



## Theorizing policing:

### *The drama and myth of crime control in the NYPD*

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#### **Abstract** \_\_\_\_\_

The article uses articles from elite publications to shape a dramaturgically informed case study exploring the decline in the official crime rate in New York City in 1996, the roles of Commissioner Bratton, the media, and the selected experts commenting upon the causes of the decline. The focal period is 1994-6, and includes news of events, such as trials and convictions, related to the events taking place earlier. Victor Turner's (1976) natural history approach organizes the narrative, which sees an established order punctuated by breach, crisis, response and redress, and conciliation or new schism. This analysis requires a brief overview of dramaturgy, the drama of policing, and the centrality of imagery and rhetoric in sustaining police legitimacy and compliance internally. It is argued in conclusion that such analysis may assist in theorizing policing, seeing the dramatic virtues of crime, and the role of media in policing and politics.

#### **Key Words** \_\_\_\_\_

crime control • crime figures/UCR • dramaturgy • experts •  
media • spectacles • zero tolerance

#### **Introduction**

While police studies is an enduring, well-funded research field in criminology, it is largely descriptive and atheoretical, replete with narrowly defined

empirical studies of arrest policies, attitudes toward community policing, and rather anodyne treatments of one segment (white, male, urban, patrol officers) of the occupational culture. Few studies derive propositions from theory, or use systematic criminology to explore police strategies and tactics. The most frequently cited monographs are Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux (1990) and Skogan (1991), and the works of Skolnick, Wilson, and Rubinstein, which were published some 30 years ago. The most frequently cited policing article, arguably Wilson and Kelling's 'Broken Windows' (1982), is a provocative essay published in a non-refereed popular magazine, seasoned with a pinch of research references, and draws loosely and analogically on experimental social psychology. It purports to be a 'theory' but is merely a programmatic statement that has been used to buttress a range of activities by police, from sweeping the homeless away, to arresting people for drinking beer on their front steps. Much police research focuses on citizen-patrol interactions and crime control features of policing, to the exclusion of political and organizational concepts such as compliance, leadership, legitimization, and the socio-political rhetoric and imagery police employ. The political system in which such interactions are cast is left unexplicated. Theorizing police, although considerable organizational research is available (Bordua and Reiss, 1966; Reiss and Bordua, 1966, 1967; Wilson, 1968; Reiss, 1971, 1974, 1992; Brown, 1988; Langworthy and Crank, 1992; Crank, 1994; Fielding, 1995), remains an unfinished task.

Here, I use dramaturgy, a perspective that emphasizes the use of symbols to convey impressions to an audience, and also a natural history method. I use materials drawn largely from the elite media and academic sources to examine the contradictions generated by the myth of command and control in policing.<sup>1</sup> The case study focuses on the crime decline in New York City which media attributed to William Bratton, Commissioner of the NYPD (1994-6), and key events reported in the media, especially those involving police and other political leadership, in New York City from late 1994 until September 1997 (with a few observations prior to 1991 and others through late 2000). Study of the media and experts' analyses, mainly in the *New York Times*, reveals that the reported crime decline in New York City was attributed to the police and Commissioner Bratton, while experts validated a connection between command leadership, strategies, and tactics in the 'war on crime,' and applauded the 'victory,' i.e. reduced crime known to the police. The media and experts elevated the Commissioner to a celebrity only to later reduce his status. Experts and the media functioned to maintain the appearance of police-based crime control, solidify the police mandate, and increase public confidence. The drama's progress falls somewhat naturally into four stages, although these are not tightly chronological (Turner, 1976): (1) Order and its breach; (2) Crisis; (3) Response and redress; and (4) Conciliation (or new schism). I discuss first dramaturgy and the drama of policing before turning to the case study.

### *Dramaturgy*

Dramaturgy examines how symbols (both material and non-material) are selectively presented in order to impress an audience. This implies a temporal dimension and requires an analysis of the relationships between audience and performers. By emphasizing the role of symbols in representation and management of appearances, it links social structure and associated symbols with interactional and collective dynamics (Goffman, 1983; Schwartz and Wagner-Pacifici, 1991).

Dramaturgy best explains social action when analyzing behavior arising under conditions of uncertainty. Uncertainty obtains when the knowledge necessary to decide is either unknowable, unknown, or only partially known. Uncertainty, when present in situations, opens the text of interaction to a range of symbolic representations (signs) whose reference and meaning vary. At times, signs, such as those used in advertising, sport, and political rhetoric, ‘float’ away, striking only allegorical or emotive responses, and have no syntactical, empirical, or referential properties. Dramaturgy tries to unearth responses to the uncertain, especially in engagements without long history, and to identify means by which uncertainty is reduced or managed. Even secularized societies, when facing threats of sin, crime, death, and disaster, seek myth and ritual to stabilize organizational relations, maintain an organizational hierarchy, and legitimate authority. Expressions of myth and reassertion of normative standards are especially likely to arise during periods of rapid change or discontinuity.

### *The drama of policing*

Organizational analysis of policing suggests inherent tensions exist in managing an inspectorial bureaucracy combining high discretion at the bottom with command distance from events. Research, ethnographic, organizational, and survey-based, reveals the complex character of policing and how shadowy and distorted are perceptions of command when seen from the ground and vice versa (Manning, 1997 [1977]). Most policy directives are inconsistent and often irrelevant in the day-to-day work. On the other hand, directives consistent with the job control and crime-focus of patrol officers are well received since they are redundant messages. The tension between command and deciding on the ground is reflected in the contradictions between the ‘paramilitary’ imagery (McNamara, 1967), wide latitude to make unreviewed decisions (Reiss, 1974), high ecological dispersion single units (Jermeir and Berkes, 1977), and evidence of the rather creative, subtle management by officers of police–police and police–public interactions (Van Maanen, 1988; Mastrofski et al., 1995).

Because the police are required to act, and often to act quickly, yet cannot fully foresee their actions’ consequences, tensions—or unresolved contradictions between actions and the formal public mandate—remain. The tensions reflect fundamental uncertainties in the mandate that require dramaturgical reconciliation. The police, like other occupations, manage

uncertainties by manipulating symbols and rhetoric representing their actions as coherent, rational, and co-ordinated. They partake of myth (counterfactual beliefs with an unexamined status), rely on ritual (repeated sequences of action that refer to themselves), and attempt to manage the appearance of consistent control while sustaining internal compliance and loyalty. Sustaining loyalty and legitimacy is a symbolic function, and a fundamental leadership obligation in policing.

Ironically, the police sustain their mandate in part because the unexplained, the accidental and the unexpected arise regularly, not predictably, and they claim responsibility for coping with such risky business. For this reason, they retain slack resources, are somewhat inefficient, and sustain a posture of surveillance and observation over defined territories. These bureaucratic strategies maximize the opportunity to encounter relatively rare events, and to respond at the appropriate level with the required resources.

Certainly, it must be accepted that police are perhaps 'naturally' dramatic in the sense that their actions connote violence, and sacred ideas such as retribution, justice, punishment, and revenge. Visible street policing, the stops, shootings, confrontations, searches, arrests, and chases are exciting, engaging, dangerous, and morally problematic. Police work is fraught with uncertainties, and the police can only partially control events and must be seen as responsive to risk-producing circumstances. Increasingly, the police are known via the media, and are thus subject to 'mediated representations.' The media vacillate in their treatment of the police to suit their notions of 'news,' and thus ripsaw policing with both outrage and uncritical praise, shifting their focus, claims and 'story line' to suit the current ostensive audience interest in 'the news.'

In an organization, imagery is crucial to retaining a market share, public trust, and funding. This is increasingly true in the public sector. The administrative role, like policing itself (Loader, 1997; Manning, 1997 [1977]), is often intended to dramatize rather than to control, and has multifaceted symbolic dimensions (Mastrofski, forthcoming). While the direct influence of Chiefs is limited to a few areas, their capacity to command media attention is considerable. The aim of the police top command is to maintain an organizational image that is sufficiently vague and polyphonic to win public trust, while sustaining multiple definitions of the police role and function. Increasingly, police appoint media officers, issue press releases and hold press conferences, and seek symbiotic relations with the media (Ericson et al., 1989; Mawby, 1996). Yet, as a result of increasing media mobility, speed and intrusiveness, as well as technologies that can be turned against them (e.g. video cameras in patrol cars and jails), the police are more vulnerable than ever to public scrutiny and media scorn.

The myth of policing includes a subtext about command and control, leadership and loyalty, mobilized when untoward events are revealed. Unfortunately, there are few studies of command and control.<sup>2</sup> Police are

by design and tradition two-faced. They are bureaucratic organizations, rule-bound, procedure-oriented, and legalistic. They are also highly discretionary, patrimonial bureaux with loyalty to a Chief as a virtue, situationally expedient, and deeply moralistic in practice. The notion that like generals in war, the top command leads, guides, commands, and strategizes while motivating the ‘troops,’ remains. The command and control myth in policing states implicitly that officers are led, directed, commanded, and evaluated with respect to their capacity to achieve the organization’s mission. The mission of police departments is rarely written and is generally unstated. In the last 30 plus years, the primary vehicle through and by which this discipline is achieved is the police communications system (Bordua and Reiss, 1967; Reiss and Bordua, 1967). The notional connection between command and action is revealed in the breach; when punishment is swiftly dealt for known mistakes, errors, and malfeasance.

Media systematically elevate the organizational status of police and police leadership. Chiefs, as with all celebrities, can be glorified and elevated if only then to be seen as scapegoats. Chiefs who succeed do so briefly (the average tenure of a Chief is said to be 2.5 years). In the USA, when a public failure such as a vicious beating or shooting, riot, or death in custody appears, the Chief is the natural target of criticism. He or she embodies and represents the myth and is protected by it. Nevertheless, tragedy, risk, and potential downfall always threaten mythical heroes. The question is, even in a drama, whether the motives are pure and proper, or merely self-serving, and the flaws grand rather than trivial.

The chief, in some respects, must be a politician of considerable skill in the community, as well as in the organization. But since this requires negotiation and bargaining rather than advocacy if success is to be grasped, externally validated political ‘success’ often produces rancor and distrust within the department.

Tensions remain especially when periodic crises emerge—an unarmed citizen is beaten or shot, evidence of corruption or violent incidents emerges, disorder is publicized, or a large-scale riot is mishandled. Responses to these tensions create new tensions with a new and unpredictable course. While the rhetoric of police–community partnerships and reduced social distance is publicized widely, punitive crime control tactics are more widely adopted (Kraska and Kappeler, 1997). In New York City, as I will proceed to argue, public rhetoric, media co-operation, and crime reduction produced an epiphany. This high point was briefly realized and then eroded by subsequent events.

### *The NYPD battles crime*

The NYPD has long been characterized as a bureaucratic dinosaur, a red-tape morass, clogged with paperwork, top heavy with ambitious police-politicians, and barely able to stem unending, uncontrollable crime waves (Daley, 1971; Murphy and Plate, 1977). Its crime statistics were dubious,

dated and slow to be produced, and done laboriously by hand (*New York Times*, 12 December 1997). The 'thin blue line' was not only seen as corrupt and violent, it was intractable, unionized, traditionally focused on job control. It outspokenly defended working officers and attacked and demonstrated against Mayors and Chiefs. Since the early 1970s, it has seen periodic scandals involving bribery, corruption, and excessive force (Kappeler et al., 1997) and been subject to no less than three major investigations (Knapp, 1972; Zuccotti, 1984; Mollen Commission, 1994).

Although gradual change had been underway in the NYPD since perhaps the 1970s under Commissioner Murphy (Silverman, 1999: 21–65), the negative imagery was transformed, largely by media attention to Bratton, his 'spin skills,' and use of the media. He understood their preoccupation with rare, exceptional, and thus 'newsworthy,' events. Other factors were present: the support of the Mayor, increased resources, and a national decline in crime. To summarize briefly the narrative, a tensely moving four-act drama, it has an opening, a breach, response, and then (renewed) schism or conciliation. Discussion of the four acts or stages organizes the following narrative. They are analytic divisions, rather than simply chronological.

### *Order and its breach*

*An order is established* The opening events occurred in 1990. Lee Brown, formerly Chief in Atlanta and Houston, was named NYPD Commissioner by Mayor David Dinkins. He began in New York City a program of 'community policing,' based on his well-publicized efforts in Houston that had received academic praise. His plan included hiring 5000 more officers (Kelling and Coles, 1997: 138). In April 1990 William Bratton, later to become Commissioner of the Boston Police in 1993, was hired to head the New York Transit Police. He undertook a reform of the Transit Police, emphasizing officer morale, equipment, including issuing 9mm guns and urging 'control of the subways.'

A riot in the Crown Heights section of New York in August 1992 was sparked after a car in a motorcade of Lubovitcher Jews ran down and killed a black child. Rioting by blacks ensued and a young Hasidic scholar was stabbed fatally. Race and religion were intertwined and led to charges that the Mayor had not provided adequate police protection (Silverman, 1999: 76–9). The police failure to control the riot, when combined with their reticence and tactical mistakes, was widely criticized by an investigative Commission. Mayor Dinkins, and the newly named Police Commissioner Raymond Kelley (Dinkins had replaced Lee Brown as Commissioner in 1992), admitted mistakes and apologized. The riot, subsequent acquittal of the accused murderer, and a civil suit by the Lubivitcher community claiming their civil liberties had been violated, as well as police and public demonstrations (by black and Jewish groups), sustained the issue for more than a year and shaped the fall Mayoral

campaign. Dinkins' handling of the riot played a role in his subsequent defeat by Guiliani, a former federal prosecutor (Jackall, 1997: 254–84) who campaigned on crime control.

Shortly after winning the election, Guiliani hired William Bratton as Police Commissioner. Bratton, in turn, promised the Mayor a decrease in crime (Bratton with Knobler, 1998: 12). This marked a shift from Commissioner Brown's stated policy of community policing to a crime control model. Bratton's crime-fighting tactics, combined with a rhetorical commitment to 'community policing' (Kelling and Coles, 1997: 145), had attained recognition when he headed the New York City Transit Police. Bratton, with consultants from the Police Foundation and Harvard's Kennedy School, now focused the Department on crime reduction (Bratton with Knobler, 1998: 249–55).

Policing now was defined as 'crime fighting,' in the name of quality of life, and was viewed by top command in the NYPD as a war, and the strategy, itself a military term, was described by militaristic metaphors, those which make social complexity a matter of winning or losing, and eradication of the 'loser' the aim rather than compromise and non-exclusive outcomes. While the 'broken windows' perspective made arrest a last solution, absent changes in social disorder, arrest was elevated in the NYPD to its central weapon in the war against 'street crime' (Fagan and Davies, 2001). Zero tolerance, a vague undefined label for controlling visible street activities, assumes making arrests for misdemeanors reduces more serious crime. It uses law tactically. (It has been repeatedly challenged by civil libertarians and defended by Kelling and Coles, 1997: 229–34.) 'Zero tolerance' crime-control tactics, encouraged and supported by Bratton (Kelling and Coles, 1997: 146; Bratton with Knobler, 1998), were fused with a rhetorical strategy called 'taking back the streets,' a war-tinged metaphor following the 'broken windows' theory (Kelling and Coles, 1997: 14–16). The code word, 'zero tolerance' was combined with another slang term, 'in your face policing,' which meant the intrusive questioning of people on the street for such serious crimes as having an open beer on a summer night (Bratton with Knobler, 1998: 229). Bratton did not use this term, and with former Deputy Commissioner Maple (1999a), has consistently urged civility and police accountability without mentioning specifics of how this might be accomplished.

Several important administrative changes were made in the NYPD. According to Kelling and Coles, Bratton '... implemented many of the techniques conceived by aggressive CEOs ... to strategically reposition their organizations' (1997: 144). Bratton's 'reengineering' (Hammer and Champy, 1993), including reassigning or forcing to resign most of the top command staff (Silverman, 1999: 94–5); using focus groups to develop written strategy papers (Bratton with Knobler, 1998: 224–39; Silverman, 1999: 205); marketing the strategies to the Department and the media (Bratton with Knobler, 1998: 280). The media and trade publications emphasized the personal, effective direction of Bratton with the sub-text of

'... greater accountability to the community and involvement in solving local problems' (Kelling and Coles, 1997: 145). This accountability theme, echoed in 'op ed' pieces in the *New York Times* (23 February 2000a, 15 June 2000b) directed to his successors, included, unfortunately, no content, detail, or explicit mechanisms.

Field stops and arrests were to include questioning concerning guns and crime-information. Information was to be shared between patrol officers and investigators. Crime mapping and weekly morning 'Compstat' meetings were used to motivate precinct captains to respond to recent trends in official crime figures, disorder, and current problems. These meetings, and related PIM units (pattern identification modules or crime packages), were orchestrated by Jack Maple, former transit officer, now Deputy Commissioner. Maple used crime maps to ensure that the stated principles of the Department, crime intelligence, rapid deployment of officers, effective tactics, and 'relentless' follow-through and assessment, were operative.

It is interesting to note in this context that these emphases, strategies, and buzz-word positioning, suggest that basic police work was not being done at this time—questioning suspects about guns, crimes, and their colleagues' activities, checking for outstanding warrants, entering stops into databases, and being 'arrest'-oriented.

The force was increased by 12,000 officers to over 38,000, including the Transit and Housing Police now merged into the NYPD, an additional 6000 civilians, and now enjoyed an operating budget of some \$2.3 billion. It now stands at 41,000 plus (December 2000). The increase in officers in the Street Crimes Unit began at this time: from 138 in 1996 to the present 400 officers, yielding an increase in stops from more than 18,000 to more than 27,000 with no increase in arrests and only 2 per cent of gun stops yielding guns (Toobin, 2000). As a result of these additions to the force, Bratton and top command could assign officers to identified (mapped) clusters of incidents or 'hot spots.' It also appears that officers were urged to make misdemeanor arrests as a way of intelligence gathering, broadening their concerns beyond the immediate encounter.

*A short epiphany* After about two years in office, Bratton declared crime reductions for 1995 in all categories on average of 40 per cent plus (homicides were down 56 per cent). The evidence of crime's decline was official data gathered and summarized by precinct sergeants, and entered into computers by headquarters staff from discs delivered weekly from the precincts. Bratton, in a working paper for an NIJ conference (1995), argued that criminologists who claimed crime could not be controlled were wrong (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990).<sup>3</sup> This claim was later echoed by others (Kelling and Coles, 1997; Silverman, 1998).<sup>4</sup> Bratton claimed that policing produced or caused these crime reductions, dismissing changes in demography, youth crime, and changes in crack use and its effect on crime rates (especially homicide), and emphasizing instead police efforts in gun control, serving warrants, and making arrests. He explained his common-



sense theorizing, the posited link between misdemeanor arrests and crime:

... for the year-to-date ending November 12 [1995], the total number of arrests for all criminal offenses in New York City—felonies and misdemeanors—increased 26.73 per cent over 1993 levels for the comparable period. Arrests for the combined index crimes—all felonies—increased 4.27 per cent. The disparity in these data demonstrate the department's shift from a limiting emphasis on the traditionally 'serious' index offenses committed by adults and toward the strategic enforcement of appropriate and applicable laws, and they provide evidence of the efficacy of the 'broken windows' theory. By increasing enforcement (as measured through arrests) for misdemeanor quality-of-life offenses among adults and young people, we were able to achieve enormous reductions in felonies, particularly index crimes.  
(Bratton, 1995)

At this point, in the first stage of the drama, the hero, the Commissioner and his loyal and passionate followers, has confronted the rather awesome and mysterious foe, crime, and battles it ferociously to exhaustion. The salience of the hero, the absence of alternative explanations, and the audiences' desire for a 'victory,' suppresses debate about supernumerary heroes, less challenging villains, or more mundane causes of crime's defeat. It also obscures unjust distribution of stops and frisks, the resultant human error, pathos, and misery and alternative consequences of police 'crack-downs' (see Fagan and Davies, 2001 on stops and arrests). This modern hero, unlike a medieval knight, has rational theory rather than God on his side.

A *liminal* period of positive media response with reservations followed the brief epiphany. Following this announcement of the success of the 'war on crime' (based on 1995 figures), the early winter of 1996 was a quiet and happy transitional period. Official figures continued to show crime decreases through 1998. News featuring crime control in New York City filled major newspapers, such as the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, and, in due time, journals of opinion such as the (London) *Times Literary Supplement* (Siegel, 1997); the *New York Review of Books* (Lardner, 1997b), and the *New Yorker* magazine (Gladwell, 1996).<sup>5</sup> Bratton was pictured on the cover of both *Time* and *Newsweek* in early January 1996. Articles in the national and New York City press documented what journalists viewed as the amazing downward spiral of crime. One article called it a 'miracle' (Lardner, 1997b) without attributing a cause directly, but speculating that Bratton's leadership and tactics were fundamental. The crime decline was generally seen by the media and the social scientists quoted as real and a direct effect of Bratton's policies. The media blitz continued from 1996 through 1998 and even late 1999 when crime figures were again released. Lardner later (1998) wrote a sycophantic review of Bratton's book for the *New York Times*.

*Foreshadowing* In April 1996, Bratton resigned amid rumors that he had challenged Guiliani's authority and media hegemony, and was now a political threat. Bratton's biography describes disagreement with the Mayor, especially over his failed 'Juggernaut campaign,' maneuvers designed to sweep the streets clean, take back the neighborhoods, and arrest drug sellers (Bratton with Knobler, 1998: 272–3). One journalist, on the basis of interviews with both of the two contestants, concluded that they had struggled over the control of the police (Klein, 1997). Howard Safir, former Fire Commissioner, was appointed Commissioner over Bratton's choice, John Timoney (Timoney was appointed Police Commissioner of Philadelphia in February 1998). In September 2000 Safir was succeeded by Bernard Kerik.

### *The continuing crisis*

*The mood of the media is labile* Anticipating a change in the mood and attention of the media is risky because their aim to entertain and inform has few principled limits. At one moment, a writer was reviewing ecstatically the Kelling-Coles book and a few days later the Louima incident burst across the front pages of the *New York Times*. James Lardner wrote:

... what has been surprising is the relatively benign state of police–community relations ... New York has been through nothing to compare with, say, the Rodney King incident ... citizen complaints against the police ... were down 21 percent through the first five months of 1997, while violent crime continued to fall.

(1997b: 56)

A crisis in the crime control epic arose from several sources. It was in part stimulated by Bratton's resignation, inability to ensure succession to leadership of his clique, and in part by public events that suggested problems with aggressive and violent police street tactics. Much of the crime suppression effort involved massive personnel, heavy questioning, and use of a network of civil regulations and criminal law to harass targeted areas and groups (Bratton with Knobler, 1998: 223–39). Aggressive street tactics focused and do focus police attention on visible minorities in high crime areas (New York State Attorney General's Report, 1998) who are believed to be the source of crime. Arrests for misdemeanors and stops rose during the 1994–6 period (Toobin, 2000), and these were disproportionately of minorities.

*The media raise questions* In part, the crisis arose because the media raised questions in their constant search for idols, producing celebrities and elevating them only to seek their destruction. Clearly, the media distort other realities based on research (such as fear and risk, crime events, and the meaning of crime), and create, sustain, and make the news rather than 'report it' (Surette, 1992; Mitroff and Bennis, 1993; Fallows, 1996). Larry

Reibstein reports in *Newsweek* (2 June 1997) a 50 per cent rise in complaints to the Citizen Review Board since 1995, and in September of the same year (7 September) reported a 62 per cent rise in complaints in the same time period. The media signaled a querulous mood in August 1997 when they featured a story about an Irish priest who was assaulted in the subway. Giuliani appeared with him on television, gave him a Yankees cap, and was shown on TV hearing the Father's homily: he forgave those who had slashed his face and robbed him.

Claims paid by the City, *Time* (25 August 1997) revealed, increased from 1992 to 1996 from \$13.5 to \$32 million. Since 1994, the Civilian Review Board had received over 20,000 complaints, 90 per cent of them from minorities. While these claims and complaints were a product of police actions, prior to and including Bratton's term, they tarnished in retrospect the Commissioner's crime control imagery.

*More media response* In late August 1997, the first major event punctuating a crisis appeared. This was the arrest, beating, and torturing of Abner Louima, a black Haitian immigrant, in a precinct after he was arrested outside a Brooklyn nightclub. The *New York Times* reported (16 August 1997) as front page news that Louima had been sodomized by two police officers using the wooden handle of a toilet plunger. He was hospitalized with a damaged colon, lost front teeth, and other injuries.

The media treated this event in the context of the crime control metaphor, suggesting that the beating was represented as an exchange—'the darker side of the zero tolerance doctrine' (*Newsweek*, 1 September 1997). Justin Volpe, an officer convicted with two others of the crime, reportedly said as he raped the prisoner: 'This is Giuliani time, not Dinkins time.'

Treating the crime decline and in events following, journalists orchestrated and played up the story line of police crime control via heroic individual actions (Lardner, 1997a, 1997b), arrests made via good police work, and dramatized police command and control leadership (Anderson, 1997). No one stepped forward, academic or other, to claim the drop in crime was too complex to explain, too subtle and multifaceted to understand, or even produced by forces beyond police control. No one suggested that such tactics had a cost to the city's residents.

### *Response and redress*

The beating of Abner Louima, the publication of the rise in complaints and in settlements, and the Mayor's continued emphasis on 'zero tolerance' and 'quality of life issues,' combined to stimulate a new series of events. These responses were designed to encourage redress and reintegration. Demonstrations and marches to City Hall occurred on 30 March 1997 and in April 1999, and later in December 1999 (protesting Giuliani's policy of arresting the homeless if they refuse to move on. The Mayor named a commission to study police violence (*New York Times*, 21 August 1999) and the Federal Government investigated the Louima case as a possible

violation of civil rights (*New York Times*, 6 March 1999). The results of these investigations have not been made public (as of December 2000).

While the issue of crime control quieted and the City enjoyed good publicity, rising tourism, and property values, three officers were tried and convicted of assaulting Louima (March 1999) and were sentenced in May 1999.

Public opinion outside New York remained favourable. 'Compstat' meetings, conferences that emphasized accountability for crime, became known worldwide and diffused to other US cities such as Boston and New Orleans (the NYPD saw 250 visitors from 25 countries during 1996–7 according to Eli Silverman, 1997b). Adapted by Jack Maple while consulting to the New Orleans department, Compstat-like deployment was used to 'Go get the scumbags' (*Newsweek*, 20 October 1997). The Federal COPS Agency in 1999 funded a study of the diffusion and impact of Compstat. NIJ now features a Crime Mapping Center.

### *Conciliation or schism*

After the crisis and response, new rallying points arose, efforts to restore the status of the police or, on the other hand, to examine the costs of crime control efforts. Some two years after the Louima beating, other media-amplified events added to the schism. The NYPD police shot an unarmed black man, Patrick Descombe, in 1998. This shooting was followed by another with even greater consequence. An unarmed African immigrant street peddler, Adalo Diallo, was shot by officers on 4 February 1999. An international media-driven event exploded. Diallo was shot by four officers who fired 41 bullets, hitting him with 19. Several penetrated his shoes as he lay, dead. A garish cartoon cover of the *New Yorker* (8 March 1999) showed a smiling police officer with a gun standing before a shooting gallery with the sign '41 shots for 5 cents.' The *New York Times* (28 February 1999) featured a story about immigrants' rising fear of the NYPD. The Descombe shooting, the beating of Louima, and shooting of Diallo, like the savaging of Rodney King, became key media events representing an emerging organizational and political schism now appearing between 'the people' and 'the police.'<sup>6</sup> All four officers charged in the Diallo case were found innocent of all counts in a jury trial (*New York Times*, 26 February 2000), with criminologist and former NYPD officer, James Fyfe, defending the officers' decision as being within standard procedures.

In this stage, the imagery of crime control orchestrated by a hero was juxtaposed to the imagery of violence and distress, relying on the media's massive interests in the bizarre, the rare, and the bloody. Some signs indicate continuing amelioration of urban stress. Official crime figures were down in all UCR categories in most big cities and throughout the USA in the 1990s, and continued to decline through 1999 (*New York Times*, 5 November 1999). The apparent police efficacy in crime control, as with

intractable social problems, is soon swallowed by other news and new fears. The underlying tensions in the city between the white working class and immigrant poor and people of color remained and were symbolized by the public violence during the dramatic series of events.

### Spectacle politics

In many respects, the drama of crime control is an example of spectacle politics, as most people in New York City, and certainly those outside of it, only experienced crime via television or news reports. A spectacle is a scene to be viewed, felt, and appreciated, rather than to be understood or explained (Edelman, 1988). This particular drama of crime control was created in part by the media, stimulated by public rhetoric concerning controlling 'disorder,' 'homelessness,' 'squeegee men,' and the mentally ill (Kelling and Coles, 1997: Introduction), and managed by creative use of these ideas by Giuliani and Bratton. These standard police street tactics were, and are, supported by improved intelligence information and deployment. They served, among other things to suppress the powerless and reduce visible deviance, increase complaints and misdemeanor arrests, and play on middle-class citizens' fears of crime and disorder in central urban areas. This aesthetic politics creates a morality play, a play orchestrated later by Mayor Giuliani, in which good and evil are bifurcated, evil is opposed, confronted and hunted, and the 'good' is victorious. Inevitably, the power and appeal of such dramas are, that like fairy tales, they resonate with basic concerns—fear, security, change, 'the other,' and with structural features of life that recycle, reappear, change form and transmogrify, only to remerge. A cycle of challenge and response, rise and fall, salvation and redemption, control and chaos is repeated. But unlike citizens in previous centuries who were entertained by tales and distant echoes of exciting events, we are now confronted within minutes of worldwide news, ritualized and distant, the basis for yet another spectacle.

### *The media role*

The media had no small part in sustaining the reality of, and then shifting perspective to, examining the downside costs of crime reduction. In the winter of 1996, they assumed that the reductions were real, not artifactual, and an undiminished good for the city. In 1997, they contrasted it with rising complaints and the beating of Louima, suggesting that the good, the reported drop in crimes known to the police, and the evil, violence and excess, were a 'trade-off' (*Newsweek*, 1 September 1997). Although the Louima incident was not filmed and shown worldwide as was the Rodney King beating, it has image-making power precisely because of the myth of command and control and the metaphor of crime control had been previously accepted and amplified by the media, and used to create a positive image of the NYPD. In the eyes of the media, the driving force in

the drama was 'crime' defined by the police, and visible public or street crime targeted by quick shifts of police personnel, and homicide. The costs to social integration of massive militaristic campaigns, the complexity of and differences between types of crime, even 'violent' crime, were not discussed by the media or experts questioned and quoted. It may have reduced fear of crime and moral panic.<sup>7</sup>

This cyclical drama was not merely the product of a sophisticated, media-wise organization and public acceptance. Experts contributed heavily and repeatedly to the drama at every point: as teachers (at the Kennedy School) of several of the NYPD administrators; as consultants (to the NYPD); as reassuring pundits eager to assume the facts of a 'decline in crime' and offer explanations; and as media-quoted celebrities.

### *Experts as celebrities*

An essential part of modern politics is the manipulation of imagery and the appearance of competence. Celebrities substitute for those with substance and enduring knowledge. Experts' analyses of the causes of the drop in crime were various. Some intellectuals said they were wary of conclusions—James Q. Wilson (Butterfield, 19 August 1997) was the only expert willing from the distance of Los Angeles to say that crime varies. He noted homicides dropped 37 per cent in Los Angeles in a time of organizational stress and reorganization. A sociologist, Richard Moran (quoted in Lardner, 1997a), called Bratton 'lucky,' and the beneficiary of drops in the UCR nationally. All other experts quoted (others may have been asked) accepted the rhetoric of police impact as primary, although they added slight nuances (Dilulio, quoted in the *New York Times*, 19 January 1997). Gladwell (1996—see note 5), for example, quoting criminologists Jeff Fagan (see Fagan et al., 1998) and Alfred Blumstein, suggests that changes in drug markets and perhaps reduced crack cocaine use, demographic shifts (fewer young between 18 and 25), high rates of mortality (including many violent deaths) among urban male cohorts (those most likely to be arrested for crimes), produced a 'tipping point' where high rates began to fall 'naturally.' Two writers (Anderson, 1997; Lardner, 1997a) cited incapacitation as a factor. New York State leads the nation in per capita population in prison, 70 per cent of these (70,000) come from New York City. The incarceration rate nationally quadrupled between 1970 and 1995 (Lardner, 1997). One social scientist (Jackall, 1997: 256–7), after almost three years of fieldwork with the police in Washington Heights, felt that the combination of private security patrols in parks, and sweeping the streets of homeless and 'panhandlers,' may have had a civilizing influence in the subways and parks. Silverman (1999: 6–19) argues that the police were the primary cause of reduced crime, and he dismisses other hypotheses as to cause. In due course, more balanced academic assessments were published (Blumstein and Jacobs, 2000; Fagan and Davies, 2001).

### *The audiences*

Consider now the audiences for these political performances. The hopeful belief in the possibility of crime control, a police theme since J. Edgar Hoover's day, and a constant, variable but enduring, public concern, gives cultural support to 'crime-fighting' achievements. This hope was sustained by the media and emphasized by Bratton while in office. He renewed commitment to crime control (down-played under Commissioner Brown). Kelling and Coles (1997), citing no evidence, claimed that the public was disenchanted with the criminal justice system (p. 254); 911 policing had failed (pp. 89–102); the public demanded that disorder be controlled (p. 36); and people wanted intervention. While the authors caution against supporting a 'siege mentality of the police' (p. 97), and advocate interpersonal skills, this is muted harmony to the 'take back the streets' martial melody. While their views may differ from the published versions, the ideas have been used to rationalize and justify the zero tolerance policies, and they have published no retractions, regrets, or rethinking of their advocacy.

Bratton's performances played to external audiences but also were designed to support officers in the NYPD. He eschewed personal claim for success, pointing to 'team work' (Bratton with Knobler, 1998: 307–9). He did not personally claim responsibility, rather emphasizing his role as leader and motivator (Bratton, 1995). The crime focus played well with the internal audience, the 'troops,' because for several reasons he focused on crime control: making arrests, seizing guns; valuing stops and questioning; rewarding officers with 9mm guns, uniforms, and cars (as he had done in the Transit Police); and mounting periodic wars on drug dealing areas. Patrol officers, it can be assumed, were enthusiastic about the tactics and focus because they were consistent with their subcultural ideology about how police work should be done. Bratton's overall themes were consistent with traditional policing. A former Chief of San Jose California, a Harvard Ph.D. and former NYPD officer, said: 'They are told they are soldiers in a war . . . in a war, you get atrocities, and that's what this case [Louima] appears to be' (*Time*, 25 August 1997: 38). The pre-emptive and premonitory tactics used in the subways and on the streets against the homeless, the mentally ill, and disorderly (often meaning drunk), the practice associated with the 'broken windows' policy advanced by Kelling and Coles (1997: Chs 4 and 6), and exemplary of NYPD tactics under Bratton, are consistent with police ideology. They have complained that they are 'handcuffed,' by the Miranda warning and the exclusionary rule and that, if 'released,' they can and will control crime. The external audience on the other hand, reached through the media, especially the *New York Times*, also received special attention (Bratton with Knobler, 1998: Ch. 1). His polished approach to the media contrasted with Guiliani's rather abrasive style, and made him a

high-profile player in both high (City governance) and low politics (NYPD governance and the internal politics therein).

### **Tensions and dynamics**

There are additional alternative readings of the drama of crime control in the NYPD. These reveal additional tensions and uncertainties, which the crime suppression drama has obscured. These are the counterpoints, or backstage events, that stand in dialectical relationship to events occupying front stage. They await their moment to change places, transform the leading events, and relegate the once key figures in the drama to secondary or supporting status.

### *Theorizing the decline*

Doubtless, the crime control claims by the NYPD (and Kelling and Coles, 1997: 51–56), with media validation, pointed to some valuable changes in the NYPD. Bratton did reorganize and decentralize command to captains at the precinct level. He urged and sanctioned drug arrests by precinct officers (previously restricted to central drug officers). This meant a record number of drug arrests: over 900,000 in the last 10 years (Egan, 19 September 1999). On the other hand, training was unchanged for new recruits and not added for serving officers. No fundamental attention was given to crime prevention, crime causation, or community consultation in training. Given that Commissioner Bratton held office for less than two years, it is difficult to imagine how he reinvented and fundamentally changed the social organization, occupational patrol culture of the NYPD, and/or the habits and practices of offenders and victims in one of the world's largest cities. His policies mirrored the crime-control rhetoric of patrol officers in the city.

These events evidence an orchestrated performance, a drama, a media-amplified spectacle. It was argued that the decline in crime rested on police crime-suppression tactics. Perhaps correctly the police might claim that they do not require an explanation if 'it works.' It matters little to most police that a drop in crime figures, a rise in clearances, or changes disorder result, as long as they can attribute it to their tactics and have media coverage supporting their efforts. Crime-attack and zero tolerance require no theory, fit the conventional street officers' ideology, produce visible scenes and intrusive encounters in public places, and target the weakest and least politically powerful groups for attention.

Although saturation patrol, rapid deployment to street incidents and clusters might temporarily reduce street crimes, the ways in which these assorted patrol tactics alter rates (or absolute numbers) of homicides, rapes, or assault is mysterious. These crimes are insensitive to active police intervention. Street policing has little or no effect on the great bulk of crime, auto thefts and burglaries of cars and dwellings. Tactics have



displacement effects, as well as creating shifts in the crime committed by miscreants. Nevertheless, inexplicable fluctuations of specific crimes within the overall rate remain (Young, 1991; Coleman and Moynihan, 1996; Manning, 1997 [1977]: Ch. 7). One hypothesis is that many petty offenders are also felons, have outstanding warrants for their arrest, and that misdemeanor arrests have an incapacitation effect. This could be tested.

The role of police actions in reducing recorded crime remains a cipher because, traditionally, increases in personnel, especially in the short term, tend to increase crimes known to the police (the official UCR definition). Crime suppression feeds into stereotypic notions that the major problem and source of crime is in the streets, committed by people of color and, less importantly, accomplished in corporate board rooms, banks, among politicians and fiduciary agents. Intervention—street sweeps, interrogation, stop and frisk, and saturation patrol, all of which were (and are) used by the NYPD—generally also increases arrests, complaints, and false or mistaken arrests. However, if police actions were aimed at visible social control, reducing scenes and areas worrying to the middle class, then arrests would be avoided, offenses downgraded, felonious drug cases reduced to misdemeanors, and guns seized. Besides criminal sanctions, other forms of control are used: those deemed unworthy being moved along or arrested on violations of civil codes, contempt, or other means; public police cooperating with private police in controlling areas; police working with other city agencies, housing, parks, and welfare, to bring pressure on marginal groups.

### *Evidentiary questions*

What independent evidence supports the crime suppression claim? Recall that the empirical support for the crime control thesis rests on police-created and police-processed data. This question is dealt with minimally by Bratton, Kelling and Coles, and Silverman, and internal research reports (Albrecht, 1998). The urge to sustain and nurture the notion that police can and do control crime was irresistible, in spite of uneven evidence, lack of a theory, and the obvious primacy of other factors (the economy, changes in the law, drug use, composition of social areas (Sampson, Morenoff, and Earls, 1999). What is clear is the increase in stops, arrests, disproportionately of the poor and people of color in poor areas (Fagan and Davies, 2001).

The issue of ‘cooking the books,’ or shaping crime statistics to suit the police, was mentioned by experts but not explored. Silverman notes in passing, that he does not believe that officials have distorted the crime figures any more recently than in the past (Silverman, 1998: 7). This begs the question of how much lying with statistics went on previously. In general, experts validated the high drama of a rare and significant event, and accepted and augmented the reality of a general decline in crime,

something which had not occurred since the 1960s. This gave crime an enduring, aesthetically shaped and palpable reality, and the media had a new 'trend' which in due course they returned to, claiming by late 2000 that all the success, the control of crime, public admiration, and the hard work of the now 41,000 officers was unappreciated, the police underpaid, and suffering low morale (*New York Times*, articles by Kevin Flynn, 25 November 2000b and 26 December 2000c).

Strangely, in connection with this crime blitz and self-promoted success, there has been no discussion of the unreliable nature of police figures.<sup>8</sup> These limitations have been well known by police, academics and journalists for at least 30 years. Consider these. First, the dark figure, which suggests that any changes in reported crime are perhaps doubled by unreported crime revealed in victim surveys, and that reporting figures vary by crime, race, class, and gender. An unreported dark figure of crime remains (Coleman and Moynihan, 1996). All the evidence for some 30 years in this country and in the UK, largely through victim surveys, is that only a small fraction of crime is reported (well under 50 per cent according to that which can be discovered by household surveys). Second, police processing itself, both of calls for service and detective work, shapes and refines citizens' classifications (Ericson, 1982; Nesbary, 1998). Third, once recorded, crime is processed differentially within the criminal justice system. A decreasing fraction is cleared in some fashion, and well under 25 per cent reaches the judicial process (Coleman and Moynihan, 1996). Fourth, it is known that the police-citizen encounter reflects police assessments strongly in non-felony crimes (Black, 1980). In general, there is a long history of police manipulation of statistics (McCleary et al., 1982; Meehan, 1992, 1993); untrustworthy and invalid official crime statistics (Seidman and Couzens, 1974; Chamlin and Kennedy, 1991); and varying accuracy or reporting and recording by category of crime and fluctuations produced by changes in categories or definitions.

Recent developments, including sanctioning a former member of the Transit Police for falsification, and FBI rejection of Philadelphia's crime statistics, do raise reasons to doubt the New York figures (*New York Times*, 3 August 1998). The police have developed traditional means of manipulating crime data officially by changing recording procedures, tightening definitions, reviewing arrests for quality, changing personnel and/or supervision practices in record-keeping and dispatching. They work unofficially through informal and unwritten tacit conventions about receiving information about crime, describing events, evidence and witnesses, identifying and labeling 'suspects,' 'evidence,' 'witnesses' and 'victims,' recording, transcribing, and editing crime reports. This effort is not directed toward increasing the official crime rate, but to reducing its level and seriousness. Evidence in the last three years from Philadelphia, the NYPD, and the Transit Police, as well as Boca Raton, Florida, suggests it is present and operational within policing (Kocieniewski, 28 February 1998, 3 August 1998). The NYPD Commissioner fired a high-ranking officer for

manipulating crime data in 1998. Sellin's (1938) rule still holds: the validity of the measure increases as it moves closer to the behavior described. When relying on police data, one relies on second-hand, processed, formatted, stylized material.

No evidence rules out police manipulation of the statistics, a common and well-studied practice. There is no agreed adequate method to compare the variations in official data among large cities. Internal traditions and tacit conventions in recording create subtle time-sensitive variations in crime records (*New York Times*, 3 August 1998). There is no independent validation of crime reports, no internal auditing, and periodic scandals suggest caution in comparing figures across years, across cities, and certainly for cross-national figures.

Let us assume that police data are one estimate of the true or real rate of crime. No independent evidence, from ethnographic studies, victim surveys, self-report studies, records checks or the like, has appeared that speaks to the process. No other measures of 'crime' such as arrests (defined administratively in local departments across the USA), clearances (a ratio of reported to those administratively closed by various means), indictments, convictions, or incidents reported or not to the police according to household or victim surveys are included in any analysis of the crime decline in New York City. To establish firmly the claim of crime reduction, even in official statistics, one would want checks on the validity and reliability of the data-gathering at very least and, ideally, independent sources of data.

## Conclusion

There is no systematic theory of the role of police in politics: it is implicit and derivative at best. Police studies focus still on 'street-level' issues. Dramaturgy's value as a perspective is that it reads off public performances as they bear on the politics of mass society, in part shaped by the media through which modern imagery of politics is shaped. Dramaturgical analysis is obligated to interweave events and forms, drama and audience, and explore the ongoing process of meaning-creation as well as micro-interactions or outcomes.

Dramaturgy illuminates the dilemmas of modern command and control. Dependent on the media, yet fearful of their sting, police cautiously adopted visual means of monitoring and defending their own conduct.

The drama of crime control in New York City was socially created and amplified by the media in co-operation with police. Alternative versions and readings are possible which sustain the tension and possibility of new, transformative dramas. This framework can illuminate the actions of police organizations in media-amplified spectacles. The present analysis does suggest the importance of crime as uncertainty. The rise and fall of crime as an issue informs us about the drama of policing because it connotes

uncertainty, a situation in which reassuring dramaturgical presentations are wanted and needed.

Cast as a drama, the story began around 1991, and is precipitating events still unfolding. As of late 2000, the cycle of bemoaning the police and their inefficacy, low morale and, ironically, their putative success, has begun yet again. A new transformative narrative is taking shape. The media-driven rise of the NYPD's reputation between 1994 and 1997, with emphasis on quality of life issues and zero tolerance of disorder and crime in the City, was significant during Giuliani's terms. This was a counterpoint to the Mollen Commission's (1994) criticisms and publicity about corruption in 1994. The crime decline had in fact begun some 10 years earlier for all major crimes in New York City, and the ensuing celebration occurred with little questioning of its causes. Bratton's leadership, his celebrity status and magazine-cover presence, were amplified not only by the media, but by selected quoted experts. Then came a response and a fall from grace. Questions then arose about police violence against citizens, complaints, suits and settlements arising, especially as a result of the August 1997–9 controversy over the torture of Louima, and the shooting of Diallo (Berry, 27 February 2000).

Combining the case with a natural history perspective illuminates the stages and cycles of the crime drama, a fact that is perhaps obvious in a long-term, elastic, easily manipulated statistic like crimes known to the police. Some 50 years of criminological research, which has cast severe doubt on the validity of official police-gathered crime statistics and the abiding dark figure, occupied no place in the public rhetoric about the recent well-celebrated demise of crime in New York City. This case study demonstrates the power of police strategies and tactics augmented by complicitous experts, used by the media and the police to create and maintain the appearance of police control of crime, solidify their mandate, increase public confidence, and claim credit for changes in the quality of life and tourism in the City.

Many contradictions result from subscribing to the command and control myth, and its corollary, that police control crime. The police capacity to eradicate or even shape crime over time and the complementary notion that top command control and direct officers on the ground to control the vast range of processes, acts, thoughts, and feelings that are called 'crime,' is a hopeful administrative fiction. Clearly, when one limits the denotations of the word 'crime' to that which is observed, reported, processed, validated, publicized, and made socially real by the police, the scope of the claim is radically reduced. All forms of crime attack (police tactics) have short-term effects, are very disruptive of neighborhoods (Rose and Clear, 1998), and produce unanticipated consequences as well as frequently displacing crime to other areas. They have sparked protests and demonstrations in the City. Once adopting a media-orientation, seeking short-term control of crime, recognizing media amplification of 'news' and changing audience tastes, police departments are vulnerable to crises

arising from the application of violence to disorder. They are also subject to the fluctuations in crime, especially homicide, that are outside direct police prevention or control.<sup>8</sup>

A drama requires a key theme or focal point; certainly, the object of dramaturgical concern here, a key theme in criminology, is 'crime.' The public and private faces of crime differ. Any discussion of crimes known is a discussion of marginalia in people's lives, but it plays well with the media and fires the public imagination. Crime is a context-based idea, not a thing; it is a representation, a word, a symbol, standing for many things, including vague fears, symbolic villains, threats and assailants, the unknown, generalized anxieties and hopes. It is associated in most people's minds with disorder, incivilities, and urban squalor. It can easily be used to arouse fearful images inconsistent with the banality and property-based nature of crime (auto theft and burglary constituting the vast majority of crimes).

Statistics are shaped, used, manipulated, and presented for social purposes. Theodore Porter suggests that social differentiation and conflict lead to 'trust in numbers' (1992, 1996), and their appearance and use reflect degrees of uncertainty in social relations. Crime statistics were used in this process to reassure and build trust rather than fear. The crime being dramatized in New York City is street crime—the visible delicts of the powerless. Crime is always selectively revealed: dramatized, represented, and articulated in public discourse. Taking back the streets, neighborhood by neighborhood, waging a war on the poor, sad and mad, in known public 'hot spots,' seizing guns and removing the homeless and beggars from the subways, are symbolic representations of one sort of disorder. They were effectively used to illustrate the virtues of middle-class public life style, and remnants of rigid working-class morality.

These illusions of controlling disorder deflect attention from the massive gains in wealth of the top 2 per cent in the USA, and the increasing marginality of the poor. It feeds into stereotypic notions that the major problem and source of crime is in the streets, committed by people of color and, less importantly, accomplished in corporate board rooms, banks, among politicians and fiduciary agents. It further elevates and sanctifies the law in the hands of a vigilant police under courageous leadership, a myth, as the primary resource in creating social order.

## Notes

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Robinson for her detailed critique of an earlier draft, the reviewers of this journal for guidance, and Piers Beirne for very helpful editorial suggestions.

1. My evidence consists of files drawn from newspapers, magazines, journal articles, especially from the *New York Times*; Silverman's fieldwork-based book (1999); and NYPD publications on Compstat (Safir, n.d., 1998). I do not claim this is a sample of articles. They are from elite New York and London publications employed as a crude index of media imagery, themes, and use of experts to sustain a 'story line,' or construction of an event or process (Sparks, 1992; Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994).

A set of papers raising some questions about the decline in crime, focused primarily on the 'zero tolerance' concept rather than the precise workings of it, has been published (Greene, 1999; Innes, 1999; Waldeck, 2000). The most powerful and persuasive work on the impacts of the policing style adapted by the NYPD in the Bratton years through perhaps late 2000, is Jeff Fagan's (Fagan et al., 1998; Fagan and Davies, 2001). The most powerful and consistent empirical evidence that contradicts the ideological spin and misleading claims of 'broken windows' is in the Chicago project headed by Robert Sampson. Based on empirical research in Chicago, it is imaginative, detailed, well analyzed and presented; it is masterful (Sampson, Morenoff and Raudenbusch, 1999, Sampson, Earls and Raudenbusch, 1997 and Sampson, Morenoff and Earls, 1999).

2. This case study illuminates the role of media and politics in policing while recognizing that New York City, like London and Washington, DC, is an exceptional city. It is a high-profile, politically focal, well-resourced city with the USA's largest police force. This should perhaps be treated as an opening and exploratory study, like Wagner-Pacifici's (1994), and its inferences subject to further testing, specification, and elaboration.
3. There is little research on the high politics and leadership decisions of police Chiefs (Hunt and Magneau, 1994; Chatterton and Whitehead, 1997, Mastrofski, forthcoming). Few departments' decision making in connection with community policing have been reported (Sheingold, 1984, 1991; Rosenbaum, 1996; Skogan and Harnett, 1996; Lyons, 1998).
4. Bratton was wrong: some criminologists, namely Lawrence Sherman, on the basis of experimental work in Milwaukee and Minneapolis (1984, 1990, 1991), and James Q. Wilson (1978) in theory, claimed that crime could be controlled. Research by Sherman, Weisburd and associates demonstrates the crime-specific efficacy of the crime-attack model for brief periods (Braga et al., 1999).
5. Reprints of Gladwell's article in the *New Yorker* praising Bratton were circulated by the National Institute of Justice, then headed by Jeremy Travis, a former Deputy Commissioner in the NYPD.
6. The moral drama in the NYPD modifies previous research on moral panics. In the NYPD case, a moral entrepreneur uses reduced crime statistics to emphasize quality of life and fear of crime, to increase public legitimacy, and gain acceptance of the police. It also speaks to the inadequacy of the

- labeling–deviancy amplification argument (Young, 1971), because control efforts have not produced more fear, even given media amplification.
7. Dramaturgically, the actual rate of crime is much less important in politics than the belief that crime is down, declining, and under control. This has been interpreted to mean that the city is reaching for a new and vibrant future, has a ‘new skyline’ (Silverman, 1999), was less crime-ridden, and more attractive to developers, tourists, and investors. Bratton, his media people, Kelling and Coles, the Kennedy School consultants to the NYPD, Silverman, and New York City-based journalists (Butterfield, Gladwell, Lardner, Alter, and *Time* and *Newsweek* editorialists) sustained the myth of command and control, and belief in crime control by direct police intervention.
  8. The number of homicides has risen in New York City (Butterfield, *New York Times*, 18 June 2000), by 6 per cent in 1999 and 8.5 per cent by June 2000. The same experts offered plausible ad hoc explanations for why crime had now risen. In an earlier article in the *New York Times*, Blumstein was quoted as saying that homicide is the best indicator of police ‘efficiency’ because ‘It is hard to hide bodies’ (3 August 1998). It should be noted that homicide is a rare crime, pursued as diligently as any by police and cleared at a markedly higher rate than other crimes, but is not the crime that creates the greatest workload, leading to pressures for efficiency, (burglary and auto theft are far greater workload factors), is defined differently across the country in practice, is not correlated with crime clearances generally, and is not based in any case on the presence or absence of a ‘dead body.’ Furthermore such commentary begs the question of what policing is about, what it should produce, and why. These continue to be moot points.

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