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NY attorney general probes deadly police shooting of Brooklyn man

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Protesters rallied at Montgomery Street and Utica Avenue in Crown Heights Thursday night, where police shot and killed a mentally disturbed man this week.

Earlier in the day, the state attorney general opened an investigation into the Wednesday shooting, which left 34-year-old Saheed Vassell dead. Police say he was brandishing a metal pipe that officers and 911 callers mistook for a gun.

Civil rights activists see it as yet another fatal shooting of an unarmed black man by police -- but investigators say they had reason to believe Vassell was armed.

The NYPD says officers responded to multiple 911 calls about a man aiming a gun at residents just before 5 p.m. on Montgomery Street. Mayor Bill de Blasio said at a news conference Thursday that the city would publicly release those 911 calls.

Surveillance video shows Vassell approaching a number of people on the street and pointing a metal object at them.

Vassell took a "two-handed shooting stance," police say, and pointed the object at the responding officers. Four of them fired 10 shots. He was treated for gunshot wounds at the scene and taken to Kings County Hospital, where he soon died.

When officers found the object — a pipe with a knob on the end, word spread quickly through the community and prompted a large response from activists. Community members and activists protested Thursday evening. Some blocked off part of Empire Boulevard in Crown Heights, chanting and holding signs that condemned police violence.

Vassell's aunt says he had bipolar disorder, drawing parallels to an earlier police-involved slaying of a mentally ill person — Deborah Danner, who police shot and killed in her own home after she allegedly greeted them with scissors and a bat.

[White NYPD Sgt. Hugh Barry was acquitted in February](#) of second-degree murder, manslaughter and criminally negligent homicide in the Oct. 18, 2016 death of the 66-year-old Danner.

Danner's family says she suffered from mental illness. Police say she swung a bat at Barry, prompting the officer to fire his gun. Barry was found not guilty on all counts.

Like Danner's family, Vassell's relatives say police reacted inappropriately.

"He did not do anything," Vassell's mother told News 12. "He's not a gunman, and the police want to portray him as if he had a gun on him."

Police say Vassell had multiple prior arrests, including one in 2002 on assault charges.