

Posted 3/11/12

THE NUMBERS GAME

A leaked NYPD internal report confirms that crime stats were fudged

By Julius (Jay) Wachtel. It's been thirteen months since NYPD Commissioner Ray Kelly [created a panel](#) to investigate charges that the department systematically underreported serious crime. While it's yet to issue findings, it turns out that there has actually been a report all along. [As revealed days ago in the Village Voice](#), NYPD investigators submitted a damning 95-page report six months before Kelly's panel was formed. It concluded that the commander of the 81st. precinct, Deputy Inspector Steven Mauriello, had ordered officers to keep victims from filing crime reports or, if that wasn't possible, to downgrade incidents below the Part I threshold so that they would not be included in yearly crime statistics.

When viewed in their totality, a disturbing pattern is prevalent and gives credence to the allegation that crimes are being improperly reported in order to avoid index-crime classifications. This trend is indicative of a concerted effort to deliberately underreport crime in the 81st Precinct.

Flashback to 2008. NYPD officer Adrian Schoolcraft, an eight-year veteran assigned to Brooklyn's tough 81st. precinct, was getting unsatisfactory performance evaluations, [he says for resisting](#) the pressure-cooker atmosphere created by Inspector Mauriello. Preoccupied with looking good at CompStat meetings, the precinct commander was exhorting cops to make as many stop-and-frisks and write as many tickets as possible while minimizing the number of reports taken for serious crimes.

Schoolcraft complained about things to a police therapist. That soon landed him on a desk, stripped of his badge and gun. Then things got worse. A dispute with his superior on Halloween night, October 31, 2009, landed him in a psychiatric ward, where he was held for six days. NYPD then placed him on leave without pay, a status that remains in effect through the present day.

Schoolcraft sued ([click here](#) for his website.) In February 2010 [he told it all](#) to the *New York Daily News*. Its reporters confirmed instances where 81st. precinct cops made it difficult if not impossible to file crime reports. Then in May the *Village Voice* ran the first of an explosive series entitled "[The NYPD Tapes](#)." It turns out that for the sixteen months preceding that fateful Halloween day, Schoolcraft had been wearing a hidden recorder.

His tapes depict a department consumed with the imperative to satisfy the Gods of CompStat. One roll-call features a sergeant instructing officers to write "three seat belts, one cell phone and 11 others." Another stars the Inspector, in his radiantly profane self:

I see eight fucking summonses for a 20-day period or a month. If you mess up, how the hell do you want me to do the right thing by you? You come in, five parkers, three A's [minor infraction], no C's [serious infraction], and the only 250 [stop-and-frisk] you do is when I force you to do overtime? I mean it's a two-way street out here.

Officers kept property crimes under the Part I threshold by demanding receipts for stolen goods and by minimizing the amount of a loss. A cop who thought he was speaking in confidence said that the same trick had been used to downgrade robberies. “If it’s a robbery, they’ll make it a petty larceny...a civilian punched in the face, menaced with a gun, and his wallet was removed, and they wrote ‘lost property’.” A Lieutenant eventually came up with an even neater solution, ordering that robbery reports not be taken unless victims immediately accompanied officers to the station to speak with detectives.

Once the cat was out of the bag NYPD internal affairs descended on Schoolcraft. He secretly taped that interview, too. Here’s what an investigator said when leaving:

The mayor’s looking for it [lower crime stat’s], the police commissioner’s looking for it . . . every commanding officer wants to show it. So there’s motivation not to classify the reports for the seven major crimes. Sometimes, people get agendas and try to do what they can to avoid taking the seven major crimes.

Other officers came out with similar tales. It turns out that Schoolcraft wasn’t the only running around with a hidden tape recorder. Adil Polanco, a cop in the Bronx, [recorded supervisors and union rep’s](#) pressuring officers to make “chickenshit” arrests and avoid taking reports.

NYPD could no longer pass it off as the ramblings of a disgruntled cop. In October 2010, apparently as result of the internal investigation just disclosed by the Voice, [NYPD formally accused](#) Mauriello and four subordinates at the 81st. with suppressing crime reports. Mauriello was transferred out of the precinct. He remains on full duty, and the accusations are still unresolved.

Recent events suggest that little has been settled:

- 02/26/12 A cop’s lawsuit claims that the 42nd. precinct [uses a quota system](#) that requires cops to issue fifteen tickets, conduct two stop-and-frisks and make one arrest each month, on pain of various forms of discipline.
- 01/23/12 In response to concerns that crime reductions may be a “mirage” caused by underreporting, [NYPD issued a memo](#) requiring that officers take reports even when victims can’t identify suspects or provide receipts for allegedly stolen goods. (NYPD insists that the memo simply reminds cops of correct procedures.)
- 01/18/12 CRC Press publishes “[The Crime Numbers Game: Management by Manipulation](#),” by criminologists John Eterno (a retired NYPD Captain) and Eli Silverman, “exposing the truth about crime statistics manipulation in the NYPD and the repercussions suffered by crime victims and those who blew the whistle on this corrupt practice.”
- 01/08/12 NYPD [credits heavy-handed transit enforcement](#), including ticketing and arresting passengers for nuisance violations such as hogging seats, for a sharp drop of crime in the subways. But an officer contends that pressures from superiors to make at least one “collar” a month is a factor.

- 12/31/11 Crime victims complain that [NYPD officers are refusing to take reports](#). Some cops say it helps keep stat's low, with one commander calling it "the newest evolution in this numbers game."

Whether NYPD has really learned anything from this mess is hard to say. After a consistent downtrend – they reportedly fell 16 percent between 2008-09 – [robbery reports ticked up](#) 5 percent in 2010. But it's not just NYPD. News reports suggest that playing fast and loose with crime statistics (click [here](#) for Baltimore and [here](#) for Cleveland) and pressing officers to fulfill ticket and arrest quotas (click [here](#) for Los Angeles and [here](#) for Cincinnati) are common.

Fudging statistics and treating cops like assembly-line workers has profound implications for the practice of policing. Tools such as CompStat have turned measures into goals, pushing aside issues such quality and making cops into liars. There's an urgent need to reexamine the craft of policing and figure out what really "counts." It may have little to do with numbers.