
Watchman and Community: Myth and Institutionalization in Policing

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The author uses a conceptual framework grounded in theory of institutional process to assess developments in the theory of community-based policing. He suggests that two contemporary myths in policing—the myth of the police watchman and the myth of community—provide core elements the theory. Both liberal and conservative advocates for reform have drawn on these myths to support reinstitutionalizing police as community protectors with broad authority, including authority to arrest, unconstrained by law enforcement or due process considerations. He also discusses fundamental differences in the ways in which liberal and conservative reform advocates perceive the relationship between the myths.

[C]ertain ideas burst upon the intellectual landscape with a tremendous force. They solve so many fundamental problems at once that they seem also to promise that they will resolve all fundamental problems, clarify all obscure issues.

—Clifford Geertz 1973:3

Clifford Geertz thus described the force with which the idea of culture energized the development of the field of anthropology. It is with such dynamic vigor that the idea of community-based policing currently envelops police work (Manning 1984; Trojanowicz & Bucqueroux 1990; Walker 1992b). Community-based policing has emerged as the articulation of a police reform movement that addressed a central problem confronting police in the 1960s—the problem of legitimacy (Mastrofski 1991). By invoking two powerful myths—the myth of the 18th-century morally invested “small-town” American community and the myth of police officers as community watchmen—community-based policing provided a source of legitimation for police activity in terms of community protection when legitimacy in terms of police professionalization had been lost (Klockars 1991).

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The police had failed by many accounts to do much in the way of controlling sharply increasing crime; moreover, they were implicated by the 1967 Kerner and 1968 Crime Commissions in the devastating urban riots of the 1960s.¹ Police practice following the reports of these commissions began to change from structures and activities associated with the police professionalism movement and toward the adoption of structures and policies that would forge relationships between police and communities. This change coalesced under the rubric of community policing by the 1980s.

Community policing involved the adoption of elements of structure, activity, and policy designed to make the police look like an organization should look that was responding to problems associated with police professionalism (among them, abrasive enforcement practices that alienated minority communities and police inability to do much about crime). By the 1980s community-based policing was rapidly being institutionalized. Its popularity stemmed from its seeming potential to alleviate a broad range of social and moral dilemmas overwhelming contemporary urban society (Mastrofski 1991).

I argue that the diffusion of the philosophy and programmatic elements of community-based policing across the political landscape of the United States from the early 1970s to the present was an institutional process aimed at restoring legitimacy to the police (Crank & Langworthy 1992). In this essay on institutionalization in the policing sector, I adopt the perspective that institutionalization is a process guided by myth construction, and I hold that the community policing movement is guided by powerful myths of community and watchman (Klockars 1991). By looking at how these two myths developed, we gain insight into how community-based policing is becoming institutionalized as the way police organizations should organize and accomplish their work, independent of the efficiency or effectiveness of community-based strategies and tactics to accomplish the prevention of crime and the production of arrests.

Integral to the process of institutionalization is the entrepreneurial activity of individuals with broad influence within the institutional field (DiMaggio 1988:15). Consequently, the assessment of the process of institutionalization of community-based policing takes into consideration how particular institutional entrepreneurs have influenced the development of the myths of watchman and community.

Finally, I suggest that, because the process of institutionalization for the police occurs within a broad political environment,

¹ Throughout, the report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (1967) is cited as "Kerner Commission"; the report of the U.S. President's Commission on Law Enforcement & Administration of Justice (1967) is cited as "Crime Commission." The References include cross-references from the informal names to the official reports.

elements of community policing can and should be described in terms of conservative and liberal crime-control conceptions (Walker 1989a). The implementation of particular strategies under the rubric of community policing in specific police organizations does not indicate how efficient or effective they are in dealing with crime; instead, such implementation reveals the dominant crime-control theology at that place and at that time.

Legitimacy and Community Policing

Legitimacy Lost

Within highly institutionalized environments, particular organizational structures, policies, and behaviors take the form they do because of prevailing values and beliefs that have become institutionalized (Hall 1982:313). Random preventive patrol, rapid police response systems, the importance of technology in the investigation of criminal suspects, organizational elaboration in crime-fighting areas, and a militaristic system of rank are aspects of policing that, under the banner of the police professionalism movement, have been institutionalized (Crank & Langworthy 1992).

Prevailing values and beliefs, however, may have their legitimacy challenged. Legitimacy crises may emerge of such severity that they bring into question the fundamental purpose of the organization itself (Meyer & Scott 1983). Such a crisis occurred for policing in the late 1960s. This crisis was precipitated by several factors. The presidential elections of 1964 and 1968 elevated street crime to national attention for the first time. In part, this stemmed from the public perception that crime was sharply increasing (Walker 1980). However, regardless of how crime was measured, police were unable to improve on their performance (Kelling & Moore 1989). Widespread protests against the Vietnam War and the violent urban riots of 1963–67 fostered a public image of police forces ill prepared to accomplish their primary mandate—preserving and protecting the citizenry (Walker 1985).² The assassinations of President John Kennedy, his brother Robert Kennedy, and Martin Luther King and the emergence of crime as a topic of national political interest contributed to a broad-based concern over lawlessness and a sharp increase in fear of crime (Michalowski 1985).

This era also witnessed an increasing public mistrust of the police, brought about by such events as the killings of Black Panther leaders by the Chicago police and the Knapp Commission

² Walker (1985:356) describes the “challenge of the 1960’s” as the growing momentum of the civil rights movement, problems of police behavior in black neighborhoods, the dramatic increases in crime between 1963 and 1973 resulting in heightened public fear, and urban riots and militant protests against the Vietnam war.

findings of pervasive police corruption in New York City (Manning 1977). A series of Supreme Court decisions, such as *Miranda v. Arizona* (1966), contributed to a public climate of concern over the tendency of the police to engage in illegal behavior (Walker 1980). The reports of the 1950s American Bar Foundation (ABF) Survey of the Administration of Criminal Justice published in the 1960s had a far-reaching impact throughout the criminal justice system (Walker 1992a). The ABF survey reports brought an end to the idea that the police performed their task in a nondiscretionary, ministerial fashion and documented the absence of controls over discretionary police behavior. These events coalesced in the 1967 Kerner and Crime Commissions' reports.

Crank and Langworthy (1992) state that loss of legitimacy is a ceremonial process marked by rituals of public degradation and absolution through the adoption of a new legitimating mandate. Their research focused on police organizations only, but I suggest that a similar ceremonial process also occurred for policing at the national level. For the police, public degradation and revocation of legitimacy occurred ceremonially through two blue-ribbon panels of prominent citizens, acting in the name of elected leadership, and convened to investigate crime control in the United States—the Kerner Commission and the Crime Commission, both issuing reports in 1967—sharply questioned then-current police strategies and related structures. Not only did these commissions cite problems of lawlessness unresolved by current police practices, but they implicated the police in the riots of the late 1960s.

Both commissions called for police reform, to be accomplished through operational strategies and organizational structures that addressed what were described as profound problems of police-community relations. The Kerner Commission noted that in 40% of the riots, police actions triggered the riot (Greene 1989). Institutionalized racism was seen as the underlying problem, but aggressive and violent police behavior was identified as the direct cause. The commission commented on the atmosphere of hostility and cynicism, reinforced by a widespread belief among minorities in rampant police brutality and in a double standard of justice for blacks and whites. This reservoir of grievances, they contended, created an explosive atmosphere where an incident, often involving the police, would spark a riot. Moreover, the commission noted that the most severe disorders were in communities with highly professionalized police agencies.³ Recommendations included the elimination of abrasive police practices, the establishment of contacts with minority communi-

³ The Kerner Commission (1967:158) noted: "many of the [most] serious disturbances took place in cities whose police are among the best led, best organized, best trained and most professional in the country."

ties, increased hiring of minority members, effective grievance mechanisms, and the creation of the position of community service officer.

The Crime Commission (1967) focused more heavily on the sharp increase in crime through the 1960s. Their criticism struck at the heart of the professionalism movement: The police, in spite of adopting a law enforcement mandate, had failed to stem a rising tide of crime. This commission's recommendations were much like those of the Kerner Commission. It encouraged the creation of police community relations units, the recruitment and promotion of more minority members, experimentation with team policing (a precursor of community policing), and the creation of a new police position, the community service officer, who would be drawn from members of the local community and would provide community liaison work.

Professionalism Reconsidered

Central to the findings of both commission reports were the citation and discussion of profound problems with police-community relations. Following the reports, many observers of the police noted that traditional sources of police legitimacy, grounded in law enforcement activity and described by an aloof and legalistic "professional" police, should be reconsidered (Moore & Kelling 1983; Fogelson 1977). The police professionalism movement, with its narrow view of police legitimacy in terms of law enforcement, had failed by all accounts to accomplish its self-chosen mandate—victory in the war on crime (Walker 1992b; Skolnick & Bayley 1986). Moreover, the quasi-military and bureaucratic organizational structure advocated by crime-control-oriented reformers at the beginning of the 20th century was itself an impediment to the production of law enforcement activity. It was even a source of enduring problems such as a "you cover my ass and I'll cover yours" line-officer mentality (Klockars 1985), line-level discontent (Brown 1981), and police officer corruption (Manning & Redlinger 1977).

The police professionalism movement was admonished for its failure to adapt to a changing urban milieu, particularly changes that involved minority emigration (Walker 1977). That the police professionalism movement advocated forms of police organization and behavior that alienated minority populations has been widely noted (Walker 1992b). Founded in the conflict between political machines and urban progressives at the end of the 19th century (Fogelson 1977), the movement, encouraged by police executives and supported in 1893 by the fledgling International Association of Chiefs of Police, represented the interests of the progressives. Structures associated with the movement—for example, a militaristic rank structure, civil service personnel system,

and centralization of authority—provided police organizations with autonomy from local political machines.

The latent consequences of such “professionalized” organizational structures, critics argued, was a fundamental separation of police from community—civil service conflicted with efforts to hire minorities from within the service community, a militaristic rank structure contributed to a “we-them” siege mentality in which the “them” became the local community, and centralization of authority was inconsistent with the need to tailor police delivery of service to the needs of particular neighborhoods.

Following the commission reports, reform advocates promulgated a new police mission, a mission that legitimized police work in terms of protecting neighborhoods and communities (Kelling & Moore 1989; Alpert & Dunham 1988). Yet, whether reform efforts would have coalesced into the community-based policing movement of the 1980s without the support of the federal government by way of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) is questionable. The history of the LEAA is a widely told story (Duffee 1980; Michalowski 1985). LEAA’s contribution to the process of police relegitimation lay in its investment in police experimentation. As Feeley and Sarat (1980) noted, the federal government provided, even required, block grants for program and policy innovation in the Omnibus Safe Streets and Crime Control Act of 1968. As they said, “The message of the act was . . . simple—money would be given, innovation produced” (p. 92).

The LEAA supported widespread experimentation in the delivery of police services.⁴ Team policing experiments, popular during the late 1960s and early 1970s, involved a “team” of officers assigned to a permanent geographical location and given the discretionary authority to develop their own solutions to crime problems. Team police were expected to identify with the local community, which would make them more sensitive to developing local crime problems. As many as 40 departments adopted some form of team policing in this period (Walker 1992b).

A second strategy was to reorganize the police into a less militaristic rank structure. For example, the city of Longmont, Colorado, abandoned traditional militaristic rank and insignia for civilian dress and less threatening titles and changed its name to

⁴ This is not to imply that the LEAA was an advocate of community-oriented policing in favor of more traditional police practices. Only a relatively small percentage of the LEAA money was spent for community-oriented experimentation. Michalowski (1985:182) notes that the bulk of LEAA funds for policing went for crime control by supporting strategies for apprehension of criminals and deterrence. In 1973, for example, 29.4% of the monies that went to policing were provided for “soft” crime prevention or community relations programs. What was fortunate for the evolving community-based policing movement was that *any* federal money was being spent for experimentation into crime prevention or community-based programs.

the Longmont Department of Public Safety (Guyot 1979). Third, traditional ideas of police patrol were reconsidered. In what has been called the most significant experiment in policing in the 1970s, the Kansas City Police Department evaluated the efficacy of random preventive patrol, a cornerstone of traditional police patrol practices, and concluded that variations in the level of patrol had no effect on crime (Kelling et al. 1974).

Fourth, a function of police patrol was shifted from the gathering of incident-based statistics to the identification and analysis of problem areas, as proposed by Herman Goldstein (1979). Traditional ideas of random preventive patrol overlooked the fact that crime events were not distinct incidents but tended to be grouped together in problem areas. The proper focus of police patrol, said Goldstein, should not be on providing a broad deterrent by dispersing patrol across the community but rather on identifiable problem areas. Other strategies included “storefront” police stations—small, typically one-person offices scattered around a community providing a restricted range of services—and expanded foot patrol. Both these strategies were aimed at elevating the quality of police-community interaction and lowering citizens’ fear of crime (Eck & Spelman 1987).

The 1970s thus witnessed the development of organizational structures and strategies aimed at reinvolving the police in the life of the community. It is against the backdrop of these organizational innovations that the mythos of community and watchman took root. The notions that cities were made up of moral communities, and that police could act as watchmen to protect these communities, were consistent with both the recommendations of both commissions and many of the structural and operational innovations in policing following the commission reports (Eck & Spelman 1987). The myths of watchman and community were to emerge as the foundational myths of the movement to institutionalize community-based policing.

Before examining the specific characteristics of the myths of the watchman and community, I will review the concept of myth and its foundational relationship to institutions and to the process of institutional development.

The Concept of Myth

That myth may take diverse forms in the service of a broad array of social and ceremonial purposes has been noted (Kirk 1974; Day 1984). One of these purposes, the functional role of myth, provides the foundation for institutional analysis of myth as it is used here. Functional perspectives of myth are grounded in the perspective that social customs and institutions are validated by myths. In a word, myths legitimate social institutions and imbue them with meaning (Kirk 1974).

The idea that myth provides a function for society may be traced to the writings of Durkheim (1955). Myth, Durkheim argued, establishes, maintains, and expresses social solidarity. The ritual acting out of myth is in its essence a ceremonial validation of social institutions (Day 1984:249). Durkheim's influence was evident in the work of Malinowski, who extended the functional analysis of myth. Myth, according to Malinowski, was not a reflection of cosmic events or of mysterious impulses in the human soul but acted as a *charter* for social institutions and actions. As a charter, myths validated traditional customs, attitudes, and beliefs (Kirk 1974:32).⁵ Thus, myth imbued social institutions with legitimacy. The idea that myth performed important ceremonial functions for particular social groups was extended to police work by Manning (1977).⁶

Myth and Institutional Change

The idea that myth can be an agent of institutional change can be traced to the writings of Georges Sorel (1916), who wrote that myths were ideas carried by particular groups seeking social change. Myths, according to Sorel, had the following properties. They were social, that is, they were held by participants in some collective action. They were political in that they aimed at achieving a change in human affairs. They were intentional, acting on social structure rather than reflecting it. Finally, they were magical, that is, they were beyond the realm of rational choice and consequently could not be evaluated and falsified (Strenski 1987:164).⁷

Contemporary investigation into the function of myth for social institutions is typically traced to the work of Meyer and Rowan (1977). These authors contended that for organizations in highly institutionalized environments, organizational struc-

⁵ Malinowski (1954:73) described the myth as a "vital ingredient of human civilization" that fulfills "an indispensable function: it expresses, enhances, and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality."

⁶ Myth, Manning suggested, served six purposes for the police. The first was to reinterpret events into integrated and holistic units, where police-citizen encounters are transformed into a confrontation between forces of good and evil. Second, police myths removed police activity from the realm of special interest. Third, myth provided an explanation of otherwise inextricable events (e.g., the myth that police enforce the law equally to all obscures the underlying reality that the probability of arrest for violent crime is actually very low). Fourth, mythical actors are provided with human attributes, placed in dramatic events, and given predictable outcomes. Fifth, myths drew public attention to the stability of the police, even in times of change. Sixth, police myths gave the police a symbolic and heightened authority over that which they oppose.

⁷ Similar ideas have been used to describe the ideology as a political device. Swidler (1986) noted that highly charged beliefs may emerge in competition with existing cultural frameworks. Systems of such beliefs are ideologies, in which ideology is conceptualized as a highly articulated and organized systems of ideas carried by individuals who aim at fundamental institutional change (Drucker 1974). Crank, Payn, and Jackson (1993) referred to the police professionalism movement in its early days as such a system of highly charged and articulated beliefs.

tures, and formal activities did not serve purposes of efficiency or effectiveness. Instead, forms of organizational structure and activity were highly institutionalized and conformed to widely held ideas about the way organizations should act and work—ideas that were mythic in that they were perceived to be beyond the ability of any particular actor to change.

Organizations that conformed to institutional myths of structure and activity received legitimacy from other institutional actors, thereby facilitating access to resources and improving the prospects of organizational survival (Meyer & Rowan 1977:345). The influence of the institutional environment over organizational structure and behavior was particularly important for public sector organizations that tended to be low on technological development and high on institutional development (Dobbin et al. 1988; Meyer & Scott 1983).

Ritti and Silver (1986) extended Meyer and Scott's ideas to the process of institutionalization. They examined the ways in which a new organization, the Bureau of Consumer Services (BCS) in Pennsylvania, attained legitimacy in a highly institutionalized organizational environment. If, they argued, organizations embodied in their structure and policies prevailing institutional myths in the organizational environment, then "myth making must be a first step in the process of institutionalization" (p. 27). In their analysis, the BCS had to demonstrate that it was a legitimate public representative of consumer concerns, while at the same time insuring a fair return to the industry. Structural innovations, described in their research as formal organizational ties and ceremonial interactions with the electricity, gas, and telephone companies, allowed the BCS to acquire legitimacy in its institutional environment while demonstrating to the public and legislature that it was indeed acting as a legitimate protector of the public interest. Thus, Ritti and Silver suggested, for highly institutionalized sectors such as the one in which BCS was participating, the process of organizational innovation was an institutional solution to the need to attain organizational legitimacy.

Crank and Langworthy (1992) looked at myth and institutionalized environments among police organizations.⁸ These authors presented a discussion of three powerful myth-building processes: coercive legitimacy stemming from rules, law, and licensing; the elaboration of relations networks in their organizational and institutional environment; and organizational-institutional reactivity, in which the organization or powerful individuals representing it were recognized as powerful actors in

⁸ Applying the Meyer & Rowan (1977) perspective of institutionalized organizations to police agencies, the authors argued that police organizations were not "mere engines" of bureaucratic efficiency (Selznick 1957:15) but embodied in their formal structures and activities "widespread understandings of social reality," called myths (Meyer & Rowan 1977:343).

their environments. The incorporation of widely held myths into structure and activity, they suggested, demonstrated to other powerful actors within the institutional sector that a police organization looked and behaved appropriately. When organizations conformed to institutional expectations, they received organizational legitimacy and thus were provided with continuing accesses to resources.

The Properties of Institutional Myths

Four elements common to myths can be drawn from the previous discussion. First, myths, as institutional elements, have *power*. This means two things. On the one hand, they convey a sense of permanence and importance above and beyond the influence of particular actors (DiMaggio 1988; Meyer & Rowan 1977). On the other, myths that invoke history do not derive their power from the historical accuracy of their premises but from the way metaphorical images conjured by myth enables an organization to provide a satisfactory public account of its behavior (Klockars 1991).

Second, a myth contains within it implications regarding features of the environment affected by the myth (Trice & Beyer 1984; Ritti & Silver 1986).⁹ That is, the myth is contextualized by a social or physical geography. For the police, this refers to their beat area and the dangers that inhere in that area. Third, contained within a myth is the emergence or transformation of something. For the police, this transformation is from danger to safety (Manning 1977). For example, ideas of community are set against ideas of urban society, with its seeming absence of morality and host of social ills.

The fourth component is specific to the process of institutionalization—the idea that foundational myths are tied to particular powerful individuals or political interest groups within the institutional environment. Traditionally, institutional theorists have looked at how a coercive institutional presence obstructs individual goal-directed behavior (DiMaggio & Powell 1983). The influence of individual actors over particular institutional processes is being increasingly recognized (Powell 1991; Crank & Langworthy 1992). The myth-building process itself may stem from individual goal-directed behavior and may reflect the political influence of “institutional entrepreneurs” (DiMaggio 1988: 13).¹⁰ Because institutionalized myths become “part of the stock

⁹ Ritti and Silver (p. 26) note that myths convey “unquestioned beliefs not only about the origins, functions, and technical efficacy of the innovation, but also about the features of the environment that require adoption of the innovation.”

¹⁰ In DiMaggio’s words, while the *product* of institutionalized environments may place “organizational structures and practices beyond the reach of interest and politics,” the *process* of institutionalization “is profoundly political and reflects the relative power of organized interests and the actors who mobilize around them.”

of ‘things taken for granted’ within the prevailing organizational culture” (Ritti & Silver 1986:26), the influence of moral entrepreneurs over the myth-building process may be both powerful and long term, affecting both organizational structure and activity.¹¹ Thus, elements of police procedure and structure introduced in the current era may extend well into the future, independent of their efficiency or effectiveness in terms of law enforcement or crime prevention.

This review of myth and institutional process provides the framework for discussing the myths of watchman and community and for understanding how those myths contribute to the process of institutionalization of the community policing movement. I argue that community policing as a new legitimating mandate worked because it evoked powerful metaphors of democracy, small-town morality, and local autonomy (Manning 1984). The strength of the metaphorical image of policing as a community-based enterprise derived from its evocation of two powerful myths—the myth of the watchman and of community (Mastroski 1991; Walker 1989a).

The Mythos of Community Policing

The myth of the watchman is as follows. The primary tasks of the police who do community-based policing are the maintenance of the public order and protection of the community from criminal invasion. To accomplish these tasks, the police mandate is to reinforce the informal social control mechanisms already present in communities (Wilson & Kelling 1982). By adopting strategies and tactics appropriate to the specific needs of particular communities, by dealing with underlying problems rather than incidents, and by generally becoming involved in the life of the community, police can do something about both crime and fear of crime and thus enhance the overall quality of community life (Skolnick & Bayley 1986; Goldstein 1979).

The police officer who does this work is not occupying a police role new to American cities but is a contemporary version of the friendly night watchman who served, in his walking beat, the immigrant masses and urban poor in the 19th century (Moore & Kelling 1983). Thus, there was already in place a historical model, called the “watchman,” for the type of policing appropri-

¹¹ An example of the influence of an institutional entrepreneur is revealed in the works of August Vollmer, often cited as the patriarch of the police professionalism movement. One of his contributions to policing was the establishment of the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) in 1929 (Carte 1986). Vollmer initially proposed the Uniform Crime Reports as a method to track crime in the United States. Today, the ritual of data collection for the UCR is accomplished by tens of thousands of reporting districts across the country, all of which use similar offense classifications for the labeling of crime.

ate for contemporary crime control problems (Wilson 1968; Wilson & Kelling 1982).¹²

The second myth, the myth of community, is a myth about what it is that the watchman protects. The community myth is that there is now, or ever has been, a “community” in the sense of groups of like-minded individuals, living in urban areas, who share a common heritage, have similar values and norms, and share a common perception of social order (see Mastrofski 1991). This image of moral community was presented by Tocqueville (1945:71) in his discussion of the relationship between a New England native and his community, and is used in Kelling’s (1987) article advocating order-maintenance policing:

[The community’s] welfare is the aim of his ambition and of his future expectations [H]e acquires a taste for order, comprehends the balance of powers, and collects clear practical notions on the nature of his duties and the extent of his rights.

The relationship between the watchman and the community has provided the foundation for a mythos of community-based policing. The watchman was responsible for the preservation and protection of a conception of community that celebrated the traditions and values of traditional American society (Klockars 1991; Walker 1989a). Community-based policing “taps a nostalgia for the U.S. democratic grass-roots tradition of citizen initiative” (Mastrofski 1991:515). Thus, the watchman and his work reaffirmed an image of community morality of 19th-century America and provided a blanket of myth to shroud that powerful image in nostalgic imagery.

These myths are consistent with the previous discussion of foundational myths. First, they have power. On the one hand, they convey a sense of durability and permanence to ideas of communities and watchmen. On the other, their power derives not from their historical accuracy (Walker 1989b) but from recognition by the public and police alike that watchman and community are valid metaphors from which to model the organization and activity of police agencies.

Second, these myths provide a transformative image from dangerous urban environments into safe and orderly “communities.” Communities destroyed by poverty and criminal predation are transformed by community police into moral communities with like-minded citizens preserving a common heritage. It is the watchman who enables this transformation to occur.

Third, the idea of community contains many implications of the environment encompassed by the myth. Geographically and ethnically identifiable groups become “neighborhoods,” or

¹² The recurring reference to the watchman in male gender is used instead of a gender-neutral phraseology to indicate the paternalistic quality of the watchman image implicit in early discussions of the watchman. Also, the use of the male gender specification in the word “watchman” is historically accurate.

moral entities characterized by a sense of belonging, a sense of common goals, involvement in community affairs, and a sense of wholeness (Poplin 1979).

Fourth, these myths are linked to particular individuals or political groups in the institutional environment of policing. The development of ideas regarding community-based policing can be traced to the writings of individuals who act as institutional entrepreneurs. The remainder of this article traces the development of the ideas of community policing and the particular influence of institutional entrepreneurs on the process of institutionalization of community-based policing.

The Watchman and the Law Enforcer: The Emergence of the Myth

The idea that police work contains watchman elements can be traced to Wilson's (1968) seminal study of police style in eight communities. His presentation of watchman-style departments provided a perspective for thinking about police work in terms of community protection. By contrasting watchmen and legalistic departments, Wilson provided an alternative to the idea that all police work is characterized by the police professionalism model.

The influence of Wilson's conception of police style stemmed not only from the content of his message but from its timeliness. That Wilson's writing coincided with the broad legitimization crisis that was occurring to the police nationally increased the likelihood that his cogent way of thinking about police would achieve recognition. In the 1960s, the field of criminal justice was undergoing a profound change, described by Walker (1992a) as a shift from a *progressive era* to a *systems* paradigm. An aspect of this new paradigm was a recognition of the wide discretion that police employ in the performance of their work. Although others (e.g., Goldstein 1963) had noted police use of discretion, Wilson (1968) provided a case affirming the centrality of discretion to the task of line-level police. Wilson's recognition of the discretionary quality of police work coincided with and complemented the paradigmatic shift across the field of criminal justice in the 1960s.

Breaking from the idea that police work simply amounted to efforts to maximize law enforcement activity, Wilson argued that there were different styles of police work. Integral to Wilson's presentation of styles of policing was a distinction between policing as a profession and policing as a craft. A craftsmanship style of policing was indicated by departments that displayed a "watchman" style of policing—one in which police activity was directed more toward maintaining the public order than enforcing the law. The watchman Wilson described was a metaphor for the traditions of the department, of the "good old days" when a police officer could, with skills learned through street sense and ap-

prenticeship, solve problems without invoking the formal process of law. The watchman controlled his beat by relying on personal authority to solve problems on the street and used his practical knowledge of local culture as a *tool kit* to provide seemingly intuitive solutions to everyday problems of the citizenry.¹³

Philosophically opposed to craftsmanship was police professionalism, the guiding ideology of police reform from the end of the 19th century through the 1960s (Brown 1981; Berman 1987). Professionalism, as an explicit and articulated set of strategies for police occupational reform, emerged as an ideological challenge by police reformers to the big-city machine control of the police organization (Fogelson 1977). However, Wilson argued that order maintenance was central to the police role, and for that reason, professionalizing chiefs would always exist in an uneasy relationship with the rank and file. In sum, Wilson presented an image of police work that was by its nature dominated by highly discretionary order-maintenance interventions and an ethic of craftsmanship that infused this type of work with commonsense meaning. This image of police work provided the basis for the later development of the watchman myth.

Myth Transformation in the 1980s: From Description to Prescription

The 1980s witnessed a reconsideration of the federalization of the crime effort that marked crime-control strategy from the issuance of the Kerner and Crime Commission reports. This was an era of a “new federalism” in which fiscal responsibility for crime control was shifted onto the states. It was an era of crime control in which ideas of community were increasingly invoked in conjunction with crime-control strategy. The use of community-based alternative efforts to resolve disputes, for example, were given impetus by the Dispute Resolution Act of 1980. Alternative dispute resolution (ADR) sought to move disputes out of the decisionmaking apparatus of the criminal justice system and into community participation and neighborhood self-governance (Duffee 1980:230). Intermediate sanctions that placed offenders within the community became the centerpiece of the community corrections movement. Much of this movement was aimed at creating the appearance of a more severe criminal justice system while at the same time allowing offenders to be released from incarceration.¹⁴

¹³ A cultural “tool kit” may be described as a set of cultural skills that direct and influence behavior. The notion of culture as a tool kit provides a perspective on the differential abilities of individuals to employ particular social actions or behaviors in the pursuit of similar goals (Swidler 1986).

¹⁴ See Gordon (1991:92–144) for a discussion of community as prison. Duffee (1980:230) notes: “In corrections, intermediate punishments such as home incarceration, electronic monitoring, and intensive probation supervision have become the buzzwords in community programming.”

In police work, the 1980s witnessed the coalescence of program innovations, structures, and policies into a full-fledged community-based policing movement. Skolnick and Bayley (1986) described how police departments in six major cities reorganized elements of organizational structure and patrol strategy in line with ideas of community-based policing. Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux (1990) provide an overview of community efforts in several communities and describe briefly community-police efforts in 9 cities. And Rosenbaum (1986) provides a detailed description of 11 community-policing evaluations in 14 U.S. cities.

If the 1980s were marked by a shift in police to an enterprise conceived in terms of ideas of community, they were also marked by a maturing of the philosophy of the police as community protectors. A broad dialogue on community-based reform was conducted among practitioners and academicians alike (Hartmann 1988; Sykes 1986; Moore & Kelling 1983). Perhaps the most influential of the new conceptualizations of police work was an article entitled "Broken Windows" (Wilson & Kelling 1982).

In 1982, the publication of "Broken Windows" marked a fundamental transformation in the watchman myth. The transformation was moral: The myth of the watchman shifted from a description of police style in particular types of urban departments to a prescription describing how police work should generally be. The watchman image evolved from that of a blue-collar craftsman who displayed an idiosyncratic, street-wise policing style to a standardbearer for the protection of urban communities in late 20th-century America.

The broken windows idea was a simple metaphor: If a broken window in an untended building was left unrepaired, the remainder of the windows would soon be broken. Similarly, untended behavior leads to the breakdown of community controls. The broken window was an analogy for untended behavior. Wilson and Kelling linked the broken-window analogy to what they perceived to be a contemporary cycle of urban decay that began with the presence of untended property (and by implication, "untended" behavior) and ended with the breakdown of community controls and the moral and economic destruction of neighborhoods via criminal invasion. The police could disrupt the process of urban decay by reinforcing the informal control mechanisms of the community itself. The responsibility of the police was to protect the rights of the community, even if sacrifices to individual liberties were incurred.

The police had only to look to their past to find a model for the watchman. Wilson and Kelling argued that a community protection style of policing was present prior to the end of the 19th century. This style, described by a community-oriented order-maintenance mandate, was present in the activity of the watchman in large urban departments through the latter half of the

19th century. Wilson and Kelling (*ibid.*, p. 38) concluded: "Above all, we must return to our long-abandoned view that the police ought to protect communities as well as individuals." This article thrust Wilson and Kelling into the role of institutional entrepreneurs, providing contemporary police reform with a model of police style constructed from a powerful mythos derived from a historical era of policing and imbued with a "moral rightness" of the police role as community protector derived from that mythos.¹⁵

The Linkage to Community-based Policing

The linkage of the watchman to ideas of police reform had an inevitability that only retrospect can reveal. The idea of community invoked by proponents of community-based policing provided an appropriate environment for the work of the watchman (Klockars 1991). Simply put, community-based policing, with its emphasis on the maintenance of public order (as opposed to enforcing the law) was precisely the kind of work the watchman did. Mastrofski (1991:515) provided a clear statement of this linkage in his analysis of the community policing reform movement:

[C]ommunity policing advocates propose a significant departure from the ways in which issues of role, control, and legitimacy are addressed. Order maintenance replaces law enforcement as the police mission; legalistic constraints on officer discretion are reduced, while direct linkages to the community are increased; and policies and actions are justified . . . in terms of the sense of peace, order, and security they impart to the public.

The myth of the watchman was thus joined to an image of community. Like the watchman myth, the community protected by the watchman was also mythic. The community-based policing movement capitalized on a "nostalgia for the U.S. democratic grass-roots tradition of citizen initiative" (*ibid.*) where "[c]ommunity relationships are based on status not contract, manners not morals, norms not laws, and understandings not regulations" (Klockars 1991:535). In the mythic reconstruction of the past, the image of community that emerged as corollary to the watchman was 19th-century small-town America, with citizenry of moral fiber, of common purpose, and value (Alpert & Dunham 1988). The watchman symbolized protection of small-town America from the profound social and economic dislocations that washed across the American municipal landscape in the 20th century. As a myth of police reform, the watchman promised a rebirth of the spirit of 19th-century small-town morality in

¹⁵ See DiMaggio (1988:15) for a discussion of morality and institutional entrepreneurship.

the 21st-century urban metropolis. Thus, the conjoined myths of community and watchman became valid and powerful representations of what community-based policing should be and provided a powerful morality of police behavior that justified legal and extralegal tactics in the name of community preservation.

Watchmen and Arrest Authority

The emergent mythos of community-based policing proved adaptable to the new federalism of the 1980s, a period in which executive federal leadership sought to divest the government of fiscal responsibility for state and municipal problems. A conundrum of the new federalism was to balance the expensive, punishment-oriented crime-control policies characteristic of the 1970s and 1980s with a strategy in which the federal government played a sharply reduced role (Duffee 1980). On the one hand, all segments of the criminal justice system were abandoning rehabilitation in favor of punitive strategies emphasizing incapacitation, deterrence, and retribution (Gordon 1991; Walker 1980). On the other, the federal government was relinquishing its role as bankroller for local crime-control efforts. These trends created a crime-control dilemma at the local level: Legislators at all levels were seeking increasingly punitive crime legislation, while local municipalities were increasingly expected to pick up the cost (Feeley & Sarat 1980). For corrections, this problem has been phrased as a question: How can criminals be sentenced to probation or parole and at the same time the appearance be created that the criminal justice system is being more punitive toward them? The answer was to increase the use of intensive supervision and to stack the sheer number of programs required for probationers and parolees. Communities were thus made to look like prison in concept and in degree of control over offenders (Gordon 1991). But the urban police asked: How could reforms favorable to community-based policing be sustained while preserving politically popular law-and-order ideas of tough-minded, arrest-producing police work?

The answer was a sharp reversal in the conceptualization of the watchman style in the early 1980s, from a police officer who would infrequently invoke formal processes of law, even in the presence of law breaking, to one who would arrest to maintain community order, even in the absence of law breaking. A component of the style of the craftsman, as articulated by Wilson (1977; 1968), was the police tendency to underenforce the law. Arrest was invoked only as a last resort, when all other strategies for restoring order had failed.

By the mid-1980s, the paternalistic image of the police as tough and street-wise but fair underenforcers of the law had evolved into an image of the watchman as a no-holds-barred ag-

gressive order-maintenance superenforcer who would arrest, even in legally ambiguous situations, in the name of protecting the community (Kelling 1985; Sykes 1986). Kelling (1987), citing civic responsibility, advocated police intervention in the public roller-skating activities of juveniles in Chicago. Aggressive order maintenance, including the use of arrest, was needed to provide the public with order and safety from threatening behavior. As Kelling (p. 91) asked, “Do we want police officers to develop a ‘What the hell’ attitude toward disorderly or dangerous behavior, even if it is not *technically* illegal?” (emphasis added). Wilson and Kelling (1982) similarly argued for the priority of community protection over individual due process protections. This aggressive police response to order-maintenance problems was often cited in the literature (Sykes 1989, Kelling 1985; Moore & Kelling 1983; Wycoff & Manning 1983). Thus, by the mid-1980s, the policing style associated with the watchman had shifted from infrequent intervention and underenforcement of the law, in the name of community preservation and protection, to frequent intervention and arrest even in legally ambiguous situations, again in the name of community preservation and protection.

The Political Dimensions of Institutional Myth Making

Nostalgia, we must make no mistake, is good politics.

—Robert Nisbet 1988:110

As a reform agenda, community-based policing has been tractable to both conservative and liberal ideas of crime control. Central elements of community-based policing—an emphasis on problem-oriented tactics, police-community partnership in crime prevention activities, geographical and command decentralization of authority to the line level, and an elevation of the importance of order maintenance and crime prevention activity (Skolnick & Bayley 1986; Kelling & Moore 1989)—are present in both conservative and liberal perspectives of police reform. By considering these two perspectives, we can begin to understand the power and mutability that sustains community-based policing as a reform movement.¹⁶

Institutional entrepreneurs representing the conservative political view advocate an aggressive order-maintenance style of policing in which due process considerations of individual liberties are less important than community protection (Wilson & Kelling 1982).¹⁷ Aggressive order maintenance is an effective deter-

¹⁶ I am not suggesting that the individuals mentioned in this paragraph are either politically conservative or liberal. I am suggesting that the ideas mentioned in conjunction with their work are consistent with either conservative or liberal crime-control ideas (see Walker 1989a:10–17).

¹⁷ Walker (1989a) notes that in practice, the differences between liberal and conservative perspectives tend to become “muddy.” The value of the liberal-conservative dis-

rent for crime (Kelling 1985). Community breakdown occurs not from underlying social or structural problems in those communities but from criminal invasion into those communities. The watchman, as the moral representative of the community, is provided with substantial discretion to deal with problems on the street, and may even use arrest when no law has been broken. The issue of discretion, according to this perspective, is about whether to observe an individual's due process protections when observing threats to "community rights" (Alpert & Dunham 1988). Appropriate police strategies to achieve these ends include vigorous enforcement of nuisance and order-maintenance laws, arresting people for violation of order-maintenance statutes, and field interrogations (Mastrofski 1991).

The liberal agenda describes a strikingly different view of community-based policing. The watchman is a community organizer (Skolnick & Bayley 1986) whose task is not aggressive order maintenance but crime prevention through community service. The watchman engages in the shoring up of community institutions through community and neighborhood organization. The watchman approaches crime not through aggressive patrol strategies—these are believed to alienate citizens—but by sponsoring community-based programs that aim at crime prevention and community service (Alpert & Dunham 1988). Consequently, the watchman constructs ties to the local community and develops local strategies that assist the community to repair itself (Guyot 1991). Strategies include newsletters, block watch, nonenforcement police-citizen encounters, and victim follow-up (Mastrofski 1991). Thus, from the liberal perspective, the watchman assists the community in self-repair, while from the conservative perspective, the watchman protects the community from the destructive influence of criminal invasion (Skolnick & Bayley 1986; Wilson & Kelling 1982).

Two examples, drawn from Skolnick and Bayley's (1986) research on contemporary police innovation, illuminate the distinction between the liberal and conservative organizational elements of community-based policing. The first, Detroit, developed innovative structures consistent with what I have described as the liberal conception of community policing. Mayor Coleman Young implemented the program to deemphasize traditional, reactive policing in favor of "intensive community mobilization for self-defense." This was accomplished through the implementation of two organizational units that did only crime prevention activity, a crime prevention section, and a mini-station command. The crime prevention section organized neighborhood watches, apartment watches, and business watches. Special attention was

tion is that it enables policymakers to assess the assumptions that provide the basis of much current crime-control policy.

given to the needs of elderly citizens, including the maintenance of a senior citizen roster and transportation for personal needs. A mini-station command operating in 52 mini-stations scattered around the city was devoted exclusively to community mobilization. Officers assigned to these beats spent half their time in patrol and half their time in community organization. These officers also would organize citizen band patrols and would maintain regular ongoing contact with community leaders. A great deal of patrol time was devoted by both sections to the organization of and participation in citizen crime-prevention meetings, described as the lifeblood of crime prevention. Meetings were held at the neighborhood level, and each precinct had a police-community relations council. Officers in both sections did what Skolnick and Bayley described as creative, customized field-work; their responsibility was to tailor crime prevention efforts to the particular needs of local areas.

Organizational innovations in the Denver Police Department are consistent with conservative ideas of community-based policing. The approach to reducing fear of crime in Denver was in terms of improving patrol effectiveness, accomplished by specialized, proactive field units. This directed patrol strategy involved four elements: intensified coverage, delegation of command responsibility, team activity, and operational crime analysis. The assumption by the Denver command was that some types of crimes were "patrol preventable," where crime prevention was achieved through high patrol visibility. Through the use of crime analysis techniques, specialized squads were engaged in problem-solving activity.

One organizational innovation was the development of a Special Crime Attack Team that attacked the problem of burglary through saturation patrol. A Special Services Unit was also established that required skills in the specialized application of force, such as hostage situations. Another program, called ESCORT (Eliminate Street Crime on Residential Thoroughfares), was described as aggressive order-maintenance. As one officer described the program, their job was to "find a rock and kick it," to look for minor violations and seek out individuals with known reputations. ESCORT was, as Skolnick and Bayley (1986:139) noted, "deterrent policing with a vengeance."

The areas of innovation adopted by Denver represented not so much a change in the role of police as modifications and extensions of traditional patrol strategy. Denver, though adopting programmatic innovations aimed at decentralizing command authority, increasing emphasis on order-maintenance activity, and doing proactive, problem-oriented policing, continued to be wedded to traditional ideas of the centrality of police patrol for police work. Storefront police organizations and a crime-prevention-oriented community services bureau were initiated but were

perceived as ineffective; they were not integrated into the ongoing field operations of the department. Thus, Denver implemented types of organizational innovation consistent with three of the ideas of community-based policing stated at the opening of this section—decentralization of authority for specialized patrol activities, an elevation of order-maintenance activity through the use of aggressive order-maintenance street tactics, and the implementation of problem-oriented evaluational strategies. But in operational strategy and organizational development, these innovations matched what I have described as the conservative branch of the community policing movement.

These two examples reveal the flexibility of the foundational myths of watchman and community. Given the right “spin,” ideas of community-based policing are acceptable organizational theory for both conservative and liberal advocates of police change. Because legitimacy can be obtained from both conservative and liberal proponents of police change, community-based policing appears to be sufficiently adaptable to survive a changing and somewhat unpredictable political electorate. In other words, even given the mutable tides of American electoral politics, community policing continues to be a healthy and vigorous movement that is becoming institutionalized.

Institutional Change in the Occupation of Policing

The rapidity with which elements of community-based policing are currently diffusing across the municipal landscape is remarkable. By 1985, more than 300 police departments had adopted some form of community policing program (Walker 1992b). The state of Washington is currently exploring a strategy to convert over 50 municipal and county police agencies in the state to a community-based policing model. Support for community-based policing has been provided by the National Institute of Justice, with its allocation of a special grants category for research and experimentation on community-based policing. Textbooks and readers on policing in the United States today all contain sections on community-based policing. Experiments with community-based elements have been conducted in many major U.S. cities (Trojanowicz & Bucqueroux 1990; Skolnick & Bayley 1986). The chiefs of police of 10 major metropolitan police organizations in 1991 issued a position paper in support of community policing (Christopher Commission 1991:104).¹⁸ The past commissioner of New York City, Lee Brown, developed a program to convert the entire New York City Police Department to a community-based model, a program that continues today. In

¹⁸ The report of the Independent Commission on the Los Angeles Police Department (1991) is also referred to as “the Christopher Commission.” The References include cross-references from the Christopher Commission to the Independent Commission.

short, community-based policing, with its core myths of community and watchman, is being institutionalized.

With the institutionalization of elements of community-based policing, legitimacy lost in the late 1960s becomes legitimacy restored in the current era. A new legitimating mandate, infused with powerful myths of community and watchman, appears to be steadily displacing the previous mandate of police professionalism. That this process is proceeding with fervor is illustrated by the Christopher Commission report (*ibid.*). That report, an investigation into police conduct in Los Angeles, called for sweeping changes in structure and procedure to refocus department resources in the direction of community-based policing (*ibid.*, pp. 95–106). In microcosm, the Christopher Commission report enacted the drama laid out by the Kerner and Crime Commissions at the national level and affirmed the continuing vitality of the myths of community and police as community watchmen.

Conclusions

By the late 1980s, many scholars had raised important questions regarding community-based policing (Walker 1992b). Walker (1989b) cited problems of historical accuracy in Wilson and Kelling's (1982) discussion of watchman-style 19th-century patrol practices. Klockars (1985) challenged Kelling's (1985) linkage between aggressive order-maintenance patrol practices and the quality of urban life. Bohm (1984) questioned whether community-based institutions could represent the breadth of interests of a diverse citizenry or provide informal systems of control. Crank (1990) suggested that police are more likely to have a professional than a crafts-like view of their occupational activity. Positive, rather than negative, relationships were noted between aggressive order-maintenance behavior and victimization (Sherman 1986). Mastrofski (1991) provided a broad-ranging discussion of misconceptions of the concept of community and implications of those misconceptions for police activity. Klockars (1991) charged that the community-policing movement was a circumlocution whose purpose was to obscure the principal role of police as a mechanism for the distribution of nonnegotiable coercive force (Bittner 1970). Bayley (1988) cited a host of theoretical and practical issues seldom addressed by advocates of community-based policing. Thus, a large body of literature emerged to challenge many facets of the community policing movement.

These challenges to community-based policing, though thoughtful and important, have overlooked an important point regarding community-based policing (but see Klockars 1991). Although it is, of course, important to ask whether community-based structures and policies are efficient or effective in the achievement of crime control, it is also important to note that

community-based policing provides police organizations with an organizational theory that is acceptable to other institutional actors, in Meyer and Scott's (1983) terms, whose opinions count. By adopting elements of community and watchman into their structures and formalized activities, police organizations ceremonially regain the legitimacy that was ceremonially withdrawn in the 1960s.

The rapid spread of elements of community-based reform across the institutional sector of policing suggests that the invocation of community is providing an acceptable legitimating theory for police organizations. Furthermore, images of watchman and community do not derive their power from historical accuracy and thus are not vulnerable to inaccuracies in historical reporting. They derive their power to mobilize sentiment from the mythic images of watchmen as community protectors and communities as enclaves of traditional American values. I have argued here that institutional entrepreneurs have latched onto these myths and have modified them in an effort to affect the direction of policing at the outset of the 21st century. This is evident in Wilson and Kelling's 1982 "Broken Windows" piece, in which the authors cast the mythos of the watchman in terms of conservative theology.

There are institutional entrepreneurs on both sides of the conservative-liberal debate, and at present neither side is recognized as the authoritative expression of community-based policing philosophy, policy, and strategy. This can be seen in the widespread popularity of community-based policing and the virtual absence of consensus over the definition of the term or the appropriate role of community-based police officers. Nevertheless, given the current spirit of change in policing, particular community-based strategies will undoubtedly diffuse across the urban vista. The types of organizational structures, policies, and operational strategies that emerge under the banner of community-based policing will, I suspect, depend on the advocacy of institutional entrepreneurs, whose efficacy will in turn reflect the relative prominence of conservative or liberal crime-control agendas in the wider sphere of American politics. However, community-based policing, guided by a powerful and surprisingly mutable mythos of police and community, will probably be with us in one form or another for many years to come.

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