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From Community Police to Bureaucratic Police

Public order and democracy in New York City at the turn of the 20th century

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How can the police force be reformed in a way that puts an end to corruption and localism without cutting ties with citizens or losing legitimacy? This was the dilemma faced by the municipal government of New York City at the beginning of the 20th century, before community policing was established between the 1970s and the 1990s.

> When I wrote to the police headquarters, I received a visit from a very polite and dignified senior officer. He pretended to be making an inquiry and paid me a second visit to tell me that the neighbours were all Catholic, as it were, and would not report each other. After a moment, I asked him if he was Catholic himself. He said he was. Then I asked if Catholic police officers were especially afraid to take on their voters through the neighbours of my property[1].

In 1915, Elizabeth R. Grannis wrote to the Mayor of New York, John P. Mitchel, to voice her displeasure at the action taken by the police. She owned a house in East 37th Street and had evicted a family of tenants who had stopped paying the rent. Shortly afterwards, her house had been seriously damaged on a number of occasions. After her complaints to the police were repeatedly ignored, Grannis approached the mayor as a last resort and made reference to the "voters" of the police, as if the latter were accountable at local level, as part of a neighbourhood democracy, and not at the level of the New York Police Department (NYPD) and the city as a whole. She suspected her former tenants of goading the neighbourhood children into targeting her house. The neighbourhood, like the tenants, was mostly Irish, and the landlady – a Protestant – was complaining that the police, also predominantly made up of Irish-Americans, was enforcing an order based on an ethnic and religious sense of identity.

Even in its contradictions, this letter shows the changes that were taking place in the early part of the 20th century. Grannis was complaining about the influence of ethnic and religious loyalties within the NYPD, but wrote on the letterhead of a Protestant organization. She was addressing the mayor of the City of Greater New York (Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, Bronx and Staten Island) in order to report a clientelist system, but her approach was

[1] Letter to Mayor Mitchel dated 15 July 1915 (Correspondence of Mayor Mitchel, New York City Municipal Archives). Retranslated from the French.

part of a democratic framework inherited from the 19th century in which matters regarding the control of public spaces were not only expressed locally by residents but also taken charge of locally – at neighbourhood or district level – by politicians and locally elected representatives. However, at the beginning of the 20th century, the policing philosophy changed: with the intention of fighting trends thought to be linked to the localism, corruption and politicization of the police, reforms made at the turn of the century aimed to increase the centralization and bureaucratization of an institution that henceforth functioned at city level rather than at neighbourhood level. The beginning of the 20th century was a period of transition during which "the balance between organizational capacity and political legitimacy" was established, which, according to R. W. Bailey, structured the development of the political system of New York[2].

That system was still dominated by the formidable Democratic Party political machine, Tammany Hall. This was a partisan organization supported locally on essentially pragmatic grounds with the aim of winning elections by gaining the loyalty of politicians and voters. Its pyramidal structure and network of local representatives able to help voters in their daily lives made Tammany influential in managing public order – a particularly difficult task in New York. Policing problems as well as their resonance and political expression seemed to be growing in New York City: the contrast between the narrowness of Manhattan and the extreme density of the population; the city's position as a port of arrival for immigrants who were increasingly numerous and diverse; social disparities between rich and poor; the influence of Tammany Hall and the leisure and entertainment industry; and the concentration of newspapers and press agencies.

How did the police organize its control of the public space in New York City within the democratic framework in place at the turn of the 20th century? Did that period correspond with a change in legitimacy and the shift from a "community police" to a "bureaucratic police"? The former term, deliberately anachronistic, provides an opportunity to ponder the possible links between this original experience and the models of "community policing" established between the 1970s and the 1990s in the United States as a way of bringing the police closer to the people[3]. In order to reflect on that period of transition it is necessary to take into account the legacy of the 20th century, which explains how old reactions and new perspectives could coexist. The salience of the democratic police model and the proximity between police officers and those being policed – a result of municipal organization – prompt one to examine how the police responded to the "calls for order" expressed by the population[4].

Police and democracy: the assertion of an institution in control of the public space

In the United States, the police force developed in two major stages. The first phase,

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[2] Robert W. Bailey, "The City of Greater New York, 1898-1998: Balancing Organizational Capacity and Political Legitimacy", in Sarah F. Liebschutz ed., *New York Politics and Goverment: Competition and Compassion*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, p. 151-167, p. 153.

[3] See Jean-Paul Brodeur, *Les visages de la police, Pratiques et perceptions*, Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2003 and "La police en pièces détachées", introduction, *Criminologie*, vol. 38, n° 2, 2005. The author highlights the profound diversity that characterizes the different versions of the model.

[4] In an effort to remain concise, we have avoided using too many references to the doctoral thesis on which this article is based. When a quote is not acknowledged, it is borrowed from the following work: Yann Philippe, *Mais que fait la police ? Réformes policières et lutte contre la criminalité à New York au début du XXe siècle (1906-1918)*, doctorate at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 2006.

institutionalization, covered the first two thirds of the 19th century. It began in New York City when the NYPD was established in 1945. Replacing the dual system of officers who worked by day and were paid piece rates, and badly paid night watchmen, the NYPD was an institution that employed full-time police officers responsible for carrying out both daytime and night-time patrols of the city[5]. The force of innovation initially kept political debates focused on the organization of the institution rather than the tasks it was to be given. For example, should police control be the responsibility of the municipal government or New York State? It was first organized at municipal level, after which responsibility for the New York City police passed to New York State between 1853 and 1870, during the political conflicts, before definitively coming back under the authority of the city[6]. The politicization of matters of police organization and the occupying of management positions by politicians rather than police officers were causes for professional concern, for even though the institution had become permanent, being a police officer rarely guaranteed a career.

The British ideal of a legitimate police force was adopted and taken in a particularly democratic direction. Firstly, the legitimacy of the police was not rooted in the institution per se, but rather on the community of which it formed part. Police officers were merely members of the public being paid full-time to perform the duties that fell to all citizens[7]. The distinctively American feature was the strictly municipal organization of the model and the influence of Jacksonism, in other words the faith that the President of the United States, Andrew Jackson (1829-1836), showed in the "common man" and the belief that "the duties of all public officers are [...] so plain and simple that men of intelligence may readily qualify themselves for their performance". The process by which the police became part of the community was thus different in London and New York City, so much so that W. Miller opposed an "aristocratic" police (London) and a democratic police (New York)[8]. The legitimacy of the former was based on considerable symbolic and institutional prestige, which gave an officer the status of an impartial representative of the legal system (rigorous recruitment conditions, specific skills). The New York police officer, on the other hand, was a man rather than an institution: his personal authority was based on his proximity to the citizens[9]. Being a police officer was not a long-term job requiring specific training; any citizen could temporarily become a police officer, according to political alternations. When the NYPD was established in 1845, localism was the norm: police officers were appointed by the district municipal councillor. Jacksonian philosophy considered policemen to be an element of the neighbourhood they were led to patrol with the idea that they would be even more active if personally involved in the neighbourhood's future[10].

It was not until the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th that the second stage of the movement occurred: professionalization. At national level, but early on in New

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[5] James F. Richardson, *The New York Police, From Colonial Times to 1901*, New York, Oxford University Press, p. 7-22.

[6] Wilbur R. Miller, *Cops and Bobbies, Police Authority in New York and London, 1830-1870*, Columbus, Ohio, Ohio State University Press, second edition, 1999 (1973), p. 35-36, p. 3 and 17-18; J. F. Richardson, *The New York Police, op. cit.*, p. 214-216 and p. 275.

[7] Cyril D. Robinson and Richard Scaglion, "The Origin and Evolution of the Police Function in Society: Notes toward a Theory", *Law and Society Review*, volume 21, 1, 1987, p. 115, republished in R. Reiner (ed.), *Policing*, Brookfield, VT, Darmouth Publishing, 1996, vol. 1, p. 9.

[8] W. Miller, *Cops and Bobbies*, preface to the second edition, p. xii; p. 16-18. This opposition, clearly rather forced, should be understood in terms of ideal types.

[9] W. Miller, *Cops and Bobbies*, p. 12-16 (London) and p. 16-24 (New York); p. 25-44 for police training.

[10] W. R. Miller, *Cops and Bobbies*, p. 28-32 and C. P. Thale, "Civilizing New York City: Police Patrol 1880-1935", Ph.D., University of Chicago, 1995, p. 580-585.

York City, the police reform movement, driven in particular by churchmen and civil association leaders, made three main accusations against the police: its partisan use at election time to stuff the ballot boxes or pressurize opponents; its contribution to clientelism as the primary source of municipal employees; and finally its corruption, which led it to organize, for its own profit and that of Tammany, the price-fixing of illegal activities rather than fighting against them. The solution to these scourges was to make police work a real profession that would no longer be a political reward granted to local partisan supporters.

While the term "professional" referred primarily to liberal professions (doctors, lawyers), the reference to "professionalism", on the other hand, provided a framework for the different ideas about reform that emerged in the policing world from the late 19th century onwards. According to Samuel Walker, three characteristics of the sociology of professions could be applied: professional knowledge, professional autonomy and a service ideal[11]. In parallel with the development of the first police administration treaties drawn up by experts from New York, the NYPD Police Academy was being structured. The length of training was increased and a coherent programme linked to the introduction of a specific form of teaching was defined, which showed that police training was no longer seen as a process of learning skills from older colleagues on the job but rather as the issuing of a professional qualification. The question of recruitment was decisive for professional autonomy: in 1884, it passed out of politicians' control and became the responsibility of an independent commission that put candidates through competitive administrative examinations. The mayors of the early 20th century expressed their desire – even when they had been elected with the support of Tammany (McClellan, Gaynor) – to give the police hierarchy (particularly the commissioner, the head of the NYPD) a free hand in managing the department. In 1906, McClellan, a Democrat mayor, symbolically appointed a Republican who had never lived in the city, Theodore Bingham, to the post of high commissioner[12]. The commissioners also declared their independence and highlighted the exemplary behaviour of the police during elections. While these gestures alone could not prove that change had really taken place, they were part of a wider movement to redefine politics: henceforth, the state was seen less as an instrument for distributing economic resources and more as an authority arbitrating between the various interests produced by industrial society and as an authority that would define the common good[13]. From then on, the autonomy won by the police force would ideally enable them to devote themselves to defending the population against criminals. Democracy was henceforth seen in terms of the efficiency of the service rendered rather than representation. In addition to this, the police ceased to be the "jack of all trades" for the municipal authority and was given the key task of fighting criminality.

All of this required a rationalization of administrative procedures, increased centralization and the assertion of a proper leadership by police chiefs. The Police Board led by Theodore Roosevelt in the 1890s was the first authority to try to fight against conflicts of interests and local entrenchment by appointing newly recruited office to police stations far from their home[14]. In 1898, the establishment of the Greater City of New York led the NYPD

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[11] S. Walker, *A Critical History of Police Reform*: *the Emergence of Professionalism*, Lexington, Mass., Lexington Books, 1977, p. ix-x.

[12] *New York Tribune*, 30 December 1905, p. 1-2.

[13] Richard L. McCormick, "The Discovery That Business Corrupts Politics: A Reappraisal of the Origins of Progressivism", *in The Party Period and Public Policy, American Politics from the Age of Jackson to the Progressive Era*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1986, p. 311-356.

[14] In general, see C. P. Thale, "Civilizing New York City", p. 586-587. On Roosevelt, cf. J. F. Richardson, *The New York Police* (p. 259-260) and Jay Stuart Berman, *Police Administration and Progressive Reform, Theodore Roosevelt as Police Commissioner of New York City*, New York, Greenwood Press, 1987, p. 81.

to incorporate the Brooklyn police. In 1901, the Board was replaced by a single Commissioner whose powers were increased in 1907. In the end, the Commissioner was supported by ever-greater numbers of deputies, and their powers were allocated according to task specialization rather than geographical distribution. Police reforms therefore tried to shield the police from local pressures and conflicts of interest. However, as can be seen from E. R. Grannis' letter, a section of the population still made reference to the nineteenth-century spirit of local democracy when expressing their requests in matters of public order.

Democracy and public order: diversity and heterogeniety of the calls for order

Although the police were being given greater control over the public space, the people were still first when it came to reporting incidents. Historians have often described the "progressive" period (1880-1920) as a time when the middle and upper classes tried to impose their views through leagues of virtue, religious organizations, civil associations and groups of experts. In fact, the police reform movement linked its demands for reform to the need for greater morality in working-class neighbourhoods and increased control of illegal activities deemed immoral (gambling, alcohol sales on Sunday, prostitution). Its requests gained particular visibility through the ability of their leaders (churchmen, association leaders, experts) to attract the attention of the press.

However, in the early 20th century the debate surrounding the police and the citizens' calls for order were part of a wider phenomenon. Many New Yorkers wrote to their mayor to highlight a problem that fell within the police's scope of action, or else to complain about the police's action or, more frequently, inaction. It is estimated that between 5000 and 6000 letters were received between 1910 and 1913 by Mayor Gaynor and then passed on to the police. The practice of writing to the mayor was not the preserve of the elite, as seen from the many letters written in broken English (some recent immigrants even wrote in their mother tongue). A large number of letter-writers even drew attention to their social predicament. The regulation of lawless areas and the mobilization of police forces – or their corruption – were matters of concern for all citizens. One woman wrote about the extreme poverty into which her family had been plunged, while her husband and brother frequented gambling houses[15]. Some mayors, Gaynor included, were particularly attentive to these social requests and recommended that the police should pay the same level of attention. Acknowledging a local jurisdiction for New Yorkers in matters of public order was a way of continuing the municipal democracy of the 19th century as well as a pragmatic move: inhabitants were the first to be concerned by what was happening in their neighbourhood and therefore constituted a valuable source of information. Even though the police was now a professional, self-managed body, it nevertheless remained the business of everyone. If needed, the mayor's informal network of correspondents could serve as a tool with which to supervise police officers. In his correspondence with the NYPD, Mayor Gaynor emphasized this form of democratic pressure. The information given by the citizens should be used to confirm the reality of street patrol work – and therefore to ensure that the police officers were not taking breaks in isolated places or, worse still, drinking in saloons – and the rumours of corruption coming from a particular police station.

However, not all New Yorkers intervened in police matters in the same way, in a city that reformers wished to see as a homogeneous political community[16]. While some of those

[15] Letter from Mary Galasso to Mayor Gaynor dated 8 November 1911 (Correspondence of Mayor Gaynor, New York City Municipal Archives).

[16] On the different political notions of the city and the machine, see J. Portes and C. Pouzoulet, "Déclin et

who wrote based their intervention purely on the fact that they were citizens and signed their letter as such, there were many who put forward their partisan identity as a reason – whether Republican or Democrat – according to the political affiliation of the mayor in power. Under Mayor Mitchel, supported by a coalition of reformers and Republicans, Ch. Weiss commented that "being an American citizen and a Republican voter, [he] thinks that [he] has the right to expect help in identifying the [police officer] guilty of robbing his mother's corpse"[17]. Letter-writers often used a variety of techniques to highlight different facets of their identity: "a citizen of Queens", "a mother", "an Italian-American", "a coloured citizen", "a proprietor" and so on. The signatures added to anonymous letters, like the arguments put forward, show that writing was "a social matter", as L. Boltanski points out[18]. Letter-writers identified themselves by highlighting criteria linked to geography, gender, social class and ethnic and racial groups. Thus, E. R. Grannis wrote on the letterhead of the National Christian League for the Promotion of Purity and introduced herself as a "taxpayer". Far from resembling the homogeneous entity governed in the bureaucratic, functional style that emerged from the reformers' organicist vision, the city was a web of diverging interests and social conflicts, all the more so given that in addition to the calls for order there were demands from those who, on the contrary, were calling for a reduction in police interventions and a halt to "persecutions".

What of the other main nineteenth-century player – the local representative of a machine which, in the pluralist vision of the years from 1955 to 1965, was credited with having achieved a kind of political integration by arbitrating between the different interests of the highly diverse population of New York[19]? As this mostly took the form of direct, informal and interpersonal contact, local politicians' interventions by definition left little trace among sources. However, in accounts published between 1902 and 1905, two prominent representatives from Tammany Hall, "Big Tim" Sullivan and George Washington Plunkitt, turned to the press to defend the image of a politician involved in the everyday management of public order in the neighbourhood:

> [The local politician] knows everybody's troubles and is expected to remedy them as far as he is able. [...] [These men] must be in court when a citizen is in trouble, ready with bail if the case demands it. They must feed the starving, clothe the naked, bury the paupers, and be good friends with everybody. [...] Did [reformers] ever think of bailing out a poor fruit-peddler who has been run-in by some too-officious policeman? [...][20].
>
> This is a record of a day's work by Plunkitt:
>
> 2A.M.: Aroused from sleep by the ringing of his doorbell; went to the door and found a bartender, who asked him to go to the police station and bail out a saloon-keeper who had been arrested for violating the excise law. Furnished bail and returned to bed at three o'clock.[21].

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renouveau de l'histoire politique", in *Chantiers d'histoire américaine*, Jean Heffer and F. Weil ed., Paris Belin, 1994.

[17] Letter dated 19 October 1915 from the 3rd deputy commissioner to Mayor Mitchel (Correspondence of Mayor Mitchel, New York City Municipal Archives).

[18] "L'affaire comme forme sociale", L. Boltanski, *L'Amour et la Justice comme compétences*, *Trois essais de sociologie de l'action*, Paris, Métailié, 1990, p. 253-367, p. 255.

[19] For a historiography of machines, see S. P. Erie, *Rainbow's End: Irish Americans and the Dilemmas of Urban Machine Politics*, *1840-1985*, Berkeley, University of California Press,1988.

[20] Tim Sullivan, *New York Times*, 23 December 1902, p. 2, quoted by Richard F. Welch, *King of the Bowery: Big Tim Sullivan, Tammany Hall and New York City from the Gilded Age to the Progressive Era*, Madison, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2008, p. 81-82.

[21] William L. Riordon, *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall, A Series of Very Plain Talks on Very Practical Politics*, repub.

From the perspective of the police, in his memoires Lewis J. Valentine recounts that when he joined the department in 1903 he quickly learned of the existence of "protectors" who came to the aid of policemen so as to obtain favours in return[22]. Nowadays it is hard to gauge the extent to which these words correspond to practices that still exist or whether they are – more or less consciously – simply part of the conventional mythology of the machine. Indeed, police memoires were often based on the opposition between before and after, in order to highlight the improvements that have been made. In his edition of the book by the journalist W. L. Riordon, the historian Terrance J. McDonald notes that the journalist had added the part corresponding to G. W. Plunkitt's "journal", quoted above, to interviews with the politician already published in the press, and therefore may have invented it[23]. Moreover, studies carried out by social workers shortly after Riordon's book was published tended to minimize the supposed generosity of the machine's representatives. A study of 183 families of juvenile delinquents revealed that only two of them had received help from the machine when their children were in trouble with the law[24]. Those who wrote letters to the mayors of New York City very rarely mentioned Tammany. To be sure, they frequently referred to the "relations" or "political influence" of a particular figure from the neighbourhood. They also regularly accused the police of corruption – some by name – involving saloons, gambling houses and prostitution. However, they almost never made a link between their accusations and the bosses or local leaders of the machine. Was this because those who were familiar with the normal functioning of the machine were precisely those who benefited from it and had no reason to complain? Or was it a sign that Tammany, under the influence of its new boss, Charles F. Murphy, had already come of age? Murphy took control of the organization in 1902 and seems to have played a vital role in Tammany's quest for respectability and its break – partial, at least – with the underground economy: a number of accounts say that the machine and police commissioners replaced prostitution money, which had become dirty, with gambling money[25]. In general terms, according to Robert F. Wesser, Murphy played a key role in transforming the Democratic party, by expanding Tammany's interests, from the old political system based on personal and local connections into the system in place at the start of the 20th century, which centred on problems[26]. The style of its political action underwent a profound transformation: its defence of voter interests shifted away from the personal provision of services to the legislative fight for social measures. Tammany's adoption of the good governance ideal was the organization's pragmatic response to progressivism. It remained to be seen how the police force would adapt to the new status quo and respond to the citizens' calls for order.

Public order, the result of a precarious balance between demand and police supply

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by Terrence J. McDonald, Bedford/St. Martins, New York, 1994 (1905), p. 98.

[22] *Nightstick, The Autobiography of Lewis J. Valentine, Former Police Commissioner of New York*, New York, Dial Press, 1947, p. 24.

[23] Terrence J. McDonald, Introduction to *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall*, p. 28-29.

[24] *Ibid*., p. 18-19.

[25] Nancy J. Weiss, *Charles Francis Murphy, 1858-1924: Respectability and Responsibility in Tammany Politics*, Northampton, Mass., Smith College, 1968, p. 22-28 ; Daniel Czitrom, "Underworlds and Underdogs: Big Tim Sullivan and Metropolitan Politics in New York, 1889-1913", *Journal of American History*, September 1991, 78, nº2, p. 536-558, p. 550; Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros, New York City, Prostitution and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920*, Norton, New York, 1992, p. 310.

[26] Robert F. Wesser, *A Response to Progressivism: The Democratic Party and New York Politics, 1902-1918*, New York, New York University Press, 1986., p. 26.

The police profession's greater independence from society required a re-evaluation of the relationship between the two. Municipal correspondence enables the historian to gain an insight of this. In an ideal scenario – which, however, is not common – one would have a citizen's complaint available, a receipt slip issued by the municipal government accompanied by a comment, an acknowledgment of receipt by the police services and, finally, an inquiry report. It is also possible to try to reconstruct the overall process that made up a "police matter" and study the way in which the interaction between police and society became a "situation". For a police matter at the beginning of the 20th century was primarily a matter about the police. Citizens were not satisfied with making a record of the urban dysfunctions that could attract the police's attention; instead they highlighted the way in which the police itself functioned. A statistical study of the information contained in the letters passed on to the NYPD between 1906 and 1917 showed that the majority of letters concerned the institution and consisted mostly of complaints[27]. Admittedly, police activity was not necessarily people's only motive, or even primary motive, for writing: they wrote both to condemn prostitution as well as the complicity of the police. However, the prevalence of this kind of letter shows that the police and its action were under discussion at the time. The democratic framework thus provided a basis for police legitimacy but also made its position difficult. As the principal prescriber and judge of police action, the people had trouble understanding why an institution that was supposed to serve them did not act according to their wishes. However, the outcome of the complaints reveals the dysfunctional nature of the relationship between the police and society. In most cases, the complaints lead nowhere, either because the police report cannot be found in the archives or because the information given in the complaints cannot be confirmed by the study, or else because the information, although verified, leads to no specific action.

While most people complained about police inaction, a significant minority complained about police action. Was the police destined to swing constantly between apathy and the abuse of power? The expression "damned if they do, damned if they don't" – frequently used to talk about the police and often by police officers themselves as a form of justification or defence – illustrates this dilemma. The pressure that the Democratic Party put on the police and the heavy criticism it received during the progressive era no doubt largely explain why the discourse used by police officers in their public addresses, memoires and even in their reports was primarily a discourse in defence of the institution. It was easy for police officers to make the point that the demands being made of them were contradictory. By definition, the political game was a competition between diverging interests. The progressive era was characterized by political alternations between Tammany administrations and reformist administrations and it was therefore risky for a police officer to be given too clear a political label. Moreover, police officers often felt that they were at the heart of social contradictions. The issue of alcohol sales, for example, divided social groups: civil associations and leagues of virtue, made up primarily of nativist Protestants, urged the police to act, whereas New Yorkers of Irish, German and even Italian origin called for police persecution. A more basic concern was the issue of children playing in the street, which pitted storekeepers and owners afraid for their windows and shop displays against families who pointed out that children had no space to play in their homes. In short, the total number of potential police tasks (orders from above, public requests, police initiatives, the force of the event) was far higher, as D. Monjardet illustrated with regard to France, than the workload of an ordinary police officer[28]. The safest solution for police officers was therefore to withdraw into positions that protected them from attacks. The administrative police reports written do

[27] For a methodological presentation of the constitution and exploitation of this corpus, please refer to our thesis.
[28] D. Monjardet, *Ce que fait la police, sociologie de la force publique*, Paris, La Découverte, 1996, p. 9, 134, 258.

not show a police force that did nothing (which would be inconceivable, of course) but instead lists typical police actions that seem to aim to satisfy institutional demands rather than actually respond to the problem highlighted by the complainant. In short, the NYPD seemed to be governed not so much by an obligation of result as an obligation of means. The main thing was to show that the police had done something, regardless of whether its action corresponded exactly with what had initially been requested.

It is paradoxical that the NYPD managed to maintain its legitimacy in the eyes of the people. And yet, ever since it was established, it had a double image: its dark image, which corresponded to the failings described above, was coupled with a heroic image that led them to be known as "the best police in the world" and nicknamed "The Finest". The police's image also seemed to improve during the progressive era, which might have been the result of the reforms undertaken. However, these different names suggest that the NYPD should be credited with its capacity to maintain a type of order that generally suited the majority of the population, beyond the dissatisfaction expressed in individual complaints. In some neighbourhoods, this type of agreement may have been the result of the sociological proximity between the police and a dominant group: many accounts, like the one quoted in our introduction, indicate a kind of collusion between the police officers and the Irish population. The agreement was more unanimous when the victims of police order were socialists or African American. Violence towards those two groups was considered to be an exceptional form of violence: it was rare for police officers who were found guilty to be punished, and it was simply presumed that they would be able to behave properly in the presence of a public deemed to be more respectable. Moreover, for the police, the defence of racial boundaries seemed to be the subject of an informal mandate by the White population as a whole: the NYPD's readiness to fight against the "coloured prostitutes" business gave it a role in the process of separating White and African American groups which was underway at the time in New York. In parallel, the repression that hit socialists and anarchists in 1917 and 1918 did nothing to bring out a feeling of solidarity among the population.

"Community policing" and the historical perspective

Was the police a community police in the 19th century? If so, can it be said that the style of "community policing" from the 1970s to the 1990s, which aimed to bring police action closer to the needs of residents, constituted a return to its roots? We can answer "yes" to the first question without too much difficulty, as long as we bear in mind the elements of mediation, tension and disappointment present in the relationship between the police and the people. The second question would no doubt require further analysis, but it nonetheless seems that the first elements call for a negative answer to the second question. While the movement for the reform and professionalization of the police – which continued, at national level, from the end of the 19th century right through the 20th century – was criticized for its negative impact by those promoting "community policing", they often overlooked the previous period in historical terms. It was acceptable – if not justified – to criticize these reforms on the grounds that they had led to a narrow definition of police professionalism on the basis of insularity (autonomy of the profession in relation to the political authority and society), legalism (focusing on the fight against crime to the detriment of order) and moral integrity (fighting corruption), but it was equally difficult to establish the police of the 19th century as a positive role model. The historical perspective that underpins many of the versions of "community policing" oscillates between a kind of short-sightedness that tends to disregard

the 19th century[29], a kind of nostalgia for the golden age of a somewhat undefined police force in which officers had local roots and support from the local population[30], and, finally, a rejection – taken for granted – of the scourges of police corruption and politicization prior to its professionalization. We shall therefore join Jean-Paul Brodeur in concluding that "community policing" was a "reinvention" – in the fullest sense – "of proximity"[31], adding that reinventing perhaps rightly implies being ignorant of the early experiences.

One of the aims of this article was precisely to show that the relationship between the police and the people of New York City at the turn of the 20th century could not be reduced to a single schematic – let alone normative – model. The community framework in which the NYPD was established did not guarantee the immediate support of the people, any more than it sparked its total rejection. Democratic public order therefore seems to fall into this interspace, like a process of ongoing creation, the result of a kind of collective and informal negotiation based on a tacit agreement – sometimes minimal, sometimes more extensive – between a population characterized by the diversity of its interests and a police institution in flux.

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[29] A booklet written in 1988 by a group of researchers of the National Institute of Justice and the University of Harvard, which presents a summary table discussing the opposition between "traditional police" (defined as that of the first two thirds of the 20th century) and "community police" (that of the 1970s onwards), specifically omits the first police "tradition" dating back to the 19th century (Malcom K. Sparrow, *Implementing Community Policing, Perspectives on Policing* Washington, D.C., US Department of Justice, Office of Justice Program, National Institute of Justice, nº 9, 1988, p. 8-9).

[30] James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling, "The Police and Neighborhood Safety: Broken Window", *Atlantic Monthly*, March 1982 ; Malcolm K. Sparrow, Mark H. Moore and David M. Kennedy, *Beyond 9/11: A New Era for Policing*, New York, Basic Books, 1990.

[31] "La réinvention de la proximité", chapter 3, in *Les visages de la police*. See also C. P. Thale, "Civilizing New York City", p. 2-3.