

LAW & JUSTICE

New York Police Acquitted in Deadly Force Case

Unarmed groom was shot 50 times

(AP) — Three detectives were acquitted of all charges in the 50-shot killing of an unarmed groom-to-be on his wedding day, a case that put the New York Police Department at the center of another dispute involving allegations of excessive fire-power.

Scores of police officers surrounded the courthouse Friday to guard against potential chaos, and as news of the verdict spread, many in the crowd began weeping. Others were enraged, swearing and screaming "Murderers! Murderers!" or "KKK!"

Inside the courtroom, spectators gasped. Sean Bell's fiancée immediately walked out of the room; his mother cried.

Bell, a 23-year-old black man, was killed in a hail of gunfire

outside a seedy strip club in Queens on Nov. 25, 2006 as he was leaving his bachelor party with two friends. The case ignited the emotions of people across the city and led to widespread protests among those who felt the officers used unnecessary force.

Officers Michael Oliver, 36, and Giscard Isnora, 29, stood trial for manslaughter while Officer Marc Cooper, 40, was charged with reckless endangerment. Two other shooters weren't charged. Oliver squeezed off 31 shots; Isnora fired 11 rounds; and Cooper shot four times.

The case brought back painful memories of other NYPD shootings, such as the 1999 shooting of Amadou Diallo — an African immigrant who was



Two women protest after hearing the not-guilty verdict Friday in the case against three detectives during the Sean Bell trial, outside the Queens County Courthouse in New York.

gunned down in a hail of 41 bullets by police officers who mistook his wallet for a gun.

In the latest case, the officers complained that pretrial publicity had unfairly painted them as

cold-blooded killers and the judge indicated that the police officers' version of events was more

credible than the victims' version.

"The people have not proved beyond a reasonable doubt that each defendant was not justified" in firing, he said.

The defense painted the victims as drunken thugs whom the officers believed were armed and dangerous. Prosecutors sought to convince the judge that the victims had been minding their own business, and that the officers were inept, trigger-happy aggressors.

None of the officers took the witness stand in his own defense. Instead, the judge heard transcripts of the officers testifying before a grand jury, saying they believed they had good reason to use deadly force. The judge also heard testimony from Bell's two injured companions, who insisted the maelstrom erupted without warning.

Testimonies Document Camp Tortures

Dog attacks, nooses used to abuse youth

(AP)—During an emotional hearing in Congress, lawmakers and witnesses likened the treatment of teens in youth boot camps to the kind of torture faced by prisoners at Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison.

Investigators uncovered cases in which a program employee's pit bull was trained to bite students in the groin and where teens had bags placed over their heads and nooses slipped around their necks, testified Greg Kutz, who has led an investigation into youth residential programs for the federal Government Accountability Office.

"It's hard to believe that people would do this to somebody else's child," said a visibly angry Rep. George Miller, D-Calif., during a hearing Thursday.

Miller, chairman of the House education committee, introduced legislation to prevent such abuses and boost oversight of boot camps. Such programs also are commonly referred to as residential treatment facilities, behavior modification



Gina Jones holds a picture of her son who died while in custody at the Bay County Boot Camp in Florida.

programs or therapeutic boarding schools.

The programs are typically loosely regulated by states. There are no federal laws that define and regulate them.

The House session was a follow-up to one last fall in which Kutz told lawmakers the GAO uncovered thousands of allegations of abuse, some of which involved death, at residential programs since the early 1990s.

New details showed eight separate cases in which teens were abused or died at residential programs. Investigators found that ineffective management and operating practices and untrained staff contributed to the deaths or abuse. Criminal charges were only brought in two cases, and only one resulted in minimal jail time, Kutz said.

In one case, a 16-year-old with asthma and chronic bronchitis com-

plained of chest pain and breathing problems, but his complaints were dismissed by program staff at an Arizona boot camp. The boy ended up dying from emphyema, a condition in which pus accumulated in his chest. An autopsy found more than 70 injuries, including some from blunt force, on the boy's body.

In another case, a 12-year-old boy died of suffocation at a Texas facility after being restrained and forced to lie on the floor face down.

Bullets Found on School Bus

Portland Public School District officials say they have determined there was no malicious intent involved in the discovery of ammunition left inside a backpack on a school bus.

The bullets were found last Wednesday after a bus driver

dropped students off at Roseway Heights Middle School in northeast Portland.

The 8th grader who owned the backpack said he forgot to remove the ammunition he found while playing at his grandmother's house.

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Nursing Home Workers Charged with Death

(AP) — Criminal charges have been filed against former nursing home workers accused of failing to get medical help for a Portland woman who was dropped while being transferred from a wheelchair to a bed.

The patient, 60-year-old Linda J.

Ober, broke both of her legs and died less than a week after the fall. A wrongful death suit filed by Ober's daughter against Gateway Care and Retirement Center claims workers ignored the woman's pleas for help and tried to persuade her that the

spill was just "a bad dream."

Former employees Suzanne Ruddell, 58, and Verna Heide, 63, have been charged with felony criminal mistreatment. Both women face trial in June.

A third former worker, Cammy

Nye, 53, was indicted on accusations of misdemeanor reckless endangering.

Rick Harding, administrator of the Portland nursing home, said two of the employees were fired, and the third resigned shortly after Ober died.

'Blade' Star Handed Prison Term

(AP)—A federal judge in Florida has sentenced action star Wesley Snipes to three years in prison on tax charges.

The sentenced was the maximum under the law, which U.S. prosecutors had recommended for the star of the "Blade" movie series. He was found guilty in February of failing to file tax returns for 1999-2001, in which the government said he owed \$2.7 million. Prosecutors had re-

quested three years, one year for each of Snipes' convictions of willfully failing to file a tax return.

Snipes' lawyers offered three dozen letters from family members, friends and even fellow actors Woody Harrelson and Denzel Washington attesting to his good character. They argued he should get only probation, because all three convictions were misdemeanors and the actor had no previous criminal record.

The defense lawyer says the language was disgusting but not threatening.

But prosecutors had urged the court to impose a stiff penalty on the actor nonetheless, because of his notoriety and the potential of a high-profile case to deter tax crime nationwide.

Wesley Snipes



Racist E-mail Called Free Speech

A son whose father is the deputy mayor of the Battle Ground City Council has pleaded not guilty to sending racist e-mails about the council's only black member.

The lawyer for 18-year-old Christopher Reinhold entered the plea at last Wednesday's appearance in Clark County District Court in Vancouver. Defense attorney Jon McMullen says it's a First Amendment free-speech case.

Court documents says Reinhold sent e-mails to city council members in January about new Councilman Paul Zandamela using a racial slur. After the mayor, Mike Ciraulo, told the council to ignore the message he received an e-mail with another slur and called police who traced it to Reinhold.



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