Perspectives on Policing

Police and Communities: the Quiet Revolution

By George L. Kelling

Introduction

A quiet revolution is reshaping American policing.

Police in dozens of communities are returning to foot patrol. In many communities, police are surveying citizens to learn what they believe to be their most serious neighborhood problems. Many police departments are finding alternatives to rapidly responding to the majority of calls for service. Many departments are targeting resources on citizen fear of crime by concentrating on disorder. Organizing citizens' groups has become a priority in many departments. Increasingly, police departments are looking for means to evaluate themselves on their contribution to the quality of neighborhood life, not just crime statistics. Are such activities the business of policing? In a crescendo, police are answering yes.

True, such activities contrast with popular images of police: the "thin blue line" separating plundering villains from peaceful residents and storekeepers, and racing through city streets in high-powered cars with sirens wailing and lights flashing. Yet, in city after city, a new vision of policing is taking hold of the imagination of progressive police and gratified citizens. Note the 1987 report of the Philadelphia Task Force. Dismissing the notion of police as Philadelphia's professional defense against crime, and its residents as passive recipients of police ministrations, the report affirms new police values:

> Because the current strategy for policing Philadelphia emphasizes crime control and neglects the Department's need to be accountable to the public and for a partnership with it, the task force recommends: The police commissioner should formulate an explicit mission statement for the Department that will guide planning and operations toward a strategy of *"community"*

or *"problem solving"* policing. Such a statement should be developed in consultation with the citizens of Philadelphia and should reflect their views. (Emphases added.)

These themes—problem solving, community policing, consultation, partnership, accountability—have swept through American policing so swiftly that Harvard University's Professor Mark H. Moore has noted that "We in academe have to scramble to keep track of developments in policing." Professor Herman Goldstein of the University of Wisconsin sees police as "having turned a corner" by emphasizing community accountability and problem solving.

The new model of policing

What corner has been turned? What are these changes that are advancing through policing?

Broken windows

In February 1982, James Q. Wilson and I published an article in *Atlantic* known popularly as "Broken Windows." We made three points.

1. **Neighborhood disorder**—drunks, panhandling, youth gangs, prostitution, and other urban incivilities—creates citizen fear.

2. **Just as unrepaired** broken windows can signal to people that nobody cares about a building and lead to more serious vandalism, untended disorderly behavior can also signal that nobody cares about the community and lead to more serious disorder and crime. Such signals—untended property, disorderly persons, drunks, obstreperous youth, etc.—both create fear in citizens and attract predators.

3. **If police are to deal** with disorder to reduce fear and crime, they must rely on citizens for legitimacy and assistance.

"Broken Windows" gave voice to sentiments felt both by citizens and police. It recognized a major change in the focus of police. Police had believed that they should deal with serious crime, yet were frustrated by lack of success. Citizens conceded to police that crime was a problem, but were more concerned about daily incivilities that disrupted and often destroyed neighborhood social, commercial, and political life. "We were trying to get people to be concerned about crime problems," says Darrel Stephens, former Chief in Newport News and now Executive Director of the Police Executive Research Forum, "never understanding that daily living issues had a much greater impact on citizens and commanded their time and attention."

Many police officials, however, believed the broken windows metaphor went further. For them, it not only suggested changes in the focus of police work (disorder, for example), it also suggested major modifications in

the overall strategy of police departments. What are some of these strategic changes?

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Defense of a community

Police are a neighborhood's primary defense against disorder and crime, right? This orthodoxy has been the basis of police strategy for a generation. What is the police job? Fighting crime. How do they do this? Patrolling in cars, responding to calls for service, and investigating crimes. What is the role of citizens in all of this? Supporting police by calling them if trouble occurs and by being good witnesses.

But using our metaphor, let us again ask the question of whether police are the primary defense against crime and disorder. Are police the "thin blue line" defending neighborhoods and communities? Considering a specific example might help us answer this question. For example, should police have primary responsibility for controlling a neighborhood youth who, say, is bullying other children?

Of course not. The first line of defense in a neighborhood against a troublesome youth is the youth's family. Even if the family is failing, our immediate answer would not be to involve police. Extended family—aunts, uncles, grandparents—might become involved. Neighbors and friends (of both the parents and youth) often offer assistance. The youth's church or school might become involved.

On occasion police will be called: Suppose that the youth is severely bullying other children to the point of injuring them. A bullied child's parents call the police. Is the bully's family then relieved of responsibility? Are neighbors? The school? Once police are called, are neighbors relieved of their duty to be vigilant and protect their own or other neighbors' children? Does calling police relieve teachers of their obligation to be alert and protect children from assault? The answer to all these questions is no. We expect families, neighbors, teachers, and others to be responsible and prudent.

If we believe that community institutions are the first line of defense against disorder and crime, and the source of strength for maintaining the quality of life, what should the strategy of police be? The old view was that they were a community's professional defense against crime and disorder: Citizens should leave control of crime and maintenance of order to police. The new strategy is that police are to stimulate and buttress a community's ability to produce attractive neighborhoods and protect them

against predators. Moreover, in communities that are wary of strangers, police serve to help citizens tolerate and protect outsiders who come into their neighborhoods for social or commercial purposes.

But what about neighborhoods in which things have gotten out of hand—where, for example, predators like drug dealers take over and openly and outrageously deal drugs and threaten citizens? Clearly, police must play a leading role defending such communities. Should they do so on their own, however?

Police have tried in the past to control neighborhoods plagued by predators without involving residents. Concerned, for example, about serious street crime, police made youths, especially minority youths, the targets of aggressive field interrogations. The results, in the United States during the 1960's and more recently in England during the early 1980's, were disastrous. Crime was largely unaffected. Youths already hostile to police became even more so. Worst of all, good citizens became estranged from police.

Citizens in neighborhoods plagued by crime and disorder were disaffected because they simply would not have police they neither knew nor authorized whizzing in and out of their neighborhoods "takin' names and kickin' ass." Community relations programs were beside the point. Citizens were in no mood to surrender control of their neighborhoods to remote and officious police who showed them little respect. Police are the first line of defense in a neighborhood? Wrong—citizens are!

Defending communities—from incidents to problems

The strategy of assisting citizens maintain the quality of life in their neighborhoods dramatically improves on the former police strategy. To understand why, one has to understand in some detail how police work has been conducted in the past. Generally, the business of police for the past 30 years has been responding to calls for service.

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For example, a concerned and frightened citizen calls police about a neighbor husband and wife who are fighting. Police come and intervene. They might separate the couple, urge them to get help, or, if violence has occurred, arrest the perpetrator. But basically, police try to resolve the incident and get back into their patrol cars so they are available for the next call. Beat officers may well know that this household has been the subject of 50 or

100 calls to the police department during the past year. In fact, they have known intuitively what researchers Glenn Pierce in Boston and Lawrence Sherman in Minneapolis have confirmed through research: fewer than 10 percent of the addresses calling for police service generate over 60 percent of the total calls for service during a given year.

Indeed, it is very likely that the domestic dispute described above is nothing new for the disputing couple, the neighbors, or police. More likely than not, citizens have previously called police and they have responded. And, with each call to police, it becomes more likely that there will be another.

This atomistic response to incidents acutely frustrates patrol officers. Herman Goldstein describes this frustration: "Although the public looks at the average officer as a powerful authority figure, the officer very often feels impotent because he or she is dealing with things for which he or she has no solution. Officers believe this makes them look silly in the eyes of the public." But, given the routine of police work, officers have had no alternative to their typical response: Go to a call, pacify things, and leave to get ready for another call. To deal with the problem of atomistic responses to incidents, Goldstein has proposed what he calls "problem-oriented policing."

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Stated simply, problem-oriented policing is a method of working with citizens to help them identify and solve problems. Darrel Stephens, along with Chief David Couper of Madison, Wisconsin, and Chief Neil Behan of Baltimore County, Maryland, has pioneered in problem-oriented policing. Problems approached via problem-oriented policing include sexual assault and drunk driving in Madison, auto theft, spouse abuse, and burglary in Newport News, and street robbery and burglary in Baltimore County.

Stephens's goal is for "police officers to take the time to stop and think about what they were doing." Mark Moore echoes Stephens: "In the past there were a small number of guys in the police chief's office who did the thinking and everybody else just carried out their ideas. Problem solving gets thousands of brains working on problems."

The drive to change

Why are these changes taking place now? There are three reasons:

1. Citizen disenchantment with police services;

2. Research conducted during the 1970's; and,

3. Frustration with the traditional role of the police officer.

1. Disenchantment with police services—At first, it seems too strong to say "disenchantment" when referring to citizens' attitudes towards police. Certainly citizens admire and respect most police officers. Citizens enjoy contact with police. Moreover, research shows that most citizens do not find the limited capability of police to prevent or solve crimes either surprising or of particular concern. Nevertheless, there is widespread disenchantment with police tactics that continue to keep police officers remote and distant from citizens.

Minority citizens in inner cities continue to be frustrated by police who whisk in and out of their neighborhoods with little sensitivity to community norms and values. Regardless of where one asks, minorities want both the familiarity and accountability that characterize foot patrol. Working- and middle-class communities of all races are demanding increased collaboration with police in the determination of police priorities in their neighborhoods. Community crime control has become a mainstay of their sense of neighborhood security and a means of lobbying for different police services. And many merchants and affluent citizens have felt so vulnerable that they have turned to private security for service and protection. In private sector terms, police are losing to the competition—private security and community crime control.

2. Research—The 1970's research about police effectiveness was another stimulus to change. Research about preventive patrol, rapid response to calls for service, and investigative work—the three mainstays of police tactics—was uniformly discouraging.

Research demonstrated that preventive patrol in automobiles had little effect on crime, citizen levels of fear, or citizen satisfaction with police. Rapid response to calls for service likewise had little impact on arrests, citizen satisfaction with police, or levels of citizen fear. Also, research into criminal investigation effectiveness suggested that detective units were so poorly administered that they had little chance of being effective.

3. Role of the patrol officer—Finally, patrol officers have been frustrated with their traditional role. Despite pieties that patrol has been the backbone of policing, every police executive has known that, at best, patrol has been what officers do until they become detectives or are promoted.

At worst, patrol has been the dumping ground for officers who are incompetent, suffering from alcoholism or other problems, or simply burned out. High status for police practitioners went to detectives. Getting "busted to patrol" has been a constant threat to police managers or detectives who fail to perform by some standard of judgment. (It is doubtful that failing patrol officers ever get threatened with being busted to the detective unit.)

Never mind that patrol officers have the most important mission in police departments: They handle the public's most pressing problems and must make complex decisions almost instantaneously. Moreover, they do this with little supervision or training. Despite this, police administrators treat patrol officers as if they did little to advance the organization's mission. The salaries of patrol officers also reflect their demeaned status. No wonder many officers have grown cynical and have turned to unions for leadership rather than to police executives. "Stupid management made unions," says Robert Kliesmet, the President of the International Union of Police Associations AFL-CIO.

The basis for new optimism

Given these circumstances, what is the basis of current optimism of police leaders that they have turned a corner? Optimism arises from four factors:

1. Citizen response to the new strategy;

2. Ongoing research on police effectiveness;

3. Past experiences police have had with innovation; and

4. The values of the new generation of police leaders.

1. Citizen response—The overwhelming public response to community and problem-solving policing has been positive, regardless of where it has been instituted. When queried about how he knows community policing works in New York City, Lt. Jerry Simpson responds: "The District Commanders' phones stop ringing." Simpson continues: "Commanders' phones stop ringing because problems have been solved. Even skeptical commanders soon learn that most of their troubles go away with community policing." Citizens like the cop on the beat and enjoy working with him/her to solve problems. Crisley Wood, Executive Director of the Neighborhood Justice Network in Boston—an agency that has established a network of neighborhood crime control organizations— puts it this way: "The cop on the beat, who meets regularly with citizen groups, is the single most important service that the Boston Police Department can provide."

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Testimonies aside, perhaps the single most compelling evidence of the popularity of community or problem-solving policing is found in Flint, Michigan, where, it will be recalled, citizens have twice voted to increase their taxes to maintain neighborhood foot patrols—the second time by a two-to-one margin.

2. New research on effectiveness—Research conducted during the early and mid-1970's frustrated police executives. It generally showed what did not work. Research conducted during the late 1970's and early 1980's was different. By beginning to demonstrate that new tactics

did work, it fueled the move to rejuvenate policing. This research provided police with the following guidance:

Foot patrol can reduce citizen fear of crime, improve the relationship between police and citizens, and increase citizen satisfaction with police. This was discovered in Newark, New Jersey, and Flint. In Flint, foot patrol also reduced crime and calls for service. Moreover, in both cities, it increased officer satisfaction with police work.

The productivity of detectives can be enhanced if patrol officers carefully interview neighborhood residents about criminal events, get the information to detectives, and detectives use it wisely, according to John Eck of PERF.

Citizen fear can be substantially reduced, researcher Tony Pate of the Police Foundation discovered in Newark, by police tactics that emphasize increasing the quantity and improving the quality of citizen-police interaction.

Police anti-fear tactics can also reduce household burglaries, according to research conducted by Mary Ann Wycoff, also of the Police Foundation.

Street-level enforcement of heroin and cocaine laws can reduce serious crime in the area of enforcement, without being displaced to adjacent areas, according to an experiment conducted by Mark Kleiman of Harvard University's Program in Criminal Justice Policy and Management.

Problem-oriented policing can be used to reduce thefts from cars, problems associated with prostitution, and household burglaries, according to William Spelman and John Eck of PERF.

These positive findings about new police tactics provide police with both the motive and justification for continued efforts to rejuvenate policing.

3. Experience with innovation—The desire to improve policing is not new with this generation of reformers. The 1960's and 1970's had their share of reformers as well. Robert Eichelberger of Dayton innovated with team policing (tactics akin in many ways to problem solving) and public policymaking; Frank Dyson of Dallas with team policing and generalist/specialist patrol officers; Carl Gooden with team policing in Cincinnati; and there were many other innovators.

But innovators of this earlier era were handicapped by a lack of documented successes and failures of implementation. Those who experimented with team policing were not aware that elements of team policing were simply incompatible with preventive patrol and rapid response to calls for service. As a result, implementation of team policing followed a discouraging pattern. It would be implemented, officers and citizens would like it, it would have an initial impact on crime, and then business as usual would overwhelm it—the program would simply vanish.

Moreover, the lessons about innovation and excellence that Peters and Waterman brought together in *In Search*

of Excellence were not available to police administrators. The current generation of reformers has an edge: They have availed themselves of the opportunity to learn from the documented successes and failures of the past. Not content with merely studying innovation and management in policing, Houston's Chief Lee Brown is having key personnel spend internships in private sector corporations noted for excellence in management.

4. New breed of police leadership —The new breed of police leadership is unique in the history of American policing. Unlike the tendency in the past for chiefs to be local and inbred, chiefs of this generation are urbane and cosmopolitan.

Chief Lee Brown of Houston received a Ph.D. in criminology from the University of California–Berkeley; Chief Joseph McNamara of San Jose, California, has a Ph.D from Harvard University, and is a published novelist; Hubert Williams, formerly Director of the Newark Police Department and now President of the Police Foundation, is a lawyer and has studied criminology in the Law School at Harvard University; Benjamin Ward, Commissioner of the New York City Police Department, is an attorney and was Commissioner of Corrections in New York State.

These are merely a sample. The point is, members of this generation of police leadership are well educated and of diverse backgrounds. All of those noted above, as well as many others, have sponsored research and experimentation to improve policing.

Problems

We have looked at the benefits of community policing. What is the down side? What are the risks?

These questions led to the creation of the Executive Session on Community Policing in the Program in Criminal Justice Policy and Management of Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government. Funded by the National Institute of Justice and the Charles Stewart Mott and Guggenheim Foundations, the Executive Session has convened police and political elites with a small number of academics around the issue of community policing. Francis X. Hartmann, moderator of the Executive Session, describes the purpose of the meetings: "These persons with a special and important relationship to contemporary policing have evolved into a real working group, which is addressing the gap between the realities and aspirations of American policing. Community policing is a significant effort to fill this gap."

Among the questions the Executive Session has raised are the following:

1. Police are a valuable resource in a community. Does community policing squander that resource by concentrating on the wrong priorities?

2. How will community policing fit into police departments given how they are now organized? and,

3. Will community policing open the door to increased police corruption or other inappropriate behavior by line officers?

Will community policing squander police resources?

This question worries police. They understand that police are a valuable but sparse resource in a community. Hubert Williams, a pioneer in community policing, expresses his concern. "Are police now being put in the role of providing services that are statutorily the responsibilities of some other agencies?" Los Angeles's Chief Gates echoes Williams: "Hubie's (Williams is) right—you can't solve all the problems in the world and shouldn't try." Both worry that if police are spread too thin, by problem-solving activities for example, that they will not be able to properly protect the community from serious crime.

❝ It is simply wrong to propose abandoning foot patrol in the name of short response time and visibility vis-a-vis patrolling in cars ❞

This issue is now being heatedly debated in Flint. There, it will be recalled, citizens have passed two bills funding foot patrol—the second by a two-to-one majority. A report commissioned by city government, however, concludes: "The Cost of the Neighborhood Foot Patrol Program Exceeds the Benefit It Provides the Citizens of Flint," and recommends abandoning the program when funding expires in 1988.

Why, according to the report, should foot patrol be abandoned? So more "effective" police work can be done. What is effective police work? Quick response to calls for service, taking reports, and increased visibility by putting police officers in cars. "It is simply wrong," says Robert Wasserman, noted police tactician and Research Fellow in the Program in Criminal Justice at Harvard,

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"to propose abandoning foot patrol in the name of short response time and visibility vis-a-vis patrolling in cars. Every shred of evidence is that rapid response and patrolling in cars doesn't reduce crime, increase citizen satisfaction, or reduce fear. Which is the luxury," Wasserman concludes, "a tactic like foot patrol that gives you two, and maybe three, of your goals, or a tactic like riding around in cars going from call to call that gives you none?" Experienced police executives share Wasserman's concerns. Almost without exception, they are attempting to find ways to get out of the morass that myths of the efficacy of rapid response have created for large-city police departments. It was Commissioner Ben Ward of New York City, for example, who put a cap on resources that can be used to respond to calls for service and is attempting to find improved means of responding to calls. Commissioner Francis "Mickey" Roache expresses the deep frustration felt by so many police: "I hate to say this, but in Boston we run from one call to another. We don't accomplish anything. We're just running all over the place. It's absolutely insane."

A politician's response to the recommendation to end Flint's foot patrol program is interesting. Daniel Whitehurst, former Mayor of Fresno, California, reflects: "I find it hard to imagine ending a program that citizens not only find popular but are willing to pay for as well."

"The overwhelming danger," Mark Moore concludes, "is that, in the name of efficiency, police and city officials will be tempted to maintain old patterns. They will think they are doing good, but will be squandering police resources." "Chips" Stewart emphasizes the need to move ahead: "As comfortable as old tactics might feel, police must continue to experiment with methods that have shown promise to improve police effectiveness and efficiency."

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Will community policing fit within policing as it is now organized?

Many police and academics believe this to be the most serious problem facing cities implementing community policing. Modern police departments have achieved an impressive capacity to respond quickly to calls for service. This has been accomplished by acquiring and linking elaborate automobile, telephone, radio, and computer technologies, by centralizing control and dispatch of officers, by pressing officers to be "in service" (rather than "out of service" dealing with citizens), and by allocating police in cars throughout the city on the basis of expected calls for service.

Community policing is quite different: it is not incident-
or technology-driven; officers operate on a decentralized
basis, it emphasizes officers being in regular contact with
citizens, and it allocates police on the basis of neighbor-
hoods. The question is, how reconcilable are these two
strategies? Some (Lawrence Sherman of the University
of Maryland is one example) have taken a strong stance
that radical alterations will be required if police are to
respond more effectively to community problems. Others
(Richard Larson of the Massachusetts Institute of
Technology, for example) disagree, believing that com-
munity policing is reconcilable with rapid response
technology—indeed Professor Larson would emphasize
that current computer technology can facilitate commu-
nity policing.

Will the community policing strategy lead to in-
creased police corruption and misbehavior?

The initial news from Houston, New York, Flint,
Newark, Los Angeles, Baltimore County, and other
police departments which have experimented with com-
munity policing is good. Community policing has not led
to increased problems of corruption or misbehavior.

Why is it, however, that policymakers fear that commu-
nity policing has the potential to increase the incidents
of police running amok? The answer? Community polic-
ing radically decentralizes police authority; officers must
create for themselves the best responses to problems; and,
police become intimately involved with citizens.

These ingredients may not sound so troublesome in them-
selves—after all, many private and public sector organi-
zations radically decentralize authority, encourage
creativity, and are characterized by relative intimacy
between service providers and consumers. Nevertheless,
in police circles such ingredients violate the orthodox
means of controlling corruption. For a generation, police
have believed that to eliminate corruption it is necessary
to centralize authority, limit discretion, and reduce inti-
macy between police and citizens. They had good reason
to: Early policing in the United States had been charac-
terized by financial corruption, failure of police to protect
the rights of all citizens, and zealotry.

But just as it is possible to squander police resources in
the name of efficiency, it is also possible to squander
police resources in the quest for integrity. Centralization,
standardization, and remoteness may preclude many op-
portunities for corruption, but they may also preclude the
possibility of good policing. For example, street-level
cocaine and heroin enforcement by patrol officers, now
known to have crime reduction value, has been banned
in cities because of fear of corruption. It is almost as if
the purpose of police was to be corruption free, rather
than to do essential work. If, as it appears to be, it is
necessary to take risks to solve problems, then so be it:
police will have to learn to manage risks as well as do
managers in other enterprises.

Does this imply softening on the issue of police corrup-
tion? Absolutely not. Police and city managers will have
to continue to be vigilant: community policing exposes
officers to more opportunities for traditional financial
corruption; in many neighborhoods police will be faced
with demands to protect communities from the incursions
of minorities; and, police will be tempted to become
overzealous when they see citizens' problems being ig-
nored by other agencies.

These dangers mean, however, that police executives will
have to manage through values, rather than merely
policies and procedures, and by establishing regular
neighborhood and community institution reporting
mechanisms, rather than through centralized command
and control systems.

Each of these issues—use of police resources, organiza-
tional compatibility, and corruption—is complicated.
Some will be the subject of debate. Others will require
research and experimentation to resolve. But most police
chiefs will begin to address these issues in a new way.
They will not attempt to resolve them in the ways of the
past: in secret, behind closed doors. Their approach will
reflect the values of the individual neighborhoods as well
as the community as a whole.

Policing is changing dramatically. On the one hand, we
wish policing to retain the old values of police integrity,
equitable distribution of police resources throughout a
community, and police efficiency which characterized
the old model of police. But the challenge of contempo-
rary police and city executives is to redefine these con-
cepts in light of the resurgence of neighborhood vitality,
consumerism, and more realistic assessments of the in-
stitutional capacity of police.

The quiet revolution is beginning to make itself heard:
citizens and police are joining together to defend
communities.

The Executive Session on Policing, like other
Executive Sessions at Harvard's Kennedy School of
Government, is designed to encourage a new form of
dialog between high-level practitioners and scholars,
with a view to redefining and proposing solutions for
substantive policy issues. Practitioners rather than
academicians are given majority representation in the
group. The meetings of the Session are conducted as
loosely structured seminars or policy debates.

Since it began in 1985, the Executive Session on
Policing has met six times. During the 3-day meet-
ings, the 30 members have energetically discussed the
facts and values that have guided, and those that
should guide, policing.

The Executive Session on Policing
convenes the following distinguished panel of leaders in the field of policing:

Allen Andrews
Superintendent of Police
Peoria, Illinois

Camille Cates Barnett, Ph.D.
Director of Finance and Administration
Houston, Texas

Cornelius Behan, Chief
Baltimore County Police Department
Baltimore County, Maryland

Lawrence Binkley, Chief
Long Beach Police Department
Long Beach, California

Lee P. Brown, Chief
Houston Police Department
Houston, Texas

Susan R. Estrich, Professor
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Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Daryl F. Gates, Chief
Los Angeles Police Department
Los Angeles, California

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University of Wisconsin
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Francis Roache, Commissioner
Boston Police Department
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