

# *IMANI'S SAFEHOUSE*



**Hello, Family!**

March is Women's History Month and we're thinking of all of our sisters and gender non-conforming siblings—particularly those at Rosie's, the women's jail on Rikers Island. We've been following the humanitarian crisis on Rikers, and on Valentine's Day, stood outside City Hall to demand that Governor Hochul close Rosie's NOW. It's frustrating to watch politicians dither and break their promises, but just know, in whatever way we're able, we got your back.

In strength and solidarity,  
Imanis Safehouse Inc.



*Sharon White-Harrigan at a protest to close the Rosie's on Rikers Island, Valentine's Day 2022*

# *NEW MAYOR, SAME OLD MASS INCARCERATION PROBLEM*

**BY D'ANGELO CAMERON**

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Eric Adams has been Mayor of New York City for a little more than a month and already his administration's position around policing and public safety has been in opposition to progress the city has made in recent years.

Before becoming Mayor, Adams called for bringing back solitary confinement to Rikers after activists and families of victims were able to halt the use of the inhumane practice. Recently, in response to a weekend shooting that killed two NYPD officers, Adams unveiled a 15-page multi-pronged plan to address the rise in gun violence in the city.

In early February, President Biden met with New York Mayor Eric Adams to discuss their approaches to solving the spikes in violent crime in big cities like New York. During the meeting, both men made commitments to expanding social services. However, in the same breath, putting more support and resources behind policing, prisons, and surveillance in communities of color – the same old methods that fuel mass incarceration in Black and Brown communities. With President Biden's history with the 1994 Crime Bill, which set up most of the mass incarceration policies we've seen since the 1990s, and Mayor Adams' call for law-and-order, both men simultaneously spoke to solving violent crime, while doubling down on the failed policies that caused it.

Adam's administration approach to public safety seems to try and toe a line between pro-police measures and using social services to address violence, but ultimately these conflicting efforts may actually fuel more violence than solve it. The plan deploys more officers city-wide and brings back a controversial anti-gun policy unit, which will be stationed in Black and Brown communities across the city. The mayor's plan puts some resources into preventative social services, but the bulk of the support will be to bolster NYPD.

Mayor Adams has also been on record for saying he plans to bring back stop-and-frisk, another counterproductive and racist policing strategy that led to many Black and Brown communities being targeted by the police. The controversial practice was not effective at stopping crime and only served as a vehicle to flood the city's prisons. The reintroduction of stop-and-frisk in New York City will mean that more communities that are under-resourced, will be again over-policed, instead of being supported with anti-violence interventions that actually center their needs.

After the tragic death of Michelle Alyssa Go, who was pushed to her death at the 42nd street subway station stop in Manhattan, Mayor Adams announced a plan to "flood" the subway system with more cops and mental health professionals, continuing to provide conflicting solutions to the issue of public safety. Unfortunately, even by trying to balance the deployment of more cops with mental health professionals, the reality remains that incarceration will be the main method by which the administration believes it can achieve safety in the city – not by addressing the root causes of violence. By throwing more cops at the issues of gun violence, homelessness, and mental health crises, the administration is regressing some of the efforts made to effectively deal with these issues holistically.

We have the tools to address violence without relying on incarceration, we just have to support them. Programs that employ the use of violence interrupters, restorative justice-centered practices, and prevention, are much more effective at stopping violent crime. Anti-violence programs that center the needs of communities not only are effective at crime prevention, they also build communities by offering ways to address the inequalities that lead to violent crime happening.

The strategy brought forth by Adam's administration to try to straddle the line between more cops and more social services isn't compatible with the reality our communities are facing. We cannot afford to go back on the efforts made to center the needs of communities and effectively address violence without relying on police and incarceration. Previous administrations have tried to incarcerate and police their way to safety in New York City, and yet violence still persisted. We must address violence holistically, support the specific needs of communities, and drop the ineffective "law and order" policymaking that has never delivered on the promise to make us safer.

# *THREE POEMS*

BY JULIE HERRNKIND

## *POEM #1*

Death is a whisper  
like a lover  
who lays claim  
to your body  
as he covets  
and tries to seize  
what he can never, truly have  
life, love and you!

## *POEM #2*

Wished for rain  
to hide my pain  
demented and lost  
what was the cost  
captured and surrendered  
felt like you put me through the  
blender  
chopped me up and spit me out  
doubts from within  
did it all have to be a sin?

## *POEM #3*

Sat alone  
tried to see  
what it was that brought this to  
me  
A cell, you see  
a death  
a male  
a loss of life  
me you say  
you haven't looked deep enough  
I say  
look past the obvious  
and see the truth  
but that would be too hard  
to do  
break all your illusions  
not you  
your intentions remain true  
but remember, somebody  
someday  
just might have to judge you too

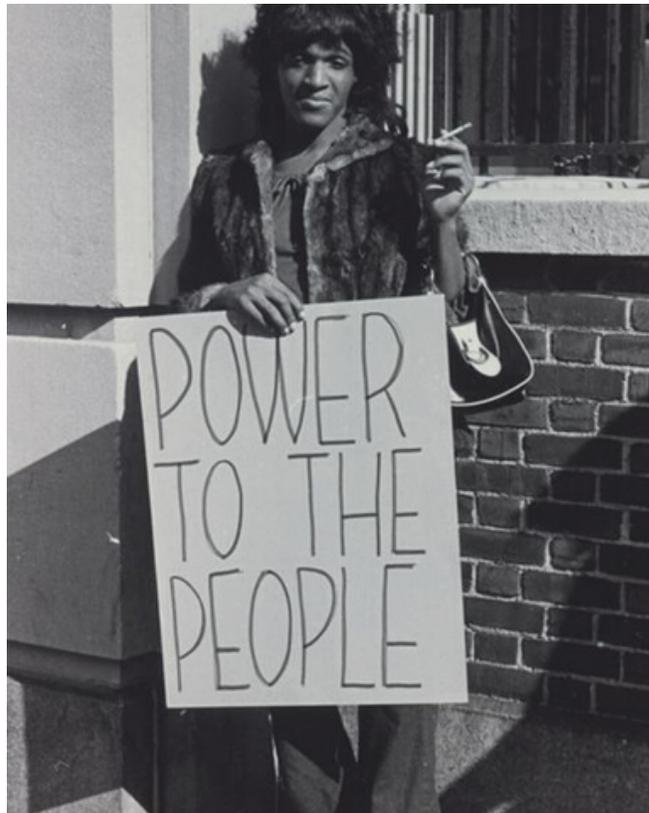
# MARSHA P. JOHNSON

In honor of Women's History Month, we're celebrating the life of Marsha P. Johnson, a pioneering activist for transgender rights.

Johnson was born in New Jersey in 1945, and moved to New York City—with \$15 and a bag of clothes, she later said—after graduating from high school. She changed her name to Marsha P. Johnson, and became a sex worker on the streets of Times Square. (The term “transgender” was not widely in use at the time; Johnson referred to herself as a transvestite or a drag queen. She also liked to tell people that her middle initial stood for “pay it no mind.”) In the 1960s, LGBTQ+ people were criminalized for having sex, cross-dressing, drinking alcohol and dancing in public. Johnson was arrested over one hundred times.

On June 28, 1969, the NYPD raided the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village, but bar patrons and neighborhood residents rose up in resistance. The Stonewall rebellion is considered the beginning of the modern-day LGBTQ+ rights movement. Johnson, then 23 years old, was one of the leaders of the uprising. In 1970, she and another trans pioneer, Sylvia Rivera, founded a group called Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries, or STAR, to advocate for transgender homeless youth. (Johnson was homeless for most of her life.)

Johnson, known for her wit and flamboyant outfits, was also a fixture of the downtown art world. She was a muse to artist Andy Warhol, and a member of the drag performance group, Hot Peaches. In the 1970s, Johnson's activism was interrupted by several stints at psychiatric institutions. (“I may be crazy, but that don't make me wrong,” she often said, according to her *New York Times* obituary.) In the 1980s, she became involved in AIDS activism, working with groups like ACT UP. Johnson, who was HIV-positive herself, spent much of the decade caring for friends with AIDS. Many of them died. “They call me a legend in my own time, because there were so many queens gone that I'm one of the few queens left from the '70s and the '80s,” she said at the time.



Marsha P. Johnson

Johnson drowned in the Hudson River in 1992. She was 46. The circumstances of her death are unknown, and in 2012, authorities reopened her case for investigation.

“Marsha P. Johnson could be perceived as the most marginalized of people—black, queer, gender-nonconforming, poor,” Susan Stryker, a professor of gender studies at the University of Arizona told the *New York Times* in 2018. “You might expect a person in such a position to be fragile, brutalized, beaten down. Instead, Marsha had this joie de vivre, a capacity to find joy in a world of suffering. She channeled it into political action, and did it with a kind of fierceness, grace and whimsy, with a loopy, absurdist reaction to it all.”



*Marsha P. Johnson, by Andy Warhol*

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If you are still interested in joining the Imani's Safehouse book club, please let us know and we will send you a free copy of Octavia Butler's *Kindred*. For anyone who is reading the book now, let us know what you think!

And as always, we welcome essays, poems, and artwork. Send us anything you would like to see published!