



## Reinventing the Wheel in Police Work: A Sense of History

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This publication was made possible by a grant from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation to the School of Criminal Justice, Michigan State University. The information contained herein represents the views and conclusions of the authors and not necessarily those of the Mott Foundation, its trustees, or officers.

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(#) coincide with endnote numbers

The publication titled *Perspectives on Policing* (National Institute of Justice, U.S. Department of Justice) prompts me to take pen in hand and solicit your indulgence in offering a few observations by someone who has devoted his entire career to the professionalization of the American police service. Certainly it is a time for reflection and a time for change.

Sometimes in police work today, just as in other activities, there is a tendency to shortchange history, to make it appear that contemporary developments have no precedent. Revolution seems to me to be too strong a word for what is happening, since some of the police tactics being promulgated today were also being utilized in our

early history and certainly when I entered the police service in 1938 as a patrolman in Detroit, Michigan, upon graduation from Michigan State University.

It has been my belief that a police officer serves as a role model in the community, a teacher in many cases, and one who can influence the behavior of others, adults and young people alike. When I entered the police service we patrolled by walking one or more beats, usually in business districts with front and back doors to check, but these beats also included residential areas. This part of our responsibility was the most satisfying for me simply because it enabled me to meet persons who engaged in a variety of activities and to learn something about what was happening in their personal lives - if they were willing to share such information. It was gratifying and noble work in my judgment because of the positive influence brought to bear upon individuals; it enabled me to share with them our successes and failures when they occurred. It was also fun to outwit the Sergeant on the midnight shift and be alerted by friends on the beat when he came looking for us working cops. It usually was relatively simple to find an officer on the beat because we had to be at a certain location every hour to "pull the box," a communication system designed to contact the local precinct station to report in and receive any instructions. Since we had to "pull the box" every hour, we had at least 60 minutes to make contacts with individuals and/or seek information.

The influence exerted and the lessons taught or learned under these circumstances were never recorded or even understood. In general, the method used to judge an officer's performance was the number of tickets written, even on foot patrol; the number of arrests made; open doors discovered; or whatever else the supervision considered important. We were a pretty unsophisticated group. The houses of prostitution and gambling dens were none of our business unless we were directed to do something about them. These places were the province of certain detectives or the first or second level of supervision. One accepted these conditions as the way responsibility was allocated. If you departed from the accepted practice, you were transferred. It was that simple. An officer friend of mine stood in front of a "bookie" joint on one occasion for hours at a time to discourage its customers. Within a week, he was transferred to an outlying precinct. Such were the rules of the game; abide by them, or else.

In 1938, not many college graduates joined the police service so when I received my assignment from recruit school to an outlying precinct in the city, I became the "college cop." This characterization by fellow officers was flattering and good-natured, and as a result, I established a good relationship with my colleagues. We worked hard, and occasionally I got to ride in a patrol car as a substitute for an officer on leave or vacation. On one of these occasions during the winter months, we were checking a neighborhood grocery store off the main street and detected someone who had broken into the store. The lookout alerted those inside the store and I gave chase to one of two perpetrators who ran, catching the burglar several blocks away. Helped by tracks in fresh snow, a patrol car was able to follow and apprehend the other person who escaped. We were all cited for this action since it ultimately resulted in the arrest of three men from a nearby town who had been burglarizing neighborhood stores in our precinct and stealing money, tobacco, and other saleable items. This type of police work was recognized and rewarded during my tenure with the Detroit Police Department.

To some extent, this value system still exists in many police departments in the nation. Some other equally positive and perhaps more important activities were overlooked. I refer to police work that brought us into contact with youngsters or adults whose activities needed redirection or whose behavioral standards needed adjustment. All police officers who walked a beat had experiences with adults and adolescents for which there were no guidelines unless a law had been violated - in which case our action was dictated: an investigation or an arrest occurred, whichever seemed appropriate.

However, there were occasions when we took action to influence behavior or attitudes that were never recognized by our superiors. I refer to experiences that other officers and I had which were beneficial to a neighborhood, either by reducing or controlling crime or by changing behavior or standards. By our actions, we changed lifestyles. I would like to describe two or three experiences which may help explain my position

relevant to current discussions occurring among the participants of the *Executive on Policing Seminar*, regarding police community relations or problem-oriented policing.

During the several months of my first assignment to a police precinct in Detroit, most of my activity was on foot patrol throughout the precinct, usually on the most heavily-traveled streets where most of the stores and business places were located. On one occasion I was assigned to a foot patrol beat on the edge of the precinct near a neighboring city. It was a triangular beat with a few businesses, restaurants, a wholesale beer outlet, two drug stores, grocery stores, etc. I was not alerted to the problem that existed on this beat prior to my assignment. The area was also an ethnic neighborhood, mostly Italian, with a junior high school located a block or two off the main street. I learned quickly from people contacted on the beat that the principal problem was vandalism and theft from automobiles parked in the area. The instigators of the problem were alleged to be youngsters who roamed the neighborhood, ranging in age from about ten to sixteen. One boy, big for his age, was reported to be the leader of this group. The two drug stores were a block apart and the owner of one of them created a problem and alienated the kids by calling the precinct station whenever the youngsters gathered in front of the drugstore. This store owner was the sister of the Mayor of Detroit. She received instant attention when she complained. Invariably, the dispatcher would send a patrol car to respond to the complaint, and the officers responding would order the kids to disperse, but were abusive and swore at them in the process. This behavior apparently encouraged these youngsters to gather in front of the drugstore, anticipating the complaint and the ultimate arrival of the patrol car. Then they would throw stones at the car and disappear into the neighborhood. These activities only made matters worse. So the "college cop" was assigned to the area on foot patrol, to see what he could do about this problem. I repeat that no one informed me about this situation before my assignment. It turned out to be one of my most challenging assignments, and one of the most rewarding. I walked the beat for approximately a month while I gathered information and formulated a course of action.

One evening an event occurred on the 4-12 shift which prompted a decision and precipitated action on my part. While "pulling the box" that evening, I was informed that a complaint had been made by school officials that some boys were interfering with and harassing people attending a play being offered at the school that evening. I was instructed to take whatever action seemed appropriate. As I arrived at the school, I noted that about twelve kids who represented the local gang and who had heard about the play were present and creating the problem. I assembled them outside the school and had a long talk with them about the conditions that existed, including such delinquencies as petty theft, vandalism, and harassment. I suggested that there were more constructive things for them to do and informed them that henceforth I was assuming responsibility for the conditions of the neighborhood and would do whatever was necessary to bring about order and peace. Since the young man who acted as their leader was present, I offered to settle things by their standards: an old fashioned fist fight, man to man, or the option that we could work together and end the vandalism, theft, and harassment. As I concluded this little speech, I held out my hand to the young man as a gesture of friendship and cooperation. He looked at me for several seconds then suddenly turned and walked away, rejecting the options I offered. I could sense that he had lost control of the group. >From that point on, I began to counsel and advise these youngsters and offered to help them find jobs so they might put their energies to constructive use.

At that time, the U.S. Military Service sponsored a program known as the Citizens Military Training Corps, a training program offered at Camp Custer, a military reservation near Battle Creek, Michigan. It was a four-phase program and young men could earn a Second Lieutenant's commission if they completed all four phases successfully, which meant attending a CMTC camp for four summers. As I recall, I persuaded one of these young men to enroll in the CMTC program. The boys, of course, realized I was trying to help them by directing their energies into constructive channels and inform them about opportunities they knew little about.

In general, the group responded positively to this encouragement, with the exception of their former leader, who studiously avoided me. As a result of my relationship with the group, the theft and vandalism virtually disappeared. The owner of the other drugstore cooperated with me and permitted the boys to meet at his drugstore, in effect supporting my efforts. As a result, complaints from the other drugstore subsided. My

relationship with the gang became so positive that when one of the youngsters asked to see my baton one evening, and promptly ran away with it, I simply informed the others what happened, adding that I could be disciplined since I was out of uniform. Within an hour, the baton was returned to me. Thus, they reflected concern for my welfare. Among the positive things these boys did was to sell the morning paper during the evening hours at the point of my triangular beat. At this point, the main traffic artery turned about 60 degrees to the left and continued several hundred yards over a viaduct. The auto traffic was substantial, and the income from selling the morning paper was good and represented a meaningful activity for these kids. Furthermore, those involved in the sale of papers knew everything happening in the neighborhood. More about this later.

In any event, after several months on the beat I was transferred to another precinct, one located in the central part of the city, much closer to my home. When the residents of the old neighborhood learned of the transfer, a group of parents and kids arranged an appointment with the precinct commander and requested that my transfer be cancelled and that I be permitted to remain in the precinct. Since I had not been requested to submit a written report of my activities, and the only evidence of what had occurred was the absence of complaints from the one drug store and the reduction in complaints of theft and vandalism, I doubted (correctly) that the precinct hierarchy knew about the happenings I have described. So my transfer took effect, after about 18 months in this particular precinct.

I shall describe two other experiences in the new precinct and then explain the purpose of these anecdotes. In the new precinct, I continued with foot patrol and had a school crossing to cover at 8:00 a.m. as my first assignment. So after roll call, one of the motorized patrol units took me to the crossing where I escorted children across a busy intersection for about half an hour, and then continued my foot patrol. As I saw it, the crossing assignment was an important assignment. It gave an officer the opportunity to talk, know, and recognize the neighborhood youngsters going to school. I quickly learned that within a few blocks of the school crossing there was a small business place, a combination delicatessen and grocery store operated by an older widower who had a family of two married children. He lived immediately behind the store proper. To enter his quarters, one merely opened a door to find a small kitchen, bedroom, and living area, all one big room. This man was apparently an immigrant. He spoke broken English and could not read very well, but was making what he considered a comfortable living. He sold delicious hard rolls accompanied by sweet butter. In due time, our relationship prospered and after I finished my duties at the school crossing I went to this store and took to time to read parts of the morning paper to this man and also to have a cup of coffee and a hard roll, since I had about thirty minutes before I had to "pull the box." This routine occurred whenever I was assigned to this particular beat. Needless to say, we became friends and anytime I needed to know something about the neighborhood or its residents, my friend became a source of information. Later, when I was assigned to what we called "clean up," a plainclothes assignment to check liquor, vice, and gambling activities, I was able to arrest a "numbers" operator who had been the object of the previous "clean up" crew's attention for months without any success, all because of information from the neighborhood. None of these relationships were ever reported and no one knew about them except the officers themselves, yet they represented, in my judgment, significant and important aspects of an officer's job.

Without realizing it at the time, I was virtually re-defining the role of a beat police officer. The system rewarded those who wrote traffic violation tickets, made arrests, caught burglars, and arrested prostitutes, all of which were necessary activities, of course. However, ignored were probably the most important aspects of police work, namely the contacts and positive relationships with the public that established the goodwill and respect so necessary, what we currently know as police community relations.

Sometimes we took action that was highly questionable simply to invite attention to a problem that seemingly could not be resolved any other way. I recall a case where a middle-aged couple operated a neighborhood grocery store near an intermediate school and sold "numbers," an illegal betting activity, to students. Complaints were registered with the police department and the situation was placed under surveillance. It was determined that the complaints were valid but the clever couple never sold a "number" in the store proper. They

invited students into their living quarters, contiguous to the place of business. To gain access to the living quarters, one entered through a doorway. After several frustrating efforts to obtain evidence of illegal traffic in the sale of "numbers" without success, we finally raided the living quarters, confiscating the paraphernalia that indicated a "numbers" operation, charged the couple under local ordinances and went to court. The case was dismissed because of our illegal entry and the judge spoke to us afterward, explaining that he had no alternative, which we understood, yet he hoped our action had the desired effect, namely to put a stop to this illegal operation involving youngsters from grade school and junior high school. It had exactly that effect, as the complaints stopped and to the best of our knowledge, the couple discontinued their nefarious activity.

Although the police department was highly centralized, the experiences I have described indicate the discretionary type of police work actually being performed at the patrol level. I am certain that other police officers throughout the city of Detroit and in other cities in the nation engaged in similar positive activities, influencing the life-styles of youngsters and adults and perhaps prompting changes in behavior.

In my view, these anecdotes and experiences relate to the discussions currently taking place at Harvard and elsewhere. You will note I have not used the words 'proactive' or 'reactive' nor have I mentioned 'deterrence' or 'prevention,' although I believe we use the latter two words interchangeably.

The first point I want to make is that the structure or organization of police departments has not changed that much since my early days as a patrolman. Detroit is still basically organized as it was in the thirties, as other departments are. A few other departments have changed, and others are considering major changes which seem to reflect an effort to decentralize. Recognizing that a move to decentralize may impact upon the power structure in the department as well as Civil Service requirements or even union contracts, attempts to introduce "radical" changes may be extremely difficult, if not impossible. Thus, when some suggest "radical alterations," implying changes in structure or personnel assignment and therefore shifts in departmental power and the consequent political reorientation that may occur,<sup>(1)</sup> caution is suggested. If the objective is to place effective public service ahead of any other consideration in police priorities and this is thoroughly discussed and understood, perhaps major changes can occur without too much disruption and opposition.

In my judgment, any change in structure should favor a form of decentralization similar to what is being implemented in Houston, Texas; i.e., a structure which places one or more deputy chiefs in strategic sections of the urban community. Based on the anecdotes I have described and other experiences over the years, I am convinced that decentralization is necessary in order to have key persons with appropriate ranks in the hierarchy carry out the philosophy, values, and standards of the principal police executive, or the policies of a police commission (assuming these are constructive and support innovative and creative police). Furthermore, we should examine the manner in which we deploy our personnel resources, to encourage constructive service designed to address the critical concerns of our people. An officer does not necessarily have to be out of service to perform such duties. During the period I described, we were virtually out of service for eight hours except for the moment or so when we "pulled the box." If we recruit able, intelligent, and dedicated persons and imbue them with the concept of service and assistance as well as arrest and detention, we can continue and perhaps accelerate the progress being made in recent years. The reward system must be modified accordingly if the kind of service suggested is to be accepted by middle management and implemented by police officers who patrol the streets. I also share the belief that computer technology can facilitate creative police service, such as problem-oriented or community-oriented policing.

Clearly what I have described indicates that community policing did in fact occur in our earlier history, although it was not recognized as such and of course, was not related to any department policy. What is necessary is to recognize the sophistication that such policing requires and to attract individuals who are endowed with the intelligence and the will to engage in this kind of service. The salary schedules today compare very favorably with the \$2000 annual salary received in 1938. The conditions that exist today are also

more challenging to the committed young man or woman who enters the police service, especially when one considers the impact of drugs and alcohol.

My experiences at the operational and executive level of police service led me in 1955 at Michigan State University to embrace the police community concept that Professor Louis Radelet introduced to the School of Criminal Justice at Michigan State University. He joined our faculty from the staff of the National Conference of Christians and Jews. Some of you who participate in the Executive Session at Harvard have contributed to this program over the years. As Director of the School of Criminal Justice at the time, I perceived this concept as basically one of preventing crime and one designed to improve the quality of life in the neighborhood and community. If we could provide positive and constructive ideas to the police and the community, we at Michigan State University felt that we could influence the police and members of the community to engage in serious dialogue and consider positive and constructive programs in addition to traditional police activities, and thus change behavior, if not attitudes. I believe the ideas discussed at these annual seminars took root with some of our audience members, resulting in constructive and creative changes occurring in many departments. Perhaps they may even be the basis for the discussions that the Harvard group has engaged in recently.

Personally, I was hoping we could also sharpen the distinction between the terms "crime prevention" and "the deterrence of crime." In my judgment, we should consider making a clearer distinction between deterrence and prevention. To me, crime prevention activity is illustrated by the tactics used in the Italian neighborhood when the behavior of youngsters was changed and directed to more positive activities. Thus, to prevent is "to keep from happening, as by previous measures or preparation, to anticipate - act in advance of" to quote the *Britannica World Language Dictionary*. The same dictionary defines deterrence as "something that deters - tending or serving to deter." In other words, a patrol officer walking a beat in a neighborhood is a presence in front of a store or car that deters someone from victimizing a car or store. That is deterrence. However, when an officer influences a change in attitude, behavior, or perhaps in the values of an individual that persuaded or caused that person *not* to commit an illegal or inappropriate act, I believe it *prevented* an illegal or unnecessary act from occurring. Perhaps this is nitpicking, but it serves to explain my perception of what police community relations is, and why I have supported the concept so vigorously these past thirty-plus years. Based on reports we subsequently received from many police officials, I am convinced the experience at Police-Community Relations Institutes held at Michigan State University modified the behavior of many who attended and helped change long-standing police agency practices.

In my judgment, to understand the subtle distinction between deterrence and prevention is important because the latter has greater potential for good than any other police strategy. It is a principle we espouse but rarely employ in practice. It can have a profound effect upon the attitude of officers whose only experience is arrest and detention and all that implies (i.e., to become rigid, insensitive, inflexible, hard, brutal, and calloused - in other words "battle fatigued.") I have seen it occur with officers who have been assigned to high crime areas for years without relief. Crime prevention is a positive approach to the police task. We have enough of the negative over which we have no control.

There is a sequel to my experience with the youngsters in the Italian neighborhood. Some months after my transfer to another precinct, my wife and I were en route to visit friends one evening and it was necessary to pass through this neighborhood. We decided to leave home early and have dinner at a favorite Italian restaurant on my old beat. In those days, we used so-called Indian wool blankets to keep warm and since it was winter, we had our blankets in the car, which was parked on the street, unlocked, in front of the restaurant. After dinner, we returned to the car and found the blankets missing. I realized immediately what had happened. The kids were up to their old tricks. I was not happy about this turn of events. Nevertheless, I guessed that we might have our blankets returned after I had a talk with the young man who was selling the morning *Detroit Free Press* at the corner where traffic was heavy. Needless to say, this speculation met with great skepticism by my wife, who hinted that I had lost my mind. We drove to the corner where I exchanged pleasantries with my young friend, informed him what had happened and that I planned to ride around the neighborhood for five or ten minutes and

would return to get my blankets from him, with the understanding that no questions would be asked. Of course, my young friend denied any knowledge of this incident and wondered what made me think he knew what happened. Nevertheless, I insisted and left saying I would return in about ten minutes. My wife was quite surprised when we returned in due time, picked up our blankets, thanked our young friend, and continued on our way.

I doubt if there is a neighborhood in this country or any other country where at least one or more persons doesn't have a finger on the pulse of everything that happens there. It is incumbent for the police to gain the trust, respect, and confidence of these allies in the neighborhood so that we can find or seek solutions to many of our crime problems and in the process improve the quality of life in many of our communities. There will always be disappointments but the successes will outnumber them and the good accomplished will be reflected throughout the community.

When we begin to know neighborhood families well enough to return members to their loved ones at home after minor indiscretions such as imbibing too much after a visit to the neighborhood bar, we will begin to restore some of the respect and support we as policemen have lost in this complex society of ours. To show compassion and friendship, and to reflect an understanding of the frailties of our fellow man is not a sign of weakness; it may gain greater acceptance for us as understanding members of the larger community.

The experiences I have had as Provost Marshall at a major military installation during World War II, as Chief of Police in East Lansing, as Director of Public Safety at Michigan State University, and as Director of the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center have served to reinforce and augment the lessons I learned as a patrolman in the city of Detroit. I could cite incidents in each of these jobs that fortify and support the conclusions I reached as a result of the Detroit experience. I also learned that urban planners, engineers, and architects make mistakes that police officials and others in the community must modify or correct. Therefore, police officials should be closely involved in the early stages of any plans these professionals develop for their community.

By way of conclusion, my points in summary are these:

1. Decentralize, if necessary, to further the objectives of community oriented policing. Move cautiously with "radical alterations."
2. Require careful reporting by officers who patrol the streets and give them time to do it.
3. Continue with the upgrading process of recruiting for the police service. A baccalaureate degree should be the minimum; otherwise we should reclassify jobs, as many have suggested over the years.
4. Review the requirements of Civil Service and union contracts to determine the extent to which they have an impact upon management's prerogatives, especially on deployment of human resources.
5. Modify the reward system to recognize innovative and creative policing.
6. Try to establish the subtle distinction between prevention and deterrence.
7. Insist on involvement with professionals in other fields if their plans have an impact on the quality of life and the services offered by a police department.

It will take bold leadership and tough decisions with all the risks involved in making such decisions, and the courage of one's convictions in the face of rejection and adversity, if police leaders are to bring about these changes. I am encouraged by the vigorous, outspoken, and intelligent action against the N.R.A. presently being fostered by IACP.

I left the active police service to join academe because I thought more could be done to professionalize police service from the academic platform. I advocated from Day One of my academic career the need to have college-trained police officers because of the complexity of the job, and the police authority to summarily take life and to deprive our fellow citizens of their liberty. These cherished treasures should not be left in the hands of the unskilled and untrained. When I articulated such ideals years ago, I was frequently criticized. I was repeatedly told that all a police officer needs is common sense. But I have been fortunate to have lived long enough to

observe the vision of the educated officer become a reality. From here on, a new generation of police officers and executives face the challenge of carrying the baton to greater heights, with a sense of history to bolster their dedication.

## ENDNOTES

1. George L. Kelling, *Police and Communities: The Quiet Revolution*, National Institute of Justice, U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Department of Justice, June 1988.

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