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Performance Management in New York City: Compstat and the Revolution in Police Management

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Scholars may argue about the effectiveness of the “reinvention movement” at the state and federal level. At the local level, the managers of urban police forces have in fact reinvented American police administration, and in doing so have contributed to dramatic reductions in crime all across the nation. The story of this reinvention is complex, but central to it is a radical shift in the way police organizations strategically use *information about performance* to achieve greater managerial accountability. Because these new performance management techniques were pioneered in New York City in the mid-1990s, the development and implementation of Compstat by the New York City Police Department (NYPD) is a valuable case study of this new approach to policing.

Traditional texts in the field of public administration and police administration focused on organizational designs and processes and hardly mentioned performance measurement or program evaluation. If the discussion did mention these goals, it usually explained

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the enormous obstacles to measuring public goods and services, such as producing public safety.

For example, in the wake of a fiscal crisis in the mid-1970s that revealed that the City had been essentially “flying blind” regarding timely information about money spent and services delivered, New York City government introduced the Mayor’s Management Planning and Reporting System (MMPRS).¹ However, a study of the MMPRS at the end of the 1980s found that voluminous agency statistics reported to the public twice a year included almost no measures of outcomes or “results.” (Smith 1993)

Yet at the heart of the reinventing government movement that has flourished in the past decade is the idea of “managing for results.” In New York City, a leading example of reinvention is the change in police management introduced by Police Commissioner William Bratton at the start of the administration of Mayor Rudolph Giuliani in 1994. In an institution long noted for its resistance to fundamental change, the introduction of a new system of management now known by the acronym for Computerized Statistics (Compstat) was remarkable for its scope, speed of implementation, and its impact on performance. The development of the Compstat system of police management involved not only a focus on measuring outcomes but also on *managing for improved outcomes*. Since the introduction of Compstat, various kinds of crime – the outcomes of policing – have plummeted to 1960s levels.

A 1996 article appearing in *NYPD*, published by the police department, entitled “Managing for Results: Building a Police Organization That Dramatically Reduces Crime, Disorder, and Fear,” described Compstat in the following words:

For the first time in its history, the NYPD is using crime statistics and regular meetings of key enforcement personnel to direct its enforcement efforts. In the past crime statistics often lagged events by months and so did the sense of whether crime control initiatives had succeeded or failed. Now there is a daily turnaround in the “Compstat” numbers, as crime statistics are called, and NYPD commanders watch weekly crime trends with the same hawk-like attention private corporations paid profits

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and loss. Crime statistics have become the department's bottom line, the best indicator of how police are doing precinct by precinct and citywide.

At semi-weekly "Compstat" meetings the department's top executives meet in rotation with precinct commanders and detective squad commanders from different areas of the city. These are tough, probing sessions that review current crime trends, plan tactics, and allocate resources. Commanders are called back to present their results at the "Compstat" meetings at least every five weeks, creating a sense of immediate accountability that has energized the NYPD's widely scattered local commands. The meetings also provide the department's executive staff with a way of gauging the performance of precinct commanders, who have a better opportunity to be recognized for what they have accomplished in their commands and how effectively they are applying the NYPD strategies.

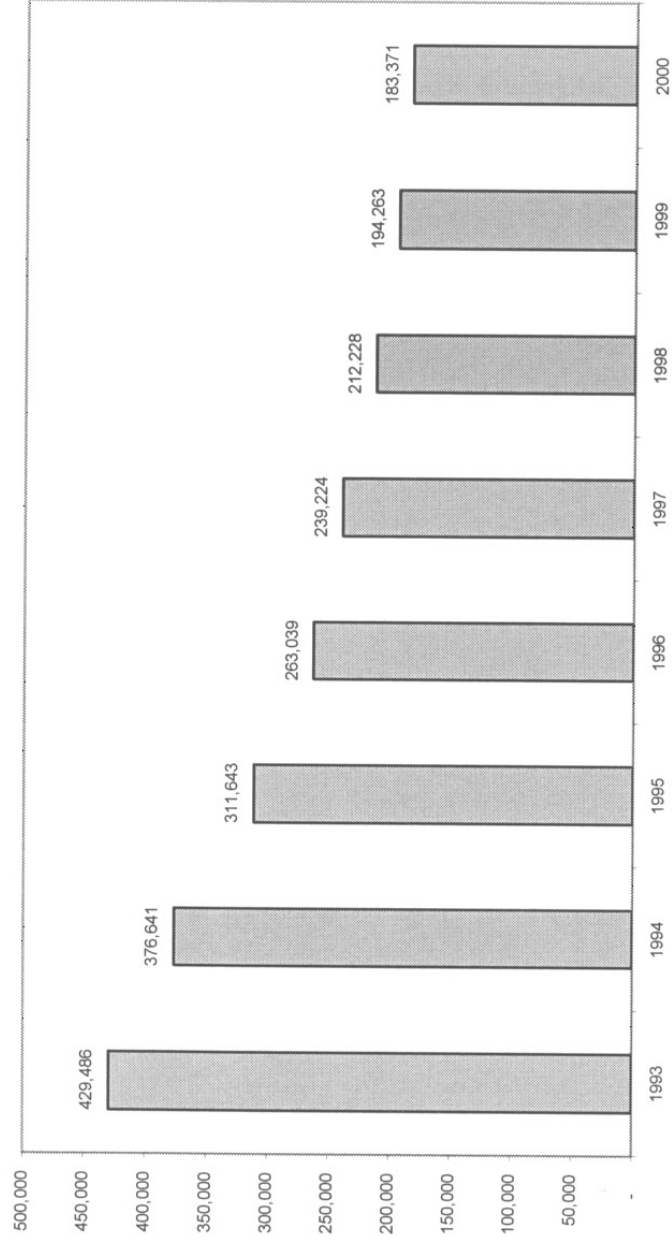
Since the introduction of Compstat in 1994 through fiscal 1999, major declines were reported in all categories of crime in New York City and in all 76 precincts.

In fact, New York City outperformed the nation in all categories, often by a wide margin, and was an early and leading contributor in the crime reductions reported nationally. The FBI's total crime index in New York City from 1993 to 1999 declined 50 percent compared with a drop of 17 percent in other major U.S. cities. Specifically, from 1993 to 1999 in New York:

- ⊗ Murder and non-negligent manslaughter declined 66 percent (this crime rate for major cities in the United States, *excluding NYC*, dropped 34 percent);
- ⊗ Larceny theft declined 40 percent (11 percent in the U.S.);
- ⊗ Motor vehicle theft fell 66 percent (U.S.: 24 percent);
- ⊗ Burglary dropped 59 percent (U.S.: 26 percent);
- ⊗ Robbery declined 58 percent (U.S.: 35 percent);
- ⊗ Grand larceny decreased 37 percent (U.S.: 6 percent);

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Figure 1
Major Felony Crimes in New York City



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- ✿ Aggravated assaults dropped 36 percent (U.S.: 19 percent);
- ✿ Forcible rape declined 40 percent (17 percent in the U.S.).

Moreover, New York City's relative crime rate ranking among the nearly 200 U.S. cities with populations of 100,000 or more also improved, dropping from 88th place to 165th. New York is now the safest large city in the country.

For many years New York City had, with the separate Transit and Housing Police Departments, three of the ten largest police departments in the country. While they were all operating under traditional organizational principles, the idea of creating an even larger bureaucracy was not an appealing prospect to transit riders and housing project residents – or for most police officers. The much more decentralized, information resourceful, and responsive Compstat model finally made possible – and politically saleable – the economies of scale and coordination that combining these departments always promised. Since the departments were consolidated in 1995, crime in the subways has continued to go down. Between 1995 and June 2000, seven major felony crimes have also declined 39 percent in the New York City housing developments (Mayor's Management Report, September 2000).

While several police officials and one scholar have written accounts of recent NYPD history (Bratton and Knobler 1998, Maple 1999, Silverman 1999), no one has published a multivariate empirical study of the impact of Compstat on public safety. Nevertheless, evidence is overwhelming that since Compstat's inauguration, the pace of crime reduction dramatically increased. This chapter describes how Compstat changed thinking about public safety in America.

**Police Management Reform:
The Compstat Model**

Compstat was introduced in NYPD by the management team assembled by William Bratton when he became police commissioner at the start of Mayor Rudolf Giuliani's administration in 1994. After

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reaching a peak in the early 1990s, when homicides exceeded 2000, and after a historic build-up in police personnel under Police Commissioners Lee Brown and Raymond Kelly,² funded by the 1991 Safe Streets, Safe City Act passed by the legislature at the insistence of Mayor Dinkins, index crime in New York had begun to decline. Nevertheless, in the 1993 mayoral election the incumbent David Dinkins had trouble winning credit for the success of his “community policing” approach to reduction in crime, and confronted a candidate who ran on the issue that public safety was still a leading problem.

Most analysts and certainly newly elected Mayor Giuliani believed that the voting public’s continuing concern about crime and public safety were critical to his victory at the polls. However, Wayne Barrett, in his biography of Giuliani, takes pains to point out that candidate Giuliani had offered no specifics about how he would achieve his goal of reducing crime. Barrett also criticizes Dinkins’s second Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly, under whose leadership index crime had declined, for attributing the crime wave to “family values...young people out there on the streets with no supervision...the out-of-wedlock birthrate,” but failing to give credit for the decline to changes by the community (Barrett, 2000, p. 352).

By most accounts, Mayor Giuliani selected William Bratton as his police commissioner because Bratton believed the police could reduce crime. Commissioner Bratton had his own reasons to believe in the efficacy of police action. When he served as head of the New York City Transit Police, he had succeeded in dramatically reducing serious crime. The best example of his approach was the strategic enforcement of the laws against the minor criminal offense of “fare beating.” The rationale was that persons entering the subways intent on robbery and other crimes were unlikely to pay to ride. By targeting stations where fare beating was most common, by using plainclothes officers to arrest and interrogate fare beaters, by checking for outstanding warrants, by searching those arrested for weapons, and by prosecuting those with weapons, the Transit Police reduced fare beating, but more importantly drove knives and guns out of the system. This kind of strategy-based law enforcement — more akin to “problem-solving policing” than community policing — became a cornerstone of Compstat.³

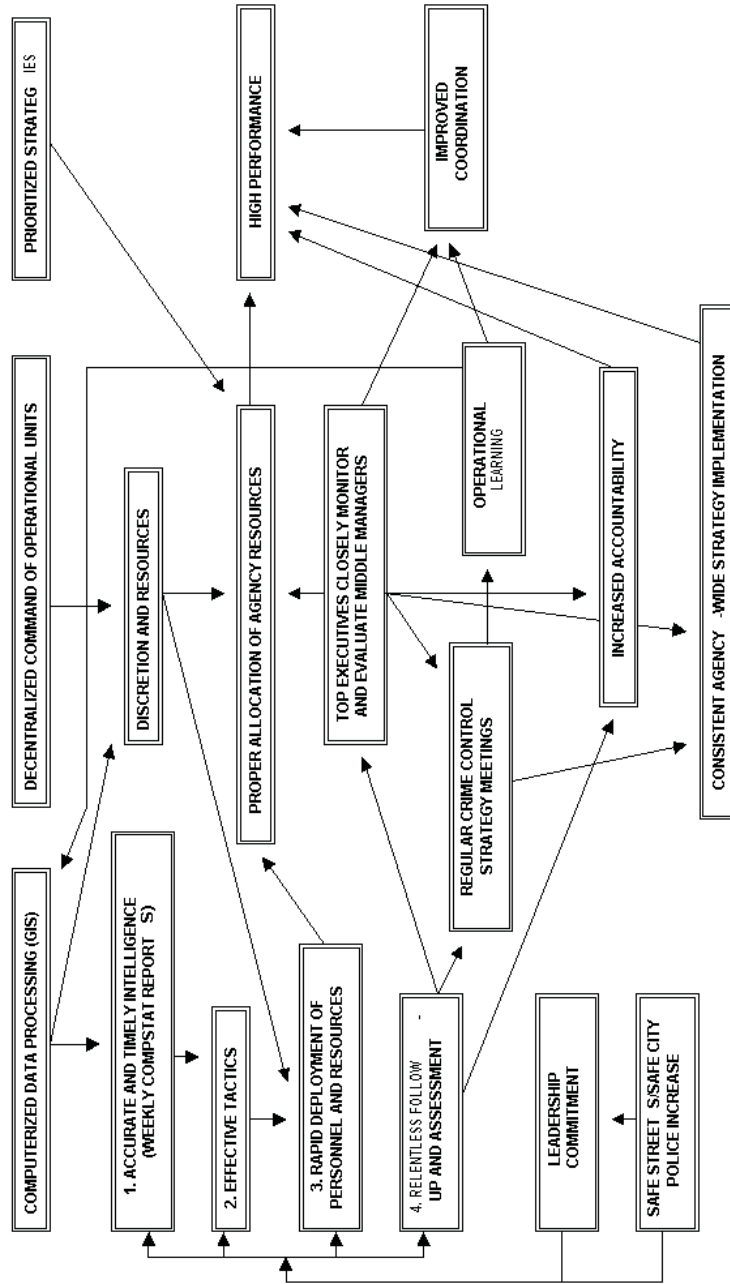
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Police Commissioner Bratton's approach to management, which relied on computer-mapped crime statistics, departed from both the traditional model of a highly centralized, reactive bureaucracy and from the newer model of community policing. In fact, Compstat differs in philosophy, structure, and management process from its predecessors. Compstat is based on a complex set of interrelated assumptions about cause and effect in the production of public safety (see Model C). The official police presentation of Compstat focused on only four factors: accurate and timely intelligence, rapid deployment, effective tactics, and relentless follow-up and assessment (Safir n.d.). Increased police personnel (provided by Safe Streets/Safe Cities), leadership (from the commissioner *and* the mayor), and the new role of precinct commanders (decentralization) are also critical inputs. The detailed tracking process cast a net around more than just index crimes. Compstat includes indicators believed to be warning markers, such as shooting incidents, shooting victims, and gun arrests, all displayed in geographically pinpointed detail for regular management review at every level.

The philosophical change entailed in this model rested on the belief that police action can affect crime and public safety. To the consternation of many of his police management colleagues and a chorus of disbelief among academic criminologists, Bratton began his tenure by setting a target of cutting crime by 10 percent the first year. (The actual drop was 12 percent.) The new philosophy was informed by the idea of "broken windows" articulated most clearly by George Kelling and James Q. Wilson who argued that effective crime control starts at the bottom of the scale of seriousness, not the top. However, Bratton emphasized targeting both top (serious felonies) and bottom-ranked (quality-of-life) crimes simultaneously, winning back the city "block by block." Jack Maple, Bratton's deputy commissioner for operations, maintains that the "broken windows" idea actually formed only a limited part of the New York City intervention. He wrote, "While I applaud tactics that reduce disorder and the public's fear of crime, implementing quality-of-life tactics alone is like giving a face-lift to a cancer patient.... For quality-of-life enforcement to make a significant contribution to crime reduction, it has to be supported by a larger strategy" (Maple 1999). The key element of "broken windows" was not the specific focus of

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Figure 2
 Model C: The Compstat Model of Performance Management



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enforcement but the belief that police intervention could have a major impact on crime.

Compstat also includes a significant structural change: the identification of precinct commanders as the locus for operational authority and accountability, and community-oriented problem solving. The traditional NYPD structure centered command, information, and accountability on higher-level officials and specialized units. Community policing could have empowered precinct commanders, but as practiced in New York by Commissioners Ward and Brown it focused more on empowering individual police officers as problem solvers (McElroy, Cosgrove, and Sadd 1993; Ward 1988).

Also under the old system, the job of precinct commander was either the icing on the top of a long career at NYPD or a short stop-over on a fast track in the career of upwardly mobile officers. In either case, the performance goal tended to be limited: escape the position before an incident or scandal marred the record.

Under Compstat, precincts became the locus of problem solving and performance management, guided by centrally devised strategies and aided by centrally deployed supplemental resources. Precinct commanders have been given the tools to analyze up-to-date statistics, find patterns of crime and police activity, and devise solutions to problems they identify within the context of priorities and strategies for reducing crime established by the central administration. Precinct commanders know that Compstat staff have the same data they do, and are analyzing it for review.

This change in management process is symbolized by the twice-weekly crime strategy meetings at the Command and Control Center at One Police Plaza. The leaders of one of the City's eight borough commands assemble for a three-hour meeting with the department's top managers to review the performance of precincts — originally one by one, now in adjacent clusters to facilitate awareness of and response to larger patterns. In the early stages these reviews were scheduled well in advance, but precincts now receive only a couple of days notice. The review process is aided by geographic information system (GIS) maps, and trends are presented on computer terminals and projected on large screens. Precinct commanders are

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questioned about their analyses of patterns and trends, about their actions to solve crime problems, and about their coordination with other police department units. A review session typically covers, in one way or another, all ten central police strategies⁴:

- ✿ Getting guns off the streets.
- ✿ Curbing youth violence in the schools and on the streets.
- ✿ Driving drug dealers out of New York City.
- ✿ Breaking the cycle of domestic violence.
- ✿ Reclaiming public spaces.
- ✿ Reducing auto related crime.
- ✿ Rooting out corruption.
- ✿ Reclaiming the roads.
- ✿ Fostering courtesy, professionalism, and respect.
- ✿ Bringing fugitives to justice.

In addition to sharpening the focus on accountability, Compstat sessions have become major vehicles for organizational learning. In the past, no mechanisms were in place to share lessons learned or advances in crime-fighting tactics. The evidence presented at Compstat meetings is intensely scrutinized for insights into what works – and does not work – in the fight against crime, with the results widely and rapidly disseminated within the department. Since commanders are often grilled in Compstat meetings about their familiarity with successful methods, they have strong incentives to be prepared.⁵

**The Unintended
Consequences of Compstat**

It is hardly news in public administration that policies and programs may have unintended consequences. A management principle underlying Compstat is that what is counted counts in terms of

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organizational performance.⁶ There is a corollary: what is not counted tends to be discounted.

In the first months of Compstat, precinct commanders were not quizzed about civilian complaints or patterns of police misconduct; after several months these data were added to the Precinct Commander Profile, and questions were raised in the Compstat review meetings. This did not receive the same level of attention by the Department — nor certainly by the Mayor — given to crime, but its addition does reflect Bratton's early recognition that performance management is a balancing act.

A focus on police misconduct in the form of overly aggressive policing and discourtesy and lack of respect in police encounters with citizens has gradually been added to the list of strategies. This strategy was introduced not as a result of any systematic evidence of increased misconduct, but in response to several highly publicized police-citizen encounters in which public response suggested poor police community relations. There is little hard evidence of trends in police misconduct in interactions with the community.⁷

Under Commissioner Bratton a special Compstat process for Internal Affairs used the new approach to track and analyze serious offenses such as corruption. The separate Internal Affairs Compstat review process was discontinued by Commissioner Safir, who returned to highly compartmentalized investigations, apparently because of traditional concern about leaks within the Department.

Information Technology and Police Organization

There is a critical technological dimension to the structural reform story engendered by Compstat. At the beginning of the Bratton administration in 1994, precincts typically did not have personal computers. NYPD was one of the last bastions of mainframe computer technology — and the related mentality of excessive central control. Precincts produced most police data, which were sent for analysis to headquarters for processing. It usually took weeks for crime and activity data sent to headquarters to come back to precincts — if

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they came back at all. There was little if any pressure on precinct commanders to reduce crime, so this lack of timely intelligence was not widely viewed as a problem. Under the old model, 911 dispatchers had more to say about the deployment of patrol officers than commanders.

Information technology played a role in police reform in the United States before Compstat. Before the decentralization afforded by personal computers and the analytic power of GIS maps, there were centralized 911 telephone and radio systems. Following the advice of the Task Force on the Police of the President's Commission on Law Enforcement in the Administration of Justice (1967), police departments aspired to be centrally controlled, highly mechanized, semi-military bureaucratic organizations.⁸ The large main-frame computers needed to support enormous 911 systems — which in New York City record 10 million plus calls for service a year — symbolized the centralized structure of this dominant police management model.

Ironically, at the very time the 1967 Task Force was recommending traditional “principles of organization” as the key to improving police management, the academic field of organization theory was producing powerful arguments for a decentralized “contingency” approach to organization design. Prominent works by Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) and James D. Thompson (1967) make a powerful case for the idea that the structure of high-performing organizations varies with the technology used and the environments in which they work. According to that theory, urban police forces, lacking knowledge of cause and effect (James Q. Wilson 1967), and operating in dynamic and complex environments, require decentralized decisionmaking. The survival of the 911 model largely intact well into the 1990s can largely be explained by public and political demand, bureaucratic inertia, and the absence of the “norms of rationality,” a constraint that organization theorists assumed to be operating. “Norms of rationality” refers to measures of performance that put pressure on organizations to produce results. Given the view that the police could not have a significant impact on community safety, large police forces focused instead on their internal or “technical rationality,” which included concerns such as improving radio dispatch technology and minimizing response time.

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But with the shift in focus to community outcomes, crime reduction, and increased public safety, the formula for rational action had to change.

During the last decade of the twentieth century, the level of crime and its seemingly incessant rise was a major public issue in the United States. Criminologists and pundits presented competing explanations for this rise, ranging from sociological to cultural to economic to chemical (drugs), but few placed the blame on the organization and management of police services. Some discussion occurred regarding how many police officers were needed to respond to crime and cope with its consequences, but few analysts looked to the police for solutions.

Scholarly literature on police reinforced lowered expectations. Long before James Q. Wilson articulated the “broken windows” theory of police intervention, he wrote in *Varieties of Police Behavior*, the most widely cited volume on police administration:

The police share with most other public agencies – the schools, foreign ministries, antipoverty organizations – an inability to assess accurately the effectiveness of their operations.... No police department, however competently led and organized, can know how much crime and disorder a community produces or how much would be produced if the police function differently (or not all).

Wilson went on to argue:

Even when the police have accurate information, it is often difficult or impossible to devise a strategy that would make the occurrence of a crime less likely. Many serious crimes – murder, forcible rape – are of this character: Though they are often reported with minimum distortion or delay, it may occur, in many cases, in private places among people who know each other and in the heat of an emotional moment.... The rate of certain crimes is determined to a significant but unknown degree by factors over which the police have little control. Street crimes are affected by weather, crimes against property by prevailing economic conditions, crimes against the person by the racial and class composition of the community, delinquency by the nature and strength of

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family and peer group controls. The police know these things – or think they know them – but they cannot estimate the magnitude of such factors, or distinguish their effect from that of police tactics, or bring these factors under police control.

Consequently, according to Wilson, “few police administrators show much interest in ‘planning’ the deployment of their manpower and equipment.”

Wilson’s “realistic” view was widely shared and reflected in police administration from the 1970s into the 1990s. Police departments in urban America all used the reactive response 911 model of service delivery. Departments deployed officers in random, visible patrol cars in the hope that their presence would not only deter crime, but also distribute response units in a way that minimized response time to unpredictable calls for service. When the City of New York began to present agency performance targets in the Mayor’s Management Report, the NYPD prior to Commissioner Bratton refused to set crime reduction targets. The argument made by the Department and accepted by the mayor’s office was that the police do not produce crime, they only respond to it, however much there is (Smith 1993). In support of this view, they could cite experts like David Bayley (1994), who wrote: “That the police are not able to prevent crime should not come as a surprise to thoughtful people. It is generally understood that social conditions outside the control of police, as well as outside the control of the criminal justice system as a whole, determine crime levels in the community.”⁹

Today, less than a decade later, the long-prevailing belief in the limited and solely reactive role of modern police forces has been dramatically altered. The idea that policing *can* make a difference had its origin in the idea of community policing.

Community Policing and Problem-Solving Policing

Compstat had its roots in the rise of two sometimes-related reforms in managing public safety: community policing and problem-solving policing. As recounted more fully elsewhere (Goldstein 1990,

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Sparrow et al. 1990), a series of studies challenged the basic premises on which 911 urban policing strategies were based. The random-patrol model assumed that rapid response gave police their best chance to apprehend criminals and deter crimes, as well as to enhance citizens' feeling of safety. A specialized force of detectives would solve crimes not deterred or where random patrol and rapid response did not result in apprehension (911 Model). Studies in the 1970s — including the now famous Kansas City Preventive Patrol Experiment (Kelling et al. 1974, Greenwood et al. 1977) — called those assumptions into question. Eck and Spellman (1987, p. 35) summarized the policy implications of this research: "In short most serious crimes were unaffected by the standard police actions designed to control them. Further, the public did not notice reductions in patrol, reduced speed responding to non-emergencies, or lack of follow-up investigations."

Research also revealed a growth in the public's fear of crime and perceived physical and social disorder at the neighborhood level. Moreover, these "quality-of-life" conditions were largely ignored by police, who focused on a narrowly defined crime control mission (Wilson and Kelling 1982, more fully explored in Skogan, 1990).

Faced with the need for new approaches to urban public safety, many police departments in the 1980s experimented with new strategies based on two further findings: police contributions to public safety were highly dependent on citizen inputs, and police efforts were oriented to apprehension more than prevention. From the first came "community policing" and a return to the idea of the cop on the beat who knows a neighborhood's people and places. From the second emerged "problem-solving policing," which suggests that police can reduce crime by focusing not just on incidents of crime but also on community problems which lead to those incidents. Some departments combined the two. In New York City a version of problem-solving community policing began in 1984 under Police Commissioner Benjamin Ward and continued into the early 1990s. Since 1994 the city has changed the orientation of problem-solving policing and dropped the rhetoric of community policing almost completely. As will be shown, there has been some distance

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between rhetoric and reality both during the ascendance of community policing in New York and its apparent eclipse.

As Commissioner Ward was addressing how the department should deploy new officers in the early 1980s, James Q. Wilson and George Kelling (1982) published "Broken Windows." They argued that the neglect of quality-of-life crime enforcement in New York City in the late 1970s might be causally related to the rise in more serious crime in the early 1980s.¹⁰ In 1984, after an extensive study of the needs of the department by the Vera Institute of Justice, the Community Patrol Officer Program (CPOP) was launched to test problem-solving, community-oriented policing in one precinct. CPOP started in Brooklyn with a 10-officer unit, supervised by a sergeant. The officers were assigned to work alone in fixed beat assignments, following a flexible schedule based on the needs of the beat. They were not responding to routine (911) calls for service, but learning neighborhood norms and folkways, identifying patterns of incidents ("problems"), and developing various strategies to address them. While community patrol officers were supposed to act on the information they obtained, they were also expected to serve as a communication link between the neighborhood and the department.

Before much testing of the model could occur, the idea grew wings and took off with a commitment in 1985 to extend it to every precinct in the city. By 1989, when Benjamin Ward left the department, a CPOP unit was operating in all 75 precincts of the City (McElroy, Cosgrove and Sadd 1993). In 1989, mayoral candidate David Dinkins announced his intention to double the number of CPOs if elected.¹¹

Mayor Dinkins appointed as police commissioner Lee Brown, a nationally recognized proponent of community policing. He issued a "blueprint for change" in which he made community policing not merely a program but "the dominant philosophy and strategy" of the department. "With community policing, every neighborhood will have one or more police officers assigned to it and responsible for helping residents of the community prevent crime, develop a capacity for order maintenance, and improve the quality of life."

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The effects of community policing in New York are not well documented. Testifying before the Public Safety Committee of the New York City Council in 1991, Jack Greene, Jerry McElroy, and Dennis Smith each argued that systematically measuring progress on the near-term, intermediate, and ultimate goals would help guide the department and stabilize public expectations. However, Commissioner Brown testified that the department had very limited resources for evaluation, and that the evaluations it did undertake would be for “managerial” use.

In his campaign for mayor in 1993, challenger Rudolph Giuliani characterized Dinkins’s community policing as “social work.” A former federal prosecutor, he claimed to be a “real crime fighter.” A “student” of George Kelling,¹² he also promised to pay more attention to quality-of-life offenses, symbolized by the “squeegee men” jaywalking city streets at intersections to try to clean the windows of often reluctant and even frightened drivers.¹³

William J. Bratton, who became police commissioner in January of 1994 and directed the departmental reengineering effort, was recognized nationally as a proponent of community policing. A number of his closest advisors while he led the Boston Police, such as George Kelling of Northeastern University and Robert Wasserman,¹⁴ are considered founders of the community policing movement.

But New York in 1994 was a different story. Community policing was associated in the public mind with the Dinkins administration. In his book (1998, pp. 198-9), Bratton explains his view of community policing as practiced in New York City:

Beat cops are important in maintaining contact with the public and offering them a sense of security. They can identify the communities’ concerns and sometimes prevent crime simply by their visibility. Giving cops more individual power to make decisions is a good idea. But the community-policing plan as it was originally focused was not going to work because there was no focus on crime. The connection between having more cops on the street and the crime rate falling was implicit. There was no plan to deploy these officers in specifically hard-hit areas...and there were no concrete means by which they were supposed to address crime

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when they got there. They were simply supposed to go out on their beats and somehow improve their communities.

But did community policing disappear with the introduction of Compstat? Problem solving, its lesser-known twin, was infused into many parts of the new plan. While the operationalization of problem solving as a street-level police behavior remained problematic, it emerged in Bratton's 1994 *Plan of Action* for NYPD as a key to high performance reviews, favorable assignments, and promotions. However, the new version of problem solving centered on the precinct, and the primary accountable official was the precinct commander, not the individual community police officer.

Precinct commanders could design their own operating strategies and draw on the department's resources in making those strategies work, and were evaluated on their success in "reducing dramatically crime, disorder, and fear." Precinct commanders who had been trained in and believed in the efficacy of community policing almost inevitably relied on a partnership between their police and the community to achieve significant crime reduction. Thus, community policing has played a role in New York City's crime reduction success story.

The Case for Compstat

It was probably inevitable, given the central place of crime-fighting strategies in the campaign that ousted the City's first African-American mayor and brought Rudy Giuliani into office, that the subject of crime and police performance in New York would be highly politicized. Mayor Giuliani did not acknowledge as significant the fact that crime had declined each year under his predecessor, nor credit the Safe Streets/Safe City legislation achieved under Mayor Dinkins for creating a much larger police force with which to pursue the fight against crime. Returning the favor, opponents and critics of the mayor are reluctant to find any merit in the claim that the NYPD under his leadership has played a central role in reducing crime. Most critics are content to offer alternative explanations, but one recent book goes to great if sometimes tortured lengths to challenge even the basic facts of crime reduction.¹⁵

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The case we make here is that, while crime statistics are flawed in well-established ways, there is no evidence that the credibility of crime statistics changed during the Giuliani administration. If anything, crime statistics have been more carefully scrutinized in the last decade than at any time in history. Statisticians recommend the use of multiple measures of almost any complex phenomenon as an antidote to biases. An unprecedented number of police performance indicators are available, and those statistics tell the same story: crime in virtually all categories and in all sub-areas of the City is dramatically down. Not only are homicides now at 1960s levels, but reports of shots fired, gun incidents, and gunshot injuries are also dramatically down. And some of those numbers come from agencies other than the police.

The key point is that there is a remarkably close link between the introduction of the new approach to police management and a dramatic drop in crime, and that other possible explanations do not fit the pattern of crime reduction as closely.

**Rival Hypotheses for
Crime Reduction in New York City**

Analysts have advanced five alternative explanations to the City's drop in crime: — demographics, drugs, gun control, the economy, and incarceration. Succinctly summarized, here are the arguments:¹⁶

Demographics: The relative size of the cohort between 15 and 21 years of age has been shown to have enormous influence upon the rate of reported crimes. Criminologists have clearly demonstrated that adolescents commit a disproportionate number and percentage of total crimes, that criminality peaks between the ages of 16 and 20 for the majority of specific offenses, and that the rate of offenses attributable to a particular age cohort declines as it ages (Wolfgang, Figlio, and Sellin 1972; Tracy, Wolfgang, and Figlio 1990). These conclusions are supported by data from the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports, as well as by victimization studies.

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Criminology's conclusions about the influence of the age 15-to-19 cohort upon overall crime, however, do not fit the patterns of crime in New York City. The city's youthful population *declined* by almost 22 percent from 1970 to 1990, when index crime rates soared in New York by 23 percent and across the nation. Both homicide and motor vehicle theft hit 20-year peaks in 1990. The proportion of crimes for which the cohort was responsible did increase: per capita arrests for youths between 15 and 19 rose almost 60 percent.

The demographic rationales for crime and their emphasis on criminality among the cohort of males between the ages of 15 and 19 cannot explain the significant crime reductions in New York City over the past several years. In fact, the number of males in that age group has actually increased between 1990 and 1995, when New York City began to realize a notable decrease in crime.¹⁷

Drugs: A great deal of recent discourse and research in contemporary criminology has focused on the nexus between drug abuse and crime, particularly violent crime. Hypotheses typically establish a causal link between drugs and crime in two ways: a particular drug is said to induce violent crime by removing inhibitions or through some other pharmacological effect, and the prohibitive cost of some drugs is said to cause users to commit crimes (particularly property crimes) to generate income to satisfy their addiction. Although positive correlations between drug use and criminality have been demonstrated, many of the studies are based on convenient samples of prison and jail inmates and therefore present sample bias (Bureau of Justice Statistics 1988, 1991). Another empirical issue is the difficulty of determining what portion of overall crime is committed by drug abusers. As Wilson and Herrnstein (1985, p. 366) point out, it would be impossible to calculate how much crime heroin addicts commit even if we had accurate data about the number of addicts and the monetary cost of their addiction.

Some have argued that the precipitous increases in robbery complaints nationwide during the late 1980s stemmed from the emergence of crack cocaine. Crack exploded onto the drug scene in New York City in 1985 and 1986, a period in which robbery complaints did increase dramatically. Some would argue, in a similar vein, that the reemergence of heroin as the drug of choice among

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street criminals will translate into an increase in burglary complaints, since burglaries rates have long been associated with heroin addiction. However, neither of these hypotheses is supported by empirical evidence in New York City.

In 1984, just prior to the crack explosion, a Drug Use Forecasting (DUF) urinalysis study at the Manhattan Central Booking facility revealed a 42 percent positive rate for cocaine among all arrestees, regardless of the charge. By 1988 — perhaps the height of the crack epidemic — the prevalence of cocaine use among all arrestees had nearly doubled, to 83 percent, lending credibility to the hypothesized relationship between crack cocaine and crime.

Although cocaine use among all arrestees has since dropped, the decline has been fairly modest. In February 1995, 78 percent of arrestees tested positive for cocaine, and in May 1995, 68 percent did so. Since 1988, the proportion of arrestees testing positive for cocaine in each quarter varied from 59 percent to 83 percent, and since 1993 the proportion varied from 63 percent to 78 percent. Cocaine use among those arrested in New York City has thus not declined substantially, and certainly not to the extent that it could account for the enormous decline in the crime that cocaine supposedly engenders. It should be noted that robberies in New York City peaked in 1981 at about 107,500 — before the advent of crack and seven years before peak cocaine use as measured by DUF. New York City robberies were 49,670 in 1996.¹⁸

Gun Control: One can intuitively grasp a connection between the availability of funds, particularly handguns, and violent crime. Roughly one-half of the nation's homicides are committed with guns, as are about one-third of all robberies and one-third of all rapes. In New York City at least, the vast majority of those guns are illegally possessed. No significant change in gun control law or any demographic or social variable might have induced street criminals to refrain from carrying or using their guns during the period when gun-related violence in New York City precipitously declined. However, the facts do clearly show a link between the number of guns and a change in police strategy and management.

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“Getting guns off the streets” was the first strategic priority of Bratton when he became commissioner of NYPD.¹⁹ The number of firearms (especially handguns) used in criminal activity declined substantially in New York City during the first years of the new administration. The percentage of robberies in which firearms were used, for example, fell from 36 percent in 1993 to 33 percent in 1994 and to 29 percent for the first six months of 1995. The number of shooting incidents declined 40 percent between 1993 and the end of 1994 (and an additional 52 percent between fiscal 1995 and 1999), and the number of shooting victims injured in these incidents dropped 38 percent. The decline in firearms use can also be inferred from the fact that the department received 23 percent fewer “shots-fired” calls during the first nine months of 1995 than during the comparable 1994 period.

The declining number of shooting incidents and victims reflects a general decline in the number of firearms carried and used by criminals, which can reasonably be attributed to the effectiveness of NYPD’s strategic gun enforcement efforts. A plausible explanation is that criminals considered the wisdom of leaving their guns at home. Indeed, NYPD gun arrests rose fairly rapidly subsequent to the introduction of the gun strategy, and began to decline only as a function of aggressive enforcement.

The Economy: The question of whether poverty causes crime has been one of the most controversial and enduring issues in criminology as well as politics. Academic research has failed to provide conclusive data to support or reject any of the common economic theories of crime causation.

In any case, none of the common social or economic factors that criminologists typically cite to explain fluctuations in crime seem to be responsible for any appreciable decline in crime. New York City’s economic picture was improving only slightly during the first years of the Giuliani administration. Data from the U.S. Department of Labor show New York City’s unemployment rate at 10.8 percent in January 1994, at 7.2 percent in September 1994, at 9 percent in February 1995, and at 8 percent in September 1995. The unemployment rate remained over 8 percent for the rest of the decade — well above the national average. The number of city residents receiving

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public assistance benefits began to decline slightly in 1994 and 1995, and dramatically only after the introduction of national welfare reform in 1996. A comparison of the number of city residents receiving food stamps in August 1994 and August 1995 reveals a very modest decrease of 0.4 percent.

There is more evidence to suggest that *the improvement in the city's economy followed a decline in crime rather than the other way around*. The New York City Convention and Visitors Bureau reported that it serviced 30 percent more visitors in 1996 than in 1993, and that the city attracted 25 million visitors in 1996 — a 14 percent increase over 1995 levels. This translates into 3.5 million more visitors who contributed to the local economy. New York City's hotel occupancy rate rose from 70 percent in 1993 to 82 percent in 1996.

Subway ridership has similarly reflected a decline in subway crime. Daily subway ridership fell 3.5 percent between 1990 and 1991 but increased 0.2 percent between 1991 and 1992, when subway crime fell 15 percent. In 1992 and 1993, when subway crime fell an additional 24 percent, daily ridership rose 5 percent. In 1994, with subway crime falling another 22 percent, ridership rose an additional 5 percent. According to MTA monthly reports, subway ridership rose every year after 1993, after declining steadily in the late 1980s. From these data, we could argue that public fears associated with riding the city's rapid transit system have declined. Investments in subway infrastructure and the new fare policies such as add-a-ride introduced in 1997 are also factors in these upward trends.

Arrests and Incapacitation: Even the best managed and most effective police agency cannot reduce crime solely through arrest and enforcement. Other spheres of the criminal justice system — the courts and corrections, probation and parole — play a salient role in reducing crime and enhancing public safety. Corrections agencies in particular are instrumental in reducing crime through incapacitation and perhaps to some extent through deterrence, although the public rarely acknowledges their importance.

Although it may be difficult to accurately estimate the relative effectiveness of incapacitation strategies, the rationale for incapacitation

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is fairly simple. We know that some criminals, particularly “career criminals,” commit a highly disproportionate number of crimes. Like many other states, New York has significantly increased the number of prisons, the size of the prison population, and the length of incarceration. Some have speculated that this increased incarceration has incapacitated crime.

Aside from the fact that the dramatic increase in prisoners depended on arrests, the key point is that prison population growth occurred during the 1980s and early 1990s and began to reverse when crime trends in New York started downward. The number of new commitments to prisons was 8,649 in 1993, but dropped 33 percent to 5,837 in 1997. With an increase of 32 percent in the mean minimum sentence, one could argue that the two trends canceled each other out. During the same period, however, the number of prisoners released on parole steadily increased from 20,662 in 1993 to 22,329 in 1997 (Citizens Budget Commission 2000).

While NYPD did not deemphasize felony arrests under the management strategy it introduced in 1994, it did attack the problem of serious crime by greatly increasing the emphasis on misdemeanors. In 1993 the department made 127,883 felony arrests and 133,446 misdemeanor arrests. In 1994, the first year of the new regime, all arrests increased, while felony arrests rose 9 percent (to 139,228 arrests) and misdemeanor arrests shot up 31 percent (to 175,128). By 1997 misdemeanor arrests were at 228,080, but felony arrests remained almost level at 135,778.

Reminiscent of the fare beating strategy in the subways, NYPD’s quality-of-life enforcement effort did not produce the kinds of arrests that result in incarceration, but these data nevertheless show that dramatic crime reductions can be achieved through sustained and tactical enforcement of quality-of-life misdemeanor offenses, coupled with vigorous enforcement of felony crimes and the concomitant incapacitation of “career criminals.” This record offers no support for the view that prisons rather than policing produced more safety from criminal victimization in New York City. Simply put: police can control the main cause of crime — human behavior.

Applying the Model to Other Public Services

The claim that the new Compstat approach to police management can reduce crime, disorder, and fear is not limited to the experience of NYPD. Compstat received a Ford Foundation Innovations in Government award, and has been replicated in a number of other cities both in the United States and abroad. The extent to which these communities adhere to the New York City model has not been systematically documented, nor have the results. In *Crime Fighter*, former NYPD Deputy Police Commissioner Jack Maple recounts successful use of the Compstat approach in a number of American cities that had not been part of the general downward trend. After introducing a Compstat-like approach, each of these cities saw significant declines in crime.

Two New York City Departments that have attempted to follow the NYPD model in areas other than policing provide additional evidence of the effectiveness of public-sector performance management. At the Department of Correction, the elements of accurate and timely intelligence combined with effective tactics, rapid deployment, relentless follow-up and assessment, and decentralized accountability produced a major turnaround in prisoner safety and drop in overtime expenses. From 1995, when the department introduced its Compstat-like management reform, through 2000, the number of violent incidents dropped from 593 to 54. The Rikers Island Jail, among the more dangerous facilities in the nation, became one of the safest (Smith 1997).

Using the principles of Compstat, the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation created PARKSTAT, which converted a very good systematic method of annually measuring park safety and cleanliness into a system for intensively managing those conditions. The department reported declining performance for two consecutive years after introducing the measurement tool. After using Compstat principles to convert its measurement system into a management system in 1996, the department more than doubled the percentage of park facilities rated as safe and clean, from 39 to 87 percent (Smith 1997).

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That these successes occurred immediately after the introduction of Compstat management principles provides additional weight to the argument that a change in police management deserves significant credit for the greater safety of New York City. These experiences suggest that performance management can significantly improve complex urban services.²⁰

Endnotes

- 1 This is in addition, of course, to elaborate new controls on planning and monitoring spending put in place in the wake of the fiscal crisis.
- 2 Bratton notes in his book *Turnaround* that only a fraction of the more than 6,000 additional officers funded by Safe Streets legislation were on the streets of New York during the critical summer before the fall election of 1993 (1998, p. 198).
- 3 Maple emphasizes these follow-on actions in what he calls the “quality-of-life-plus” strategy (1999, p. 155).
- 4 During the first several years, there were only eight strategies; the last two were added by Commissioner Howard Safir.
- 5 The positive effect of this rapid transmission of “lessons learned” depends on the quality of the learning.
- 6 Prior to the introduction of the COMPSTAT style focus on measuring “outcomes,” such as reduced crime/increased public safety, the measuring of activities and outputs of police was associated with rapid but ineffective radio runs, and arrests that were made to reduce public pressure, and other abuses in the name of “productivity.” See Eck and Spellman 1987.
- 7 Deputy Commissioner for Policy and Planning Michael J. Farrell pointed out in an interview the dependence of Compstat-style performance management on agreed-upon performance measures. Civilian complaints against the police are intrinsically contested data; until they have been investigated and perhaps even adjudicated, they are difficult to use in management. Systematic citizen surveys would provide a general reading on community/police relations, but they are expensive and do not focus on the small percentage of the population that actually interacts with the police. Police Commissioner Bernard Kerrick, Safir’s successor, recently announced that the city, using the nonprofit Vera Institute, would survey citizens about police and safety.
- 8 Thompson (1967), for example, hypothesizes that “under norms of rationality, organizations facing heterogeneous task environments seek to identify homogeneous segments and establish structural units to deal with each.” He also maintains that “when the range of task environment variations is large and unpredictable, the response organization component must achieve the necessary adaptation by monitoring that environment and planning responses, and this calls for localized units.”
- 9 Bayley, in *Police for the Future*, was describing the situation under the existing organization of and approaches to urban policing. In his concluding chapters on “Solutions” he articulates many principles that foreshadowed Compstat.
- 10 This neglect was exacerbated in New York City by NYPD’s response to the 25 percent cut in uniform staff that occurred in the wake of the 1975 fiscal crisis. In a

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form of triage, NYPD significantly reduced its attention to “lesser crimes” to focus on “real police work”— index crimes (see Smith 1981).

- 11 What does the CPOP experience show about managing change in complex urban police organizations? That implementing change is very difficult! With the strong support of a knowledgeable police commissioner; with a relatively clear and limited objective in a period of relative munificence, political continuity, and no extraordinary crime crisis; with little need to coordinate implementation with outside agencies; and with facilitation by a leading criminal justice organization, it nevertheless took four years to extend the program to 75 precincts involving 750 officers (less than 3 percent of the force).
- 12 Both Andrew Kirtzman (2000) and Wayne Barrett’s biographies of Mayor Giuliani recount that he met with and was influenced by Professor Kelling during the period between his first unsuccessful and his second successful run for mayor. Both authors of this article participated in the candidate’s policy “seminars” organized by Richard Schwartz.
- 13 The disappearance of “squeegee men” is often cited as an early success of the Giuliani quality-of-life law enforcement. However, William Bratton notes that in the summer of 1993, before the election, Commissioner Raymond Kelly used problem-solving methods to remove the squeegee men from intersections (Bratton and Knobler, 1998). One might concede that candidate Giuliani set this agenda as Mayor Dinkins’s compassion for people who were washing car windows on the streets of New York was a matter of public record.
- 14 Robert Wasserman also played a central role in NYPD as a consultant to former Commissioner Lee Brown, who made community policing “the dominant operational philosophy of the Department.”
- 15 In a chapter entitled “These Statistics Are Crime,” Wayne Barrett (1990) argues: 1) that crime statistics clearly show that police efforts under Mayor Dinkins deserve credit for reducing crime, 2) that crime reductions during the Giuliani administration were the result of other factors, such as a changing drug culture, 3) that any reduction in crime that did occur is the work of Police Commissioner Bratton and his management, not the mayor, and 4) that crime statistics supporting the credit claims of Mayor Giuliani are not to be believed. (The same statistics, if issued during the Dinkins administration or other jurisdictions apparently can be believed.)

Even after he conjures every manner of challenge, Barrett’s bottom line is not that crime has increased, nor that it has not declined, but rather that it has gone down less than claimed, and that other factors deserve credit besides the police.

- 16 This section draws heavily on Bratton’s presentation at a National Institute of Justice (NIJ) Policing Research Institute conference on “Measuring What Matters,” held in Washington DC, November 28, 1995.
- 17 As crime started to drop in the 1990s, the decline in youth population reversed itself. New York’s Department of City Planning estimates that the population of youths between ages 15 and 19 increased by 0.04 percent between 1990 and 1995. Most significant, especially for criminologists who consider race as a variable, the number of male blacks between 15 and 19 rose by nearly 2 percent and the number of male Hispanic youths by 5.7 percent. Asian and Pacific Islander males aged 15 to 19 also increased by an estimated 2.4 percent. Pulling down the average for the entire cohort were male whites, who decreased by 8.4 percent. These data are confirmed by New York State Department of Education figures showing that total

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public-school enrollment grew 4.4 percent between 1989/90 and 1994/95. The number of public-school students in grades 9 through 12 — who comprise a significant portion of the high-risk group — grew by 12 percent.

- 18 Nor was the hypothesized increase in heroin abuse evident in quarterly Drug Use Forecasting data. In 1984, 21 percent of arrestees tested positive for opiates, and positive tests peaked at 27 percent in June 1988 and 25 percent in October 1988. In the most recent DUF testing quarters, February and May 1995, respectively, 22 percent and 20 percent of arrestees tested positive for opiates.
- 19 NYPD Strategy No. 1, getting guns off the streets of New York City, entailed intensive scrutiny and follow-up of every incident, arrestee, or accomplice involving a gun, and follow-up of every lead on sources of guns. NYPD officer teams that previously focused on narcotics now focus on the link between narcotics and guns. NYPD worked with a joint city-federal task force on illegal gun trafficking that has traveled to other states to make arrests and monitored federal firearms applications that could increase the number of guns coming to New York.
- 20 The City of Baltimore has introduced CitiStat, a Compstat-inspired approach to performance management, for all city agencies. See Francis X. Cline, "Baltimore Uses Data Bank to Wake Up City Workers," *New York Times*, June 10, 2001, p. 24. See also Christopher Swope, "Restless for Results," *Governing*, April 2001.

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