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RED HOOK INITIATIVE, COMMUNITY, AND THE GRASSROOTS ADVOCATES FOR NEIGHBORHOOD GROUPS AND SOLUTIONS COALITION (GANGS), CONDEMN VIOLENT ATF AND NYPD RAID IN RED HOOK, BROOKLYN

Red Hook, Brooklyn, May 2023 — On the morning of April 27th, the NYPD and members of the ATF and DEA descended upon the Red Hook Houses, a NYCHA housing development in Red Hook, Brooklyn, in a joint raid. Government agents threw flashbang grenades, wore military gear, pointed guns with laser sights at residents, and utilized the shock-and-awe tactics of an occupying army to arrest five teens aged 15 through 19. At least one young person was bitten repeatedly by a police K-9 while police threw others to the floor and assaulted them.

While this violence would never be warranted against community members, not to mention young people, no charges stemming from this raid have been brought against the young men. Nevertheless, all were perp-walked past waiting press and spent well over the 24 hours in police custody, enduring additional mistreatment and misconduct as police attempted to cover their tracks. Using tactics endemic to the NYPD's treatment of young Black and brown people, police attempted to block access to attorneys and refused to honor the express invocation of the teens' right to remain silent.

What happened in Red Hook exemplifies the criminalized existence of Black and Brown New Yorkers in rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods and the hypocrisy of the NYPD's attempts at increasing "safety" while carrying out brutal state-sanctioned violence. This is the second time in the span of two weeks that the NYPD has targeted Black and Brown Youth in Red Hook. In press accounts, the young people named in the raid were labeled as "gang members". This labeling is consistent with the NYPD's tactics to target young men and consistently harass them despite no violation of the law or evidence of gang participation. We condemn it all.

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Red Hook residents have called on the City to make investments to truly increase safety in this community such as investment in public housing infrastructure, access to public space, access to mental health resources, a decline in over-policing, and addressing severe environmental and physical hazards relating to the NYCHA Sandy construction project. Those demands have been left unmet and instead the community is offered only increased policing.

These traumatized young people, and all New Yorkers, deserve true safety, not the brutal and life-altering violence currently on offer. We must invest in them and the systems that actually serve them.

Obi Afriyie, Community Organizer, Legal Defense Fund, says: “What happened to those boys on Thursday April 27th, is a traumatic experience that will stick with them for the rest of their lives. The gross misconduct by law enforcement during the raid, is another example of the lack of empathy, humanity, and support shown to our young Black and Brown bodies, specifically ones residing in or around NYCHA housing developments. Over-Policing communities does not make them safer. Criminalizing communities devoid of resources and recreational spaces, does not make them safer.”

Babe Howell, Professor, CUNY School of Law, says: The NYPD’s practice of performing dangerous and traumatizing militarized raids for media coverage in lieu of orderly arrests, is an unfortunate but predictable outgrowth of the NYPD’s labeling NYC youth as gang members based on appearance alone. While the Inspector General recently parroted the NYPD’s claim that labeling Black and Latinx youth as gang members based on appearance and location causes no harm, this incident belies that conclusion. The rampant labeling of urban youth of color as gang members encourages police to dehumanize and fear NYC youth and to engage in preemptive violence whether or not they are on the database. These raids must stop.

Natisha Romain, Director of Adolescent Youth Programs, says: “This raid is a reminder of the violent and aggressive approaches that the police take to “create safe” neighborhoods, especially ones with Black and Brown youth and families. Instead of making residents feel safe, they have caused physical, mental, and emotional harm. As a youth development professional, I am deeply concerned about the mental and emotional toll that an incident like this can have on our youth, their families, and the Red Hook community as a whole. The police have to be held accountable for their actions.”

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Na-Lekan Masego, For Our Liberation, Chairperson, says: “The Red Hook community is no stranger to being targeted by police. The NYPD has a larger force than half of the world's militaries, and Black and Brown people are very often the subject of their constant militaristic tyranny. The Raid that took place on April 27th follows a formula that we’ve all become too content with. Enough is enough.”

MK Kaishian, Civil Rights Attorney, says: “This brutal raid was a hyper-public display of the same system that regularly tramples the civil rights of young New Yorkers through NYPD violence, routine harassment, baseless arrests and detentions, and illegal interrogations. Essential to this system are the lawyers, policymakers, courts, and media that provide cover for police abuse and continue to target and traumatize its victims. Now, these institutions are actively working to justify a terrifying police raid in which Black teenagers were attacked by dogs and brutalized by grown men. Continuing to rely on police and prosecutors for safety solutions is not only deeply unserious but actively dangerous. We must reject this system altogether in favor of true safety initiatives.”

Red Hook Resident says: “The increase in police presence is one of many tactics used to systematically drive our black and brown people out of communities subject to gentrification. We must continue to do the work that will solidify a place in society for our youth. Holding the NYPD and news outlets accountable for the damage they have caused overtime is a great first step to obtaining change and justice.”

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