

Progress in American Policing? Reviewing the National Reviews

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NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL. 2004. *Fairness and Effectiveness in Policing: The Evidence*, ed. Wesley Skogan and Kathleen Frydl (Committee to Review Research on Police Policy and Practices and Committee on Law and Justice, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education). Washington, DC: National Academies Press. Pp. xvi + 432. \$49.95 cloth.

PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION ON LAW ENFORCEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE. 1967. *The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society*. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office. Pp. xii + 351. <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/42.pdf>.

WEISBURD, DAVID, AND ANTHONY A. BRAGA, eds. 2006. *Police Innovation: Contrasting Perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. xx + 388. \$37.99 paper.

This essay uses three publications—the 1967 President's Crime Commission report on police, The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society; the National Research Council's review of research on policing, Fairness and Effectiveness in Policing: The Evidence; and David Weisburd and Anthony A. Braga's edited collection, Police Innovation: Contrasting Perspectives—as reference points for reflecting on the extent to which the American police institution has moved toward a progressive and professional ideal over the past forty years. I argue that unless the scope and complexity of the policing function is more fully taken into account,

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and unless the causes of crime and disorder and the police role in controlling and preventing them are reconsidered, the ideals of police reform will remain elusive.

About every thirty or forty years American legal scholars, social scientists, and federal officials get intensely interested in the local police institution. Usually, this interest is sparked by widespread police misconduct of one sort or another: brutality, corruption, incompetence, or unfairness. In the past, this intense interest has typically resulted in the appointment of one or more blue-ribbon commissions that examine the nature and causes of police misconduct and recommend reforms.

In the 1890s, after American police forces had been in operation for about forty years, myriad local commissions were established to study police corruption and incompetence in local police forces and to prescribe reform (Fogelson 1977; Walker 1985). Four decades later, under the direction of renowned police scholar August Vollmer at the University of Chicago, the National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement completed its assessment of the state of American police and published its *Report on Police*, focusing much of its attention on egregious police investigative methods (National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement 1931). Four decades after that, in the midst or wake of widespread racial tension and urban rioting, no fewer than six national commissions examined various dimensions of problems in crime and justice, all giving careful attention to the police institution (President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice 1967; National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders 1968; National Advisory Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence 1969; President's Commission on Campus Unrest 1970; National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals 1973; American Bar Association 1973). The best known of these is the President's Commission report, *The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society*. In the intervening years between the national commissions, there have been innumerable local and state blue-ribbon commissions appointed to study problems with police and recommend reforms. In recent decades, these include the Christopher (1991) and Rampart (2000) Commissions in Los Angeles in the wake of brutality and corruption scandals; the Knapp (1972), Zucotti (1987), and Mollen (1994) Commissions in New York in the wake of corruption, brutality, and employment discrimination scandals in the New York City Police Department; and the Philadelphia Police Study Task Force (McKay 1987).

To be sure, blue-ribbon police commissions, whether at the national, state, or local level, are as much about political maneuvering as they are about research and policy making. They serve multiple purposes—conveying official disapproval of aspects of the police institution, buying elected officials

time and distance from the political fallout generated by the police institution's failures, documenting and describing the problems within the police institution, recommending reforms, and engaging the scholars and lawyers who typically staff these commissions in the process of improving policing. And, at least to some degree, police commission reports serve as blueprints leading to actual changes in the police institution.

A rather different sort of national commission report was published in 2004, one that is at least as important as the other reform reports. The National Research Council's¹ Committee to Review Research on Police Policy and Practices published its final report under the title *Fairness and Effectiveness in Policing: The Evidence* (National Research Council 2004). This exhaustive research review synthesizes the body of research on the police institution, the vast majority of which was published after 1970. Serving as a blueprint for police *research* rather than for police *reform*, this commission report does what prior national commission reports did not: it informs the seemingly perpetual debate over police reform with research-based knowledge. Although social science research cannot hope to answer all the important questions about police reform, it adds value to the policy debates, providing evidence as to the successes and limitations of police reform efforts. As such, this report serves as an important and useful landmark in the long pursuit of a truly democratic and professional American police institution.

Another important scholarly work is not the work product of a formal national police commission, but rather a coherent collection of essays by noted policing scholars describing and critiquing a set of contemporary strategic innovations in democratic policing. *Police Innovation: Contrasting Perspectives*, ably edited by David Weisburd and Anthony Braga (2006), serves as a portrait of the leading edges of the progressive policing movement of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

In anticipation of the next national commission on police—or whatever form the next national interest in the police institution might take—this essay uses the 1967 President's Commission report, the 2004 National Research Council's report, and Weisburd and Braga's 2006 volume on police innovation as points of reference for taking stock of the progress made in improving the American police institution and of the work yet to be done.

The 1967 President's Commission emphasized the need for improvement in the American police institution along several general lines. One of its major themes was to promote greater integration among the various government agencies that loosely comprise the criminal justice system. There was a general belief that if police, prosecutors, courts, and corrections would

1. The National Research Council is an arm of the National Academy of Sciences.

work more in concert rather than at disparate or cross purposes, the whole enterprise would be more successful in controlling crime.²

The Commission stressed that crime was a product of many large social forces beyond the control of the police and, moreover, that controlling serious crime was only one of a range of police objectives that also included order maintenance, protecting citizens (sometimes from themselves), and safeguarding civil liberties.

The Commission pointed out that the nature of the police function left tremendous amounts of discretionary authority in the hands of relatively undertrained, undereducated, undersupervised, underpaid, ill-equipped, and inadequately guided police officers, each of whom had wide latitude to do either great good or great harm to the communities being policed.

The Commission acknowledged the strained and distrustful relationship between police and minority-group citizens, namely, African Americans and Latinos (or Negroes, Puerto Ricans, and Mexican Americans in the lexicon of the day). Partly to remedy this situation, the Commission emphasized the need for police agencies to recruit and hire more minority officers, to establish formalized police-community relations programs, and to screen out and guard against racial bias among all officers.

The Commission called for more and better research and analysis to inform police operations and administration.

To this mix the Commission called for improved systems to control police corruption, improved forensic and communications technology, more scientific police management and administration, increased sharing and integration of services among police agencies, and stronger police standards at the state level. In sum, the President's Commission report was an ambitious agenda for substantial reform of the American police institution.

Partly in answer to the President's Commission report, the American police institution has changed tremendously in the four decades since its publication.³ It has changed at least as much as any other occupational sector of American society, which is no small feat for an occupation so renowned for its resistance to change and its fundamental orientation to preserving the status quo (both society's and its own). But in some deeper respect, little has changed: the same fundamental problems and conflicts remain embedded in the police function and how it is being carried out, problems and conflicts that still beg for better and more permanent resolution (Bittner 1990; Goldstein 1977, 1993).

2. The truly groundbreaking insights into the workings of the various agencies that comprise the criminal justice system, including the police, were the product of the American Bar Foundation's ten-year *Survey of Criminal Justice Administration*, published in several separate volumes (see LaFave 1965; Newman 1966; Tiffany, McIntyre, and Rotenberg 1967; McIntyre 1967; Miller 1969; Dawson 1969).

3. For additional reflections at various historical intervals on the impact of the 1967 President's Commission's report, see Walker (1978), Conley (1994), US Department of Justice (1998), and Feucht and Zedlewski (2007).

If one were to walk into a typical American police agency in 2008, look around and ask a few questions, one could not help but be struck by how much things have changed from what a similar visit would have revealed in 1968. The most obvious change would be in the faces and backgrounds of the police officers. There would be far more women: in 2008 about 11 percent of police officers in local police agencies were women, with female representation among the officer ranks exceeding 35 percent in at least a few agencies. In 1968 even the President's Commission failed to contemplate women as police officers. There would be greater racial and ethnic diversity among officers in 2008 than in 1968. The typical educational level of officers would be higher, the typical police recruit would be older, and police recruits would have a more diversified occupational history than their 1968 counterparts. But for all these changes in the composition of American police personnel and in their education and training, by 2004 the National Research Council could not conclude that these changes had fundamentally altered actual police practices (National Research Council 2004, 152–54).

How can it be that such a large effort to transform the demographics, education, training, and management of American police personnel, partly as a result of pressure brought to bear on police agencies through civil litigation and partly as a result of enlightened police leadership, cannot be demonstrably linked to improvements in police practices in the field? The National Research Council concedes that this finding may merely be a function of inadequate research. But it is more likely the case that no matter who is employed to do the policing job, and no matter how well they are educated and trained, so long as the police job remains so challenging, so much in conflict, and so wedded to fundamentally flawed strategies, police performance will remain wanting. Put another way, changing the players will not make much difference if the game remains the same.

Policing strategy in 2008 would look at least somewhat different from policing strategy in 1968. The strategy of the late 1960s was based almost exclusively on deterrence theory, whereby the police adopted methods designed to increase the certainty that criminal offenders would be apprehended, arrested, referred for prosecution, and ultimately punished. Police patrols were increasingly motorized to enhance the area they could cover and the speed with which officers could respond to citizen calls for assistance. Police detectives were organized to emphasize case follow-up, following up cases initiated by patrol officers, and accumulating the evidence necessary to present the case for prosecution.

This is not to say that all police business resulted in criminal arrests, but criminal arrest served as the ideal response to many crime and disorder incidents, with police officers otherwise handling incidents in highly improvised, informal, idiosyncratic, and undocumented ways. When police officers chose to resolve an incident by opting for an alternative to arrest—for example, by issuing an informal warning, referring the matter to another

agency for resolution, temporarily relocating the offender or complainant from the scene of the incident, administering summary corporal punishment, or doing nothing—often such alternatives were applied in a manner that eluded scrutiny by police supervisors, courts, mass media, and the public. The reasonable and the unreasonable, the effective and the ineffective, and the fair and the unfair actions taken by individual police officers as alternatives to arrest remained largely invisible because police officers worried that such alternatives were not authorized even if they were widely adopted or tolerated.

By the 2000s “community policing” had become the watchword of policing strategy, emphasizing closer and more personal working relationships between police officers and citizens, with the goal of bolstering public trust in the police and more directly addressing public order problems that undermine the public’s sense of safety and security. Police have been experimenting with, and in some places routinely engaging in (albeit in a rather weak form), problem-oriented policing, the once radical prescription for reforming the police institution put forth by Herman Goldstein in the late 1970s (Goldstein 1979). A variety of other major strategic innovations in American policing have also developed over the past four decades, many of them adopted to varying degrees in other Western democracies (Brogden and Nijhar 2005). In addition to (1) community policing and (2) problem-oriented policing can be added such strategies as (3) broken-windows policing, (4) pulling-levers policing, (5) hot-spots policing, (6) third-party policing, (7) Compstat (shorthand for “computerized statistics”), (8) evidence-based policing, all discussed by the contributors to the Weisburd and Braga volume, as well as (9) intelligence-led policing (a recent British innovation that is fast capturing the imagination of the American police (Ratcliffe 2008), and (10) zero tolerance policing—a variation or perhaps a distortion of broken-windows policing (Punch 2007).

Of these ten innovations, four of them—broken-windows policing, pulling-levers policing, hot-spots policing, and zero tolerance policing—essentially apply criminological theories to policing. Broken-windows policing is premised upon the thesis first articulated by James Q. Wilson and George Kelling in 1982 (Wilson and Kelling 1982) that posits that physical and social disorder, left unattended, leads to serious crime, and that for police to reduce serious crime, they must attend more directly and assertively to lower-level disorder. This thesis may or may not be true (the evidence remains incomplete notwithstanding the popularity of the idea), but it is a theory of crime and crime control. Zero tolerance policing, a concept that emerged from a narrow interpretation of broken-windows policing, posits that strict police enforcement of even minor transgressions of the law yields reductions in more serious criminality because offenders come to realize that their offending will not be tolerated, at least at certain times and places. Pulling-levers policing posits that, selectively and carefully applied, threats

of sanctions against particular offenders can effectively reduce the likelihood of their committing certain offenses, including serious crimes. Hot-spots policing posits that because crime and disorder tend to be geographically concentrated, police can effectively control them by targeting police resources—specifically the physical presence of police officers—at those geographic places.

In contrast, the other six innovations—community policing, problem-oriented policing, third-party policing, Compstat, evidence-based policing, and intelligence-led policing—are not based on criminological theories; rather, they are based on organizational or systems theories. They each posit that if police organize their institutional structures, processes, and data and communications networks in particular ways, they are more likely to achieve their objectives. Contrary to what is often written about them, none of these innovations are based on ideas about the causes of crime and disorder, nor do they specify precisely what interventions police ought to apply. Instead they prescribe how police should organize themselves in order to figure out what to do. Community policing speaks to the nature of the relationship between police and citizens, how police should communicate with citizens, the legitimate objectives of police, and the relative responsibilities of police and citizens toward a safe and orderly society. Problem-oriented policing calls for the police to think of their work as constituting complex problems that demand careful analysis and tailored interventions. Third-party policing asserts that police can be more effective if they persuade or compel those parties who control the underlying conditions under which crime and disorder flourish to alter those conditions such that crime and disorder are less likely to occur. Compstat is an approach in which police analyze crime data in real time and dedicate their resources quickly and persistently to the times and places where the data indicates crime and disorder is clustering. Evidence-based policing calls for police to employ strategies and tactics that have been demonstrated, through empirical testing, to be effective. Intelligence-led policing, the definition of which is still evolving, represents a synthesis of several of these other strategic innovations, emphasizing using police intelligence to set priorities, deploy resources, and account for apprehending offenders and reducing crime and disorder. As is apparent from even this cursory description of these six innovations, they complement and overlap one another more than they stand in opposition to one another.

For all the strategic innovation that has been introduced to the American police field over the past four decades, one can still reasonably conclude that conventional policing strategies—and the organizational systems, structures, and cultures that support them—predominate. The bulk of police personnel, those assigned to the patrol function, are principally committed to random patrol and responding to citizen requests for police service, applying quick and temporary remedies to each incident. Police

detectives remain principally committed to processing criminal cases and preparing them for prosecution. Even many of the specialized units in police agencies continue to emphasize intensive criminal law enforcement and patrol techniques.

One is reluctant to appear critical of these important strategic policing innovations because, at their best, they hold tremendous potential for addressing some fundamental challenges in the police institution and making the police fairer and more effective. However, a complete assessment of the American police institution must also account for the fact that the United States has achieved the highest incarceration rate in its history and one of the highest rates in the world (Ruth and Reitz 2003). While police alone do not determine who goes to prison and for how long, it is overwhelmingly the police who initiate the process through criminal arrest. If one of the goals of the 1967 President's Commission, and of similar reform proposals of that era, was to reduce the overreliance on the criminal justice system as a means of controlling crime and promoting public order, there is little to suggest that goal has been achieved. Local criminal court systems across the country are as inundated as ever with far more cases and offenders than they can properly process. Even while record numbers of offenders are being prosecuted, sentenced, and shipped off to prison, prosecutors are struggling to divert even greater numbers of cases and offenders from the system. In the face of all the efforts to expand, integrate, coordinate, and make more efficient the operations of the criminal justice system, it remains an overtaxed and marginally effective system.

If overburdened criminal justice resources were the only problem caused by the heavy use police make of criminal arrest, that problem would at least theoretically be easy to solve by adding more resources. But, of course, this is not the only problem. Use of arrest, prosecution, and incarceration over the past four decades as the preferred means for controlling crime and maintaining public order has not had an equal impact on all sectors of society. It has most profoundly affected the very minority communities whose strained relations with the police precipitated much of the national interest in the police in the 1960s. Very high percentages of minority males in many communities—as high as one third of those who are young adults—are under various forms of control of the criminal justice system (under arrest, awaiting trial, in jail or prison, or out on conditional release) (Ruth and Reitz 2003, 93). The impact has been so great that, regardless of where one lays the blame—on the individual offenders, on criminal groups, on minority communities, on the police, on legislators, on the courts, or on the majority electorate—one is compelled to acknowledge that it has altered the very social structure of many minority communities. The absence of stable, responsible, and income-producing males from these communities has fundamentally weakened the informal social control mechanisms that are essential to a healthy society.

Aside from its effect on the social structure of minority communities, heavy reliance by police on criminal arrest (and its civil law equivalents such as citations, which commonly convert into criminal arrest warrants when offenders do not appear in court or pay the fines) threatens the legitimacy of the police institution to the extent that large percentages of minority-group citizens perceive that they disproportionately bear the costs of society's response to crime and disorder. Moreover, the pressures and incentives that encourage heavy use of arrest also contribute to improper police conduct that manifests itself in detentions, searches, and arrests without adequate legal justification; in racial bias in enforcement practices (Fridell et al. 2001); in public humiliation of suspected offenders; in planting of evidence; in false testimony in police reports and in court (Slobogin 1996); and in tunnel vision and wrongful arrest (Findley and Scott 2006), to name but a few forms of police misconduct.

The reasons that police make criminal arrest the preponderant response to many crime and disorder problems are multiple. They are under great public pressure to do so, often including pressure from the leadership of minority communities (Kahan and Meares 1998), the public and elected officials generally perceive criminal law enforcement to be the central function of the police, arresting offenders is a function for which police are specially qualified and which they perceive as central to their mission and occupational identity (and which remains the most commonly rewarded form of police activity), the criminal justice system is under most circumstances better organized and more open to processing police business than are alternative systems (e.g., mental health, civil courts, administrative agencies, alternative dispute resolution), and police officers' discretion not to invoke the criminal process through arrest is still not universally and adequately acknowledged and structured. Indeed, criminal arrest is widely perceived as the logical default response of the police to all manner of crime and disorder problems. A special case must be made for *not* making a criminal arrest, not for making one.

If the American police have been so innovative in their strategies, how can it be that in 2009 the American police institution seems to be plagued with many of the same problems relating to the use, overuse, and misuse of the criminal law that it was in 1968? First, not all of the strategic innovations cited above equally encourage police to prefer alternatives to criminal arrest. Some of them—community policing, problem-oriented policing, and third-party policing in particular—certainly do. But some of these strategic innovations, either conceptually or as applied by police, actually encourage heavy reliance on criminal arrest as the means for controlling crime and disorder. Broken-windows policing, pulling-levers policing, hot-spots policing, Compstat, and to some degree intelligence-led policing all reinforce the notion that crime and disorder can best be controlled through heavy police presence, or intensive or targeted enforcement of the

criminal law. In short, these innovations are heavily premised upon deterrence theory and are deemed innovative not because they depart from conventional criminological theory but because they apply deterrence theory in arguably more focused and refined ways.

Second, these strategic innovations have not been adopted uniformly across the country. Whereas some police agencies might gravitate toward strategies that de-emphasize criminal arrest as the preferred response to crime and disorder, others might purposely gravitate toward those that promote even greater reliance on criminal law enforcement. For example, a great many police leaders were drawn to the perceived successes of the New York City Police Department in the 1990s in reducing reported crime rates, attributing most of that success to the adoption of a zero tolerance strategy. Whatever effect this emulation might have had on local reported crime rates, where adopted it most certainly increased the volume of cases being processed through the criminal justice system. And, of course, some police agencies made no effort whatsoever to adopt any strategic innovations but just continued on with conventional strategies.

At the core of the persistent problems in American policing, from corruption to excessive use of force to ineffective strategy, is the nearly unshakeable and blind faith that citizens and police alike have in deterrence as the basis for how police should seek to achieve their objectives. Deterrence theory is what forms much of the rationale for preventive police patrol (and its methods such as rapid response to calls, stop-and-frisk, vehicle searches, proactive traffic enforcement), for follow-up criminal investigations (and its methods such as suspect interrogation, collection and analysis of forensic evidence, undercover surveillance), and for special operations (and its methods such as sting operations, crackdown enforcement, buy-and-bust drug enforcement). Without question, deterrence theory has power, relevance, and validity as it relates to police work, but not to the degree commonly believed, not necessarily in the way in which it is carried out, and not to the exclusion of other crime control theories (Kennedy 2008).

For example, police can pursue and apprehend car thieves, and the courts can punish them when convicted, but the return on the investment in apprehension and punishment is far less than what can be achieved by designing and manufacturing cars that are more difficult or otherwise less attractive to steal (Laycock 2005). Merchants have far greater capacity to prevent and control retail and employee theft through marketing and inventory control practices than can ever be achieved by apprehending and prosecuting shoplifters and thieving employees (Masuda 1997). Greater gains in controlling the problems attendant to methamphetamine production, distribution, and use can be made by improving regulatory controls over the drug's ingredients than can be made by apprehension of methamphetamine offenders (Scott and Dedel 2006). And on and on.

The more closely one examines the multitude of crime and disorder problems that police commonly confront, the more one comes to appreciate the difficult and almost untenable position police are in. They are asked to try to control problems—largely through use of the criminal law—that are caused or exacerbated by conditions over which they have relatively little control.

The 1967 President's Commission report gave a nod to recognizing the difficulty of policing amid deep-rooted social problems. It pointed out that many of the "root causes" of crime such as poverty, racial tension, restless youth, family breakdown, and urban decay are neither created nor controlled by police. The implication, however, was that until these root causes were remediated by other sectors of society, police would be relatively powerless to control crime. This fostered the belief among criminologists and police that the police role was to limit the worst damage and to deal as best they could with the consequences of structural social problems. At a minimum, police were implored not to make matters worse through their own misconduct.

As I have noted, the criminological theory most compatible with the view I have just described is deterrence theory. But at least one branch of criminology, known as environmental criminology, has begun to alter the way in which police can understand crime and disorder and, consequently, their role in controlling it. At its core, environmental criminology posits that there is much that can be done to alter the opportunity structure of crime and disorder through changes in the physical and social environment in which it occurs (Felson 2006).

The new criminology reinforces the view of the 1967 President's Commission, that police alone do not control the social conditions that drive crime and disorder. But more importantly, it creates a clear role for police to play in helping to alter the opportunity structure, even if sometimes that role is to press other sectors of society to change conditions that they control (Scott 2005). For example, police have enjoyed some success in controlling retail drug markets and the crime problems attendant to them through a variety of measures intended to alter their support structure, such as poorly designed and maintained apartment complexes, lax tenant screening and lease enforcement, sales of drug paraphernalia, road design that facilitates drive-through drug transactions, dealers' access to telephones, etc. (Sampson 2003; Harocopos and Hough 2005). Police have also persuaded or compelled shop owners to adopt business practices that discourage robbery (Altizio and York 2007) and gas station owners to do likewise to discourage gasoline theft. Indeed, there is growing evidence that where police (or others with responsibility for crime prevention and control) develop a firm and particular understanding of the causes and contributing factors underlying discrete crime and disorder problems, and adopt specific measures to alter those conditions, they can more effectively prevent and control those problems (National

Research Council 2004; Sherman et al. 1997). In this respect, the 1967 President's Commission was wrong in asserting that the mission of police is not to address the causes of crime but merely to deal with them as they occur and to try to deter them.

Although the Commission's call to improve the interrelationships among police, prosecutors, courts, and corrections was important and necessary, ultimately it has proven insufficient. It should by now be apparent that no matter how smoothly the criminal justice system operates, it will be inadequate to the task of controlling crime and disorder. At a minimum, it is necessary to acknowledge that for police to be effective in achieving their objectives, they must function efficiently and effectively not just within the criminal justice system, but within the many other systems that help establish and maintain order in society. These other systems include public health systems (particularly as they relate to substance abuse treatment and violence prevention), mental health systems, school systems, informal dispute resolution systems, administrative regulatory systems, land use planning systems, product design systems, environmental protection systems, traffic planning and engineering systems, youth recreation systems, community action systems, and the like. The police should not be conceived as being merely the front end of the criminal justice system, funneling in large volumes of cases to be processed, but rather as a unique government agency that functions in the interstices among many formal and informal social systems.

Even the manner in which police and prosecutors use the criminal justice system, important as that system will always be to their missions, merits deeper reconsideration. Over the past four decades, the criminal courts have discovered that they have greater capacity to mete out more tailored and creative forms of punishment, often mixed with rehabilitative measures. Experiments in community courts, community prosecution, therapeutic justice, restorative justice, and innovative conditional release have demonstrated promise to be both more effective and fair than conventional fines and incarceration.

One can only speculate, but hopefully imagine, what the American crime problem, and consequently the American police institution, might be like if mental health and drug and alcohol treatment services were more available, if commercial products were designed to be more secure, if buildings and public spaces were designed to discourage crime and promote safety and security, if schools more effectively managed the behavior of students during and after school hours (at least until parents returned home), if commercial and residential rental properties were managed in ways that discouraged crime and disorder, if the commercial enterprises that operate via the Internet were better regulated, if child protective services were better resourced, if community groups were more self reliant and capable at addressing local problems, and so on. Police depend heavily on the proper functioning of these and other systems to carry out their mission, and where these systems

fail, police are often summoned into the breach. But, absent a sophisticated understanding of how all these systems work and absent a willingness on the part of these other systems to pay attention to the problems their failures create for the police and society, the introduction of police into many situations, relying predominantly on the relatively crude tools of criminal law enforcement and coercion, often proves ineffective, or worse, exacerbates the situation.

With the 1967 President's Commission report serving as the most prominent call to action of its era, the 2004 National Research Council's report serving as the most prominent progress report of this era, and Weisburd and Braga's volume serving as a scholarly characterization of what police are presently doing to reform their own institution, there is much to celebrate about the great strides made in improving the American police institution, but implicit in these progress reports is the agenda for the next era of police reform. And this time, it's not just the police that need to reform in order to improve American policing.

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