



Policing in the 21st Century

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I'd like to talk today about policing in the 21st century. To do that I have to take you back a little way first. When I was a kid in the '50s and early '60s there was a very popular song at that time. The song went something like, "What a difference a day makes – 24 little hours." Well, for all of us, and certainly the profession I've been proud to be a part of for almost forty years – American policing – September 11, 2001 made a significant difference for all time, in all of our lives and in our children's lives and in the lives of the children beyond them.

So for American policing the difference was quite clear: we no longer could be home-town police; we were going to have to be homeland police also. That the concerns of dealing with external threats to the United States which had been largely been the responsibility, through all of our history, of the federal government was now going to have to also be assumed by local police and private security entities.

Because our federal government – the total array of enforcement that they could put against this external threat – all the federal agencies together only number about 40,000 – 50,000 agents. The FBI, which is the principal entity that we rely on, has just 13,000. The CIA, because of their secrecy we don't quite know, but certainly the number is not even close to the FBI. But there are between 700,000-800,000 of us in public policing, and there are about 2.5 million private security officers in the country serving in a wide variety of capacities.



So to defeat this enemy – to prevent them from bringing terrorism to our homeland; to reduce the potential problem – it's going to require a new partnership. It's going to require new relationships. It's going to require trust that had never been in place prior to 9/11.

So I want to talk a little bit, because of your interest in the world, about how American policing on 9/11 also became world policing. Indeed, the new venture that I will be going into in early November will be to try to take so much of what we have improved upon in America over these last 40-50 years. The American criminal justice system; the American policing system which are truly the models for the best practices around the world – to try to take those to countries that are emerging from chaos, civil war, warfare, terrorism and are struggling around the world to have what we have: a democracy. To have the ability to live free from fear, disorder and chaos – something that so many countries around the world have lived with for years and decades and generations.

So that will be my new mission, and it's an exciting one, much the same as when I joined the Boston Police Department on October 7, 1970 – that was my new mission in life. I was just back from Vietnam and this was the life I wanted to embrace – to be a police officer.

Let me take you back to that time – October 7, 1970 – and then bring you quickly forward to 9/11. And from 9/11 to where we are today, and where I think, from today, where we are going. We are fortunate that we have learned from the mistakes we made; the successes that we gained – all of that is helping to inform and shape where we were going. We're going to a much better place than where we have been in many respects because we are much more aware of what we have to deal with. We're much better equipped than we were in the past to face the unknowns of the future.

Nineteen-seventy was a time of extraordinary chaos in our country. We had had the civil rights initiatives of the '50s and '60s to deal with – the terrible issues of segregation. We had the extraordinary and growing unpopular war in Vietnam. We had a whole societal re-evaluation of who we are as a nation – the poor, the middle class, the rich – and their respective places and obligations.

We had a university and college population that for the first time in history was wising up in many respects to object to so much of what the country was experiencing: civil rights issues; the war; academic freedom. It was a time of phenomenal change in our relatively young democracy. As I came into policing at that time, policing was one of the major entities being asked to change in our society, because it was felt that the police had been significantly engaged in inappropriate practices, both in enforcing segregation – not only in the South, but in many respects throughout the rest of the country – so that our abuses, even though they were in some respects shaped by the law, had engendered such hostility from our African-American population, in particular, that it spawned almost 20 years of disturbances and racial riots; the civil rights marches and ultimately the civil rights movement, the assassination of Martin Luther King, and finally the Civil Rights Act.

We also had to deal with the issue of the war and the many demonstrations against the war and the way in which we police them. Indeed, to me that circumstance had its most visible problem with the Democratic Convention in the late '60s in Chicago, where the Chicago Police Department went totally out of control trying to deal with the anti-war demonstrations around the convention center.

And we had the issue of police brutality and corruption which, unfortunately, was fairly widespread throughout much of the country. This was not widely known, but it was widespread.

So policing was felt to have been the flashpoint of so many of the country's issues. It was decided that America as a society was going to begin to face up to this. How do we deal with all of these social injustices? How do we deal with a country that was questioning its very roots? Well, one of the thoughts was that policing – until America could figure out what to do about unemployment; poverty; racism; the pressures of demographics and a changing society – that the role of the police should change.

Up until the '70s, the role of the police had been – the expectation was – that we would prevent crime; that we would – by the way we police – somehow or another prevent crime from occurring or prevent it from growing. And we had not succeeded. While we were practicing what we thought were the best police practices, we had actually exacerbated the social conditions of the country; whether it was race; whether it was class; or whether it was all the other issues like labor versus unions.

Police were asked to become more professional. While the country, through the "Great Society" and other initiatives tried to figure out what to do about all those other issues, the police were asked to professionalize. Professionalization focused on three areas: (1) Educating police. Many police at that time did not have even high school educations; very few police even had college educations. So the education phase was certainly a paramount and appropriate priority.

I'm the beneficiary of a scholarship that was created during that time that allowed me to go to college in the first four years of my police career. So, while I was becoming a police officer I was also achieving a college education. And the strength of that dual experience was that I did not get wrapped up in the "blue cocoon." Policing oftentimes, as you went through it,

wraps you like a cocoon tightly so that you become isolated from the rest of the community – and even your families – because of the police culture.

Fortunately, every day I would spend my mornings at university, where many of those young men and women – when I put my police uniform on and walked out of the federal building to basically protect the federal building against the demonstrations – many of my classmates would be on the other side of the barriers. But in the mornings I had the opportunity to understand what their feelings were, and their concerns. So I did not get wrapped in the blue cocoon.

I understood from the very beginning of my career that policing was beginning to go through a series of paradigm-changing experiences over the next 40 years. The police cannot be the “thin blue line.” A thin blue line really isolates communities from each other and in this city the thin blue line in the ‘50s, ‘60s, ‘70s and into the ‘80s was intended to isolate the African-American population in the south; isolate the Latino population over here to the east and protect the white population over there to the west.

The role of the LAPD was: in many respects we were border guards. The idea was we were the thin blue line to keep communities away from each other; who were suspicious of each other; who were not trustful of each other. But in that process, we isolated ourselves from *everybody*. Fortunately, in my early career I understood that one of the things the police must never do is to try to operate in isolation. We cannot be the thin blue line.

Instead we need to be like a beautiful stained-glass picture that you see in a church or cathedral – those beautiful pieces of glass are held together by the lead that joins them. Thin, almost imperceptible to the eye, so it doesn't detract from the overall picture. That's what police should be about: holding

together rather than keeping apart. That's the role of police in today's society but that was not the role of police in the early '70s. We were very divisive.

Policing, as we tried to professionalize, began a movement toward the appreciation that we must be a part of – and not apart from – our communities. So in the '70s we embraced this philosophy and the Los Angeles Police Department was the national and international embodiment of the "professional police model."

The professional police model emphasized three elements: It emphasized around the theme of response to crime – that the prevention of crime was society's responsibility. That the causes of crime were then believed to be racism, poverty, unemployment. And what could we the police do about unemployment, or racism, or poverty? Well, instead we focused our professionalization efforts on getting better at responding to crime. That's when my good friend and early-on hero – my inspiration to become a police officer – Sgt. Joe Friday came into the picture.

Think of good 'ole Joe – he had 24 minutes to solve the crime, six minutes of commercials back in the good old days. Thank God there's technology today because he'd only have 18 minutes, because there's 12 minutes of commercials now. But Joe was all about after-the-fact. He was also about that embodiment of the model of the professional police officer to stand back; to be impartial; to not express comfort; to not embrace; to not get too close to potential tainting of corruption and influence of any one community.

So Joe was essentially operating in isolation as he sought to solve the crime. He was honest. He was incorruptible, but he was also not working with – not working for – the community in many respects. Joe was the embellishment of the act of model policing: make the arrest after the fact, after the crime occurred. Then along came Adam-12 – those young handsome fellows

dressed up in this uniform that I'm wearing. It looked exactly the same. The firearm might be a little different, but basically the uniform looks the same.

Adam-12 emphasized also rapid response to crime – with those red lights flashing; the siren; 911 came into being so you could call us faster. The good old days you had to use a dime, then it got even better – you didn't have to use anything – it was free. Technology improved – rapid response; reactive investigation; random patrols. We used to be the cop on the beat – I began my police career, the first year, walking the beat.

Then the automobile revolution came along and indeed one of the professionalizing elements of the 1970s was to put cops in cars. In doing so, we became even more isolated from the communities we were policing, because we used to walk the beat and see people face-to-face. There was nothing between you and them. But once we got into cars we were going by too quickly and the 911 monster ate us up, because with so many calls, we did not have time to interact with the public like we used to be able to do.

I experienced that. I started walking a beat, got into a police car – a basic car; six cylinders; standard shift. But by the mid-1970s – late '70s – we got air conditioning. And what does air conditioning do? You roll the windows up. So we became even more isolated from the population we were serving.

And our measurement of success was how fast you would get into a call, and get out of it to get ready for the next call. To give you a sense of focus of where the emphasis was, we were "out of service" when we were servicing you. We were "in service" when we were riding around in random patrol. So we had it backwards. We were really supposed to be "in service" when we were interacting with you, but the way we described it was "out of service." That was the model of policing, and it was doomed to failure because it was not doing anything to focus on the problems that were causing crime. There

was no analysis as to what were patterns and trends. Instead, the analysis was of response time; was of arrest rates; was of clearance rates. We were measuring the wrong things. Meanwhile, society was deteriorating around us – more crime.

In the '70s we also had the phenomena of the “three Ds” – a little bit of an alphabet test here today. There were the “three Rs”: rapid response, random patrol, reactive investigation. The three Ds were the other element that created the catalyst for the explosion of crime in the 1980s. The three Ds were de-institutionalization – hundreds of thousands of poor souls who were let out of the fortress-like, prison-like mental institutions. Once again, society was well intended. But the home-care facilities; the neighborhood facilities; the self-treatment facilities – they were promised but never funded. And many of these poor souls ended up where? Downtown on skid row, a national disgrace right here in Los Angeles. And every city had it, but in most cities it was more diffused than it is here in Los Angeles.

So we began to add to the fear in the streets because there were fewer police and when police were there they were riding by in black and whites. In this city it was compounded by the fact that there were so few police anywhere. There were so few police cars here when my wife and I first moved here seven years ago – coming from New York where there seems to be a cop on every corner – we saw police here so infrequently she used to refer to it, “Oh look, Bill, there’s a black and white!” – a sighting. We so seldom saw them.

We had de-institutionalization. We had de-policing, effectively; because there were fewer of us because we were now in cars and were busy chasing our own calls. And we also had decriminalization. Many of the tools that police had been entrusted with were taken away by our Supreme Court – justifiably

in many cases – the “third degree” beating of suspects to get confessions was commonplace, unfortunately.

Certainly issues of segregation reinforced issues of racism. We also were using force much more than we were allowed to under the constitution. We were searching inappropriately. There’s a wonderful book just written about the history of the Los Angeles Police Department, *L.A. Noir*, by Jim Buntin. It’s about the Los Angeles Police Department in the 40s, 50s and 60s. It would scare the hell out of you reading that book in terms of the practices this department back then; the spying that was done, both legally and illegally, and how the police department functioned.

So the Supreme Court began to change the rules; began to take away many of the tools that we had used and abused – Escobedo, “Miranda,” the “exclusionary rule.” So we also were effectively decriminalizing public drunkenness – not a crime. What do you do with a public drunk? Take him to the detox center. But like the deinstitutionalization of the mentally disabled, the institutions that were supposed to be built were not built.

There was no place to take them – skid row once again. So, now it’s skid row, and throughout the rest of the city and other cities in America we have a large population of mentally disturbed. We have a large population of alcoholics – bums as we used to call them – that police were barely empowered to do anything about. And then we compound it with the drug revolution. Many thousands of returning Vietnam veterans came back, unfortunately, from a war that was tremendously emotionally and mentally impactful on so many of them, with also the ready availability and use of drugs. So many of those poor souls were now coming back, and where did they end up? Skid row; on the streets.

So, we had in the '70s fewer police. We had more things on the streets that were creating fear, and we were having the issue of drugs in a society where fewer people were getting through high school; in which the drug influence was creating more broken homes.

As we moved into the '80s it was the drug cartels, the drug gangs, and – in the Los Angeles case – the birthing of the Black and Latino gangs in the 1960s and '70s. The equipping of those gangs and those drug dealers with increasingly sophisticated weaponry – instead of the six-shot revolver or the Saturday night special they now had Uzis; they had 9 millimeters; 40 millimeters; 45 millimeters; 50 millimeters. For a period of time, they were better armed than police in America were.

It all came apart in the 1980s because the responding to crime was not doing anything about the causes of crime. The numbers of police continued to decline and the system was getting very dire. You lived through the 1980s, and you lived through 1990 in this city; and in New York – the worse crime year in the history of this country, in the documentation of it: 2,200 murders in the streets of New York in the 1990s; 6,000 shooting victims.

And here in Los Angeles, 1,100 murders and almost 3,000 people shot in the streets of Los Angeles, a lot of them by gangs, but a lot of it also by an increasing youthful population who had access to firepower and were engaged in the dealing and use of drugs, and the compounding of streets that were increasingly fearful. That population of aggressive panhandlers; that population of people who had to live in the streets because there's no place to go, and the police had so few powers to deal with them.

We had created in America with our good intentions – which is so often what happens with our good intentions internationally – we had created unintended consequences. We had created the homeless population through

our well-intended efforts. We had created a drug problem through our well-intended efforts to take a look at exploring other drugs that could in fact be used recreationally that would not be habit forming.

Cocaine, great drug of the 1980s; powder cocaine. *Newsweek* had a cover photo of cocaine – a big mountain of it – that said, “cocaine, the new drug of the middle class – you can use it on weekends then have no effect for the rest of the week – go to work, great.” What we came to find out too late was that it was addictive, particularly the derivative – crack cocaine – which decimated the African-American communities in so many cities around the country and compounded the violence, the despair and the desperation.

So by 1990 we were a country in freefall as it related to my world, and I was living and experiencing this as a patrolman; sergeant; lieutenant; superintendent; chief of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) police in Boston; Chief of Police and the metropolitan police in 1990; chief of the New York City transit police with 4,000 cops in a city that basically was the poster child of everything that was wrong in America. And we, the police, were failing.

With 9/11, we couldn't keep up with the calls and we stopped going to a lot of them. In the 1980s, a million calls a year from you, the public in Los Angeles, were not being answered on 911 calls because there were no police to go to them. There were just not enough of us – always the history of Los Angeles. The motto of the LAPD, on the side of every one of our cars is, “To Protect and to Serve.” We try. We've gotten a lot better about it in the last seven years, I hope. But the real motto of the department should be (for almost all of its history): “Too Few, Who for Too Long, Have Been Asked to do Too Much With Too Little.” That is the story of the LAPD. It's the story of the history of tension between police leadership, political leadership, and hostility from so many communities in that police



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