



Book Review

Review of *The Profession: A Memoir of Community, Race, and the Arc of Policing in America*

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Book: *The Profession: A Memoir of Community, Race, and the Arc of Policing in America*, by Bill Bratton and Peter Knobler (New York: Penguin Press, 2021), 512 pages, ISBN-10 0525558195 (hardcover), ISBN-13 978-0525558194 (hardcover).

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William J. "Bill" Bratton is perhaps the most recognizable chief law enforcement executive in modern history, credited with leading two of the largest police departments in the two largest cities in the United States. In *The Profession: A Memoir of Community, Race, and the Arc of Policing in America*, Bratton and co-author Peter Knobler chronicle Bratton's career, from humble beginnings as a Boston patrol officer, to the conclusion of his unprecedented second term as New York Police Department (NYPD) Commissioner. Bratton reflects on his historic career and provides his insider perspective on the evolution of policing over the last half century. Bratton also describes his role in leading innovations in technology and policing strategies, such as Compstat and community-oriented policing, that are now standard procedure for police departments around the world. Bratton and Knobler provide thoughtful commentary on current events and end the book on a prescriptive note.

The Profession opens with a retelling of the horrific 2014 assassination of NYPD Officers Rafael Ramos and Wenjian Liu. Summing up the feelings of every law enforcement chief executive, Bratton wrote, "one of the most terrible parts of the NYPD commissioner's job is dealing with the death of officers under one's command" (p. 5). Bratton and Knobler use this tragedy as a backdrop to introduce the often-competing priorities facing the Commissioner during a crisis.



Responding to the murder of Ramos and Liu, Bratton demonstrates concern for the wounded and their families, mediates the contentious relationship between the Mayor and the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association, and manages the media's demands for information. Chapter one prepares the reader for what lies ahead; a behind the curtain look at the burden and privilege of being America's top cop.

Bratton, a Vietnam veteran, returned home in 1970 and joined the Boston Police Department at age 23. For the next 46 years, Bratton's career had many starts and stops, but rarely faltered in its forward momentum. Early on, Bratton seized opportunities to ascend the ranks of the Boston Police Department. Disappointed that he was not selected to be commissioner in Boston, Bratton pivoted and found reputation-building opportunities as Chief of the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority and Chief of the New York City Transit Police Department. Later, he returned to the Boston Police Department as superintendent-in-chief. Bratton and Knobler candidly describe the emotional setbacks and resiliency displayed by Bratton on his path to being named Commissioner of the NYPD in 1994.

Bratton's deep affection for law enforcement and his ongoing desire to serve is apparent throughout *The Profession*. In Bratton and Knobler's 1998 book, *The Turnaround: How America's Top Cop Reversed the Crime Epidemic*, Bratton described resigning as Commissioner of the NYPD in 1996, leaving behind unfinished business for a job in the private sector.¹ Bratton recounted the treacherous political nature of serving under New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, the deterioration of the commissioner's relationship with the mayor, and Bratton's inevitable resignation. *The Turnaround* also foreshadowed Bratton's return to law enforcement. *The Profession* picks up where *The Turnaround* left off, telling Bratton's twenty-year comeback story.

Bratton served as a consultant for six years, including a stint as consent decree monitor for the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD). In 2002, Bratton returned to law enforcement as Chief of the LAPD, introducing the department to Compstat, community-oriented policing, and many of the policing strategies that proved effective in New York, and would later help the LAPD emerge from the Department of Justice consent decree. After seven successful years in Los Angeles, Bratton returned to the private sector before rejoining the NYPD in 2014 for his second term as commissioner. Bratton described his desire to remain connected to the profession to which he had dedicated his entire adult life. Reminiscing on his time as Chief of the New York Transit Police many years earlier, Bratton mused, "I've got to say, even with all these challenges—or perhaps because of them—I was having the time of my life. I was exactly where I wanted to be, in a position to make a difference in millions of lives. What more did I need?" (p. 143).

Bratton and Knobler reveal the challenges facing a law enforcement leader who must juggle big city politics while addressing crime and disorder. Bratton was keenly aware that politics and police leadership are not mutually exclusive. Over the course of decades, Bratton developed the acumen to traverse both, balancing the policing needs of the community, while navigating the agendas of the elected officials to which he answered. It was often here, in the public arena, that Bratton's career faltered. Bratton and Knobler describe a thin-skinned Giuliani taking exception to Bratton casting a shadow over the mayor's public image. Bratton expressed a tongue-in-cheek self-awareness of his own ego and the role it might have played, when he quoted his former colleague, John Miller, Deputy Commissioner of Intelligence & Counterterrorism of the NYPD as stating, "Bratton would never walk away from a camera."

The Profession offers Bratton's insider view of some of the most important innovations in modern policing. Bratton positions himself as both a practitioner and student of law enforcement, one who challenged the status quo and surrounded himself with forward thinking colleagues that shared his vision for more effective policing. Bratton leveraged the prominent research of the day and had the resources necessary to implement crime reduction strategies that led to historically low crime rates under his watch. Bratton described coming of age in the years surrounding George Kelling's 1972 Kansas City Preventative Patrol Experiment and the Newark New Jersey Foot Patrol Experiment, studies that ushered in an era of Broken Windows and community-oriented policing.²

Progressive theories of addressing crime and disorder informed Bratton's policing philosophy and deployment strategies throughout his career. Bratton and Knobler also cover the development of Compstat, a then one-of-a-kind crime mapping and police response tool that has since been implemented by police departments around the world. Bratton recounts the early days of Compstat, which began as a rudimentary concept of placing dots on a paper map to identify crime trends and hold police leaders accountable to address them. Decades later, Bratton cemented his Compstat legacy with the 2015 opening of the state-of-the-art Jack Maple CompStat Center at NYPD headquarters.³

In later chapters, Bratton and Knobler turn their attention to the current state of police and community relations. Bratton balances empathy and advocacy for the community with loyalty to the ideals of policing and those who serve the profession with integrity. Bratton and Knobler weave social commentary into the book's conclusion, acknowledging the role of systemic racism and implicit bias in policing and in society. Bratton clearly supports efforts to reform policing, without ceding the importance of law enforcement as a societal institution. Bratton and Knobler make no excuses for incidents of police brutality yet dismiss calls for disbanding and defunding police departments. Instead, the authors see this crisis of confidence as an opportunity for those on seemingly opposite sides to collaborate and to reimagine policing in the years ahead.

The Profession: A Memoir of Community, Race, and the Arc of Policing in America is an important narrative of a leadership journey that will likely never be replicated. Bratton and Knobler bring the Commissioner's story full circle to provide authoritative historical context to the public's urgent concerns about the role of law enforcement in modern society, while weaving in enough of Bratton's personal ambitions, triumphs, setbacks, and comebacks to effectively humanize the responsibilities shouldered by those who lead major city police departments.

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* Corrections included addressing typographical errors and formatting issues.

Endnotes

¹ William J. Bratton and Peter Knobler, *Turnaround: How America's Top Cop Reversed the Crime Epidemic.*, (New York: Random House, 1998).

² George L. Kelling, Tony Pate, Duane Dieckman, and Charles E. Brown, *The Kansas City Preventive Patrol Experiment* (Washington, DC: Police Foundation, 1974); George L. Kelling, *The Newark Foot Patrol Experiment* (Washington, DC: Police Foundation, 1981).

³ Police Executive Research Forum, *Compstat: Its Origins, Evolution, and Future in Law Enforcement Agencies.* (Washington, DC: Police Executive Research Forum, 2013).