



The city's policing debate has often been reduced to its crudest terms: Either you're for stop-and-frisk or you're tolerant of crime. You don't care about the Constitutional rights of young black and Latino men, or you don't care if they die.

Public housing tenant Kis Ravelin was arrested on charges of trespassing after being stopped by police in the lobby of his own home.

To Protect and Serve?

Public housing residents experience both crime and police surveillance at rates far higher than most of the city. Can the relationship between police and the people be restored?

BY ABIGAIL KRAMER

THE STAIRWELL OF KIS (pronounced “kiss”) Ravelin’s building in the Washington Houses, a two-block cluster of New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) developments in East Harlem, could double for that of almost any public housing high rise in the city: Mustard-yellow walls rise up from a run of concrete steps, seeping a faint smell of SpaghettiOs and disinfectant. At the bottom, a dim lobby opens onto glass and steel security doors with a broken lock and defunct intercom system. Visitors are greeted by a sign announcing: “NYCHA Premises Are For The Use Of Residents, Invited Guests, And Persons With Legitimate Business Only. NO TRESPASSING.”

Ravelin, who’s 23 years old and generally found wearing a skeptical expression and an immaculate pair of hightops, lives at the top of the first flight of stairs in an apartment he shares with his parents and a 2-year-old terrier named Rex. He’s been in the building since he was 14 but spends much of his time at St. Thomas Aquinas College in Sparkill, New York, where he’s halfway through a degree in business management. A few evenings each week, he practices bass in the band at the church he’s attended most weekends of his life. The neighbors call him Quiet Boy.

Which is why they were surprised—“bedazzled,” says a silver-haired lady who lives down the hall—one afternoon three years ago to see him with his hands against the lobby wall, legs spread while two police officers turned out his pockets and searched his pants and socks. Finding them empty except for a few dollars, a set of house keys and no ID, the officers cuffed him and put him in the back of a squad car. The charge was trespassing—in the entryway of his own building.

New York City has spent much of the past year embroiled in a loud, often volatile debate over how it polices its lowest-income residents. At the heart of the controversy is the New York Police Department’s strategy of targeted, “zero tol-

erance” policing: First, identify the places where crime is happening most. Second, flood those places with police officers, instructed to crack down on low-level offenses in the hopes of preventing more serious crime. Central to the strategy—and the furor it inspires—is the practice of “stop, question and frisk,” whereby patrol officers detain and sometimes search people on the street, in theory because an officer has reason to believe that a person has been, is, or will be engaged in committing a crime.

Defenders of longtime NYPD Commissioner Ray Kelly point to a decade of plummeting murder rates, crediting the department’s use of aggressive, targeted policing with taking guns off the streets and saving the lives of thousands of young black and Latino men. Critics counter that the city has done away with the presumption of innocence, placing young men of color under wholesale suspicion and threat of arrest.

Within the neighborhoods that have become notorious as hotspots for aggressive policing, public housing developments are the melting points. Residents live out the city’s policing debate at its extremes, victimized by violent crime at nearly double the rate of the rest of the city—and subject to far more intensive police surveillance. Many older tenants say they’re afraid to leave their apartments for fear of crime. Younger residents often say they’re more afraid of the police—that being stopped, searched and sometimes arrested is a defining part of adolescence as a NYCHA tenant. In 2009, the Citywide Council of Presidents, an elected body of tenant representatives, delivered a letter to Commissioner Kelly that described policing in their developments as “dehumanizing” and compared their homes to penal colonies.

Earlier this year, the NYPD pulled back on the number of street stops by just over a third—a move that quieted some criticism, although officers continue to conduct more than 44,000 stops per month according to the most recent data. Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Commissioner Kelly have dismissed calls for any formal policy change and defend the use of high-volume stop-and-frisk as New Yorkers’ best defense against violent crime.

It’s a refusal that puts the NYPD out of step, in many ways, with the city’s other criminal justice agencies. In the last decade, New York has slashed the rate at which it sends people to jail and prison, investing millions of dollars into courts and programs that monitor offenders in the neighborhoods where they live. The city has created neighborhood services for teen lawbreakers designed to keep them with their families and out of jail; ramped up court diversion programs; and, among other things, improved educational opportunities and job supports for people on probation. One explicit goal has been to rebuild relationships between the criminal justice system, and the communities thrown into chaos by previous decades incarceration booms. Another is to focus attention on the tiny number of people in any neighborhood who commit the most serious crimes. Criminal justice reforms are among the

defining social policies of Mayor Bloomberg's three terms in office, yet they have failed to reach the system's front door.

With the coming of a new administration, that's unlikely to last. Under the pressure of snowballing lawsuits and public protests, New York City is being forced to face questions about the complicated nexus of public safety and civil rights—and about what change could look like: Can the NYPD become more legitimate in the eyes of people who live in the communities most vulnerable to crime? How can police repair relationships with the people who need them most?

Ironically, some of the answers might be found here, at the epicenter of both violent crime and police crackdown: New York City's public housing.



Public housing residents in New York City live with far more than their share of crime, and the problem is getting worse. The overall rate of reported crime is 30 percent higher in NYCHA developments than in the rest of the city. Rates of violent crime are nearly twice as high, and drug crime rates are four times higher. Over the past two years, the number of major felonies—murder, rape, robbery, felonious assault and so on—has gone up by 14 percent on NYCHA properties, while the same crimes have risen just 5 percent citywide.

Public housing residents also see considerably more than their share of the police. NYCHA complexes are patrolled by a special NYPD Housing Bureau, made up of more than 1,800 officers. They are also covered by local police precincts, and many fall into the NYPD's Impact Zones, targeted for intensive roving patrols. The Housing Bureau operates its own Impact Response Team, which it deploys to developments in response to jumps in criminal activity. Altogether, in 2011, the NYPD conducted over 151,000 patrols in NYCHA buildings. That breaks down to more than 400 per day.

In 2010, a group of public housing residents filed a class action lawsuit against New York City, claiming they had been wrongfully arrested for trespassing either in their own buildings or in other NYCHA developments. Their arrests, the lawsuit charged, were the result of a culture of discriminatory policing: Residents and their guests are stopped by police so often, the plaintiffs argued, that the NYPD effectively manages pedestrian checkpoints on public housing properties, violating the Constitutional rights of tenants, who are mostly black and Latino.

This summer, the plaintiffs obtained data that had never before been available to the public: eight years of detailed numbers on crime and policing in and around public housing residences. The data confirm that intensive police presence corresponds to an outsized rate of stops: Public housing residents make up about 5 percent of the city's population, but in each of the past seven years, NYCHA properties accounted for between 11 and 15 percent of all documented police stops.

The plaintiffs hired Columbia University Law School Professor Jeffrey Fagan to analyze the policing numbers. Even while controlling for higher crime rates, Fagan found that people on public housing property are close to twice as likely to be stopped by police than people in surrounding neighborhoods.

The disparities are even bigger when it comes to stops made only on suspicion of trespassing. From 2006 through 2009, public housing accounted for roughly half of all trespass stops in the entire city.

In order to stop a person on public housing property or anywhere else, police are required by law to have a specific, explainable reason for why they believe this person has committed or is about to commit a crime. Defense attorneys point out that this is an improbable standard to meet when the potential offense amounts to standing in a lobby. "It's very difficult for a cop who isn't regularly on the beat, especially a rookie, to establish probable cause for trespassing unless the person they confront admits, 'I don't know anybody here, I'm just loitering,'" says Chris Fabricant, a professor at Pace University whose legal clinic frequently represents trespassing defendants.

Residents and civil rights advocates say that what happens, in practice, is that police run sweeps of NYCHA buildings and their grounds, stopping most anyone they see. "If someone cannot immediately provide a name and apartment number for the police to then verify they are in fact visiting, an arrest is made," said Christian Lassiter, an attorney from the Bronx Defenders, in testimony to the City Council. "If someone visits a 'sister' building in the same NYCHA development in which he or she lives and in many cases, grew up in, that person is arrested... If someone has an outdated identification, showing a different address than his or her current residence, that person is arrested. Frankly, if someone looks or dresses the wrong way, he is stopped and searched and frequently arrested."

On the few occasions that its officials have spoken publicly on the issue, the NYPD defends trespass arrests with the arguments at the heart of zero-tolerance policing: The ability to pick people up for low-level crimes not only maintains order for law-abiding residents, but deters criminals who would otherwise go on to do far worse things. Chief Joanne Jaffe, who heads the NYPD's Housing Bureau, told the City Council back in 2006 that "The nexus between quality of life offenses and violence is very clear. ... As a result of summoning [low-level offenders] or arresting them for those summonses, we are able to deter certain crimes."

Peter Vallone, Jr., the chair of the Council's Public Safety Committee, sought to clarify: "So basically, what you're saying is, by grabbing someone for trespassing, you're preventing... a potential robbery or something of that nature before it occurs."

"Absolutely," said Jaffe, who then listed the results of quality-of-life stops made by Housing Bureau police in

Brooklyn during the fall of the previous year: “In September, stopped a male for acting disorderly. The male was wanted for a shooting in [precinct] 79. September, stopped a male for riding a bicycle on the sidewalk. Male was wanted for a shooting in the 88... Stopped male for smoking in lobby of development in the 81 precinct. Male was armed with a loaded 32 caliber gun...”

Kis Ravelin, the 23-year-old from the Washington Houses, says he’s not unsympathetic to the logic of enforcing low-level crimes. He’s got as much reason as anyone to want loiterers and drug dealers removed from his building, he says. “We want the police here to protect and serve. The problem is when you start to feel like a prisoner in your own home.” Ravelin says he sees officers in his building about three times a week. Often, they’re looking at pictures of suspects on their phones, checking his face for a match. “It makes you feel like an experiment gone rogue,” he says. “Like they’re waiting for you to go haywire.”

Ravelin’s arrest for trespassing happened in the summer of 2009, when he was 20. He had gone to the store on his corner, he says, and returned home to find two officers in his lobby. One asked his name and where he lived. When he answered, she said she wanted to come upstairs and watch him open his door. “I told her I’d go get my ID and bring it down for them,” says Ravelin. “I didn’t see a need for them to follow me. I’m in my own home. I felt like my word should be enough.” In a misdemeanor complaint filed with the Criminal Court of the City of New York, the arresting officer—a member of the Housing Bureau’s Impact Response Team—says that Ravelin told her, “I don’t have to do anything and I don’t have to go upstairs to show you I live here.”

That’s when the officer told him he was giving her “too much lip,” Ravelin says, and ordered him to put his hands on the wall. She brought him to Central Booking, where his fingerprints and a retinal scan were taken. He was held in a cell for about 20 hours, he says, before he went in front of a judge, who looked at his address and dismissed the case.

It’s when the charges stick, say defense attorneys, that arrestees face a complicated decision: Trespassing defendants are typically charged with up to three misdemeanors and given the option of pleading down to a violation. Even when a person is innocent, it can be far simpler to plead guilty to the violation and walk away than to fight the charge. Contested cases can drag on for months, requiring defendants to show up at court as many as seven or eight times, missing school or work to sit around the courthouse for much of the day.

For the 40 percent of trespass arrestees with no criminal record, accepting a violation is unlikely to have a drastic impact on their lives. Fighting a case, on the other hand, means risking a permanent misdemeanor conviction and its attendant barriers to employment, housing and financial aid. “It’s incredibly frustrating and sad when you have a client that wants to fight their case but really can’t afford to do it,” says

Chris Fabricant, the lawyer from Pace University. “You tell them, ‘Next week we could have a trial.’ The majority have done nothing wrong. They would take that option. But when they’re informed about what it would mean to fight the case, they can’t do it.”

For Kis Ravelin, the process was an infuriating waste of time. “What was the point?” he asks. “Is that all? You’re gonna frisk me? Go through my pockets? Violate me? Lock me in a cell? And then it’s just done? I wasn’t gonna let it slide.” A few months after the arrest, he filed a civil suit that’s still pending against the city, seeking \$15,000 in compensation.



In a corner building of the Abraham Lincoln Houses in East Harlem, two blocks south of the Madison Avenue Bridge and several blocks northeast of gentrification, Aida Melendez and Diane Hull sit at a card table in the lobby of the high rise in which they’ve lived for a cumulative 88 years. Melendez has been here since she was born, 61 years ago next month. Hull married into the development nearly three decades ago. Since January, they’ve served as co-captains of the building’s Resident Watch, sitting at the door from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. nearly every weekday, armed with a house phone, matching NYCHA-issued windbreakers and an oversized book of word-finds.

Melendez, who wears her Resident Watch cap low over a graying buzz cut and oversized Buddy Holly glasses, says that between them, she and Hull know everyone who lives here. Conversations during their shift are punctuated by calls of “How you doing, sweetie?” “How are those girls of yours?” and, most frequently, “Pardon my French.” (There is a lot of swearing at the Lincoln Houses Resident Watch.) Melendez keeps a bag of candy under the table for kids who’ve been good at school.

NYCHA’s Resident Watch program has existed under various names since the 1960s, with evolving levels of connection to the police. In the current incarnation, active Watch sitters are registered with local Housing Bureau precincts. At the beginning of each shift, Hull and Melendez call over to Police Service Area 5, the station that covers public housing developments for most of Harlem. Before they leave, a pair of officers comes to check in and patrol the building. In between, Hull and Melendez keep a log for visitors to sign. If there’s any trouble, they phone the Watch supervisor, who puts in a more urgent call to PSA 5.

So far, says Melendez, there haven’t been any problems during a shift—but not because of the police. “You don’t see my bodyguards?” she asks, pointing to a row of middle-aged men sitting on benches outside the door: Richie, Bingo, Nardo, Coven, Isaiah and Bigfoot. “We grew up together here, we look out for each other,” she says. When Melendez got her retirement payout a few years back, Coven volunteered to be her personal escort, walking her around the neighbor-

hood while she spent cash on gifts for her nephews. Richie, she says, will take any excuse for a fight. “God forbid he gets three drinks in him. Your ass is grass.” Nardo looks somewhat less reliable, eyes closing as he droops forward over a copy of the *Daily News*. “He’s a druggie, but he’s a good lookout

From 2006
through 2009,
public housing
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trespass stops in
the entire city.

too,” says Melendez. She watches him nod out for a moment. “When he comes back up he can tell you every word he read.”

In 2010, NYCHA revamped and renamed the Watch program which, in addition to keeping members in card tables and windbreakers, pays supervisors at each development a monthly salary of about \$500 to recruit and oversee volunteers. Keith Massey is the Watch supervisor at Lincoln Houses, where recruitment is not booming: Of the 20 buildings in the development, only three operate Watches. The total volunteer roster is 18, the sitters’ median age about 61.

At a recent recruitment drive in the lobby of his own building, Massey taped flyers to the wall, advertising the opportunity to “make your community a better, safer place to live.” Massey, 60 years old with owlish eyes and a stringy, five-and-a-half foot-frame, leaned against a bank of mailboxes for the duration of the appointed hour, greeting residents on their way home from work. No one stopped for information about the Watch.

“People fear for their lives,” says Massey. “We have a major crime problem here.” As soon as the sun goes down, Massey and other members of the Watch say, drug dealers wait in front of the buildings and in the lobbies, selling crack and marijuana to buyers who use it in the stairwells and on the roofs. Groups of young men hang out on the grounds through the day and night, shooting dice, smoking weed and riding motor scooters through the courtyards where little kids play.

Things get especially tense in the summer, when residents say they hear gunshots at least three times a week. “If you don’t know how to tuck and roll, you better not be outside,” says Melendez. “Iraq? That’s not shit compared to Lincoln.”

Two years ago, NYCHA mailed a survey to 10,000 resident households, seeking opinions about safety and policing in their buildings. Of the 1,100 people who responded, nearly 80 percent said they were somewhat or very fearful of crime in their developments. Asked whether fear made them change their behavior in their homes, half said they avoid teens and 55 percent said they sometimes choose not to leave their apartments. The survey didn’t show overwhelming discontent with the NYPD: Seventy-three percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that officers have treated them and their visitors with courtesy, professionalism and respect. Twenty-seven percent disagreed or strongly disagreed.

What was notable about the survey (though it wasn’t particularly noted in the press releases put out by NYCHA) was that 83 percent of respondents were over age 40. The largest group by far—nearly 40 percent—were age 62 and older. In a subsequent report, NYCHA said it planned to conduct a separate survey for young residents, but that hasn’t happened.

Older residents often describe the crime problems in their buildings as generational. “Young guys now have no respect for older adults,” says Charles Myers, age 64, who’s lived in his building for 40 years and does a Watch shift every evening. He says he’s been threatened by teenagers who call him a snitch, trying to warn him off the Watch. “I put my table up like I do every other night,” says Myers. And it works—the loiterers clear out long enough for residents to come home and get their kids inside for the evening, Myers says. “Then I leave and they come right back.”

Back at the height of New York City’s crime and drug epidemics, low-income residents often complained that the police ignored crime in their neighborhoods—that they couldn’t even get a response to a 911 call. When the city launched its zero-tolerance strategy, many older NYCHA residents saw it as a vast improvement on what had come before. “I thought the patrols were good because they dealt with the loitering,” says Keith Massey, the Lincoln Watch supervisor. “But then I saw it go too far.” Just a few weeks ago, Massey says, he watched a police officer approach a young resident in front of the building and reach into his pocket. “That boy wasn’t doing anything wrong,” says Massey. “There’s no reason to treat him like that. It starts to make you think, ‘Are you under the assumption that I’m a criminal because I live in public housing? Because of the color of my skin?’”

Another longtime resident, who asked to remain anonymous because she worked for the NYPD for 26 years, described a similar evolution of thought. “I didn’t used to think the police were being too aggressive,” she said. “I’ve always said there should be more police presence in the developments. But it seems like the police in our neighborhoods, they’re not from here. They’re from Long Island, upstate. They don’t realize they’re talking to people who need respect just like everyone else. Everyone here is not a perp, there’s a lot of good people here just like in their communities...

“You have to be willing to work with people who are also going to hold you accountable when you’re wrong.”

Longtime NYCHA residents Aida Melendez and Diane Hull serve on their building’s Resident Watch.



Their motto is courtesy, professionalism and respect, but they don't do that in our neighborhood.”



Residents' concerns come down to a simple duality, says Erik Crawford, who's served as the Resident Association president of the Davidson Houses in the South Bronx for the past 14 years: People want police presence around their homes in order to feel safe from crime. And they want to go about their lives without being harassed or treated like suspects.

Crawford was first elected president of the Davidson association when he was just 18. It was the late-1990s, and nearly two decades of the city's violent crime and crack-cocaine epidemics had left the building with a deep-running fracture: Older residents who lived in the senior section were suspicious of teenagers on the family side, says Crawford. Crawford's peers felt bombarded by the aggressive tactics that had come to dominate the city's policing strategy.

Crawford campaigned as bridge builder. His mother had deep roots in the building and friends on the senior side, who'd watched Crawford grow up and thought he was a good kid. Young people saw him as one of their own. He promised to improve the development's infrastructure and to fund activities to help keep kids out of trouble—and he made good on those promises. Soon after becoming president, he lobbied NYCHA for close to a million dollars to fix the building's chronic heat and hot water problems, plus \$175,000 to turn an abandoned parking lot next door into a basketball court. More recently, he got a million-dollar grant from the Bronx borough president to refit Davidson's community center kitchen for cooking classes, and worked with a nonprofit tech company to install closed-circuit TV cameras in the main lobby of the building.

But a significant piece of his role, says Crawford, is dedicated to brokering relationships between young people who feel victimized by the police, older residents who still live in fear of crime, and the officers who regularly patrol the building from the Housing Bureau's PSA 7 and the 42nd precinct.

Davidson sits within six blocks of five junior-high and high schools. At dismissal time, dozens of teenagers walk across the building's grounds. Some live there; some use it as a way to get to the bus on Prospect Avenue, which runs parallel to Davidson's front wall. When the weather's nice, groups of kids stand outside the building or in front of the corner store across the street. “They want to hang out for a minute, say goodbye to their friends,” says Crawford.

Most afternoons, they are met by a police van or squad car that parks on the street between Davidson and the store. Between two and five officers get out to ask them where they live or tell them they can't congregate in front of the store, Crawford says. Sometimes, officers stand at Davidson's main entrance, asking kids for ID as they walk through.

In many ways, says Crawford, young people take this

routine for granted. This is a generation of kids who've grown up with zero-tolerance policing. When they were little, they watched older siblings and cousins get stopped and searched by officers on their streets. When they reached adolescence, it started happening to them. They learned that this is what happens to people who live and look like them in New York City. “Being black or Hispanic, plus living in public housing, you have to face the fact that you're gonna be targeted,” says Crawford. “It's a double-whammy.”

Interactions get heated when young people feel they're being treated disrespectfully. “Some of [the officers] will just walk up and tell them to get against the wall,” says Crawford. “Some of the young people have a lot of anger for the police. They don't want to be humiliated in front of their friends. Maybe they'll mouth off to the officers, start cursing, and it escalates from there.”

Crawford's fear, over the long-term, is that when kids feel targeted, it turns them against cops and by extension the law. “When they're 16 years old and they deal with this every day, they'll never have respect for the police,” he says. “The consequence is you're more likely to end up behind bars because all these negative interactions cause you to violate authority.”

Crawford says he's seen relationships between police and young people get steadily worse over his time as Davidson's association president, but he's also seen one thing with the power to disrupt that process: face-to-face conversations between police officers and young people who feel aggrieved. Part of Crawford's job is to maintain relationships with the higher-ups at PSA 7, where he attends monthly community meetings, usually accompanied by a group of older residents who want to see more police around the building. Until recently, there was an inspector at the PSA who would arrange meetings with individual patrol officers after residents—or Crawford, on their behalf—complained of a negative interaction. The meetings didn't solve the larger problems, Crawford says, but he saw them as a suggestion that it's possible to build a different kind of relationship between officers and young people who often treat each other like enemies. “It teaches young people to solve problems in a positive way,” he says.



Over the past three decades, policing in New York City has been pulled between two competing theories, each defined by its approach to a single, built-in tension: Policing is an inherently authoritarian act. But police authority is most effective when it's considered legitimate by the people being policed. In a review of 13 studies on attitudes toward the police, conducted over a span of eight years, researchers at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice found a consistent conclusion that spanned age, race and neighborhood: People are more likely to obey the law when they think law enforcers are legitimate. And the primary determinate of legitimacy is not success in fighting crime, but whether or not people think the

"To Protect and Serve," continued from page 16

police are fair. John Jay Professor David Kennedy, the author of *Don't Shoot: One Man, a Street Fellowship, and the End of Violence in Inner-City America*, puts it like this: "When the face of the law is ugly, the law's ugly. When the law's ugly, the things the law stands for are undercut... When the law's ugly, people don't go to the law when they need help. People handle things on their own."

Police can prevent and solve a certain percentage of crimes simply by cracking down—by being present on the street in overwhelming numbers and by searching members of the demographics groups most likely to be carrying guns. But to do much of their work, officers need the help of residents who know where crime is taking place and who's committing it. "Good police work involves building relationships with people in communities," says Paul Butler, a Georgetown University professor and former prosecutor for the Department of Justice. "You gather intelligence by talking to people in the neighborhood... Stop-and-frisk makes people not want to cooperate with the police."

"If you're a grandmother, you don't like the dope boys on the corner. You want them gone. But you also hear your grandson talk about how he can't walk home without being pushed against a wall," Butler adds. "The police need friends. They're making enemies."

The NYPD began its formal engagement with the concept of community partnerships in the 1980s, after what had been a disastrous decade for policing in the city. A series of major corruption scandals had left the department discredited and divided, serious crime had spiked by 40 percent and a municipal fiscal crisis had gutted the force of more than a third of its personnel. When the money came to rehire that personnel (12,000 new officers between 1980 and 1984), the city commissioned the Vera Institute of Justice to assess how the expanded force could best be deployed. The collaboration led the NYPD to a theory known broadly as Community Policing, which would grow, for a short time, to define the predominant philosophy of the department leadership.

Its premise was that police work is more effective when it includes community residents and institutions in both identifying and solving a neighborhood's most pressing problems. Under the city's Community Patrol Officer Program, officers were assigned to neighborhood beats long-term, with the primary tasks of building relationships and addressing quality-of-life concerns. As part of an evaluation of the pilot version of the program, one officer described the difference between his new assignment and his old one: "Normally if you were in a store for half an hour talking to somebody, you're goofing off. Now if you're in a store for half an hour, it's considered a positive aspect of the job. You met the owner, you were talking to some of the people who work there. When someone

comes out of there at the end of the day drinking beers and you walk up to him and call him by name, and say, 'Listen José, no cerveza on the street,' the guy now says 'Okay, okay,' and shakes my hand."

Until the mid-1990s, NYCHA properties were policed according to similar principles—not by the NYPD but by a separate force operated by the Housing Authority. Officers were stationed at particular developments for years, sometimes decades—with the result, residents say, that they were integrated into communities in ways that would be inconceivable now. Joseph Garber, who's lived in NYCHA housing since 1957, remembered that his building's police unit kept a record room with the names of residents on index cards. If someone was locked out of their apartment, says Garber, they could go to the record room, show ID and an officer would open their apartment door. Erik Crawford says that when he was growing up, the officers assigned to Davidson played basketball with kids at the development's community center once a week. "They'd stop in and see how you're doing, show interest in someone's homework," he says. "We didn't know it was part of their job."

But the years of New York City's experiment with Community Policing were also characterized by a massive spike in violent crime, largely due to the drug trade, and endemic corruption throughout the ranks of the NYPD, which continued to be plagued by misconduct scandals. In the early 1990s, the department went through another major reorganization when newly elected Mayor Rudy Giuliani named Bill Bratton as its commissioner.

Bratton brought "Broken Windows" policing to New York City, implementing a strategy that would help define law enforcement for the next two decades. The idea was that acts of disorder—what have come to be known as quality of life offenses—have a contagious effect on communities, leading to social destabilization and more serious crime. Curb disorder, the theory goes, and you can make a significant dent in problems like drug dealing and violence.

In a 2002 essay on policing and youth violence, Jeffrey Fagan (the same professor who analyzed data in the current trespass arrest lawsuit) makes the point that Broken Windows originated as a Community Policing practice. In its original iteration, Broken Windows suggests that police should work intensively with law-abiding citizens to identify disorder and bring stability back to public places. That work depends on goodwill—something police can't maintain if too many people in a community experience them as draconian or unjust.

In New York City, Fagan argues, the premise of Broken Windows was distorted by Giuliani's signature zero-tolerance policies, which required patrol officers to crack down on low-level crimes, arresting and detaining tens of thousands of people each year for infractions as minor as graffiti and fare beating.

More than ever before, those arrests were concentrated in particular areas of the city: In the mid-1990s, the NYPD developed its CompStat system for mapping crime statistics, and for using near-real-time data to target police resources to “hotspot” locations—which were mostly low-income, black and Latino neighborhoods. Guided by CompStat, the NYPD sent large numbers of officers to aggressively enforce the law, often through the practice of stop-and-frisk. Arrests went way up (23 percent between 1993 and 1996, including a 40 percent jump in misdemeanor arrests), as did citizen complaints against the police (60 percent between 1992 and 1996). At the same time, crack use diminished, the drug trade moved largely indoors and murders and robberies went way down, with numbers nose-diving through the 1990s and 2000s.

All of which leaves New York City with the questions at the heart of its current ideology and policy wars: Did zero-tolerance policing cause the city’s drop in crime, saving thousands of lives, or was the decrease a return to normalcy after the devastating crime waves, drug epidemics and economic turmoil of the seventies and eighties? To the extent that strategies like stop-and-frisk are effective in preventing violence, do they nullify themselves by alienating communities from the police, ensuring that law-abiding residents won’t work with the NYPD? What is the cost to black and Latino children subject to the routine humiliation of aggressive, prevention-oriented policing—and its attendant message that their liberties are valued less than those of other people? What is the cost to the rest of us?



David Kennedy, the strategist behind violence reduction tactics credited with slashing gun crime in cities like Boston and Washington, D.C., writes that zero-tolerance is “a bumper sticker, not a strategy. New York police officers still exercised a great deal of discretion; no department could arrest everybody for every crime they were committing, or it would grind to a halt within an hour of hitting the streets.”

The reality is that the NYPD continues to invest resources into programs that fall under the rubric of Community Policing. Officers in the Housing Bureau participate in carnivals, bowling trips and toy drives organized by NYCHA community centers, as well as sports and afterschool programs. Last year, NYCHA held four overnight campouts for young residents, led in part by housing police. The NYPD’s Juvenile Robbery Intervention Program sends officers to the homes of young public housing residents who’ve previously been arrested for robbery, connecting them (and their family members) to services like drug treatment and job training.

The purpose of those efforts is to build relationships. Ideally, residents of the city’s hardest-hit, highest-crime neighborhoods should be able to help the police target the small number of people who cause most of the real damage, says the Reverend Ruben Austria, executive director of Com-

munity Connections for Youth. Austria’s program partners with the city’s probation department to work with kids in the Bronx who’ve been arrested and are at risk of sinking deeper into the juvenile justice system.

“What if we got to a place of trust where community residents could point to a crew and say [to police], ‘You’re focusing on what the kids in that crew are doing, but there’s a couple of older guys driving all the action, putting guns in their hands, and we’re sick of them?’” asks Austria. “If the police were to go in and bust that person, the community would probably celebrate.”

In many neighborhoods, the foundations of those relationships already exist, says Austria. But they happen locally, where they’ve been negotiated between activists who work with young people on the street and their local precinct commanders—not because they are a priority of the NYPD or the city. “Working relationships happen at the community level a lot,” he says. “It may not be Al Sharpton or Jesse Jackson. There’s a whole other set of community leaders who are working hard, but nobody’s talking to them at the [NYPD’s] administrative level. Precincts don’t have the support of their own leadership for having real partnerships with community leaders.”

The city’s annual policing budget attests to Austria’s argument: The NYPD’s Community Affairs Bureau—the sole division responsible for fostering positive relationships—is allocated \$12.8 million per year. That’s a somewhat bigger budget than the mounted division’s (\$8.2 million), but just two-thirds that of the property clerk’s division (\$18 million), and smaller than nearly every individual precinct. It’s less than half of one percent of the total \$4.5 billion police department budget.

The Reverend Vernon Williams is a pastor whose Perfect Peace Ministry works with young people in Harlem. Williams, who spent much of his own youth selling heroin and serving time in prison, intervenes in conflicts between street crews, sometimes by walking the street and inserting himself physically into altercations.

Williams says he doesn’t have a simple, blanket policy against stop-and-frisk. “If someone had searched the boy who shot Lloyd Morgan,” he says, referring to the four-year-old who was killed in the playground of a Bronx public housing complex in July, “he’d be alive today.” In August, an NYPD officer was shot in the legs when he confronted an armed 23-year-old in Queens. “Let’s say a police officer didn’t intervene with that young man,” says Williams. “Would there be another Lloyd this morning?”

Williams is in frequent contact with the precinct commands in his neighborhood, sometimes to negotiate the release of a young person whom he believes shouldn’t have been arrested, sometimes to mediate a particularly contentious situation between young people and the police. He describes a meeting between one Harlem street crew and the NYPD’s 32nd precinct. Members of the crew had been complaining that the police were harassing them; police said the crew was getting out

of control, bringing heat on itself. No formal agreement came out of the meeting, but Williams says it cooled things off to let young people and the police communicate face-to-face, away from the super-charged environment of the streets.

Iesha Sekou, the director of another small organization that works intensively with young people in Harlem, says those kinds of interactions are crucial for young men and women who are inclined to see police as their enemy. Sekou's program, Street Corner Resources, invites African-American and Latino police officers to speak at workshops with young people from the neighborhood. "They tell stories about times when they—even as police officers—have been stopped or searched by other officers," says Sekou. "It gives the young people an opportunity to relate to the officers, which is important. We need to have relationships with the police. We need to be able to call them when we need help."

Within the NYPD's housing police, precincts still rely on resident input to identify quality-of-life problems on NYCHA properties. At a recent Community Council meeting in Harlem, Captain Chris Morello, the amiable, clean-cut commanding officer of Police Service Area 5, spent an hour going over crime trends and police activity with an audience of about 50 residents from the neighborhood's public housing developments. When Morello announced the promotion of one community affairs officer, the room gave her a standing ovation. Later, residents reported particular nuisances: An elderly woman complained about a group of young men who drink and smoke weed in the courtyard outside her apartment. Another reported that people were throwing bottles and cans out of a window in her complex. Morello asked them both to stay so he could get more information.

True to the original theory of Broken Windows, housing police capitalize on their relationships with residents to investigate and fight bigger crimes. Just a week before the meeting, PSA 5 had worked with the NYPD's narcotics bureau to take out a ring of drug dealers operating in the Lincoln Houses, arresting 17 people during a nighttime raid. Even in the heat of a conversation with a reporter about what they saw as police harassment of young men from the development, residents talked about the bust as a legitimate and welcome police operation. "It should clear things up for a while and give us a break," said Keith Massey, the Resident Watch supervisor.

But no one expects that break to last for long. One young resident, a dean's list college student and youth mentor, said he knows of another drug ring operating out of his neighbor's apartment upstairs. He'd like to make a report, he says. "But I don't trust the police. They're like an invading force. If you live in Iraq, do you report to Blackwater?"

The problem, says Chris Watler, who directs the Harlem Community Justice Center, a neighborhood-based court that also runs programs for high-risk youth, is not that the police department's work to build community relationships is insignificant or doesn't matter; it's that those efforts are dwarfed,

in too many people's daily experience, by the patrol strategies they meet on the street. And as long as that's true, the police will undermine their chances at building goodwill with the people who experience crime most.

"When there's a shooting, community affairs officers often really do have a plug-in to leaders in the community. They can be a real force for calm and discussion, and that's important," says Watler. "But that's very separate from what happens on patrol, which is very alienating. It makes you feel as if your government doesn't work for you. It works against you."

Dominick Walters, a 21-year-old from the Bronx who's been arrested twice for trespassing—once in the building next door to the one he's lived in since he was 5—put it like this: "You just make everybody turn against you. It's supposed to be the cops and the regular people against the criminals. Instead you got everybody against the cops."



In its most public iterations, the city's policing debate has often been reduced to its crudest terms: Either you're for stop-and-frisk or you're tolerant of crime. You don't care about the Constitutional rights of young black and Latino men, or you don't care if they die. This summer, Commissioner Kelly provoked an irate response from community activists when he accused them of being passive on killings in minority neighborhoods. "Many of them will speak out about stop-and-frisk" but are "shockingly silent when it comes to the level of violence right in their own communities," he said. "Ninety-six percent of our shooting victims are people of color, yet these community leaders are not speaking out about that... I'd like to see some political outcry."

Brooklyn City Council member Jumaane Williams responded the next day: "I am outraged at the presumptuous and patently false comments of Commissioner Kelly, which directly insult communities like mine, which are grieving for our lost and trying to save our young people every day," he said. "Maybe he'd like to come with me when I go to the families of the victims just hours after they've lost a son and see just how silent I am."

It's the needs of those families, says Ruben Austria of Community Connections for Youth, that get ignored when the city engages in reductive arguments over policing. It is possible to be aggressive on crime while respecting the rights of people in high-crime places, Austria argues—but that balance requires real partnerships with communities. Collaboration can't be a precinct-by-precinct project; it needs buy-in and commitment from the city and the NYPD at their upper levels of administration.

Over the past three years, one example of collaboration has been happening in an unlikely place: Not long before the lawsuit on trespassing arrests was filed, NYCHA called together a task force on safety and policing in its developments, made up of high-level officials from the housing authority

and the NYPD, and tenant representatives from the Citywide Council of Presidents.

The task force met regularly for more than a year to discuss problems and potential solutions, many of them in direct response to tenants' complaints about their treatment at the hands of the police. Brian Clarke, a vice-president of operations at NYCHA, says that the process was unprecedented.

It is possible to be aggressive on crime while respecting the rights of people in high-crime places.

"The number one thing was getting all the folks together: Duly elected resident leadership, representing their fellow residents, meeting with the NYPD and telling us what we needed to improve on," he says. "I've been here 16 years and I haven't seen anything like this happen."

The task force negotiated two changes to the NYPD's policy on trespass arrests, based on tenants' charges of harassment and disrespect: First, new language in the NYPD's Patrol Guide clarified that an officer must have reasonable suspicion to stop a suspected trespasser—in other words, officers do not have the right to question anyone they encounter during a patrol. Second, if an officer decides that a person doesn't belong in the building, he or she may tell the person to leave, rather than issuing a summons or making an arrest.

The city brought the Patrol Guide revisions to court, as part of its defense against the trespass lawsuit. The plaintiffs' attorneys dismissed the changes as meaningless, saying that not only were they ignored in everyday practice, but that they weren't nearly good enough to bring the NYPD into compliance with the law. Since the guide still fails to specify what counts as reasonable suspicion, the lawyers argued, it leaves far too much discretion to individual officers, who can't possibly know the difference between a trespasser and a legitimate resident or visitor on sight. The judge was persuaded and the city's argument was dismissed.

But some of the policing numbers turned over by the city suggest at least the possibility of a different story: Between 2009 and 2011—the period after the Patrol Guide was revised and police were trained on the changes—trespassing stops in public housing dropped by almost 60 percent. Last year, public housing accounted for just under a third of the city's total trespassing stops—still an outsized proportion, but a significant drop from the 50 percent they had represented in preceding years.

There's no evidence that cutting down on trespass stops tied the police department's hands when it came to enforcement. During the same period, there was a much smaller drop in stops made for other reasons—and yet, the total number of arrests on public housing properties barely declined at all.

Policing is too complicated to draw a straight line of cause-and-effect from training policies to stop rates—and in any case, NYCHA residents were still subject to significantly disproportionate rates of police enforcement. The big-picture problems, as defined by residents like Kis Ravelin and Erik Crawford, were not solved. But in the area that had been negotiated between NYCHA tenants and the police—where department leadership had sat down to hear residents' concerns and collaborate on resolving them—the data indicates that there may have been meaningful change. In the polarized context of New York City policing, that's no small thing to say.

Reginald Bowman is a long-time tenant activist, the current president of the Citywide Council of Presidents, and the person responsible for delivering the 2009 letter to Ray Kelly comparing public housing to penal colonies. To Bowman, the task force represents hope for a way forward.

"Is the problem solved?" he asks. "No, it's not. But effort is being made to solve it, and I think the community would be better served if law enforcement personnel, victims, litigants, would all come to the table and spend the time, energy and resources they have in solving the problem... Sometimes you don't need a whole bunch of publicity and noise to solve a problem. You need to roll up your sleeves and sit down at the table and work out the problem. It doesn't have to be news. There doesn't have to be a press conference."

In all likelihood, as New York gets closer to its next round of mayoral and City Council elections, there will be many press conferences about policing strategies. The city is currently entangled in three class-action lawsuits challenging its use both of stop-and-frisk on the street and of trespass arrests in residential buildings. The issue is trickling down to individual cases, as well: In two high-profile decisions this summer, Manhattan appeals court judges overturned the weapons convictions of teenagers who'd been stopped and searched without legally sufficient cause. The City Council is currently considering bills that would not only constrain police use of stop-and-frisk, but set up a new, independent monitor for the police department.

Whatever the views of the next mayor and police commissioner, their administration will have little choice but to change its policies on stops. How much that change means, will depend on whether they also reinvest in partnerships with the people their policies impact most.

"The NYPD can't only work with people who say 'all police are heroes,'" says Austria. "You have to be willing to work with people who are also going to hold you accountable when you're wrong. That makes for a challenging partnership, but that's what real partnership is." ✨