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216 Held in Protests of Police Acquittals

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Demonstrators on Second Avenue near the Triborough Bridge raised their voices in protest Wednesday against the acquittals of three detectives in the shooting of Sean Bell. [More Photos >](#)

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In the largest public protest against the acquittal of three detectives in the shooting death of [Sean Bell](#), 216 people were arrested on Wednesday in carefully orchestrated demonstrations that halted traffic at busy intersections in Manhattan and Brooklyn, the police said.

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The demonstrations, described by the Rev. Al. Sharpton as “pray-ins,” played out on a bright spring afternoon as boisterous displays of civil disobedience in which people signed up to be arrested, assuring organizers and lawyers that they were carrying proper identification to show to the police.

Once positioned at the intersections, demonstrators dropped to their knees or sat and prayed briefly before hundreds of police officers escorted them to buses and police vehicles.

“We believe deeply in what we are doing today,” said Hazel Dukes, the president of the New York State chapter of the [N.A.A.C.P.](#), who was one of a dozen people arrested after they knelt and blocked traffic about 4:30 p.m. on the Canal Street ramps to the Holland Tunnel.

“We have come to raise our voice for justice,” she said before being placed in white plastic handcuffs and taken to a police van.

In all, it appeared that more than 1,000 people participated in the protests, although they

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attracted so many onlookers that it sometimes became difficult to distinguish protesters from tourists or people out for a stroll after work who had stopped to watch the commotion.

"It's good to see people stand up for their rights," said Julia Mordaunt, 27, a graphic designer from Burlington, Vt., who was on her way to buy jeans and stopped to watch about 100 demonstrators who had gathered at the southwest corner of 60th Street and Third Avenue, near an entrance to Bloomingdale's. About 3:50 p.m., that group marched east toward the Queensboro Bridge, linked arms and sat along Second Avenue, blocking traffic on and off the bridge. Thirty-six people there were arrested.

The protests were staged at six locations in the city. In the largest one, about 400 people assembled about 4:30 on the Centre Street approach to the Brooklyn Bridge and blocked Brooklyn-bound traffic for more than an hour. About 60 people in that demonstration were arrested, including Mr. Sharpton and Nicole Paultré Bell, who was to have married Mr. Bell on the day he was killed in a hail of 50 bullets fired by the officers outside a nightclub in Jamaica, Queens, in 2006.

Two friends of Mr. Bell's, [Joseph Guzman](#) and [Trent Benefield](#), who were injured in the fusillade, were among those arrested at the Brooklyn Bridge site.

Demonstrators also stopped traffic at the Manhattan entrance to the Queens-Midtown Tunnel, where about 20 were arrested. They sat in front of cars waiting to come off the Manhattan Bridge in Brooklyn, where 23 were arrested, and blocked ramps at the Triborough Bridge at 125th Street and Second Avenue, where about 40 were arrested.

The scope of the protests on Wednesday contrasted with the relatively muted response to a state judge's acquittals of the detectives on April 25. At the time, Mr. Sharpton and other activists, politicians and community leaders praised the overall peaceful response that followed the verdict, but vowed to fight the judge's decision in strategic rather than bellicose ways.

The demonstrations in New York were mirrored by a smaller one in Atlanta, where 75 people stood on the steps of the State Capitol on Wednesday to protest the verdict in the Bell case, although no one was arrested. Mr. Sharpton has said that more New York City demonstrations are planned "to shut down" the city in the spring, though a date was not specified.

Also on Wednesday, Gov. [David A. Paterson](#) announced that he would meet privately with Mr. Sharpton and Mr. Bell's relatives on Thursday in New York City. The governor has said that he was surprised by the number of shots fired and by the acquittals of the three detectives.

Paul J. Browne, a police spokesman, said almost all of those arrested on Wednesday were charged with disorderly conduct, processed through central booking in Manhattan and issued tickets to appear in court. He said that about six demonstrators were issued summonses for less serious violations.

There were no injuries, and no arrests for violence, he said.

"As anticipated, it was not violent and there was some traffic disruption," Mr. Browne said. "But both the civil disobedience and the resulting arrests were conducted in an orderly fashion."

But the crush of the demonstrators, sometimes worsened by the pushing and shoving of photographers trying to get close to the demonstrations, led to tense moments.

In Brooklyn, the Rev. Herbert Daughtry and City Councilman [Charles Barron](#) led protesters to the foot of the Brooklyn Bridge, but were stopped by officers holding orange netting. The protesters then turned and marched on Tillary Street toward the Manhattan Bridge, but officers jogged in front of them with the netting. In the end, Mr. Daughtry simply told the group to sit cross-legged in the street and wait to be arrested.

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