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Jerry H. Ratcliffe
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Foot Patrol

Rethinking the Cornerstone of Policing

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Foot Patrol

Rethinking the Cornerstone of Policing

 Springer

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ISSN 2192-8533	ISSN 2192-8541 (electronic)
SpringerBriefs in Criminology	
ISSN 2194-6442	ISSN 2194-6450 (electronic)
Translational Criminology	
ISBN 978-3-319-65246-7	ISBN 978-3-319-65247-4 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-65247-4	

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017949279

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Printed on acid-free paper

This Springer imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Springer International Publishing AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

Acknowledgments

Across two citywide randomized experiments and many studies before and after, we would like to gratefully acknowledge the invaluable assistance of the following people, all of whom are colleagues, coauthors, and friends: Elizabeth Groff, Jennifer Wood, Travis Taniguchi, Cory Haberman, Lallen Johnson, Caitlin Taylor, and Ralph Taylor. Their insights and wisdom have made us better scholars. A huge thanks also go to the hundreds of Philadelphia Police officers who shared their views and experiences with us and insights that made the bulk of this book possible. The level of dedication they demonstrate to the city and its citizens never ceases to astound us.

The Philadelphia Foot Patrol Experiment and Philadelphia Policing Tactics Experiment would not have been possible without the leadership of Police Commissioner (ret.) Charles Ramsey, Deputy Commissioner (ret.) Nola Joyce, Police Commissioner Rich Ross, Deputy Commissioner (ret.) Kevin Bethel, Deputy Commissioner (ret.) Tommy Wright, and all of the commanders and officers of the Philadelphia Police Department. We would also like to specially recognize Anthony D'Abruzzo and Kevin Thomas for their work behind the scenes during these collaborative experiments.

In the preparation of this manuscript, we would like to thank Cynthia Lum, D. Kim Rossmo, Renée Mitchell, Josh Koehnlein, and, from Springer, Katie Chabalko.

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Crowd-Pleasers and Crime Fighters

In 1960, Chicago was rocked by the Summerdale scandal. Eight Chicago cops enabled local thief Richard Morrison to burgle locations in the Summerdale police district on Chicago's north side. The officers not only acted as a lookout for the thief but also used their squad cars to transport stolen goods from the scene (Benzkofer 2013). The case resulted in the arrest and conviction of the officers, as well as the retirement of Police Commissioner Timothy O'Connor. Mired in controversy, Chicago turned to renowned police academic and practitioner O.W. Wilson as the city's next police chief. One of the first things he did to try and restore community trust was assign foot beat officers to each district. As Skogan and colleagues pointed out, this was largely a public relations exercise: "Not much was expected of these officers; they were to be *crowd-pleasers*" (Skogan et al. 1999: 76, emphasis added).

Are foot patrol officers just crowd-pleasers? Officers on foot have been the backbone of policing for the majority of the nearly 200-year history of the modern police service though, as we will discuss later, less so in recent decades. There is general agreement that officers on foot are central to police-community relations and positive neighborhood contacts: "Foot patrol is a pillar of community policing that stands alone in its simplicity and its impact on communal feelings of fear of violent crimes... The presence of a single officer can bring relief to a troubled sector and give its populace a new peace of mind" (Giannetti 2007: 22). And while not exactly the dominant policing model, foot patrols are widespread. In 2007 (the year most recently reported for foot patrol), the majority of police departments in the United States used regularly scheduled foot patrols (55%). This number rose to 81% for cities with over half a million residents, and 92% for cities with a million or more people (Reaves 2010).

Foot patrol is interesting because it changes the nature of social interactions between individuals. It slows the pace of approach, allowing an officer to take the time to assess the person or group she is drawing near to, and it draws individuals much closer together. On a busy city sidewalk, we pass within a breath of each other, sometimes brushing against fellow travelers. On quieter streets with few pedestrians, we might say good morning to the other person. As one sergeant