

New York City police cleared in fatal shooting

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The family of Gidone Busch reacted bitterly to the exoneration this week of the four New York City police officers involved in the shooting death of the 31-year-old mentally disturbed man. A grand jury convened by Brooklyn District Attorney Charles J. Hynes, announced that no charges would be brought against the police in the August 30 shooting.

Busch was shot in the orthodox Jewish neighborhood of Borough Park two months ago. Hundreds of people demonstrated late into the same night against the police action.

The grand jury proceedings directly contradicted the original account of the shooting by Police Commissioner Howard Safir. Attempting to quiet the community outrage, Safir had told a City Hall news conference the morning after the shooting that it was necessary because the police were immediately threatened by Busch. "We have seven independent witnesses," said Safir, to the fact that Busch was shot in the act of beating a fallen police sergeant with a hammer. "Each of those witnesses says at this point as he continued to hit the sergeant with the claw hammer, the police fired 12 shots."

As it turns out, the grand jury heard no such testimony at all. Not a single witness came forward with anything resembling Safir's account. Instead, according to participants in the deliberations, the prosecutors explained that Busch was shot after he ran up a narrow stairway from his basement apartment, struck one police officer, and then rushed past the group of cops. He stood on the sidewalk with the hammer raised over his head, and the police fired a volley of shots after he ignored demands to drop it. Newly disclosed radio calls showed that only seven seconds elapsed from the time Busch ran past the police until he was shot dead. The police acted on the dictum, "shoot first, ask questions later."

The grand jury decided the police were within their

rights anyway, and no explanation of the differing accounts has been forthcoming from either the Police Commissioner or other authorities.

Busch's family held its own news conference on November 1, after the grand jury announcement. I'm very disappointed," said his mother, Doris Busch-Boskey. "I just hope we can learn from this, in how they handle emotionally disturbed persons."

Busch, who had a long history of serious mental illness, including two involuntary commitments and a hammer attack that smashed the nose of another man, is by no means the first emotionally unstable individual whose illness has been treated with bullets by the New York City police.

This case highlights both the desperate crisis in the treatment of the seriously mentally ill, as well as the endemic police brutality and indifference to human life. Coming in the same year as the unprovoked police killing of African immigrant Amadou Diallo in the Bronx, the latest death also demonstrates that race is not the only factor, or even, in the final analysis, the most essential one in these cases. The police force is trained to respond with deadly force to symptoms of social crisis, and to dehumanize broad sections of the working class population whose only crime is that they are poor, ill or powerless.



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