politicians like Jumaane Williams to make sure it never comes to a revolutionary moment. It's the job of revolutionaries to help the people get there, and to win.

6. WHAT LIES AHEAD

The question from here is: what next?

It's sad, but the rebellion will not get justice for Kimani. The rebellion would have to have been much bigger, more powerful, and more organized. But there will be other opportunities. We need to prepare.

We need to find a way to make revolution, and stop police killings forever. Black and Latino men, ages 14-24, are 5% of NYC's population. 5% of the population by itself can't solve all of society's problems. How will this 5% not just look out for itself, but also build unity with all the other poor and working class people in the city? These people are our cousins, brothers, mothers, and aunts. We need a political vision that can unite the poor and oppressed. That political vision is part of what needs to be figured out. Revolutionaries want to work with all those involved in the Flatbush Rebellion to make this happen.

We cannot lie. The struggle will be long, hard, and painful. That's the difference between a rebellion and a revolution. We want to do both. We are now building for another round of struggle, and new, better organized rebellions. We are working towards ending the NYPD. Below are 9 steps we can take together to make this happen. We hope you will join us.

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Williams, and groups like Fathers Alive in the Hood (FAITH), all arrived with a game plan. These people wanted the ghost of Kiki buried forever and forgotten. They wanted peace--the same peace we have every day, when young people are murdered by the cops and the city goes on with its business. They wanted to go to a church and talk. When they tried to get the crowd to join them, a few people entered, but most kept marching.

This time around, white people came out in large numbers. Many of the whites in the crowd were revolutionaries: communists, anarchists and more. Other revolutionaries were Black, Asian, Latina. They all knew that no NYC neighborhood in recent memory had been able to do what Flatbush had done. They felt full support must be given to the rebellion.

But a great divide existed between white and black. They didn't talk to each other much. Most importantly, they weren't able to fight the police together. The whites weren't able to prove their contempt for the police. Little was said and little was done. The anger in the hearts of many people--black and white, militant and revolutionary--was contained.

The police were everywhere. They were on rooftops, in the air, on horses, and on foot. With only a hundred or so in the crowd, no militant resistance was possible. It would have required hundreds, or thousands more, but it didn't happen. So the Flatbush rebellion was brought to an end.

If the rebellion had not taken place, few people would have heard of Kimani Gray, and even fewer would have remembered him. But the Flatbush rebellion made headlines across the country. It increased public scrutiny on the cops. And it gave people a brief glimpse of the power we can have, at any time, when we unite and fight.



3. WHERE DID IT COME FROM?

Rebellions like the one in Flatbush are happening across the world. In Paris, Oakland, London, and Cairo, rebellions are shaking the system. They're happening because tens of millions of young people are being denied a future, and they're angry about it.

For most young people in the U.S. today, there are very few jobs to be found. And those that exist don't pay enough to cover rent or tuition, let alone raising a family. In some parts of the country, 50% of young black men are unemployed, and those with college degrees are mopping floors to pay their debts. The only choice young people have today is between grueling dead-end jobs at McDonalds, unemployment, prison, or death. And they know it. When adults tell them to "get a job" or "work their way up," they are smart enough to know it is a lie, and they don't listen.

Some young people try to give their lives meaning by hustling, getting props from their friends, and getting a memorial mural on a brick wall somewhere when they die. This may give them a sense of honor, and a few friends may remember them. But it doesn't change the larger system that denies the vast majority of people a good life.

We live in an economic system called capitalism. The situation of young people today is not an accident, but something that's an inherent part of our society: *it happens on purpose*. In our society, everyone is caught between unemployment and shitty employment. When we're unemployed, we have some free time but risk starvation. When we're employed, we earn a little money but have to sell ourselves to a boss for hours on end. This rat race is what keeps the system moving. The system demands that everyone must work at exhausting jobs and make profits for others, or be searching for work, desperate and poor.

Some people think they can escape this rat race if they work hard enough, but the reality is that most people never do. And if they escape it, they have to forget their hood roots, and become the new exploiters of the hood.

This is why the rebellions will keep coming, NOT because young Black people are uncontrollable, inherently criminal, or fucked up. Rebellions will



happen because people rise up against injustice. Because today, a whole generation is being thrown in the garbage, and it is refusing to be forgotten.

The last time rebellions shook the United States was after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther

King Jr. in 1968. That year, over 100 cities rose up in rebellion. Hundreds of thousands of people fought together in the streets. In some cases, young people took control of their cities for days, and redistributed food, clothes,

driven off the street corners by the NYPD. "Hip hop" slowly came to mean shallow music and self-destruction, and the creative street organizations that had appeared in the hood were destroyed. The trap of joblessness and the drug economy remained. Banging came back full force.

If oppressed people do not fight their enemies, they end up fighting each other. Over time, that is what happened to the gangs of the 1960s and 1970s. The war against the police turned into a war against each other. Having a political vision helps groups to identify their common enemies, and avoid falling into this trap. Revolutionaries have a political vision, for overturning the capitalist system to create something better for everyone. Revolutionaries believe the common enemy are the police, the bosses, the landlords, the government, the capitalists, the rich and powerful.

Can gangs become revolutionary organizations? This is a very important question. They did it in the 1960s. We hope that this happens again, but lots of challenges remain.

Many people say we need "reform".

Remember the name of the CRIPS. First it was Community REVOLUTIONARY Inter-Party Service. Then it was changed to Community REFORM Inter-Party Service. What is the difference between reform and revolution?

People who believe in reform think the system can be changed little by little, to help the oppressed. Things are gradually getting better, they say. By voting, "using your voice," writing letters to the Mayor and the President, or just by working harder, the system will change. They don't realize that the system depends upon keeping the majority of people poor, overworked and desperate. They don't see how it's the very nature of the system to do this. They don't think the entire system needs to be changed.

Revolutionaries know the system is fundamentally rotten. We believe that millions of people overthrowing capitalism and the government is the only way to stop police killings for good, and make a better life for all. Revolution means more than just putting a new president in office, or firing the worst cops. It means making a new kind of society, where everyone participates directly in running society. It means abolishing bosses, landlords and the police, and providing the means for a good life to everyone FOR FREE. It means ending racism, women's oppression, gay oppression, and more. It means all human beings--men and women, different nationalities and religions--relating to each other in a new and better way, as sisters and brothers.

We believe it can be done. You can Google "Haitian Revolution," "Russian Revolution," "Chinese Revolution" or "Spanish Revolution" to learn about different revolutions throughout history, their strengths and weaknesses. It

or formed groups of their own. They read Karl Marx, Malcolm X, Mao Tse-tung, Frantz Fanon, and put their ideas into action. They ran food and political education programs, led massive demonstrations against the cops and the government, and organized whole neighborhoods to resist. It didn't happen only in Los Angeles, but across the country. In Chicago, a local Puerto Rican street gang called the Young Lords turned political, spread to NYC, and renamed itself the Young Lords Party. Other gangs in Chicago--including white street gangs--joined in a "rainbow coalition" with the local chapter of the Black Panther Party, led by Fred Hampton. But the police and FBI shattered the unity of those years, by waging war against revolutionary organizations. Soon the Black Panther Party and many others were destroyed. Now young people started forming different groups.

In Los Angeles, one such group was called the CRIPS. "CRIPS" stood for Community Revolutionary Inter-Party Service in Progress. In the early 1970s, the CRIPS said they wanted "jobs, housing, better schools, recreation facilities, and community control of local institutions." Local politicians urged them to change their name to Community REFORM Inter-Party Service. Ultimately, the jobs the CRIPS were hoping for would never appear: those jobs were leaving Los Angeles. There was nothing to do but bang.

The CRIPS did not have a clear political vision for freedom, and they slowly forgot their revolutionary origins. Political vision gives people a reason to unite to fight a common enemy. Without it, inter-gang violence soon



returned to Los Angeles. This eventually led to the formation of the Bloods as a defensive measure against the CRIPS.

In NYC the story was slightly different. Here, the Ghetto Brothers, a Bronx street gang inspired by the Young Lords, held a peace summit in the mid 1970s to

unite all the gangs in the borough. The meeting was a success. Afterward, it became possible for young people from all different cliques to travel to each other's neighborhoods and party. The transformation made new kinds of creativity possible. Young people turned their gangs into crews, and began competing with one another for artistic recognition. New cultural groups formed, such as Zulu Nation. They created public artwork on buildings and trains, and invented new forms of music and dance. This is how hip hop was born.

But early hip hop also lacked a political vision. Within a few years, the music was bought up by capitalists, and the ciphers that gave birth to it were

televisions, and more to all. Out of this experience, some young street fighters became revolutionaries. They wanted to end the rat race once and for all, and break out of the trap between unemployment and shitty employment. They formed new chapters of the Black Panther Party, or groups like the League of Revolutionary Black Workers in the auto factories. From the fires of rebellion, a new generation of freedom fighters was born.

Many smaller rebellions have happened since then: Miami 1982, Seattle 1999, Cincinnati 2001, Toledo 2005, and especially the Los Angeles rebellion of 1992. Unlike the rebellions of the 1960s, however, these rebellions did not produce a new set of revolutionaries. We have yet to see if a new generation of young people will rise to the challenge, and lead a movement to change the society that oppresses us.

The Flatbush Rebellion can be a beginning of something new, or the end. It's very sad to say, but those who killed Kiki will probably receive no punishment. More brothers and sisters will surely be murdered by police in the future. Young people in East Flatbush have made sure that Kiki will never be forgotten, but what about all the other kids killed by cops each year? What about their own lives, facing wage-slavery, unemployment, prison and death?



To change the system, rebellions will have to spread, and grow more powerful and organized. People will have to show the bravery they displayed in Flatbush, and more. It's clear what people are gonna have to do to actually live in a world without police. We can't print it, because it is illegal to say such things. But you either know or you don't. We can't get rid of the police without getting rid of capitalism and the government. As long as capitalism exists, it will need police to keep killing us, to keep poor and desperate people from taking their lives into their own hands. It's easy for someone to front and say they'll do this, but it's much harder to actually make it happen.

We should be proud of the Flatbush rebellion, but not get arrogant about it. The rebellions in East Flatbush were not powerful enough to do that. To shake this system to its roots, people from all over NYC will have to join in, by the tens of thousands. Young people will have to rebel in neighborhoods across the city. Workers will have to join by refusing to work, and bringing the city to a halt. Until we can do that, we are just a thorn in the side of the system. We have to bring the system down, and in the process, build something better.

5. DEBATING THE AFTERMATH

People across Flatbush and NYC are talking about the rebellion, what its strengths and weaknesses were, and whether it can be justified. We want to take this section to contribute to these discussion.

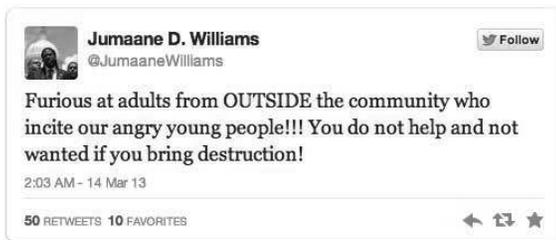
Some people say “protest” is okay, but “rioting” isn’t.

On google search, “Kimani Gray” has over 20,000 hits. This would have never happened without the rebellion. The world would have never known. He would have been another dead black boy in a world that doesn’t care about the lives of young black people.

There’s nothing wrong with smashing cop cars, breaking bank widows, and so on. It would be better if money could be taken from the banks and shared around, and the cop cars made unusable. But that will have to happen another day. Militants should not attack small shops, cars belonging to poor and working people, or people’s homes. But everything else is fair.

The police will only respect force. The only problem with the rebellion was that there wasn’t enough of it. Hoods in NYC are too disconnected from one another. When rebellion in Flatbush broke out, cliques from across the city should have come out to support. Just like the NYPD sends police from all over the city to contain the people, our brothers and sisters should represent in full force.

Some people are saying the rebellion was caused by outsiders.



Councilman Jumaane Williams has claimed the rebellions were caused by people who did not live in Flatbush, and many reporters and others have followed his lead. By “outsiders,” he also

means white people. Everyone knows this is bullshit. Jumaane Williams is implying that the young black militants in Flatbush were either controlled by whites and outsiders, or that they did not care enough about Kimani Gray to fight the police on their own. We know both are lies.

Williams’ lie is important for two reasons. First, it proves what role Williams played during the rebellion. He didn’t try to help the rebellion defeat the cops. He tried to defeat and contain the rebellion. He wanted to make sure that whites, Asians, Latinas and Blacks did not fight the police together.

That might have led to a historic defeat of the NYPD in East Flatbush. It would have proven what we know to be true: when they unite, oppressed people can defeat the police.

The second reason Williams’ lie is important, is that it highlights problems faced by people of all races, who came to Flatbush to support the rebellion. Many of the those people were revolutionaries and came prepared to fight the NYPD alongside their brothers and sisters. But they knew what Jumaane Williams, and others like him, would say. The revolutionaries were waiting for the Black militants to take the lead Tuesday and Thursday night. They didn’t want to take the lead themselves, because if they did, Jumaane Williams would say the same garbage again. We have to figure out how to solve this problem.

Some people say Kimani was part of a gang, and gangs are always violent and bad.

There are many types of organizations in our country. There are basketball teams, chess clubs, political parties and unions. Gangs are one type of organization of oppressed people, but they often divide themselves from the rest of the community, and lose potential allies. That’s why the smartest militants from the 1960s stopped banging and started a different kind of group: revolutionary organization.

The story of the gangs we know today, such as the Bloods and the CRIPS, begins in Los Angeles. Gangs first developed there in the 1940s, when young blacks grouped together to defend themselves against racist whites. But as this happened, the police sided against the young blacks. If you were a gang of white racists, you were alright: the police did not mess with you. But police saw black gangs as criminals who had to be locked up.

By the 1960s, many jobs were being replaced with robots, or getting moved to different parts of the United States. Young black people could not get jobs anymore. More and more young people were left unemployed, hanging on street corners, and often fighting with each other. The only thing that stopped the inter-gang

violence was unity in rebellion. The famous Watts rebellion of 1965, sparked by a case of police brutality, brought many formerly hostile gangs together. For several years, the streets were peaceful because the gangs were fighting the enemy, and not each other.



The smartest, most devoted gang leaders joined revolutionary organizations like the Black Panther Party,