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INNOVATIONS IN POLICING: A REVIEW OF *THE NEW BLUE LINE*

Norval Morris*

THE NEW BLUE LINE: POLICE INNOVATION IN SIX AMERICAN CITIES. By Jerome H. Skolnick and David H. Bayley. New York: The Free Press. 1986. Pp. ix, 246. \$18.95.

Don't expect a balanced, critical review. Fine books on policing are too rare for cautious criticism. For some weeks now I have been infringing canons of copyright, pressing pirated copies of Skolnick and Bayley's book into the hands (and, I hope, the minds) of my colleagues on the Chicago Police Board and the top brass of the Chicago Police. Let Skolnick and Bayley sue; the matter is too important for legal niceties.

Why the enthusiasm? If the lessons of this book are learned by the city police forces of America, the sub-communities that make up those cities might in time combine with their police for much more effective prevention and detection of crime. It could be a revolution in policing. Farewell, Officer Friendly, you were always a patronizing old fraud; welcome, the possibility of day-to-day collaboration between the police and the citizenry for crime control.

Perhaps you would prefer to know the provenance of *The New Blue Line* and an outline of its contents rather than continue to suffer these elliptic enthusiasms. A reasonable desire.

The National Institute of Justice and the Police Foundation (a Washington-based private foundation, funded in the main by the Ford Foundation) planned and financially supported a January 1983 conference, seeking to define "innovative ideas, strategies, and organizational reforms that might have some success in responding to city crime" (p. 1). Skolnick and Bayley, each an established academic and each experienced in participant observation of police work, were commissioned to act as resource persons to the conference. Ideas developed at the conference were then tested in controlled experiments in Newark and Houston, and these experiments are now being pursued under the aegis of the Police Foundation. *The New Blue Line* is the report by Skolnick and Bayley of what they learned from all this, including substantial periods of field observation of the police of six cities — Santa Ana, Detroit, Houston, Denver, Oakland, and Newark.

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— Ed.

This provenance of *The New Blue Line* merits comment. The book developed, as you see, from a collaborative effort between governmental and private funding sources, city police forces, and university-based scholars — an unusual conjunction, revealing the gradual acceptance of serious scholarship about the police by the police.

The New Blue Line focuses on the innovative, the new. What is wrong with the tried and true of policing? Why would not better policing emerge simply from more of the same — more police, better equipped, fulfilling their traditional roles? Business as usual will not do, Skolnick and Bayley suggest, because so much that is believed about the tried and true of policing proves on critical examination to be neither true nor effective. Thus — and I am risking only minor overstatement by this summary — increasing the number of police seems neither to reduce crime nor to increase the ratio of solved to reported crimes; random motorized patrol does not seem to influence the incidence of crime nor to increase the proportion cleared; the same is true of regular foot patrol, though this does seem to decrease fear of crime if not crime itself; two-person patrol cars do no better than one-person cars, nor do they reduce injury to the police; saturation patrol does reduce crime in the area patrolled, but whether it spills over elsewhere is uncertain (and, in any event, resources are lacking for other than occasional saturation patrol); increasing the speed of police response to emergency calls has no effect on clearance rates; “emergency” telephone calls are pushing the city police forces to a selective response without any adverse impact on crimes solved; and there is much else in the macho mystique of the public’s view of police work that is similarly romantic and false.

The accumulating, often counter-intuitive findings from field studies of the police and from empirical studies of their effectiveness in terms of crimes solved, criminals convicted, and the community’s sense of security are generating a crisis of confidence in traditional police methods, a crisis perceived by the more thoughtful police administrators. In the words of Skolnick and Bayley, “the primary strategies followed by American police departments are neither reducing crime nor reassuring the public” (p. 5). It is a considerable challenge.

The New Blue Line is not the usual academic condescension to the police. Skolnick and Bayley are well aware that there now emerges from within the police a group of younger, better educated, less rigid and conforming leaders. The walls of police isolation have to a degree been broken down over the past ten or fifteen years, and criticisms of traditional police methods are now advanced more vigorously by a few police administrators than by outside scholars. There is no criticism of the quasi-military structure of policing offered by scholars that is half as vigorous as what I hear from senior police administrators when speaking in confidence. This book begins to bridge a chasm of dissim-

ulation by a profession (if profession it be) that has too often seen criticism from within as akin to treason.

Here is the theme that percolates most of the new initiatives Skolnick and Bayley found in their six very different cities:

[P]rotection needs to be provided by citizens themselves . . . [T]heir assistance is essential in capturing and prosecuting the people who victimize them. The job for the police, therefore, is to work with the public so as to ensure that these things happen, to develop specific and articulate approaches that can achieve results. [p. 6]

And the *sine qua non* of this achievement "seemed to arise out of the capacity of police leaders to imbue a sense of responsibility and accountability to the citizenry into the policing enterprise" (p. 11).

Variations on this theme are played in the descriptions in six chapters of *The New Blue Line* of the six cities studied. The tone of these chapters is conversational, enlivened by war stories. What follows is a summary of what most attracted Skolnick and Bayley's attention in each city.

SANTA ANA

In Santa Ana, Community Oriented Policing, "COP" to indulge the police affection for mnemonics, grows out of earlier experiments with team policing. COP differs from earlier team policing efforts in that responsibility for the team is decentralized to the local area, and team members are reasonably stably situated, serving in their area for periods of up to two years. Civilian as distinct from sworn police are extensively used, the goal being fifty-five percent civilian and forty-five percent sworn. Civilians are involved even in motor patrol, equipped with a radio but not a gun, investigating a wide diversity of street situations and calling for assistance from sworn and armed police if that proves necessary (pp. 25-26). In each local area there is a "substation," a storefront-type office manned by unarmed police to which the citizen can go for assistance, complaints, and advice, without being seen as an informer — though information highly relevant to crime control is precisely what the citizen often supplies. Some substations become, in effect, community centers; but all are, in the military sense, intelligence centers. The overall purpose is to make the patrolman the "uniformed generalist" of his area, supported by the police team which is informed on the area he patrols, as well as by the citizenry who come to see the police as a service agency rather than as an occupying paramilitary force interested only in the crisis of violent crime.

How successful is all this? Skolnick and Bayley claim no scientific validity from their field observations of the Santa Ana Police Department, but conclude: "It seems that insofar as the community of Santa Ana or, rather, the subcommunities within the community — the businessmen, Hispanics, blacks, women, the elderly — are concerned, the

unique combination of the values of community orientation and high technology suggest a rare and resounding police success story" (p. 48).

What is appropriate policing for Santa Ana may well be not at all appropriate for Detroit or Newark, but the central idea of reaching out for community support for and collaboration with the police perseverates through the reports on new methods employed in all six cities.

DETROIT

The migration of middle-class whites from the inner cities of America, their place taken by underclass blacks, is nowhere clearer than in Detroit. Problems of crime, race, and poverty intersect cruelly in this country, and Detroit is an exemplar of this intersection. Nevertheless, here too Skolnick and Bayley found considerable success with community mobilization for self-defense in collaboration with the police. As in Santa Ana, the new methods involved much greater stress on proactive policing, reaching out to prevent crime and to give citizens a sense of involvement in their own protection, rather than providing merely reactive response to cries for help over the 911 network.

These ideas were implemented in Detroit by the formation of a new division within the police, an independent command called the Crime Prevention Section, reporting directly to the chief of police. This section organized citizen groups into a collaborative relationship with the police for their own protection — "Neighborhood Watch for residences, Business Watch for commercial establishments, Apartment Watch for high-rise apartments, and Vertical Watch for office buildings" (p. 54). An important means to this collaborative effort were the fifty-two "mini-stations" dedicated to this task but providing many other services to the community in the process. A departmental memorandum stated the purpose of these storefront locations: "to stimulate and improve citizen participation with the police . . . this increased citizen participation to be achieved through crime prevention activities" (p. 62).

I probably err in referring to "storefront" locations since the mini-stations were situated and furnished very differently depending on the locality in which they were established and the degree of local support they could attract. Most had a distinctly makeshift appearance with "linoleum-covered floors, metal folding chairs, scarred desks, sprung swivel chairs, and paint-peeled walls hung with faded notices" (pp. 62-63), whereas others had carpets, leather couches, and armchairs, all donated by local businessmen, and one, near the General Motors Building, was posh indeed.

There is much else in the description of Detroit's effort to create community-supported policing, and not all of it is by any means a record of success. Political pressures and traditional attitudes have

combined to frustrate or impede many of these developments. Skolnick and Bayley see any overall assessment as premature:

The Detroit police department, like most police forces in the United States, still flies by the seat of its pants. New ideas jostle with old, innovation with tradition, until a strategic plan emerges from the interplay of forces inside and outside the department. . . . [A]ll that can be said is that the Detroit initiative shows that radical inventiveness in American policing can occur in the most unlikely places. [pp. 79-80]

HOUSTON

Lee Brown's appointment as Chief of Police of Houston in 1982 must have been a severe shock to the back-room old boys of Houston's very traditional, head-banging and ass-kicking police — a black superintendent, and even worse, a Berkeley Ph.D. superintendent. Appointed by a woman mayor, of course, which explains it all.

A year thereafter Brown issued his "Plan of Action, 1983," which in forty carefully drafted pages set out detailed plans for the reform of all branches of the Houston police force. The old boys swooned.

Deep set in the 1983 plan were commitments to the protection of minorities, to community consultation and collaboration. Reliance was again placed on team policing of a defined area, with command and responsibility decentralized to that area. The police affection for the mnemonic here expressed itself in "DART" — Directed Area Responsibility Team — and again local "command stations" were to be the physical focal points of this decentralized authority, and "community police stations" of the storefront variety the means of better communication between citizen and police. Houston's storefront offices are not the makeshift offices of Detroit, but were fashioned and staffed to Brown's precise plans. They make use of civilian employees and civilian Community Service Officers, as had been suggested many years earlier by President Johnson's Crime Commission.

There is much else that Skolnick and Bayley describe of Lee Brown's reformatory efforts, including more proactive patrol attuned to the needs of the different communities that make up Houston. They attempt no evaluation of the efficacy of Houston's movement toward team policing, decentralized command, and storefront police stations, but they offer one important insight from their study of the Houston police:

One thing is clear: Regardless of whether rigorous evaluation of strategic innovations in American policing is undertaken, experts and practitioners must be much more careful than they have been in using omnibus terms like team policing, decentralization, community outreach, and storefronts. Many cities have experimented with storefronts over the past decade or so, but what they have done is not always the same. Even within Houston, it is not the same everywhere. Storefronts can be small police stations, bases for community organization, facilities for walk-in

solicitation of assistance, fixed patrol posts, facilities for ready referral, or liaison offices with community service agencies. Deciding what a "storefront" should do is critical both for developing it efficiently and for justifying its costs. If police elsewhere are to learn from Houston, they must penetrate behind programmatic labels and pay careful attention to the operational details. [p. 116]

DENVER

Skolnick and Bayley report Denver as less innovative in policing in recent years than their other five cities. There has, it is true, been experimentation with different patrol strategies, and some years ago experimentation with decentralization of the Community Services Bureau by means of storefront offices, but "[a]ctive, visible, flexible patrol is the centerpiece of the department's operations, supplemented by expert criminal investigations" (p. 145).

The Capitol Hill section, a so-called entertainment area proximate to a skid-row depressed area, is important to Denver as a tourist town. Here some unusual policing has been tried, and with apparent success. Again there are the mnemonics — this time "ESCORT" (Eliminate Street Crime on Residential Thoroughfares). Police serving in this unit patrol on small motorcycles, do not respond to 911 calls except as a back-up for precinct officers when needed, and have as their duty crime prevention — what police often refer to as "order maintenance" — in this high-crime-rate, sleazy neighborhood. Their Kawasaki KZ 440s allow them to cruise in parking lots, parks, and alleys. Mobile and accessible at the same time, they are "able to interact with people in ways that are not possible from inside a patrol car. They frequently stop and talk or banter with people as they slowly glide past. . . . [They] delight in slipping up beside people who think they are alone and unobserved" (p. 137).

OAKLAND

Skolnick and Bayley's report on the Oakland police has a nostalgic tone, looking back to the massive reforms of the period from 1967 to 1973 under Chief Charles Gains. The period from 1973 to the present, under Chief George Hart, has been one of consolidation of what was successful and acceptable politically of those earlier reforms. Nevertheless, efforts at proactive crime prevention by different patterns of patrol have been pursued particularly in the downtown area, plagued by prostitution and drugs. Foot patrol and patrol on motor scooters have the same purpose here as in the Capitol Hill area of Denver. But the balance between community-accepted proactive patrol and harassment of people on the streets is not easy to strike, and the Oakland police have not escaped public controversy.

Skolnick and Bayley sum up their report on Oakland as follows:

"The Oakland Department used to be considered one of the most, if not the most, innovative in the nation. Hart is not much interested in novelty and experimentation. 'The innovation of the 80s is to survive,' he argues. Thus, there is little taste for new programs" (p. 178).

NEWARK

"Square inch for square inch, Newark could contend for the title of crime capital of the Western world" (p. 181). Not a setting hospitable, one would think, to innovations in policing, but under the leadership of Hubert Williams (recently appointed as President of the Police Foundation) from 1974 to 1985, a record of considerable and effective police reforms was achieved. In Skolnick and Bayley's words: The Newark police department "has done well recently. It has possibly done more with less than any other police department in the United States" (p. 193).

The innovations in policing in Newark discussed in *The New Blue Line* are: a truancy task force; and sweeps, roadblocks, storefronts, and bus and subway inspections as proactive "order maintenance" strategies. Several of the practices described under these headings are of doubtful constitutionality, but so far they have received broad acceptance by both the political powers and the embattled minorities in Newark. Here too there has been an increasingly strong movement not to allow police manpower to be directed by the constant pressure of 911 calls and a reciprocal effort to redirect that manpower to what are known in advance to be criminogenic situations and activities. It is not an easy balance to strike.

THE SIX CITIES

Many ideas for more effective policing emerge from these six chapters. The central point, however, is that "the cops can't keep the streets safe by themselves" (p. 210). This means that there must be a "movement away from reactive crime control to positive crime prevention strategies" (p. 210). And this in turn means "community oriented policing" which will require "fundamental changes in the perspectives of patrolmen" (p. 210).

As Skolnick and Bayley recognize, it is hard to think of an organization more resistant to change than a city police force. The paramilitary bureaucratic management structure of the police inhibits change, but less, in my view, than the traditional view police have of themselves as an embattled in-group standing together, knowing what is right to do because it has long been right to do it, seeing themselves as the victims of greedy politicians, their work impeded by ignorant and sometimes corrupt courts and lawyers, their efforts criticized by ill-informed academics and the sensation-seeking press.

Nevertheless, this is a heartening book. It shows what can be

achieved. It recognizes the difficulties, full face, but does not despair. The movement from isolated motor patrol buttressing a 911 telephonic and radio system to "prevention oriented policing" will not be swift, but it is, so Skolnick and Bayley affirm, the wave of the future. They suggest four principles as essential to that orientation: "police-community reciprocity, areal decentralization of command, reorientation of patrol, and civilianization." But, as Skolnick and Bayley recognize, obstacles confront the realization of all four of these objectives.

Police-community reciprocity assumes that there are "communities" to relate to, to collaborate with; but there is very little sense of community left in some of the high-crime-rate inner city neighborhoods. "In our often anomic urban society the transcendent identity of many city dwellers is that of crime victim" (p. 214). If, sadly, that is true, then that will be the only commonality the police will have to work with to minimize predatory crime in those neighborhoods — and it is encouraging to learn that the Detroit and Newark experiences suggest that it can be done.

Areal decentralization of command — as demonstrated, for example, by Houston's DART program, which integrates patrol, criminal investigation, and intelligence activities, and by the mini-stations and sub-stations and storefronts which aim to link the community with the relatively stable police team — seems to be accepted by the police where it has been tried, after a time of natural opposition to any reform. No innovation is ever welcomed, but at least this reform comes quite quickly to police favor. It, too, has problems. It is often less than welcome by the top echelons immediately below the superintendent, since it necessarily involves a loss of power at the center. It also necessarily involves a loss of power at the political center — at City Hall. And it is particularly congenial to corruption: To work in one setting for a substantial period, to relate to all the problems of crime and vice in an inner-city neighborhood, is a path to temptation. There are remedies for this in vigorous internal inspection and a willingness to use undercover work *against* the police, when suspicion has focused, though these remedies are far from popular with police unions, who grow in power by the year. Nevertheless, if policing is to be community protective it will have to be decentralized to meet the sharply divergent needs of different sections of the cities, and it will have to relate better to and communicate better with the communities it serves.

Reorientation of patrol, Skolnick and Bayley's third necessary element, presents fewer difficulties. In some areas and at some times there is a great deal to be said for foot patrol, and it is not only in the six cities here studied that foot patrol steadily expands. It is proactive and not reactive, it links the policeman to the citizen; it allows a sensible allocation of manpower to meet the diversity of obligations of the

police; it lessens the tyrannical burden of the 911 emergency-dispatch system. But it is just one example of the increasing recognition that no one form of patrol is appropriate to all areas or to all purposes.

Civilianization, the last necessary element of Skolnick and Bayley's prescription for community oriented policing, is more controversial. It threatens the sworn officer; it threatens the police union. Yet it is the hallmark, in my view, of efficient allocation of resources to the police task. Many police duties do not require a gun and a badge; many police duties can be better performed if it is known that no gun is present. In the view of Skolnick and Bayley, "the more a department is civilianized, the greater the likelihood that it will successfully introduce and carry out programs and policies directed toward crime prevention" (p. 219).

The New Blue Line concludes with speculation by the authors on what factors account for successful innovation in some cities and, inferentially, not in others, and what the chances are of widespread achievement of community oriented, proactive policing in the future. This is the least convincing part of the book; perhaps all that means is that it is the most speculative, the least supported by field observations.

I am left with two lessons of importance from this book: First, policing must cease to be predominantly reactive, waiting for the telephone call, remotely patrolling the streets ready to rush to the reported crisis; it must become more proactive, learning in advance each community's and each neighborhood's crime prevention needs and fears, and reaching out in advance to meet and assuage them. Secondly, the needs and fears of sub-groups of the community must be understood and met, and this will be done only if the police so position themselves that, one way or another, the lines of communication are open, not just open in theory or open to the confident, but open in practice also to the unsure, the hesitant, and the deprived.

In sum, I put this book on my shelf of a very few books on the police that combine street knowledge and scholarly integrity. *The New Blue Line* is important to the amelioration of the plague of crime in the cities of America, and, what makes one even more grateful, it is presented in readable and captivating form.