



SAVING LOS ANGELES

SUPERCOP BILL BRATTON HAS CONQUERED CRIME IN BOSTON, NEW YORK AND NOW L.A. HIS NEXT CHALLENGE: RESCUING THE REST OF AMERICA

As he moves through the ballroom of the San Jose Marriott Hotel, a scrum of reporters and camera crews circles William Bratton, peppering him with questions and photographing his every step, leaving no doubt he is truly America's superstar cop. Dressed in a well-tailored navy-blue suit, crisp white shirt and red necktie, the 60-year-old Los Angeles police chief is calm in the face of the media swirl, coolly answering questions in clipped paragraphs punctuated by his thick, long-voweled Boston accent. His résumé is impressive and well-known. A former working-class boy from Boston, he rose to become that city's nationally renowned police commissioner at the age of 45. In the mid-1990s he took over New York's police department and helped transform that city from one of the most crime-ridden in America to one of the safest. In the process he became known—and billed himself—as "America's top cop." His image was emblazoned on a 1996 *Time* magazine cover as the face of hope for an America obsessed with urban violence—a face demanding that

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Even America's best cop has setbacks: Bratton watched his Los Angeles police force go on a rampage at a pro-immigration demonstration last May (left and bottom left). Still, his success in curbing crime has put him front and center in the presidential campaign. He's close to both Bill and Hillary Clinton (below) but was fired by Rudolph Giuliani when he was mayor of New York. Giuliani has recently been courting Bratton, trying to minimize their past conflicts (bottom right).



"IF WE DON'T SOLVE THE RACE ISSUE," SAYS BRATTON, "WE'LL NEVER SOLVE THE OTHER ISSUES."

somebody fight back. That somebody, *Time* proclaimed, was Bratton: FINALLY, read the story's cover line, WE'RE WINNING THE WAR AGAINST CRIME. HERE'S WHY.

Bratton wasn't done. In 2002, after growing rich in the private sector, he won the second-biggest prize in American big-city policing after New York: chief of the LAPD. He is the only man ever to lead both of America's two most famous police departments, based in the world's two biggest headline-generating media centers. Surprisingly, he succeeded in L.A. just as he had in New York.

More important, he has disciples, police chiefs in Miami, Baltimore, Newark, Hartford, Providence, Raleigh and Ann Arbor who are implementing the same crime-fighting police-deployment tactics and management reforms he pioneered in New York and is currently using in Los Angeles. He is not only the country's most famous police chief, he's also the most influential crime fighter in recent history.

It's no wonder Bratton is rumored to be on the short list to head the Department of Homeland Security or the FBI in a Hillary Clinton administration. He's so influential that his archnemesis, former New York City mayor and now Republican presidential hopeful Rudolph Giuliani—the man who fired him—twice

made pilgrimages to L.A. last year in thinly veiled attempts to neutralize Bratton in the 2008 elections.

There's little doubt Bratton will be a force in those elections, as the man who puts fighting crime at center stage. Crime may be low in Los Angeles and astoundingly low in New York City, but if you live in Detroit, where the murder rate is seven times that of New York's, or in Newark, where the homicide rate is three times that of L.A.'s—or in a score of other cities across the nation—a "gathering storm" of crime is brewing after a historic nationwide decline, says Bratton. That storm can be abated, he believes, through the management and deployment strategies and community-backed policing he has championed. "Cops matter," he says simply. By placing police and public safety at the forefront of the public consciousness, he hopes to achieve a complex goal: using the police to solve the problem of race in America. "If we don't solve the race issue," he says, "we'll never solve the other issues. The police have traditionally been the flash point for so many of America's racial problems."

Bratton has come to San Jose, California on this sunny June morning on a less lofty mission: to participate in a panel discus-

sion—titled "MacArthur Park and Beyond: Can the LAPD, Immigrant Groups and the Media Ever Trust Each Other Again?"—sponsored by the National Association of Hispanic Journalists at its annual convention. Bratton and his three co-panelists take their seats on the stage in front of about 300 journalists and editors seated on folding chairs, with scores more hugging the walls in a long, cramped line.

As the lights dim, everyone focuses on a large white screen showing news footage of dozens of Los Angeles police officers, as edgy and eager as a Texas high school football team, streaming into L.A.'s MacArthur Park. A few plastic bottles and rocks had been hurled at the cops, and now they were responding. Clad in riot helmets, hard plastic face masks, bullet-proof vests, radio headsets and full military attack gear, they storm onto the lawn of the park located just west of downtown L.A., smack in the middle of a tumultuous sea of Central American immigrant poverty and gang violence.

Despite a handful of troublemakers, the park is full of peaceful, almost festive protesters, including women wheeling strollers and dozens of reporters, all of whom seem unaware that anything is amiss and are genuinely surprised to find themselves under assault. (continued on page 130)

BILL BRATTON

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Wielding either two-foot-long solid aluminum Monadnock PR-24 batons or surreal-looking rifles that shoot rubber bullets, the police officers descend on the crowd, indiscriminately firing 240 rubber bullets and other projectiles at close range into the throng. Marching in tight, robotic formation, they swing their batons like laborers using machetes in a sugarcane field, beating reporters and innocent civilians to the ground.

Anyone familiar with the LAPD instantly knew by the officers' arrogance that they were members of what was inevitably described as the LAPD's "elite" Metro Division, though people never asked "Elite at what?" Instilling the fear of God into a crowd was the answer. The road to Metro was well-worn: Work in the toughest divisions, in the killing fields of Southeast and Hollenbeck; live out the Dirty Harry credo that the rules of the game are some effete politician's, not yours; get promoted by beating and arresting anyone who looks at you the wrong way; and if you can, get yourself a righteous shoot. That was what the department valued and what Metro symbolized.

Metro was also emblematic of another pillar of the LAPD: the belief that the department existed for the convenience of its members, not for the public good. Metro police had take-home city cars and a workday that consisted of arriving at 9:30 in the morning, lifting weights for two and a half hours and then spending the afternoon at the shooting range, training with the air-support guys or practicing rappelling down a cliff.

It was all geared to events like the immigrants' May Day rally, where Metro could use its training to do its thing—kind of like the LAPD's old canine unit, which used to let the dogs bite suspects as a reward.

Nobody died that May Day, and there were no life-threatening injuries. Nevertheless, the indiscriminate and disproportionate police response to such a minor provocation set off a firestorm in Los Angeles. The timing couldn't have been worse for Bratton, who had been lobbying hard to be reappointed for a second five-year term to complete his transformation of the LAPD.

As the ballroom lights flicker on, Bratton squares his narrow shoulders and broad, large head and allows a noncommittal expression to float across his face, ready for what is to come. Remarkably, given an audience that includes journalists who had been roughed up, as well as many others from the Spanish-language media passionately committed to their immigrant constituency, there is little drama. For one thing, no wellspring of animosity is directed toward Bratton. He has been a steadfast supporter of an L.A. directive ordering police not to arrest people because of their immigration

status, and he advocates allowing illegal immigrants to obtain driver's licenses. He has maintained that the idea of terrorists streaming across the Mexican border is an overblown political red herring ("Go to any Home Depot and what do you see?" he once asked. "Hundreds of guys standing there looking for work, not raping and pillaging.")

He also acted decisively after the incident, defusing the uproar by shrewdly and swiftly becoming its most outspoken critic. He demoted and reassigned the highest-ranking officer at the scene, reassigned the second-ranking officer and ordered retraining in crowd control and rules for dealing with the media. For decades LAPD chiefs had infuriated minorities with knee-jerk defenses of the indefensible. Not Bratton. He took the rhetorical lead by declaring the rampage "the worst incident of my this type I have ever encountered in my 37 years" of policing. It worked. The Police Commission voted to rehire him the following month and heaped praise on him in the process. Nevertheless, it was to Bratton's discredit that when it happened no one seemed more surprised than he.

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For decades prior to Bratton, the LAPD's us-against-them paramilitary culture and confrontational policing had produced, in whole or in part, the 1965 Watts riots, hundreds of shocking police shootings and choke-hold deaths, the infamous beating of Rodney King, the devastating 1992 riots, the botched investigation of O.J. Simpson, three successive police chiefs forced to leave the department in disgrace and the 1999 Rampart scandal. The last, although not as well-known nationally, was in fact the straw that broke the camel's back, convincing the city of the necessity of hiring an outsider to transform a notoriously closed, inbred, scandal-plagued organization.

The Rampart scandal featured drug-dealing dirty cops, at least a hundred (and undoubtedly hundreds more) police frame-ups and untold numbers of beatings and shootings of suspects either condoned or ignored by LAPD brass and the deputy DAs, who were anxious to win cases and avoid antagonizing the cops on whom they depended to make their cases. There was a whiff of *Chinatown* about it all, the smell of something that had been occurring forever and would never be fully investigated because to do so could blow the lid off L.A.'s criminal justice system. In the end, the U.S. Justice Department declared that a pervasive "pattern and practice" of police abuse existed and jammed a consent decree down the city's throat, mandating LAPD reforms under the critical eye of a federal judge.

Bill Parker, who was chief from 1950 to 1966, was the modern-day godfather of the LAPD. He institutionalized all

the department's problems, making the department into a hard-charging army whose mission was to stomp out the street lice. The definition of *lice* was extremely broad, and the job was taken seriously. Parker's officers policed L.A.'s sprawling 469 square miles on the cheap: The LAPD has always been understaffed. (For example, New York has 38,000 officers for its population of 8 million, while L.A. has only 9,500 officers for its 4 million citizens.) The result was a small, motorized, faceless force riding around and responding to radio calls, thoroughly divorced from the communities it served.

Most important, Parker skillfully used the chief's ironclad civil-service job protections to declare himself and his department unaccountable to civilian control. "The Police Commission doesn't run the police department. I run the police department," he once announced, providing the model for subsequent chiefs.

By the time Bratton took office, in 2002, the department's morale was in shambles, racial tensions were rising, gang violence was endemic and people were despairing of the LAPD ever being reformed.

Bratton seemed just the guy to do the job. Raised in blue-collar Boston-Irish Dorchester, he grew up in a cold-water flat. His mother, June, was a housewife; his father, "Big" Bill, worked two full-time jobs for most of his life, one at a chrome-plating company, the other as a mail sorter at the post office. Bratton remembers seeing little of him. Nonetheless, the father's influence on his son was profound. Spending time with Bratton, you are struck by the upward tilt of his chin, the tilt of the pugnacious and/or supremely confident, and by his belief in himself and his judgment. Were that confidence wedded to a demonstrable narcissism or grandiosity—which it is not—it would be insufferable; instead, it comes across as quiet strength, an aura he inherited from his father. "Somewhere along the line," writes Bratton in his autobiography, *Turnaround: How America's Top Cop Reversed the Crime Epidemic*, "my father developed the confidence that he could handle whatever came along. You could tell by the way he carried himself. He never swaggered, but he didn't back down. My sister and I were crazy about him." Recently Bratton added, "The older I get, the more I see my father in me."

When he was 11 Bratton read *Your Police*, a children's history of the NYPD with vivid pictures that fired the imagination of a dreamy kid. Then he discovered *Dagnet*, the television series that made the LAPD famous, and knew he wanted to be a cop.

Enlisting in the Army in 1966 to become a military policeman, Bratton wound up in a sentry-dog unit in Vietnam, briefly seeing combat when the Long Binh ammo dump he was guarding was attacked.

By the time he was discharged, in 1968, he had "basically missed the 1960s," an

era he dislikes. "I always loved my country and our system of government," says Bratton, "and when it became fashionable to be 'anti,' I never bought into that. I believed in order and conformity. There were rules and reasons for those rules, and I understood those reasons."

In 1970 Bratton joined the Boston Police Department, then a poorly paid, listless and corrupt institution that seldom attracted the best and the brightest. It proved a good place for a smart, ambitious young cop to shine. The department had fewer than 25 officers with college degrees, and when it offered part-time scholarships to Boston State College, Bratton leaped at the opportunity. College enabled him to escape the provincial world of policing, where "all your friends are cops, all your talk is cop talk, and all you hear are cop ideas," Bratton says. Instead, he absorbed the ideas of liberal, antiwar classmates and professors, allowing him to see the world through others' eyes. Within a decade he rose through the ranks to become a boy-wonder second in command.

In 1990 he left Boston to become chief of the enfeebled, demoralized and inept

New York City Transit Police. Transit crimes had been rising at a rate of 25 percent a year for three years—twice the rate of New York's as a whole—when Bratton took charge. Over the next two years Bratton forced the transit-police brass out of their city-owned take-home cars and required them to ride the subways in uniform, just as he did. He reorganized the department, replaced a broken-down communications system with one that actually worked inside the subways, reinvigorated troop morale and pioneered management and officer-deployment strategies that reduced robberies by 40 percent and felony crimes by more than 20 percent. He made the city's subways feel safe again for millions of daily riders previously petrified of being attacked every time a train door slid shut.

In the spring of 1993 Bratton returned to the Boston Police Department, as chief. That November Rudolph Giuliani—a hard-nosed former federal prosecutor—was elected mayor of a New York whose residents felt crime was out of control.

Based on Bratton's transit-police success, Giuliani tapped him to head the NYPD in 1994. Over the next 27

months, in a city besieged by muggings, crack wars, auto break-ins, in-your-face street hookers, violent and mentally ill homeless, intimidating squeegee men and wilding wolf packs, Bratton reduced serious crime by one third and homicides by 50 percent. By institutionalizing smart policing tactics such as Compstat—which uses computers to map and track where crimes are occurring and swiftly masses officers in those areas, holding captains accountable for crime in their precincts—Bratton again proved cops can play an important part in long-term crime reduction. Since Bratton left, both transit crime and New York's crime rate as a whole have continued to steadily decline. Today New York City has 75 percent fewer homicides, robberies and auto thefts than it did in 1990, and Bratton's innovations have become permanent.

But there were problems, too. While reducing the number of people carrying guns, Bratton's stop-and-frisk policies also resulted in the stopping and patting down of thousands of innocent black and brown men in the hope of either finding a gun or deterring them from carrying one. As a result New York saw a 50 percent rise in police-brutality complaints.

In an opinion piece in *The New York Times* four years after he left the NYPD, Bratton criticized the extremes to which the department had taken the stop-and-frisk practice. He pointed out that once crime had been significantly reduced, people in poor black and brown neighborhoods had "every right to expect that one of the benefits of a safer city would be less police intrusion into their everyday lives."

But Bratton's popularity in New York was due in part to his success in selling himself and his department—a remarkable achievement given how unnatural a glad-hander he is. Bratton is a man of instinctive reserve and personal stiffness. There is no smooth obsequiousness about him, none of the salesman's bonhomie. His charm lies in being direct and open in promoting his agenda, which is always to convince you of the rightness of his cause and persuade you to believe in him. Because he's so straightforward and facile at using facts and logic to win you over, he's hard to resist.

He acquired his PR skills by being the face of the Boston PD as a young officer in the commissioner's office. Most commissioners, he says, "wouldn't give the press the time of day, so it fell to me, as the department's highest-ranking sworn member, to deal with the media. As a result I had a good grounding in dealing with the press when I went to New York in 1990."

There Bratton met John Linder, who had a big advertising budget as the head of marketing for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. Linder thought Bratton's distinctive Boston accent and crime-fighting efforts would be effective in coaxing fearful riders back into the



"Her no-tolerance policy against interoffice romance doesn't apply to large penises on Valentine's Day."

subways, and Bratton decided to give it a try. "It wasn't so much my loving those TV cameras," says Bratton, "as appreciating those ads as a way to get my story out."

The commercials and Bratton's close friendship with two of his top inner-circle advisors, John Miller and Jack Maple, led to a nickname: Broadway Bill. Miller, a tall, handsome WNBC reporter fond of wearing \$2,000 suits, became Bratton's press guru. Miller, says Bratton, "was fun, smart as hell and had the best Rolodex in America. I also knew that I would live and die by the New York City press and that having one of them in my tent would be very helpful."

Maple was a chubby transit cop in a homburg and bow tie, straight off the streets of Queens.

He was also a brilliant police strategist who, on a cocktail napkin one night at Elaine's, began mapping out the entire strategy for what would become Compstat. Miller and Maple loved Elaine's, the East Side watering hole frequented by writers and celebrities, and soon so did Bratton, whose third wife had moved back to Boston. He wore expensive double-breasted suits, tasseled loafers and Hermès ties, and instead of sitting around and kissing up to Giuliani, he surrounded himself with his own cadre of innovative police thinkers. The cynical, hard-edged New York press loved it all, seeing him as an effective, savvy cop who knew what

New York reporters needed and gave it to them. Predictably, the press coverage angered Giuliani because it wasn't about Giuliani—who once banned ads for *New York* magazine from city buses because of the tagline POSSIBLY THE ONLY GOOD THING IN NEW YORK RUDY HASN'T TAKEN CREDIT FOR. So when Bratton appeared on the cover of *Time* he was unceremoniously dumped for the sin of upstaging Giuliani and for forgetting that, in the narcissistic loopiness of *Giuliani World*, there could be only one king.

After that Bratton formed his own security firm advising police departments in South America. When the planes hit the World Trade Center on September 11,

2001 he found himself in his Manhattan apartment, watching the biggest calamity in New York City history unfold on a television screen. "As a police officer," says Bratton, "you live to deal with crisis and be tested by it. It's very frustrating when you're not in a position to do anything, particularly when you know what needs to be done."

September 11 proved a "principal, compelling" factor in driving Bratton back into the game. With his record he expected a warm welcome in L.A., but it didn't turn out that way. Instead he discovered he wasn't wanted. "The *Los Angeles Times* did a series of profiles on

prospective chiefs," says Bratton, "and nearly killed me with this very disparaging article about this slick Bratton guy from New York." Then Rick Caruso, a wealthy local developer who was the Police Commission president at the time, "made it quite clear through intermediaries that I shouldn't apply and wasn't wanted because I was too brash."

Bratton, moreover, had studiously prepared for the job with the help of his new wife, trial lawyer and former Court TV anchor Rikki Klieman. "I put together a package of materials that was about this thick," says Bratton, holding up his right thumb and index finger and spreading them wide, "including my plan for what

I would do if selected chief. And people even took offense at that. 'Imagine the gall of this guy coming here with all this stuff. Who does he think he is?' That was the attitude. The mayor slid into my camp only after one of his top aides went to New York and met with former New York governor Mario Cuomo, Judge Milton Mollen, who headed an investigation into New York police corruption, and rank-and-file cops and came back appreciating what I'd done there."

Bratton was also determined not to make the same mistake as Willie Williams, one of his predecessors in L.A. Williams, the rotund, affable African American police chief of Philadelphia, was hired after the 1992 riots to reform

the LAPD. Knowing no one in Los Angeles and trusting no one, he was isolated and ineffective from the start, and his staff moved in with their long knives to cut him to pieces. After five years he barely made it out of town alive.

By contrast, Bratton flew in his long-time brain trust, an inner circle of allies and advisors going back to his days in New York: John Miller, John Linder, Rutgers University criminologist George Kelling and New York lawyer Richard Aborn. "Those," he says, "were my outsiders."

For his insiders he chose two of the department's best-informed and most respected critics, constitutional attorney and law professor Erwin Chemerinsky and Merrick Bobb, an L.A.-based attorney

specializing in monitoring troubled police departments. He then hired Gerald Chaleff, a liberal defense attorney who had helped negotiate the consent decree when he was president of the Police Commission. Chaleff would serve as his consigliere, overseer of compliance with the decree and explainer of the byzantine worlds of L.A. politics and criminal justice.

The first L.A. power broker Bratton went to see was John Mack, then president of the Los Angeles Urban League and the black community's lion in its long battle against police abuse. Mack was initially cool to Bratton. The previous chief, Bernard Parks, had antagonized virtually everyone but a small cadre of the

city's black elite, which included Mack. They viewed the tall, handsome Parks as the most visible and powerful African American in a city where blacks were losing their political clout to Latinos. Mack had led the fight to rehire Parks, and when then mayor James Hahn and his police commission refused to do so, Mack and the rest of the black leadership were apoplectic. But Hahn had had little choice. Parks was a true-blue believer in an LAPD unaccountable to civilian control and wouldn't fundamentally reform the department. "If Parks had remained as chief," says Bratton, "the place would have ground to a halt. After the Rampart scandal, Parks lost the department's support. And once a chief loses support, that opinion can't be turned around, no matter how tough you are."

Winning over the black community wasn't easy for Bratton. While attending a meeting in a large African American community center, he was met with a large shrine-like photo cutout of Parks surrounded by flowers. "Bratton kind of smirked, as if to say, 'Do you think this is going to stop me?'" recalls prominent African American civil-rights lawyer Connie Rice, who had frequently sued the department over brutality and discrimination. "He just blew right past it and told the people there that from now on the LAPD was going to operate differently. Then he came back again and again and through sheer force of will forged relationships—including one with Mack, who saw anybody who opposed Parks as a personal enemy. Yet Bratton completely seduced him, and Mack has become one of his biggest supporters."

In fact, Mack, as president of the

Police Commission when it rehired Bratton, in June 2007, lauded him. "In his first term Chief Bratton provided visionary and progressive leadership for the department," said Mack. "His efforts have greatly benefited the city of Los Angeles and advanced effective policing. He has aggressively reached out to individuals, victims, immigrant-rights organizations, Latino leaders, members of the media, civil-rights and civil-liberties leaders and organizations."

Bratton also courted leaders of the Police Protective League, the union that had fought fiercely to oust Parks. He established his bona fides by talking tough on crime and declaring in a speech at the police academy that the "era of gotcha is over"—a reference to the full-scale investigations of officers Parks had launched over the most minor matters. "Bratton immediately understood the union's problems with Parks," says LAPD deputy chief Charlie Beck. "He accepted contract provisions he didn't like but couldn't change and didn't fight the union on small things. His attitude was 'Well, shit, they've been getting beaten three times a day. How could they not like me? I'm not going to treat them like that.'"

Bratton won over nearly everyone else, bringing them into his orbit and acting on their concerns. He asked Rice, the department's smartest and most effective critic, to chair an inquiry on ways to prevent a future Rampart scandal and to work with his command staff and the union to rewrite the rules and regulations that dictate so much of LAPD culture.

Bringing people like Mack and Rice into the process gave Bratton tremen-

dous political strength. "If you hear Mack and Bratton giving out the same message," says Chaleff, "who is there to argue with? You have to be really on the fringe to be in neither camp. It sends a message within the department that this is not about us versus them. It's about trying to solve difficult issues together."

Bratton's principal focus, however, has been on crime, which he has dramatically reduced. From 2002 through 2006, serious crime in L.A.—homicides, rapes, assaults and robberies—declined 34 percent overall, with murders down by almost 39 percent and gang killings down by almost 30 percent. In the first five months of 2007 overall homicides dropped an additional 24 percent and gang killings by 32 percent.

But the May Day police riot made glaringly clear just what Bratton had failed to accomplish and why he felt he needed another five years to deliver on the primary reason he'd been brought to Los Angeles in the first place: to transform a department that had been forced into doing the equivalent of an AA program and seemed determined to periodically fall off the wagon.

Deputy Chief Beck was surprised when one of his officers watching a MacArthur Park May Day video turned to him and said, "I can't believe it. They knocked down the little guy who sells fruit from a crate." "No way," replied Beck. For Beck, that summed it up. "Any local cop would've known he was harmless."

Beck was particularly pained that MacArthur Park had once again become a symbol of what was wrong with the LAPD. Bratton had promoted him two grades to deputy chief, leapfrogging him over a long line of the old guard, in large part to change the park from a drug bazaar and gang epicenter into a safe public space for poor immigrant families dwelling in overstuffed apartments without backyards in the most densely populated area west of the Mississippi.

At the age of 54, Beck is old-school LAPD turned new school, freed by Bratton to use his common sense, civic pride and the accumulated wisdom of decades on the street to solve problems and make neighborhoods better for the people who live in them.

The son of a former LAPD deputy chief and father of a daughter who is currently an LAPD patrol officer, Beck grew up in suburban L.A. and started out as a young officer in Watts, an area of low-income-housing projects so tough it had a riot named after it. "Working in Watts was brutal," he says. "I had partners killed. I saw people in the very worst circumstances who had become filled with hate. We, the officers, were despised. It took a long time for me to understand how circumstances can dictate a person's life."

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BILL BRATTON

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On this August afternoon in 2007 Beck gives me a tour of MacArthur Park. “Bratton first came to Mac Park in late 2002,” says Beck. “There were people slinging dope everywhere, along with gangsters, prostitutes and hawkers selling illegal IDs. People would drive up, get curbside service from dealers and drive off. There was literally no grass in the park because city crews were afraid to enter there.”

In New York Bratton had four times as many police officers at his command to flood any trouble spot and keep them there as long as necessary. In L.A. he has had to pick and choose his spots. He identified MacArthur Park and four other areas where he could make a noticeable difference.

“Three hundred people were going to jail each month out of this park,” continues Beck, “but they would just go through revolving doors and be right back here.”

So Bratton told Beck to fix the park permanently. “He didn’t tell me how to do it,” says Beck, “except for the guidelines: Everything has to be legal and constitutional and have a lasting effect.”

Under Parks the situation was radically different. As Bratton once put it, “There was one big stop sign outside his office, and as a result the department became incredibly risk-averse because nobody could do anything without getting his signature on a piece of paper.” Bratton has authorized local captains (as Beck was when dealing with MacArthur Park) to act independently instead of having to get permission.

Beck began by arresting hundreds of people for dealing and hundreds more for purchasing drugs and did so until the word got out and his undercover officers had no more dealers or customers to arrest. Then he got the Parks and Recreation Department to trim the shrubbery and trees, both for aesthetic reasons and so that people couldn’t conduct drug sales and acts of prostitution in seclusion. None of the park lights worked, so he convinced the Department of Water and Power to put in new lights, promising that he would not permit them to be dug up by thieves wanting to sell the wiring. He convinced General Electric to help pay for surveillance cameras around the park, then had his officers monitor them and, to deter future crimes, tell everyone they apprehended about the cameras. He got money from the City Council to renovate a once-beautiful band shell, restock the artificial lake with fish and install artificial turf for a soccer field. “My goal,” says Beck, “is for it to be open until midnight so that people can play soccer in a well-lit, safe place.”

He invited gang-intervention workers—most of whom were ex-gang members themselves—to take-back-the-park rallies and talked to them and current gang members about the changes he was trying to make. “Gangs are stratified,” he says. “You have the ones that shoot, pillage, rape—I

know I’m not going to change them. But I’m going to try like hell to get the ones at the other end.” The result, says Beck, is that “crime in the park is very limited: There’s no drug dealing, robberies or rapes, no drinking in public and no shopping carts.”

“The old guard would say you’re doing social work, not police work,” I tell him. “Yeah, I know,” he replies. “Initially, all you care about are the nuts and bolts of what you’re doing. But after you become comfortable with the nuts and bolts, you start wondering, Why does this conveyor belt keep bringing me all these broken parts? And how can I affect what’s happening on the other side of the conveyor?”

The LAPD had never addressed those questions prior to Bratton, and as a result, says Beck, it was at least “partially responsible for the 1992 riots. We treated people callously and embraced the philosophy of solving crime by simply making arrests. Making arrests is important, but you have to do a lot of other things, too. The old LAPD worked really hard but in ways that weren’t productive.”

Beck is now the deputy chief of the South Bureau, the sprawling, economically

impoverished area of black (and increasingly Latino) Los Angeles that was the epicenter for both the 1965 and 1992 riots. In the South Bureau the gang violence of the Bloods and Crips defines the locale, and 70 percent of murders there are gang related (citywide it’s 56 percent).

Neither the LAPD nor the city has had an intelligent approach to gangs. Bratton’s trying to change that. He has given Beck the same freedom he had in MacArthur Park and a mandate to reduce gang violence. “The one thing I’m really encouraged about is what we’re doing with the gang-intervention workers,” says Beck. “I used to believe they were exactly like the guys I was trying to arrest. Then I went to Chicago and saw a program where they were having success using them in collaboration with the police. Now I’m doing it here. I keep it simple. I tell them, ‘I’ll catch the last murderer; you stop the next one.’ About a month ago we had a really popular young man, a Blood gang member, killed in Nickerson Gardens by a Compton set. Normally, that would’ve sparked a spate of tit-for-tat shootings. But we had some good



“I thought tonight we could curl up next to the fire with a good book.”

gang-intervention folks and had been holding meetings there for over a year. We told them we had detectives working on the murder around the clock, and within four days—partially because the community was with us—we made an arrest. And there was no retaliation.

“The community cooperated because they saw us as genuinely involved in the problem. You can’t just go in there and talk nice to people. You need collateral in the bank, and we had that. These folks are very low income and have been marginalized for years. It would be pretty easy to go in and say ‘Your kid’s a gangbanger, and if he hadn’t had those drugs in his pocket, he might not have gotten killed.’ But nobody acted like that. A lot of it is just having an open dialogue, treating them like they’re your equal and not some lower species you’re in charge of watching at the zoo—which is definitely the way we did it in the past. I think that’s been huge in all of this. What’s gone on in Watts over the past two

years is a great story. As of July we have not had one homicide in Watts. We have a lot to do with that, but a lot of it is because of internal community pressure to not solve everything with violence.

“The LAPD is maturing. We look at things in a much broader way now because of Bratton. I’d like to think the LAPD will never turn back if Bratton left, but there’s still a lot of the same furniture in the department, and old-school L.A. policing is much easier to do. It’s much more difficult to solve a problem than just react to it.”

Rising from the darkly stained table in his memento-strewn office, Bratton walks to a long, low-slung bookcase overflowing with pictures and other objects and shows me a framed photo of him, Giuliani, Maple, John Timoney, now chief of the Miami PD, and Bratton’s father and son marching at the head of the 1995 St.

Patrick’s Day parade. Most are dressed in overcoats, as in pictures of New York in the 1940s, and the photo already looks like a historical artifact, not like an image of something that took place a little more than 10 years ago.

Giuliani visited Bratton twice in 2007. The first time they talked with California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger about gang problems. Other than briefly bumping into each other, Bratton and Giuliani hadn’t met in a decade, and as Bratton tells it, there was no great drama. “Rudy and I have never had a cross word,” Bratton says, adding tellingly, “although our staffs battled to the death. So it was all very cordial. He talked about how he felt he was a changed person, having survived prostate cancer and 9/11 and since having a new wife. He didn’t seem like the angry, combative, confrontational man he once presented himself to be. As to whether in the heat of the presidential campaign all of this has truly sunk in,” he continues, breaking into a huge smile, “we’ll have to wait and see.”

Their second meeting was at Giuliani’s request and took place in Bratton’s office. Bratton pointed out the key to New York City he had received from Giuliani. “When you gave me the key,” Bratton joked, “I didn’t know you were going to change the lock.”

“It’s nice to have the leading candidate for president from the Republican Party come to call. The irony is that I worked for Senator Hillary Clinton when she was running for senator and Rudy was going to be her opponent. I’m personally closer with the Clintons than I am with Giuliani, but I could not have done what I did in New York without a tough mayor like Rudy. But I’m a big fan of President Clinton and Hillary. They’ve done wonderful things. Bill Clinton did more about crime during the 1990s than any president in history. You can see pictures of him and me all over here,” says Bratton, sweeping his arm to indicate the walls.

But at this stage of the game he isn’t giving out endorsements. “In terms of where Hillary and her husband are on most issues, that’s where I am,” he says. “But I’m a political independent. It’s nice to be on good terms with both the leading presidential candidates, because crime is coming back.”

He answers the next question before it is asked. “In terms of Homeland Security and the FBI, those are very significant positions. And when the president of the United States knocks on the door, you certainly have to respond to the knock and give it consideration. I’m somebody who needs to be stimulated; I’m not a maintenance-type person. But I don’t see myself going into maintenance mode in Los Angeles anytime soon.” In any case, not until January, when a new administration moves into the White House.

