

String of police shootings in San Diego, California

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Since the start of the new year, local San Diego police officers have been involved in four separate shooting incidents. Two of these resulted in the deaths of the people the officers were pursuing.

The first two incidents occurred on January 12. Tom Billodeaux was shot in a Reading Cinema in Carmel Mountain. Reports allege that Billodeaux fled an alleged domestic abuse scene across the street from the cinema after his girlfriend called the police to file a report. Officers cleared the strip mall where the Cinema was located and found Billodeaux in a screening of *Les Misérables*. After he allegedly pulled a gun, officers shot Billodeaux, killing him at the scene.

Another incident occurred across the county when 21-year-old Jonathan F. Vasquez and his 19-year-old female and 18-year-old male passenger allegedly refused to stop when officers attempted to pull them over. Officers stated that Vasquez proceeded to drive towards them, resulting in a barrage of bullets that killed Vasquez at the scene and wounded the female passenger in the shoulder.

On January 18, two more officer involved shootings occurred. In El Cajon, a city in the east county of San Diego, local resident Raymond Lee Goodlow was shot in the face and wounded while riding his bicycle on the sidewalk. Goodlow, referred to as a “transient” by one report, maintained a good reputation with the community. His shooting solicited support from local residents, who noted his good-willed nature.

Officers claimed that the shooting was necessary because as he was riding his bike he began “reaching into his waistband.” According to El Cajon police Lieutenant Tim Henton, “The suspect was still reaching into his waistband the officer gave him orders to make his hands visible, to show his hands, but he was noncompliant”—while he was riding his bike. This

prompted five to six shots.

Another incident occurred on January 18, when Angel Miguel Lopez, father of 10-month old twins, was shot and killed after he and a friend allegedly ran from the police. Officers had been staking out Lopez’s residence for hours in full SWAT regalia in an attempt to issue two arrest warrants, even using a flash-bang grenade to try to solicit the suspect’s cooperation.

After running from the scene, officers allege that Lopez reached into his pocket after being asked to put his hands in the air. This, they argued, was reasonable cause for the killing.

Lopez’s wife said, “There was no reason for them to come at him the way they did. For all they know, he could have been pulling up his pants... People make mistakes—nobody’s perfect—but he didn’t deserve this. Especially his children didn’t deserve this.”

The media also plays a role in justifying the officers’ responses. Three out of four of these incidents have been justified in the same way: the suspect was reaching into his waistband, with the officers had no choice but to respond with “necessary force”. The repetition of this story by the various news outlets without a thorough investigation gives an implicit acceptance of these stories.

Because the San Diego-area police are highly decentralized, very few statistics are available regarding incidents of arrest-related deaths. The most recent study published by the Bureau of Justice Statistics traced the steady growth of officer-involved shootings with 396 reported by 48 different states in 2003 to 497 reported in 2009. There have been no reports published by the county of San Diego that traces its own series of officer-involved shootings or arrest-related deaths.

The spate of killings in San Diego comes after mass

protests last year in Anaheim, located between San Diego and Los Angeles to the north. A huge police deployment followed demonstrations in response to the killing of Manuel Diaz, a 25-year-old unarmed man in July.



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