

New York cop acquitted in shooting of unemployed 'squeegee man'

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Brushing aside compelling eyewitness testimony that New York policeman Michael Meyer shot an unarmed man without provocation, a New York City judge found the police officer not guilty of all criminal charges in the June 14, 1998 shooting of "squeegee man" Antoine Reid.

The cop, who was off duty at the time, shot Reid, an unemployed man who washed car windows for spare change, after he soaped the policeman's windshield while his car was stopped in traffic at a freeway exit ramp. Reid was hospitalized in critical condition following the shooting and lost his spleen as a consequence.

Judge John Collins, in a non-jury trial, found Meyer not guilty July 8 of assault and reckless endangerment. Earlier he dismissed charges of attempted murder. The ruling evoked a standing ovation from police officers and relatives in the courtroom. Collins said he accepted as reasonable Meyer's contention that he shot Reid because he feared bodily harm. "The defendant, under our law, does not have to prove that he acted in self defense," he declared.

Standing outside the courthouse Reid called the verdict "an outrage. Just because you are a cop doesn't give you the right to shoot somebody."

The facts of the case demonstrate the shooting of Reid to be another brutal and unprovoked assault by a member of the New York Police Department. It again illustrates the extreme indulgence shown by the powers in New York to the most violent and homicidally inclined cops.

At the time of the shooting Meyer had been assigned to a desk job because of chronic civilian complaints about his use of excessive force. His record drew the notice of the Civilian Complaint Review Board, which ordered him transferred to a job where he would have

minimal contact with the public.

The incident occurred when Meyer got caught in traffic in the Bronx while returning with his fiancée and her son from a New York Yankees baseball game. Reid, who had worked the same spot for the past 10 years, approached the cop's vehicle and attempted to wash its windshield. The officer, enraged, leapt out of his car and cursed the man. He then backed him across several lanes of traffic and finally shot him.

Lisa Wilson, Reid's girlfriend, said following the shooting, "The man (officer Meyer) told him to take it off (the soap). Antoine said, 'I'm taking it off.'"

"The man pushed the car door open, got out of his car, charged at him, grabbed him, slapped him, then said, 'I'll cap you... I'll cap you... I'll cap you right now,' and pulled a gun out and shot him," she said. "He fell to my feet."

At the trial four witnesses testified that Meyer fired without provocation. One motorist testified that he saw Meyer walk forward and shove the victim three or four times as the windshield washer walked backward with his arms up. Even when the cop grabbed his neck Reid did not respond. The witness said he then heard the sound of a gunshot and saw the victim fall to the ground.

At that point the motorist said he leaned out of his car window and asked, "Why did you kill that man?"

Another witness testified that he delayed calling for help after the shooting out of fear the cop would come after him. When the prosecutor asked why he was afraid he replied, "It appeared that a shooting took place that didn't have to happen." Judge Collins ordered that remark struck from the record.

The shooting follows a pattern of brutality encouraged by the law-and-order policies of the administration of New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani.

As one of his first measures the mayor pledged a crackdown on “squeegee men” as part of a campaign to improve the "quality-of-life" for affluent New Yorkers.

Bronx District Attorney Robert Johnson expressed dismay at the implications of the verdict. “Antoine Reid's crime is one that has continually been referred to as a quality-of-life crime. If somebody can be shot down for a quality-of-life crime, what does that mean for all the rest of us?”



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