New York City police wound two bystanders in Times Square shooting incident

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In the latest example of wanton disregard for public safety by the New York Police Department (NYPD), two bystanders were shot near Times Square in Manhattan as officers fired their weapons at a 35-year-old man who was wandering in traffic. Reports indicate that the man appeared to be mentally impaired and may have intentionally been attempting to be struck by a vehicle. Some witnesses indicate that he had actually been hit several times.

The incident took place at approximately 10:00 p.m. on Saturday in the vicinity of the Port Authority Bus Terminal, an area typically crowded with travelers and tourists. Police allege that the man, who had not threatened anyone but was merely disrupting vehicular traffic, appeared to reach for a weapon when police approached and then mimicked shooting at them with his hand. Two officers then opened fire despite the fact that a crowd had gathered.

The shots missed the man, later identified as Glenn Broadnax, but struck two women. One was hit below the knee, fracturing her tibia and fibula, and the other in the buttocks. Both were taken to the hospital.

The man was quickly subdued by use of a Taser. No weapon was found. The police have yet to indicate whether they consider the shooting to have been "justified".

Comments posted on Twitter and YouTube videos indicate a strong negative reaction by the crowd to the shooting, with the police described as reckless and lunatics. Eyewitnesses report that they saw no weapon and question why the police opened fire.

The bus terminal and surrounding area have long been frequented by the homeless, many of whom are mentally ill. The fact that a man was observed behaving strangely in this vicinity should have been a surprise to no one, least of all the police. Broadnax, who was described after an examination at Bellevue Hospital as "an emotionally disturbed person," has been charged with a raft of offences including menacing, obstructing governmental administration, riot, criminal possession of a controlled substance, resisting arrest and disorderly conduct.

Officially, police guidelines instruct officers to avoid unnecessarily endangering the public, but give wide discretion. Over the last few years numerous incidents have taken place involving the uncontrolled use of force by the NYPD, which have led to endangerment, injury and death.

In August of last year, police injured nine innocent people with gunfire while pursuing a man in crowded streets near the Empire State Building. The man, who had been involved in the shooting of a coworker and was ultimately killed by police, was merely walking away and did not threaten anyone on the street. (See "New York police kill gunman, wound nine bystanders in midtown Manhattan")

A few weeks earlier, police shot and killed a mentally deranged man on Seventh Avenue, again in the midst of a crowd. (See "Slaughter on Seventh Avenue")

The NYPD has defended all of these actions.

Similar incidents have been reported and many more are likely unreported. (See "Spate of police shootings coincides with deepening social crisis in New York")

The NYPD routinely fires on unarmed workers and youth. Eighteen-year-old year old Ramarley Graham was killed in the Bronx in February 2012 when undercover NYPD narcotics officers, suspecting that he had drugs in his possession, followed him home, battered down his door and shot the unarmed youth in the bathroom of his family's apartment.

The violent shootings of defenseless suspects, as with the reckless behavior of the police in the latest incident,

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are a social reflex in response to the growing tensions in the city. The extreme economic inequality, unemployment, deterioration of health care and education are creating a powder keg in which any incident may initiate an explosion.

The shooting over the weekend is a part of a part of a larger pattern that includes the notorious stop-and-frisk program, which cultivates the shoot first and ask questions later attitude. It emanates from the highest levels of the city establishment and encourages a feeling of impunity and detachment by the police from the population. This attitude is intended to prepare the police for their role of suppressing coming social struggles.

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