TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface

Acknowledgments

CHAPTER 1 – The Idea of Community Policing

The Community Policing Revolution

The Philosophical and Structural Facets of Community Policing

  The Philosophical Facet

  Broad Police Function and Community Focus

  Community Input

  Concern for People

  Developing Trust

  Sharing Power

  Creativity

  Neighborhood Variation

The Organizational and Personnel Facet

The Strategic Facet

Geographic Focus and Co-Ownership

Direct, Daily Face-to-Face Contact
Prevention Focus
The Programmatic Facet
Reoriented Police Operations
Problem Solving and Situational Crime Prevention
Community Engagement
What Community Policing Does Not Constitute
Reconciling Law Enforcement with Community Policing
Community Policing and Homeland Security
Summary
References

CHAPTER 2 – A History of Communities and Policing
The Lessons of History
The British Roots of Policing
Colonial Law Enforcement in Cities and Towns
The Rise of Municipal Police
Frontier Justice
Vigilantism
Twentieth-Century Policing
Police Reform in the 1930s
The Police and Minorities
Initial Attempts to Reach the Community
The Challenge of the Late 1960s
The Birth of Community Policing
A Summary of the Lessons Learned and Mistakes Not to Be Repeated

References

CHAPTER 3 – The Changing Meaning of Community

The Importance of Definitions

A History of the Meaning of Community

Virtual Community

Assaults on Community

The Technological and Corporate Divide

How Community Policing Can Build a Sense of Community

Summary

References

CHAPTER 4 – The Police and Community Perception

People’s Attitudes Toward Police

Age and Perception of Police

Race and Perception of Police

Gender and Perception of Police

Socioeconomic Status and Perception of Police

Personal Experience and Perception of Police

Barriers to a Police-Community Partnership

   Excessive Force
   Police Corruption
   Rudeness
   Authoritarianism
CHAPTER 5 – Managing and Implementing Community Policing

Organizing the Police

Principles of Organization and Police Administration

Classical Organization Principles

Organizing for Community Policing

Strategic Planning

COMPSTAT

Personnel Development

Tactical Planning and Operations

Supervision

Geographical Focus

Reoriented Police Operations and Problem Solving

Implementing Community Policing

Step 1—Performance Gap

Step 2—Recognizing a Need for Change

Step 3—Creating a Proper Climate for Change

Step 4—Diagnosing the Problem

Step 5—Identifying Alternative Strategies

Step 6—Selecting the Strategy

Step 7—Determining and Operationalizing Implementation Strategy
Step 8—Evaluating and Modifying the Strategy

Leadership in the Community Policing Department

Summary

References

CHAPTER 6 – Community Policing and Crime

Challenges to Traditional Crime Control

Police Measures of Crime—What Do We Know?

The Traditional Police Effort

The Dynamics of Serious Crime

Community Policing’s Strengths

References

CHAPTER 7 – Community Policing and Fear of Crime

Traditional Policing and Fear of Crime

Discovering the “Fear of Crime”

The Flint Foot Patrol Experiment

What Is Fear of Crime?

Theoretical Models Explaining Fear of Crime

Extent of Fear of Crime

Victimization and Fear of Crime

Gender and Fear of Crime

Age and Fear of Crime

Race and Fear of Crime

Fear of Crime and Schools
CHAPTER 8 – Problem Solving and Policing Problem Spaces

The Nature of Problems and Problem Solving

Geographical Policing

Defining Dangerous Places and Hot Spots

The Mechanics of Problem Solving

  Scanning

  Analysis

  Response

  Assessment

Methods for Identifying Problems

  Officer Observation and Experience

  Complaints and Community Groups

  Crime Mapping

  Police Reports, Calls for Service Analysis, and Crime Analysis

  Geographic Concentration Pattern

  Similar Offense Pattern

  Community Surveys
CHAPTER 9 – Community Crime Prevention

Theoretical Foundation for Crime Prevention

Social Disorganization Theory
Rational Choice Theory
Routine Activities Theory

Types of Crime Prevention Strategies

Social Development Programs

Situational Crime Prevention

Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED)

Access Control
Target Hardening
Surveillance

Community Crime Prevention Programs

Neighborhood Watches
Community Anti-Drug Campaigns
Public Media Campaigns

Legislative/Administrative Programs

Police Programs

Summary
CHAPTER 10 – Community Policing and Drugs

Nature and Extent of the Drug Problem

Police Drug Strategies

  High-Level Enforcement

  Retail-Level Enforcement

  Efforts Aimed at Juveniles

Community Policing and Drug Problems

Summary

References

CHAPTER 11 – Community Policing and Special Populations

Juveniles

Juvenile Crime and Violence

Crime in Schools

Urban Youth Gangs

  Community Policing and Gang Intervention Programs

Helping the Homeless

Policing the Mentally Ill

Minorities and the Police

  Lightning Rods of Racial Tension

    The Rodney King Incident

    The Abner Louima Incident

    The Amadou Diallo Incident
CHAPTER 12 – Toward a New Breed of Police Officer

Images and Impressions

Traditional Police Culture

Resistance to Community Policing

Changing Traditional Police Culture

What Community Policing Offers

Implications for the Future

References

CHAPTER 13 – Community Policing at the Crossroads

Community Policing: From Theory to Practice

A Restatement of the Philosophy of Community Policing

The Social Context of the Community Policing Revolution

Turning the Spirit of Community Policing into Practice

Challenges to the Spirit of Community Policing

Contemporary Issues and Questions about Community Policing

Community Policing and Terrorism

Summary
References

The Ten Principles of Community Policing

Glossary/Index
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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