



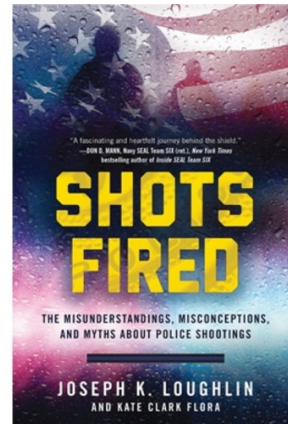
Written by [Robin Kinderman](#) on February 22, 2019

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Dissecting Officer-involved Shootings

Shots Fired: The Misunderstandings, Misconceptions, and Myths, About Police Shootings, by Joseph K. Loughlin and Kate Clark Flora, New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2017, 344 pages, hardcover.

Many of us are not strangers to the misconceptions of police perpetuated by social media and the news, such as the false “hands up, don’t shoot” narrative. And many have undoubtedly debated with friends and colleagues about what an officer “coulda, woulda, shoulda” done in a situation involving lethal force. But even for those of us who know that we should make sure of our facts before critiquing police officers’ deadly encounters, the book *Shots Fired* is an eye-opening look into the real world of law enforcement.



Shots Fired is written by Joseph Loughlin, a police veteran of 30 years who held every sworn rank in the Portland, Maryland, Police Department. In the introduction, he writes that he was inspired to write the book after the events in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014.

“I wanted to foster a better understanding of the human beings behind the badge, and of real-world policing in the worst of police experiences: deadly force events. This book is the result.”

Loughlin goes on to explain that the blame for the current stigma associated with police officers isn’t on just the media or Black Lives Matter. He cites our current situation as a “culmination of a sense of injustice and loss of dignity... not just at the hands of police but by a social system that has let many people down.” He explains that cops don’t just write traffic tickets and respond to robberies; they deal with “society’s ills,” as he calls them: poverty, domestic abuse, child abuse, mental illness, drugs and alcohol, violence, people who are inherently evil, and death. They see what we don’t see, what we don’t want to see — what we expect them to keep us shielded from. The purpose of his book is to get us to understand why officers do what they do — what happened in certain scenarios to cause them to use their guns.

He does this in the best way possible: first-hand accounts. Loughlin starts with officers he worked with and expands from there. He focuses on the East Coast to keep the examples few enough to be manageable. The book is 16 chapters long and includes two to three cases per chapter.

Loughlin breaks the book up into four sections: “Myths and Misconceptions,” “Training and De-escalation,” “Stopping the Threat,” and “Loss and Redemption.” The chapters within each section address the questions and doubts that even supporters of police have about the incidents covered, such as, why did the officer fire so many times? Why didn’t he shoot to wound? Why did he shoot an unarmed



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person? Why didn't he use his Taser first? And, in general, why did the officer react the way he did?

All of these questions and more are addressed by officers recounting events in which they had to shoot a suspect. Loughlin interviews the officers involved in each incident, to let the reader see what happened from their perspective.

The book moves along quickly, and it is attention-grabbing. It was very interesting to follow the different types of situations officers were put in, and how they dealt with them. At times, especially in Loughlin's recap of each chapter, the book did occasionally smack of repetitiveness, but it seems this was simply because Loughlin wanted to drive home the fact that officers are humans asked to perform inhuman tasks.

Besides the specifics of each encounter, Loughlin also addresses other factors that play into deadly-force situations, such as officer training and mental health. Thanks to Hollywood, many people (even those of us with good intentions) are of the opinion that all officers receive adequate training and that they spend lots of time at the shooting range (and they're all excellent shots because of this). Not true. Loughlin points out that because of mandatory training on issues such as domestic disturbances, mental health, and — thanks to our PC culture today — gender issues, little time and money is left for training on use of force. Yes, all officers receive basic training at the academy, but beyond that, it's up to each individual department as to how often and how much training their officers receive. This is all dependent on budgets, equipment, and manpower.

Another factor to take into consideration is the disadvantages of non-lethal equipment, such as batons, pepper spray, Tasers, bean bag guns, etc. Loughlin explains that batons can easily get taken away, pepper spray can fail, and seasoned criminals know how to disengage Taser barbs.

In one of the incidents presented in the book, a female cop approached a man who was urinating in public. When she asked him to stop, he charged at her. She hit him with her baton, which he then stole and proceeded to beat her with. Her only choice was to shoot him.

Every incident covered is different: There are routine traffic stops, drug dealers, hit-and-runs, shoplifters, bomb threats, kidnappings, criminals on the run, shoot-outs, and more. Sometimes it's one or two cops dealing with a perpetrator; sometimes it's several. Sometimes the officers go into a situation knowing they will probably have to use their guns; other times they have no idea. Sometimes the officers get shot once, sometimes more than once. And officers die.

One story was about a traffic stop gone wrong. Officer Nicholas Goodman of Portland, Maine, pulled over a truck that looked to be in very rough shape, and the driver wasn't wearing a seat belt. After obtaining the man's ID and running it through dispatch, he found out that the ID and truck belonged to the driver's brother, and that the driver had three felonies and was not allowed to drive. He called for backup. When another officer, Officer James Davison, arrived, they approached the truck — Goodman on the driver's side and Davison on the passenger side. When Goodman asked the driver to get out of the vehicle, the driver tried to start the truck; Davison jumped in the vehicle to stop him, and Goodman tried to grab the driver's hand away from the ignition. They all began to fight, yet the truck took off, taking Goodman and Davison with it. Goodman ordered the man to stop, but he wouldn't, so Goodman shot him.

The book also shared the local paper's subsequent coverage of the event, which was misleading through its choice of facts presented. The paper did state that the driver had a substance-abuse problem and a



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“checkered” driving record, but also added that he was “a devout Christian who went out of his way to spread the Gospel, and a mechanic who would stop in the pouring rain to help a motorist in trouble.” What it didn’t say, as Loughlin points out, is that the driver was a convicted felon who wasn’t allowed to drive, that he was driving a vehicle with dangerously faulty equipment, that he gave the officers a fake name and ID, that he didn’t obey orders to get out of the vehicle, and that he assaulted both officers. Officer Davison admitted that jumping in the truck was not the smartest action, but Loughlin counteracts that with “What if?” What if they had let him go? Maybe he would have hurt or killed someone. Loughlin states that officers “have a legal obligation to take felons into custody and are responsible if they do not.”

One commonality in the use-of-force incidents is the distorting effects of the physical reactions to stress that the officers experience, resulting in such things as tunnel vision, loss of hearing, incorrect depth perception, distortion of time, and the seeming moving or viewing of actions in slow motion. The impact of stress was very interesting and shed some light on why officers act the way they do in these lethal-force encounters, i.e., why they fire their guns multiple times. Loughlin provides studies and footnotes showing that these experiences are the body’s physical response to experiencing extreme stress and fear.

Loughlin also asks every officer about the aftermath of the event — what they went through legally and emotionally — and it becomes evident that an officer-involved shooting can take a heavy toll. The legal proceedings can take months, even years, owing to crime reconstruction, ballistics, forensics, interviews, and court hearings. While the proceedings are going on, the media reports what they perceive to be true, based on eyewitness accounts, which are often lies. In one incident, an officer needed to shoot a man who was resisting arrest. The officer shot him only after tackling him to the ground, asking him to comply several times, feeling the assailant’s gun against his stomach, and telling him if he didn’t stop, he was going to get shot. The assailant’s girlfriend quickly spread the rumor that the officer had called her boyfriend the N-word and shot him in the back while he was in handcuffs. Even after the facts were released, the girlfriend’s lies remained the truth for many people. Cases such as these affect not only the officer, but also relationships with family members, what their kids deal with at school, and how community members interact with them. And not every department offers therapy afterward; while some departments have extensive support groups, others have nothing, leaving the officers to deal with the traumatic aftermath on their own. Loughlin writes that many officers get divorced, start drinking, leave the force, or even commit suicide.

While this book is sometimes repetitive, it drives home an important thing: There are many factors involved in shooting incidents that non-officers don’t fully comprehend, such as how fear physically affects the mind and body, and that citizens should allow a little leeway for the unknown when hearing an account about an officer-involved shooting.

This book is for anyone who wants a glimpse of the dirty, unpredictable, dangerous world our officers operate in. Next time you are informed about a police shooting incident that looks questionable, find out all the facts.



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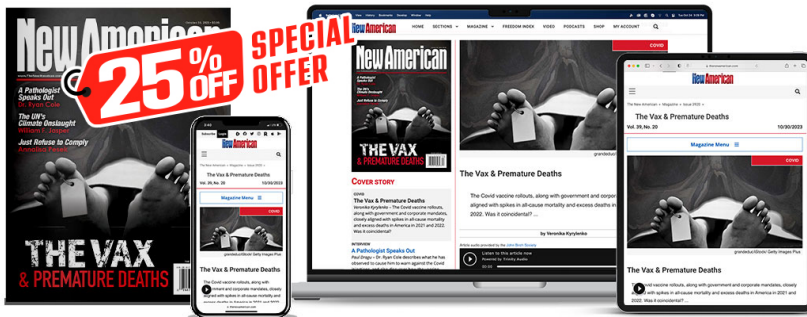
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