

Neighborhood

If you were going from Bensonhurst to Bed-Stuy, you would most likely either pass through Classon Avenue or Atlantic Avenue. When coming into Bed-Stuy from other districts, you would cross through either Flushing Avenue, Broadway Avenue, or Saratoga Avenue. In the middle of Bed-Stuy is Tompkins Park, and above that is Tompkins Park North. Across the bottom of Bed-Stuy is Stuyvesant Heights which is a mix between residential, commercial and recreational areas. Around Bed-Stuy (Yusef's home) are Greenpoint and Bushwick - mostly Hispanic neighborhoods. Brownsville, Crown Heights, and Brooklyn Heights are mainly black neighborhoods surrounding Bed-Stuy. The neighborhoods surrounding Bensonhurst (the area where Yusef was shot) are mostly white, but there are some that have a higher Hispanic and black population, such as Brighton Beach and Borough Park. The communities around Bensonhurst are Bay Ridge, Borough Park, Sheepshead Bay, and Coney Island. It would be hard to distinguish a real significant difference between these neighborhoods, because they are all mostly white communities.

Community Profile

Bed-Stuy was the area where Yusef Hawkins lived. During the 1980's, the majority of the population was black. There was a very small number of Hispanics and whites living in this area. 85% were black, 13% were Hispanic, and 1.3% were white. Bed-Stuy was mostly residential. It was a pretty poor place – 44.3% of the residents were assisted financially. "Do the Right Thing" took place in this area. Yusef Hawkins was killed in Bensonhurst, a mainly Italian and Jewish neighborhood – 65% were Italian, and 25% were Jewish. Because of past tensions between the blacks in Bed-Stuy and the whites in Bensonhurst, Yusef would've stood out in Bensonhurst. When he entered that neighborhood that day, he was unknowingly putting himself in a great amount of danger. A resident of Bensonhurst, (Jessica S.) said, "Black people? No. They'd never come in here, In here we all know each other and we're all from the same neighborhood," meaning Bensonhurst. "If a black kid came in here, he would probably leave right away because the guys would abuse him." He was passing through a residential area on his way to look at a car sale in Bensonhurst, when a group of angry Italians saw him. They mistook him for a black teenager who they were expecting to go to one of their girlfriend's birthday parties. They immediately approached him and beat him with baseball bats. One man was carrying a gun, shot him, and killed him. Because Bensonhurst is a mainly residential area, Yusef would be easier to notice as he was walking through the residential part. Bensonhurst wasn't quite as poor as Bedstuy was in that time, and about 20% of people in that area were assisted financially.

Yusef Hawkins

Written by Westside ID112

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Yusef Hawkins

On August 23, 1989, Yusef Hawkins, who was sixteen at the time went to look for a used car in Bensonhurst with three of his friends. A mob of about 30 white youths soon approached them. Most of them were carrying bats, however one was carrying a gun. This mob of mostly white Italians were angry because one of their girlfriends invited a black boy to her eighteenth birthday party. The mob thought that Hawkins and his friends were there for the party, so the mob beat Hawkins and his friends with the bats, and shot Hawkins dead.

Reactions

There was an overwhelming reaction to Yusef Hawkins' death. Unbelievable amounts of people swarmed Yusef's funeral. Both Jesse Jackson and Reverend Al Sharpton spoke in public about the event, Sharpton was the spokesperson for the Hawkins family. Crowds organized numerous marches, different movements, such as leaving their car lights on all day, were organized. The black community was shocked at this horrific crime that had taken place. Yusef's death didn't only stir up the communities that he had lived in and where it had taken place - it brought upon a whole debate with the mayoral candidates for New York City. Mr. Ed Koch said that the demonstrations organized by black leaders and politicians were wrong, and all that they were doing was making tensions between blacks and white worse, instead of better. On the other side, Mr. David Dinkins felt that the politicians and leaders did the right thing, and they had their own right to go against this hostility between blacks and whites. Just as it had been before Yusef was killed, Bensonhurst and Bed-Stuy were as divided as much as ever.

Results

The death of Yusef Hawkins resulted in a lot of controversy, debates, and conflicts between blacks and whites. Civil rights movements became more frequent, and tensions between the two races and the two neighborhoods rocketed

(<http://shs.westport.k12.ct.us/jwb/Collab/CivRts/HawkinsRslt.htm>)