

New Yorkers Stopped for Looking Too Brown or Black

by [Whitney Teal](#) May 17, 2010 09:55 AM (PT) Topics: [Racial Profiling](#)

- [Share15](#)
-
- 1164 Views



In really, really obvious news, the Center for Constitutional Rights has revealed that blacks and Latinos in New York are nine times more likely to be stopped on the street and "frisked" by local police officers, according to the [New York Times](#).

But among minorities who are stopped, the arrest rate was slightly lower than that of white people. White people were a tad more likely to be arrested during such encounters than blacks and Latinos — which suggests that white people are stopped in New York City only when it's pretty obvious that they're committing a crime.

The data also illustrates how officers are allowed to act on their own race-based whims. When stopping blacks and Latinos, rarely were cops responding to actual criminal descriptions (only about 15% of stops fit that description). Most of the time, cops simply deemed that the suspect was making "furtive movements," whatever those are.

The NYPD vehemently defended its tactics. "These are not unconstitutional," says press rep Paul J. Browne. "We are saving lives, and we are preventing crime." The study, however, proves otherwise. Not only are the vast majority of people stopped and frisked not arrested, but police officers don't seize many weapons either: 575,000 stops produced just 762 guns. And most of the weapons were found on white people: as Te-Ping reports on our [Criminal Justice blog](#), though 1.7% of frisked whites were carrying weapons, for blacks who got stopped, that figure was closer to 1.1%.

“These stats suggest that racial disparities in who gets stopped has more to do with officer bias and discretion than with crime rates, which is what the Police Department argues,” says Darius Charney, a lawyer with the Center for Constitutional Rights.

The police do admit that they overly police minority communities, although they don't call it that. The city simply admits that more officers are sent to patrol areas where crimes were more likely to be committed — which, according to the NYPD command, also happens to be areas where lots of non-whites live.

For once, I'd love to see an institution like the New York Police Department call a spade a spade, and say they have some work to do. Instead, amazingly, the department chose to cite a 2007 examination of their procedures, which according to Browne "found no racial profiling."

Honestly, I can understand their desire to discount these numbers. No one wants to be seen as racist, or acknowledge that when it comes to who gets stopped by the police, race is a factor. We're past that, right?

Not exactly. Of course the NYPD doesn't want to hear that Browne or any of the officers he represents could possibly hold racist views. But they *do*. Unfortunately, we still live in a country that continues to see black and Latino people as born criminals. And as long as institutions like the NYPD refuse to acknowledge that fact, the bullying of non-white people by law enforcement won't stop.

Photo Credit: [Antonin Remond](#)



[Whitney Teal](#) is a freelance writer and proud alumna of Howard University based in the suburbs of Washington, D.C.