

# Twitter campaign backfires on New York Police Department

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On Tuesday, the New York City Police Department (NYPD) attempted a public relations campaign on the popular microblogging platform, Twitter. @NYPDNews, the Twitter account of the department, asked its followers, “Do you have a photo w/ a member of the NYPD? Tweet us & tag it #myNYPD.”

Users, presumably New Yorkers, could show their support for and friendly interactions with “New York’s Finest.”

The PR effort proved a catastrophic failure. Within an hour of the first postings—by the police themselves—hundreds of people had uploaded photographs of police brutality: women whose hair was being pulled by cops, demonstrators brutalized and a suspect pressed to the hood of a car by a mob of officers.

Later in the day, the number of negative tweets and images about the department topped 10,000 an hour.

Many users memorialized those unarmed men and women shot and killed by the NYPD in recent years.

One remarked, “When I saw #myNYPD on my feed I immediately thought of #RamarleyGraham #KimaniGray #SeanBell and many who died thanks to the actions of NYPD.”

Another user tweeted, “#NYPD cops found not guilty after firing 50 shots at groom Sean Bell killing him on his wedding day #myNYPD #SeanBell”.

Sean Bell was killed in 2006 when NYPD officers let off a fusillade of 50 bullets on the unarmed worker on his wedding night as he was sitting in his car near a club in the borough of Queens. The plainclothes cops had never identified themselves and no officers were convicted in the shooting.

The less deadly, but routine, acts of police violence featured as well:

“myNYPD cares about noise control so they’ll shoot

a homeless man’s dog while he’s having a seizure,” one person tweeted, along with a post of an officer kneeling and pointing his gun at a dog while a man lay on the sidewalk. Other users posted images of the dog’s corpse. Users also mentioned the case of Kang Chun Wong, the 84-year-old who was beaten and arrested by the NYPD for jaywalking in January, posting pictures of Wong’s bruised face.

Later in the day, users created similar hashtags to express their outrage at the behavior of other police departments around the US. On #myAPD (the acronym of Albuquerque Police Department in New Mexico), one user commented, “#myAPD = Another Person Dead.”

The episode reveals a number of striking facts about life in New York City and America generally.

In the first place, the twitter storm showed that there is a deep and widespread hatred of the police by New York City’s population. The NYPD is commonly regarded as a group of thugs and murderers, protectors of the privileged and the enemies of the poor. The ratio of unfavorable to favorable remarks about the NYPD figured in the hundreds to one.

Hatred of the police in the city has been common for decades, but particularly increased over the last 12 years during the heyday of Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s notorious stop-and-frisk policy, in which millions of predominantly minority youth were stopped and searched, even though, by the NYPD’s own admission, nearly 90 percent of them had committed no crime. While the recently elected Democratic mayor, Bill de Blasio has promised to curtail stop-and-frisk (in fact there was a decline in the practice that began in Bloomberg’s last year in office), his new Police Commissioner, William Bratton, was the architect of the policy under Mayor Rudolph Giuliani in 1990.

While there has been a drop in the number of youth harassed, the practice remains an essential part of NYPD policy.

Stop-and-frisk policing has also accompanied a staggering rise in police violence, including the murder of unarmed workers and young people, including Sean Bell, Amadou Diallo (killed in 1999) and Ramarley Graham (killed in 2012).

Less deadly violence was the standard response of the NYPD to the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) protests against social inequality in 2011-12, in which police beat, pepper sprayed and arrested *en masse* thousands of peaceful protestors. Twenty-five-year-old OWS organizer Cecily McMillan is currently on trial for allegedly assaulting a police officer who has a documented history of violence. Film footage shows McMillan being brutalized by police during her arrest at an OWS demonstration on March 17, 2012.

The NYPD also inspires hatred for its role in the mass surveillance of the protesters during OWS and other actions, and for its infiltration of Mosques, Muslim-owned restaurants and gathering places throughout New York and New Jersey by its notorious Demographics Unit, which was recently disbanded (or, more precisely, reconfigured).

Moreover, such an outpouring of contempt and ridicule shows that the official media are sealed off from the sentiments of millions of working people. There is no major newspaper, radio or television station that can reflect, even in a distorted way, what New Yorkers think of social life in their city. Only a glimpse of these feelings can be given on social media but it is all the more startling for its complete absence from the major corporate-controlled media.

Finally, it is noteworthy that the NYPD was clearly taken off guard by the response. While the military-intelligence-police complex prepares for the social explosion that increasing poverty and inequality must bring, it is evident that it and the political establishment as a whole are completely oblivious to the feelings and basic outlook of millions of Americans.

There was no social explosion on Tuesday, but there was an indication, filtered through social media, of the mass anger and discontent coursing through the American population against official society and its potential for a sudden and explosive manifestation.



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