

Slaying in Minneapolis, A Horror Story of Law Enforcement

Justine Damond, Shooting Cultures and Race

By [Dr. Binoy Kampmark](#)

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Featured image: Justine Damond (Source: [Four Gates](#))

It plays out as a horror story of law enforcement. A distress call to the Minneapolis police about activity taking place behind the house on Washburn Avenue, possibly a sound of intercourse, distress, or both, taking place after 11 during the night of July 15. "Hi, I'm, I can hear someone out back and I, I'm not sure if she's having sex or being raped." [1]

The caller, Justine Damond, had been spooked by the commotion. She had called her fiancé in Las Vegas who had, in turn, insisted she call the police. When the officers arrived, an unsuspecting Damond approached the police vehicle, came up to the open window of the driver, Officer Matthew Harrity, and was shot by his partner, Officer Mohamed Noor.

The unfurling story supplied commentators with a different combination from the usual anatomy of an American police shooting. Characters tend to be slotted along defined racial and demographic lines: the indigent black youth butchered in cold blood by a nerve wracked white officer who finds in his gun the most persuasive form of conciliation.

Not so on this occasion. The individual who is said to have pulled the trigger was a black Somali-American, whose hiring by the police department supplied politically correct, multi-culti gold. Similarly, the victim was atypical for the cultural optics, a white Australian woman from Sydney involved in the Lake Harriet Spiritual Community, all-healing, all ashram, all therapeutic.

With the reverse racial splash evident in this incident, comparisons were inevitably drawn. Now, it was time for the Somali-American community to lament. Minneapolis City Council member Abdi Warsame specifically noted remarks made by US Rep. Michele Bachmann that Noor may have had "cultural" reasons for gunning down Damond.

"What we are seeing is a lot of rhetoric in the media where this is a Somali issue, where this person is a Somali officer." [2]

Bachmann sports her own extensive laundry list of laments, specifically about Minnesota's shifting demographics.

"Minnesota is a state that now has a reputation for terrorism."

Politically correct brigades were attempting to muzzle those “afraid of being called ‘racist’, ‘bigots’, ‘Islamaphobe’.” Fearing nothing of the sort, Bachmann described Noor as an “affirmative-action hire by the hijab-wearing mayor of Minneapolis, Betsy Hodges.”[3]

In the US, logistical matters were picked through with a procedural attention that has become common in these casual civilian executions. The officer, it was noted, had failed to turn on his body camera. The same went for his partner. Fire arm procedures were also pondered.



Minneapolis police officer Mohamed Noor
(Source: Minnesota Public Radio News)

Both officers had been rather green on the beat. Officer Noor, during his short stint in the force, had already encountered three civilian complaints and a law suit regarding his treatment of a woman during the course of performing a mental health check-up.

In Australia, Damond’s death engendered a feeding frenzy across the tabloid scene, a chance to capitalise on America the violent, America the vicious. Christopher Dore of The Daily Telegraph, with stomach churning enthusiasm, called her killing “the best story for us that day. You know, here’s this Aussie girl who goes over to find love. And because of the complications of American policing and guns, she’s dead.”[4]

Others simply found the idea that such complications could never be replicated in idyllic Australia. An “unhinged gun culture,” asserted David Penberthy of Adelaide’s The Advertiser, “killed Justine Damond.”[5] With soft analysis, Penberthy asserted that she was “the first Australian victim of a gun culture that betrays the promise of America.”

The response from a police force caught off guard has also been rattling in its insensibilities. When a shooting incident takes place, blame the deceased whose guilt is taken to the grave. Noor, through his legal representatives, has suggested just that, claiming essentially two things: first, that Damond was in a drug-induced state when she approached the vehicle; second, that being in such a state somehow warranted his actions.

“It would be nice to know,” claimed Noor’s legal representative on Thursday, “if there was any (prescription sedative) Ambien in her system.” It would also be nice to know what darkened state of mind the officers in question were in answering the distress call put out by Damond.

The suggestion that Damond might have been on medication, let alone any bodily impurity, sparked something of a tussle: the world of clean living against that of the mind altering nightmare. A pure Australian, battling a contaminated culture.

“Justine,” claimed the family spokesman Tom Hyder, “was someone who only ate organic, she watched everything she ever put into her body. She is not someone who would have used drugs.”[6]

Heads have rolled. Police chief Janeé Harteau is, thus far, the most prominent scalp. Her own period had been marked by allegations of inappropriate handling regarding previous police shootings, notably that of Jamar Clark.

Mayor Hodges insisted that Harteau hang up her hat as chief.

“I’ve lost confidence in the Chief’s ability to lead us further... It is clear that she has lost the confidence of the people of Minneapolis as well.”

So, it would seem, have residents in Minneapolis with the whole law enforcement apparatus, having found reform in the police force lethargic at best, superficial at worse. Whether Damond’s death is accounted for in a legal sense will come down to the acceptable use of force by police, one governed by that ever precarious standard of “reasonableness”. [7] (Can a shooter ever be reasonable?)

In the US, the threshold on such reasonableness is so ground touchingly low as to be liberatingly violent.

“People just say, if a person was unarmed,” complained Jim Bueermann, former police chief of Redlands in California, “why would an officer have shot him or her?”

Best, then, never to call, approach or consult an officer on duty.

Dr. Binoy Kampmark was a Commonwealth Scholar at Selwyn College, Cambridge. He lectures at RMIT University, Melbourne. Email: bkampmark@gmail.com

Notes

[1] <http://www.minneapolismn.gov/www/groups/public/@mpd/documents/webcontent/wcmssp-202070.pdf>

[2] <http://www.startribune.com/warsame-blasts-anti-somali-rhetoric-in-wake-of-damond-shooting/436190813/>

[3] <http://www.startribune.com/bachmann-praises-trump-blasts-political-correctness/435517653/>

[4] <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/22/us/minneapolis-police-shooting.html>

[5] <http://www.adelaidenow.com.au/rendezview/david-penberthy-an-unhinged-gun-culture-killed-justine-damond/news-story/891fc77a54f9daebcbcf6de19dba490>

[6] <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/world/justine-damonds-death-police-search-for-more-clues-to-what-led-to-her-shooting-death/news-story/fa309ad74b331e89ab6a9db41d2d3164>

[7] <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/490/386/>

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Kampmark](#)

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