New Perspectives in Policing

JUNE 2014

HARVARD Kennedy School
Program in Criminal Justice Policy and Management

NIJ
National Institute of Justice

The Challenge of Policing in a Democratic Society: A Personal Journey Toward Understanding

Charles H. Ramsey

Executive Session on Policing and Public Safety

This is one in a series of papers that will be published as a result of the Executive Session on Policing and Public Safety.

Harvard's Executive Sessions are a convening of individuals of independent standing who take joint responsibility for rethinking and improving society's responses to an issue. Members are selected based on their experiences, their reputation for thoughtfulness and their potential for helping to disseminate the work of the Session.

In the early 1980s, an Executive Session on Policing helped resolve many law enforcement issues of the day. It produced a number of papers and concepts that revolutionized policing. Thirty years later, law enforcement has changed and NIJ and Harvard's Kennedy School of Government are again collaborating to help resolve law enforcement issues of the day.

Learn more about the Executive Session on Policing and Public Safety at:

NIJ's website: http://www.nij.gov/topics/law-enforcement/administration/executive-sessions/welcome.htm

Harvard's website: http://www.hks.harvard.edu/criminaljustice/executive_sessions/policing.htm

The Code

"As a law enforcement officer my fundamental duty is to serve mankind; to safeguard lives and property; to protect the innocent against deception, the weak against oppression or intimidation, the peaceful against violence and disorder; and to protect the Constitutional rights of all people to liberty, equality and justice."

This paragraph is part of the Law Enforcement Code of Ethics (author unknown). I believe it captures the essence of what it means to be a police officer in a democratic society. Unfortunately, the policing profession sometimes loses sight of what I believe is the most challenging element: "to protect the Constitutional rights of all people to liberty, equality and justice."

Police leaders must ensure that their officers fully understand the nature and significance of the commitment this brief phrase suggests. It commits us to a pact with the communities we serve. We make this commitment standing before God, swearing allegiance to the principles, values and ethics of the law enforcement profession.

It took me almost 30 years and a visit to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum to fully comprehend the role police play in protecting the freedoms that we, as Americans, hold dear. Today, I strive to share important lessons about these obligations with my officers — in part through the use of symbolism and ceremonies and in part by telling certain stories. This paper describes some of the most valuable lessons I believe I learned through reflecting on the exhibits at the Holocaust Museum. It also describes some of the ways in which I have sought to convey those lessons to other officers.

The Badge

At the Metropolitan Police Department in Washington, D.C., I established a new ceremony that we conducted for every graduating class of new recruits. Each graduate has a family member attend the ceremony, and that family member pins the badge on the graduating officer's uniform for the first time. The recruits therefore share that moment with the people whom they most care about and who care most about them. They learn to regard the badge as a symbol — a bright and highly visible symbol — of the authority and the trust that the public places in them. The community does not place that level of authority and trust in many people, but it has placed it in them, in us, the police. Every day we wear the badge, we must do everything we can to use our authority wisely and to earn the trust that the community places in us.

The badge identifies each officer not only as a member of a particular police department but also as a member of the policing profession. The badge represents our oath of office, serving as a constant reminder of the values and principles we hold dear. Having family members share in the ceremony, we believe, makes it less likely that officers will tarnish that badge, more likely that they will remember and stay true to their oath.

Inevitably, some do go astray. In Philadelphia, if an officer is found to be corrupt, that badge is taken away and destroyed. That tarnished badge will never be worn again by a member of our department. A new badge is minted, with the same number, to take its place. When recruits receive their badge, they are given the names of every officer who has worn that badge number before them and worn it with honor. The names of officers who tarnished their badge are not included in that list.

We want all officers to know that by wearing the badge they inherit an honorable tradition. They will wear the badge only for a time. But, during the time when they do have that badge, it is incumbent on each of them to keep it untarnished — as a symbol not just of authority but also of pride and integrity. Each officer becomes a part of a legacy of service connecting all of those who wore that badge before them and all those who will wear it after them.

Cite this paper as: Ramsey, Charles, *The Challenge of Policing in a Democratic Society: A Personal Journey Toward Understanding.* New Perspectives in Policing Bulletin. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, 2014. NCJ 245992.

Instilling Values

The law enforcement profession is good at training new recruits. I use the word "training" deliberately. We offer defined curricula in the police academy; we teach skills in self-defense, certify firearms proficiency, and give out multiple directives that explain what to do and what not to do in the line of duty. We can teach officers to be technically proficient, expert marksmen, and well-versed in criminal law and procedure. But it is much more challenging to teach them how to be compassionate, civil and just human beings; how to think, how to feel, how to judge, and how to connect with members of the public whom they will encounter when those people are at their most vulnerable.

As a profession, we institute all kinds of policies and procedures to try to shape the behavior of police officers. And yet many of the same undesirable behavior problems persist, year after year. In my view, we will not change behavior if we do not change attitude, and we will not change attitude if we do not change a person's heart. We need to affect the way in which officers see themselves and their role in society. We need to change what is inside them and help them see things differently.

Teaching our officers to respect the intent of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights — not just the technical aspects of criminal procedure — is an emotional, spiritual and moral experience. They need to understand the importance of and commitment to both the oath they swore and the code of ethics they obligated themselves to live by.

A Visit to the Holocaust Museum

Early in my tenure as Commissioner of the Washington, D.C., Metropolitan Police Department, in 1998, I received an invitation from David Friedman, Executive Director of the Anti-Defamation League in Washington, to visit the United States Holocaust Museum and meet the museum's director, Sara Bloomfield. I took up the invitation and visited the museum one afternoon on my way to the airport. For me it was a powerful and totally unexpected experience. I spent a good part of that first tour walking and talking with Irene Weiss, a Holocaust survivor. To hear her tell her own experiences and memories was remarkable. All of us study the Holocaust in school and from textbooks, but few of us have the opportunity to hear about it firsthand from those who lived through it.

I left the museum overwhelmed with emotion. Something there — particularly in some of the images — haunted me. I left with a strong sense that there were important lessons to be learned, for myself and for every other police officer. But I was not clear at that point what those lessons were. So I went back a few weeks later, unannounced, and toured the museum again on my own. I spent a considerable amount of time there on that second visit, and that is when I started noticing the pictures of police officers and began to understand their involvement in this tragedy.

Having had many years since to contemplate the various exhibits, I now point to three photographs that continue to hold special significance for me. Let me tell you about them and about my reflections on what they have taught me.

Photograph 1: Complicity

The first is a photo on the top floor of the exhibition that shows a police officer and a Nazi militia soldier flanking a muzzled dog.

I would guess that most first-time visitors to the museum mistakenly believe that the Nazi atrocities were carried out almost exclusively by the military, by the infamous SA and SS troops. Most people simply do not realize the integral role that local police played — not just passively permitting atrocities to take place but actively participating in many of them. Over time, the distinctions between local police and the Nazi military became so blurred that the two became synonymous. Even in the early days of the Nazi regime, soldiers and police, though organizationally separate, often worked hand in hand.

At the time of the Holocaust, at least a few Americans began asking the question, "Where were the police?" One of the newspaper blow-ups on display in the museum is from the *Dallas Morning News* of November 11, 1938. Its banner headline, reporting on the Kristallnacht rampage of two days earlier, reads as follows: "Hysterical Nazis Wreck Hundreds of Jewish Shops, Burn Synagogues in Wild Orgy of Looting and Terror." What is particularly disturbing is the "kicker" (subheadline) to the story: "Policemen Refuse to Halt Organized Riots in Germany."

What is revealing about that newspaper story is that it expresses the long-held tradition in our own country that if people are rioting and looting and destroying property, it is the job of the police to intervene. It is just so fundamental to

Photo credit: Bundesarchiv, Bild 102-14381 / photo: Georg Pahl

our view of the police mission: the protection of life and property.

How then, in Germany in the 1930s, did things get so out of whack that people could loot and destroy in an organized and widespread manner without the police even trying to intervene? In our modern policing paradigm, such complacency on the part of the police seems almost impossible. But it was a reality then, as well as an obvious paradox.

The historical explanations point out a trend at the time toward a nationalization and politicization of policing. The stated reasons for that trend, and for the increasingly repressive tactics the police employed, have an all-too-familiar ring to them. Crime was out of control. Mobsters were in control. Enforcement across different jurisdictions was difficult. The Depression was breeding

crime, and this lawlessness demanded a swift and certain response.

The Nazis did not call it "zero tolerance" at the time, but the brand of crime control they practiced was "zero tolerance" taken to its most horrific extreme. The concept quickly moved from "zero tolerance" for criminal behavior to "zero tolerance" for those people believed responsible for crime, disorder and other forms of hardship — in this case, Jews, gays and lesbians, people with mental illness, those with physical and cognitive disabilities, the "Roma" and many, many others.

Of course, the term "zero tolerance" is quite in vogue today. Some people even suggest (quite mistakenly, I would argue) that zero tolerance and community policing are one and the same, or at least closely related. What worries me most about this is that the ideals of democracy are all about tolerance — tolerance for different people, different cultures, different viewpoints. In the name of zero tolerance, many police departments today crack down on nuisance crimes such as drinking in public and other minor misdemeanors and almost always choose underprivileged neighborhoods for this strategy. I certainly do not advocate drinking in public or any other disorderly or criminal behavior. But how many of us ask the questions: Why is this person an alcoholic to begin with? And why doesn't he or she have a home to live in?

If we are to stand for any type of zero tolerance, it should be zero tolerance for the causes of crime and zero tolerance for the types of racist attitudes that led to the Holocaust 70 years ago and continue to feed hate crimes in our communities today. That is the type of "zero tolerance" we, as police officers, should be focusing on.

What followed from the zero tolerance policies in Nazi Germany was the denial of basic human rights and individual freedoms. Almost from the beginning, local police were intimately involved, and they soon became part and parcel of the Nazi reign of repression and terror.

Could the Holocaust have happened without the active cooperation and participation of the local police in Germany? We may never know the answer to that question. But one thing we do know for certain: local police forces began to operate in accordance with a set of values totally contrary to their oath of office and totally contrary to the mission of the police in a free, democratic and pluralistic society.

The Holocaust is probably the most extreme example of just how horrific and far-reaching the consequences can be when police officers violate their oath and fail to protect the basic rights and liberties of citizens. But even small ethical violations on the part of police officers can result in people's rights being denied, their confidence in the police being eroded and their communities becoming less safe.

I have mentioned my reservations about the concept of "zero tolerance." I also have serious reservations about the notion of a "thin blue line." The idea is decades old and suggests a fragile but necessary demarcation between good and evil in our communities. The history of the Holocaust

shows us that in Nazi Germany the police did become a line, helping to separate the people that Hitler and his political allies defined as good from those they defined as evil.

The problem with reinforcing any kind of line is that you have to put each and every individual you encounter on one side or the other of that line — either the good side or the evil side. That requires police officers to make snap judgments about people based not always on their behavior but sometimes on their appearance, their background, where they live, whom they associate with or other factors.

I believe that much of the tension that surrounds perceived profiling by police based on race or ethnicity stems from this viewpoint. Today, in communities across America, we still face painful issues relating to the perceived profiling by police based on race and ethnicity. The "thin blue line" metaphor does damage. True community policing does not define police officers as a line — thin, blue or otherwise. We are not now, nor should we ever be, something that divides or separates communities.

How then should we help the police officers of today understand their role as defenders of the constitutional rights of all people? How do we help them recognize their own biases and prevent prejudice from influencing their decisions? Unfortunately, the issue of race in our society still divides us. It is difficult to have a discussion on the topic or to get people to see the world through the eyes of someone of another race without a variety of defensive reactions getting in the way. It was my attempt to answer those questions that led me to reflect more carefully on the Holocaust. The events leading up to and including the Holocaust powerfully demonstrate the dangers that can materialize when police offer their allegiance to a person or to a political party rather than holding true to the ethics of their profession.

In cooperation with the Holocaust museum and the Anti-Defamation League, the Metropolitan Police Department established a one-day educational program (which has been running now for more than a decade) called the "Law Enforcement & Society Program."[1] It gives officers a chance to spend a day at the Holocaust museum and reflect on the role of police in a democratic society. I am told that more than 90,000 law enforcement officers from a range of federal, state and local agencies have been through this program. I hope their visit to the museum was as profound an experience for them as it was for me.

This training reminds officers that local police must never become so politicized — as they were in Nazi Germany — that they regard their primary role as carrying out the will of political leaders or simply looking the other way when political agendas that deny fundamental rights

[1] The day begins with a guided tour of the museum's permanent collection, which traces the history of the Holocaust from the Nazi rise to power through the end of World War II and its aftermath. The tour is followed by a group discussion among the police officers, museum historians and educators on the abuse of power under the Nazis and the role of police within the Nazi state. Finally, the session concludes with an interactive conversation between Anti-Defamation League educators and police participants, who are encouraged to discuss their personal reactions and feelings in response to what they have seen. They are prompted to explore in greater depth the role that local police played in the genocide. They discuss how the lessons of the Holocaust can be applied to their own work as police officers today.

are pushed forward. Our power — our authority as police officers — comes not from the politicians. Our power and authority come from the people. Above all else, our role as police officers is to protect and preserve the rights of the people: the right to assemble, the right to speak, the right to petition and criticize one's government, and the right to be secure in one's home and with one's own possessions and beliefs. Defending these rights for all people, all of the time, ultimately defines us as police officers.

One of the lessons police recruits pick up from the day they spend at the museum is much more intimate and personal. It is a lesson in how to deal with their own personal prejudices — which are normally very private — while they carry out their very public role as police officers.

Nobody enters this profession without some prejudices. That is just human nature, and police officers are human beings too. We all come to this job with certain preconceptions about people, certain stereotypes and even certain prejudices. Exposure to the history of the Holocaust forces our recruits to confront those highly personal feelings in a compelling but supportive way. Nobody is asked to publicly confess any prejudices he or she may hold. We do not call it "sensitivity training" or anything like that, as such labels seem to accuse. But I do believe any person who walks through the Holocaust museum or goes through our training would be hard-pressed not to go home and take a deep look inside themselves, at their own attitudes and values. That is exactly the effect it had on me. Because our recruits take this introspective journey early in their careers, I am convinced they start off being more aware of other people's circumstances, more sympathetic to their predicaments and more tolerant of differences than they might have been otherwise.

Photograph 2: Resignation

Another photo that made a profound impression on me is one of the first you see when you get off the elevator to begin the tour. It is a 1945 photograph of a lone prisoner who has just been liberated from Buchenwald. He is sitting, eating rice from a bowl, and you look at him and he is looking up at whoever took the photograph, and you can look into his eyes and tell that he will never really be liberated because of the immensity and intensity of the suffering he has been through.

Photo credit: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland. Photo used by permission.

Usually, the idea of "liberation" conjures up images of parties and ticker tape parades and wild celebrations in the streets. There were certainly many such images among the museum exhibits, captured by photographers as World War II came to a close. But this liberation photo

is obviously quite different. The subject's eyes tell the story of much more than just physical discomfort and exhaustion. They show intense emotional pain, anguish and resignation. Given what this man has been through, there seems to be no room for relief, excitement or joy.

Looking into this man's eyes, I began to wonder what message they held for today's police officers. When we come into a distressed or crime-ridden community to execute a search warrant, make an arrest or board up an abandoned building, are the eyes of the residents all that different from the eyes of this prisoner? Do our residents really view police as "liberators"? Or are we seen as something else, perhaps as a part of the problem, maybe because we did not do enough to prevent their neighborhood from deteriorating in the first place?

Part of the anguish I see in the Buchenwald prisoner's eyes is the conviction that all of this human tragedy and suffering was so unnecessary. It did not have to happen, if only the people who were supposed to protect the rights and liberties of the Jewish people had stood up and done something early on, when they could have, when they should have.

That is part of the anguish that many of our own residents feel today. It is great that the police are here now, trying to clean up the problems of crime and disorder that have developed over the years in their communities. But where were the police when these problems were taking hold?

Of course, there are important differences between the two scenarios. In the 1930s and 1940s, local police officers in the Nazi empire not only failed to prevent atrocities from taking place, they actively participated in many of those atrocities, including the murder of innocent people. That type of blatant criminal behavior is not to be found among the vast majority of our police officers today. But the question — then and now — is still the same: Where were the police?

Where were the police when libraries were being looted and books burned? When Jewish businesses were being illegally targeted? When people were being classified and publicly harassed, and ultimately imprisoned and slaughtered? Where were the police?

And where was the rest of the community — the local politicians, other government officials, civic leaders and everyday citizens — most of whom stood by silently and watched it all happen?

In America we might similarly ask: Where were the police when people were being lynched because of the color of their skin, and segregation was the law in states across the South?

Fast-forwarding several decades, where were the police when crack cocaine and other drugs invaded our communities? When gangs armed with powerful automatic and semiautomatic weapons took control of many of our streets? When shootings and homicides became everyday occurrences in far too many of our communities? Where were the police? And, once again, where was the rest of the community when crime was

gaining its stranglehold on many of our communities? Do residents' expressions and behaviors toward police in our country's most beleaguered communities now reflect a similar resignation? Is the disconnection between residents and police exacerbated by feelings of abandonment and mistrust?

Whether they pertain to the 1930s or to our times, these are compelling questions. They are questions I think all police officers should be thinking about and talking about.

In our daily routines as police officers, we spend the vast majority of our time with the most vulnerable in our society — people who are poor and undereducated; people who may be newly arrived in our country and may speak a different language; people who are afraid and sometimes hopeless; people who may not appreciate, understand or trust the police. Who but these people have the greatest need of our help? In serving these and other people, we must show compassion and always be mindful of an obvious but sometimes forgotten fact — we are dealing with fellow human beings, not icons on a computer-generated map or numbers in a statistical report. When we start to look at crime victims, witnesses and others as statistics and stop seeing them as human beings, as people in trouble or in need, then we have lost our way.

To serve with compassion means understanding that when someone is the victim of a robbery, burglary, sexual assault or any other crime, his or her life may very well have been changed forever. It means treating each and every one of these individuals with empathy, dignity and respect. It means working tirelessly to help bring some sense of closure to the victims of crime. It means doing everything in our power to ensure that others do not suffer the same fate. And it means understanding that we should never judge others. It means recognizing that fate and circumstance are the only things that separate us from one another as human beings.

I learned a powerful lesson about the importance of respect from a member of my squad when I was a sergeant in the Chicago Police Department. I was having difficulty understanding why some people in our most challenged neighborhoods viewed police negatively rather than seeing us as protectors. This officer told me it all boiled down to the lack of respect some officers showed toward the community. He expressed this truth in a somewhat unusual and compelling way. His explanation went like this: "At the moment of birth everyone is a perfect 10, but once you enter this world, deduct 3 because life is only temporary. If you are born into a dysfunctional family, deduct another 3 because you will have very few positive role models in your life that will help keep you on the straight and narrow. If you are poor or a member of a minority group, deduct another 3 because many doors that lead to success may not be open to you. That takes the person that was once a perfect 10 down to 1. The 1 represents that person's dignity and self-respect." He said to me, "As a police officer, do what you have to do to make an arrest or defuse a situation but *never* do anything that takes away that person's 1 because that is all they have left and they will fight you to hold on to it."

As police officers we must respect the communities that we serve. It is by showing respect and compassion toward others that we develop legitimacy in the hearts and minds of these communities.

Photograph 3: Bystanders

The third photograph that haunts me shows about 15 soldiers standing around a man who is on his knees, about to get shot in the back of the head. He has dug his own grave and is about to fall into it.

Photo credit: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Sharon Paquette.

Out of the 15 soldiers, maybe 14 of them appear to be looking on to see what is happening. Some of them are actually smiling. But one soldier is looking away. Now, the photographer might just have snapped that picture at that time when that particular soldier happened to look away. But I have wondered, and I would like to think that this soldier knew right from wrong and was saying to himself something like, "Man, this is messed up. I don't even want to be here." It makes me wonder what would have happened if five of those soldiers out of the 15 had said, "Whoa, wait a minute, we are not doing this." Would that have changed things a little bit? It would surely have taken considerable courage to speak up in those circumstances.

Let us bring this up to date. What about the other officers, the bystanders, when a suspect takes a beating? What is running through those officers' heads? I would guess that there are some with a perverted sense of justice who think everything is fine and that this person deserves this treatment, and I suspect a considerable number know it is not fine and they are deeply uncomfortable. But what will they do? Will they have the courage to intervene, to step forward, to challenge their colleagues, to do the right thing? Feeling uncomfortable will never be enough. This is a call to action.

We look at courage in our business as going up against an armed gunman, into a dangerous situation or facing physical danger. We think less about courage as standing up for what is right. What is more, our systems and organizational cultures often fail to support or reward that kind of courage. When an officer reports misconduct to internal affairs, what kind of reward does he or she get for such courage? Too often, it seems as if the incentives and reward structures are stacked

against those who are on the side of right. Too often, those who speak up or say "no" end up ostracized and decide never to do that again — because of the way the department treats them, because of the cost that the system imposes on them. At some point that has got to change if we expect reality to be different in 10 or 20 years.

I believe that fundamental change in attitudes and in police culture is possible. Of course, it is hard, and I am not suggesting for a minute it is not. But it takes a different kind of courage, a courage that many people simply do not have as individuals. Collectively, we have to find the strength.

First Responders

Since 9/11, and again in the wake of the Boston Marathon bombing, we hear police (among others) described as first responders. Everyone was struck by the images in Boston of police officers at the scene of the bombing rushing in without hesitation to help the wounded with little or no regard for their own safety.

If we really understand our oath — and the role police must play in protecting human rights, civil liberties and democratic values — then we also have to be the first responders when basic human and civil rights are threatened or denied. Not bystanders. Will we rush in then to intervene, without regard for the personal consequences, just as we do at a bomb scene? Of course, others should follow us and have their role to play, too, but police need to be first, the very first. Our oath as police officers demands that we take this leadership role.

When I went through the academy, I learned about the First Amendment and the Fourth Amendment, not from the standpoint of how important it was for me to protect them but so that I would know how to get around them to do my job.

I remember when we had the "Occupy" demonstrations in Philadelphia as in so many other major cities in the U.S. and abroad. During our department's planning sessions, I was astonished at how quickly and naturally the conversation turned to mass arrest procedures, the importance of having arrest procedures ready for various eventualities and checking that we were ready to deploy them at short notice. So I raised the question, "What is Plan B? Why do we always go to mass arrest procedures? We should have as our goal not to arrest anyone. Whether we agree with the demonstrators or not, these folks have a legitimate right to protest and to air and voice their concerns. Our job is to make sure they can do that, peacefully."

We reminded ourselves that Philadelphia was the birthplace of democracy in the free world. For as long as the demonstration lasted, every day at roll call the sergeant read the First Amendment out loud. Every day! This went on for months, and maybe some people got a bit tired of it; nevertheless, we stuck with it and read the First Amendment each and every day at roll call to remind the officers at the beginning of their shift what their job was.

In my office at police headquarters, I have one picture that makes me particularly proud. It

shows a group of our bicycle officers at the National Constitution Center, where a huge stone tablet has the First Amendment engraved on it. These officers chose to take their own picture, as a group, surrounding that tablet. That means a great deal to me.

The public has come to know that we will rush headlong toward danger and will put ourselves in harm's way to protect total strangers. Even if some of our own should fall in the process, the public knows that there will be others to fill in. The heroes who responded to the terror attacks of 9/11 will forever serve as shining examples of this type of service: service with purpose and service with courage.

But our oath to "serve and protect" means much more than protecting life and property. Our oath also carries with it the unique and awesome responsibility of protecting the constitutional rights of all Americans — of safeguarding the very freedoms that we cherish and that set us apart from so many other nations on earth.

In recent years, whenever we see the escalation of crime, drug abuse, youth violence, child abuse, security threats or other serious problems, we hear various calls for the relaxation of the exclusionary rule, the reversal of other Fourth Amendment rights and, most recently, the overhaul of police *Miranda* warnings. All of these suggestions have been made in the name of more effective law enforcement and safer communities.

Yes, the police need to work harder and smarter in controlling crime. But in doing so, we must never compromise our staunch defense of the Constitution and the bedrock freedoms it guarantees. We must never buy into the notion — as the police in Nazi Germany did — that taking away individual rights is somehow the way to solve our crime problems and create safer communities. If our officers leave their day at the Holocaust museum with only one lesson learned, I hope it is that one.

Our Legacy

The ultimate goal of the police is to create a society that is free of crime and where everyone's rights are safe and secure. That is the ideal, something to reach for, but something that we will probably never fully achieve. There will always be challenges and obstacles that get in the way.

Today, the threat of terrorism creates challenges to our physical safety and security as well as to our traditions of fairness, equality and liberty. Faced with such threats, we will increasingly be forced to weigh the issues of individual privacy against the issues of public security. We will be tempted to use new and powerful surveillance technologies just because we can. But should we? Moving forward, we will have to be more thoughtful about which technologies to deploy. Technology is sometimes a benefit, sometimes a curse. Of course, we should pursue effective and appropriate technological solutions to our problems. But we must also consciously decide where the limits lie and do so before we cross those lines. As police weigh conflicting obligations, we need to remind ourselves constantly that our first priority is the protection of constitutional rights.

In closing, let me return to the issue of how we, as police officers, view ourselves and how, as a consequence, others might view us. Earlier in this paper, I expressed my reservations concerning the metaphor of the "thin blue line." As a result of my personal journey, I no longer buy into that metaphor at all. I would prefer that police see themselves as a thread woven through the communities they serve. That metaphor makes police an integral part of the very fabric that holds communities together in a democratic society. Our partnerships and collaborations will mean much more when we view ourselves as a part of the fabric rather than as a separate institution trying to engage the public. As a thin blue line, we might suppress crime in some neighborhoods, but as part of the fabric of society, we are already joined with others in the task of creating safe and healthy places to live and work.

Policing is a noble profession. We always meet the challenges of our time, overcome the obstacles and continue moving forward, all the while staying true to our values and principles. Our legacy is precious and deserves our constant care and attention. One hundred years from now, most people are unlikely to remember any of us as individuals. Our individual names will be on the list of those who wore the badge. But collectively, will we have made an imprint? What will that imprint look like? What legacy will we leave behind, as individuals and as a profession?

I have every confidence that we will be remembered positively — and our imprint will be honorable, memorable and lasting; that is, so long as we remain true to our calling of service to others, to our oath of office, and to the principles and ethics of our profession.

Photo credit: Philadelphia Police Department.

Author Note: Charles H. Ramsey is Commissioner of the Philadelphia Police Department, President of the Major Cities Chiefs Association, President of the Police Executive Research Forum and a member of the Harvard/NIJ Executive Session on Policing and Public Safety. This paper draws in part from a speech entitled "The Lessons of the Holocaust: Helping Create Better Police Officers for Today and Tomorrow" delivered by Commissioner Ramsey at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum/Anti-Defamation League Symposium on April 12, 2000, from other more recent speeches delivered by Commissioner Ramsey regarding the character of police service, and from remarks made by him during the Executive Sessions.

U.S. Department of Justice
Office of Justice Programs
National Institute of Justice

Washington, DC 20531

Official Business
Penalty for Private Use $300

NCJ 245992

PRESORTED STANDARD
POSTAGE & FEES PAID
DOJ/NIJ
PERMIT NO. G–91

Members of the Executive Session on Policing and Public Safety

Commissioner Anthony Batts, Baltimore Police Department

Professor David Bayley, Distinguished Professor (Emeritus), School of Criminal Justice, State University of New York at Albany

Professor Anthony Braga, Senior Research Fellow, Program in Criminal Justice Policy and Management, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University; and Don M. Gottfredson Professor of Evidence-Based Criminology, School of Criminal Justice, Rutgers University

Chief Jane Castor, Tampa Police Department

Ms. Christine Cole (Facilitator), Executive Director, Program in Criminal Justice Policy and Management, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University

Commissioner Edward Davis, Boston Police Department (retired)

Chief Michael Davis, Director, Public Safety Division, Northeastern University

Mr. Ronald Davis, Director, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, United States Department of Justice

Ms. Madeline deLone, Executive Director, The Innocence Project

Dr. Richard Dudley, Clinical and Forensic Psychiatrist

Chief Edward Flynn, Milwaukee Police Department

Colonel Rick Fuentes, Superintendent, New Jersey State Police

District Attorney George Gascón, San Francisco District Attorney's Office

Mr. Gil Kerlikowske, Director, Office of National Drug Control Policy

Professor John H. Laub, Distinguished University Professor, Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, College of Behavioral and Social Sciences, University of Maryland

Chief Susan Manheimer, San Mateo Police Department

Superintendent Garry McCarthy, Chicago Police Department

Professor Tracey Meares, Walton Hale Hamilton Professor of Law, Yale Law School

Dr. Bernard K. Melekian, Director, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (retired), United States Department of Justice

Ms. Sue Rahr, Director, Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission

Commissioner Charles Ramsey, Philadelphia Police Department

Dr. Greg Ridgeway, Acting Director, National Institute of Justice

Professor David Sklansky, Yosef Osheawich Professor of Law, University of California, Berkeley, School of Law

Mr. Sean Smoot, Director and Chief Legal Counsel, Police Benevolent and Protective Association of Illinois

Professor Malcolm Sparrow, Professor of Practice of Public Management, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University

Mr. Darrel Stephens, Executive Director, Major Cities Chiefs Association

Mr. Christopher Stone, President, Open Society Foundations

Mr. Richard Van Houten, President, Fort Worth Police Officers Association

Lieutenant Paul M. Weber, Los Angeles Police Department

Professor David Weisburd, Walter E. Meyer Professor of Law and Criminal Justice, Faculty of Law, The Hebrew University; and Distinguished Professor, Department of Criminology, Law and Society, George Mason University

Dr. Chuck Wexler, Executive Director, Police Executive Research Forum

Learn more about the Executive Session at:

NIJ's website: http://www.nij.gov/topics/law-enforcement/administration/executive-sessions/welcome.htm
Harvard's website: http://www.hks.harvard.edu/criminaljustice/executive_sessions/policing.htm