

## NYPD Officers Open Fire on Minorities

By Amy E. Wong



On Saturday, Nov. 25<sup>th</sup>, NYPD officers shot 50 bullets at three unarmed civilians, severely injuring two and killing one, Sean Bell, hours before he was to have married the mother of his two children.

I'm not sure what exactly happened, considering how fresh this case is, but I know one thing that is definitely happening now: racial tensions are building up.

This is no big surprise. After all, there have been several high-profile minority confrontations that ended disastrously in recent years. Rodney King, Amadou Diallo, and Sean Bell were all unarmed and all black...and two of them are now dead.

Noel Leader, a representative of the group 100 Blacks in Law Enforcement, has already accused Police Commissioner Raymond W. Kelly of "turning a blind eye to [...] a rising wave of police brutality in black communities." He claimed that Kelly's "door has been closed" to his organization's attempts to reach out.

As a minority who lives in a minority community (composed predominantly of Latinos and Asians), I know, firsthand, that a lot of police brutality takes place in minority communities. However, I think it is questionable that race played a role in Saturday's shootings.

The group of cops who fired their guns included two white males, two black males, and one Latino male. The three men who were shot were of African- and Latin-American ethnic backgrounds. It wasn't a *Black v. White* showdown; *the Us v. Them* mentality was more nebulous.

In my search to find out why these bullets were discharged, I found this article in the [Post](#), which provides a comprehensive review of Saturday night's events.

One dramatic new detail of the deadly mayhem (provided by sources who talked to some of the cops involved in the shooting) describes the undercover cop at one point climbing onto the hood of Bell's Nissan Altima, his gun drawn and his police shield around his neck, screaming, "Police! Turn off your car! Let me see your hands!"

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When Bell then tried to run down the plainclothes officer—twice—the cop began shooting. Some of the 11 bullets he fired pierced the rear window of Bell’s car, the sources said.

This left the cop’s backup unit—which was just arriving on the scene amid shattering glass and the undercover’s shouts of “He’s got a gun!”—thinking they were being fired upon from inside the vehicle. That’s when they returned fire with another 39 bullets.

The shooting, which is currently under investigation, may have been justified. Michael Palladino, President of NYC’s [Detectives Endowment Association](#), said that “deadly force was being used against our detectives in the form of a motor vehicle.” If an officer’s life is in danger, police are allowed to open fire.

In this case, the undercover cop allegedly opened fire because Bell floored the gas pedal and headed for him, hitting him and gashing his knee. With his life in danger, the cop shot at the car. When Bell hit him one more time, he cried out, “He’s got a gun!”—a major turning point at which, I think, the whole shooting could have been prevented.

Although the suspects were unarmed, it could be argued that the undercover cop really did believe that the three men had a gun. Earlier in the night, one cop allegedly overheard Joseph Guzman, one of the men injured in shooting, saying, “Yo, get my gun! Get my gun! Let’s get my gun from the car! Yeah, we’re gonna f— him up!”

The other four cops heard the gunshot and the undercover cop’s cry for help and then proceeded to open fire.

According to blogspot [Gothamist.com](#), the 49 shots that followed the undercover detective’s first shot may have been contagious shooting.

One former police official who insisted on anonymity because the investigation is continuing said, “He shoots, and you shoot, and the assumption is he has a good reason for shooting. You saw it in Diallo. You see it in a lot of shootings. You just chime in. I don’t mean the term loosely. But you see your partner, and your reflexes take over.”

Yes, the 50 bullets were horribly and shamefully excessive.

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However, I don't think this is a race-fueled case. I think it was fueled by adrenaline, fear, and misunderstanding. I am sincerely sorry for all those involved in this wretched ordeal, and I am sorry that this may inadvertently escalate America's racial tensions. I hope that, as new evidence and testimonies pour in, we can clarify our understanding of what happened.

**Side Note:** The NYPD has been under a lot of heat for shooting at unarmed civilians, but, at least in this case, I don't think their fears were unfounded. I found this at the *Post*: "Bell had been arrested three times in the past: twice for drugs and one on a gun rap in a case that was sealed. Guzman has been busted nine times, including for armed robbery. He spent two stretches in state prison in the '90s. Benefield has a sealed record as a juvenile for gun possession and robbery."