

Community Policing
A Contemporary Perspective
Seventh Edition

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Preface, Seventh Edition

When the first edition of *Community Policing: A Contemporary Perspective* was written, the nation was in the midst of a deep recession, and policing faced a crisis in public confidence. The police institution lacked a clear direction that was meaningful in the lives of the majority of people. The lack of institutional direction was met with challenges to the very idea of public policing. In an era of fiscal conservatism where deregulation and privatization ruled, most police executives saw departmental resources shrink and the federal government abandon its responsibility to urban centers and communities. Declining budgets were met with an increased politicization of crime and reductions in public services. Political leaders intensified the rhetoric of “law and order,” and promoted “crime-fighting,” rather than “peace-keeping” and “problem-solving”; a self-reliance approach to social problems reigned. Political leaders pandered to the public’s fear of crime and demanded that police focus on urban violence, despite substantial decreases in both criminal victimizations and federal contributions to the coffers of urban municipalities. As political leaders played shell games with public resources, police executives were forced into a downward spiral of progressive disengagement from communities, focusing more and more of their shrinking budgets on “serious” crime.

Despite the fact that the professional model of policing had failed to live up to its touted potential, police executives were forced to make technical innovations directly applicable to the narrow “war on crime.” Policing thus became detached from the needs and desires of the people. As policing became increasingly meaningless in the day-to-day lives of people, confidence in the police diminished and administrators experienced great pressure from the public and politicians to reform the institution. Policing had to become meaningful to the quality of people’s lives to

prove its social utility and divert a crisis in legitimacy. During this bleak moment in history, community policing offered a hopeful approach for the future.

Shortly after the publication of this book, the picture of US policing, economics and politics began to change. The transformation seemed to come overnight. The nation moved out of the recession into one of the largest and most sustained economic expansions ever witnessed. The politics of self-reliance and deregulation began to be tempered with talk of community and social responsibility. Talk of community policing replaced pandering to public fear of crime and “get-tough” approaches to social problems as the cornerstones of elite political agendas. States and municipalities, largely through their own initiatives, were able to recapture lost shares of the public revenue and the crisis was averted. Yet crime and victimization rates continued their downward spiral, largely independent of policing strategies and tactics. In less than a decade, the philosophy of community policing provided law enforcement with a unified direction as well as the public and political support necessary to sustain that course.

While many of the reforms in US policing during the last two decades of the twentieth century were the result of a broad range of social and political forces, much of the change can be directly traced to the new vision of communities and policing advanced by Robert C. Trojanowicz. Trojanowicz shifted the discourse, especially among police, from the obsession with “crime fighting” and “serious crime” to the social dynamics that promote stronger, healthier communities. In doing so, he provided the police and political leaders with a roadmap for institutional reform that attempted to place policing at the heart of the provision of an array of social services as to be responsive to the needs of communities. During a less-than-hopeful period of recent history, Trojanowicz confessed that he was too humble to call community policing “a gospel,” and his book became known to many as “the bible” of community policing.

All too quickly after the publication of his book, and just as community policing began to find firm political and economic support along the road to substantial change, Robert passed away.

Robert was a hopeful visionary who provided US policing with a path to a brighter future. His work, however, did not suffer from the utopian tendencies of many visionaries; he understood all too clearly how the real world worked. He not only understood what policing needed for it to remain a viable and meaningful social institution, but he also understood the pitfalls and traps that could resurface along the road to reform. His caution about the possibility of police revering to its hyper-law enforcement orientation became prophetic with the unfolding of the events of September 11th, 2001 and the militarized political response to the tragic event as well as the sudden onset of a grave recession in 2007. Today policing finds itself in an even more precarious position than it did when Robert wrote the first edition of this book. Communities face a degree of socio-economic and racial tension not witnessed since the 1960s; civil liberties are crumbling under the strains of the unchecked rule of the market and risky accumulation strategies that place the interests of finance ahead of the population at large, and the social compact forged in the fires of civil unrest and the Depression have been all but broken, pushing even greater numbers of people into poverty and destitution. Once again political leaders have pushed policing to the center of these tensions allowing them to resort to traditional, repressive methods that only serve to widen the gulf between the police institution and the people they claim to serve.

It was in the spirit of cautious optimism that we undertook revision of *Community Policing: A Contemporary Perspective*. We attempted to extend the roadmap that the father of community policing sketched and to bring it back into contemporary focus. In doing so, we have tried to remain true to the spirit and vision that suffused his original work, both in terms of its

hopefulness and its pragmatism. Today, more than anytime in the recent past, policing needs the active involvement and participation of the community and communities desperately need responsive policing. This book advocates methods of policing that are responsive human social needs. We hope that Bob would be pleased.

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9/5/2014