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Toward a New Professionalism in Policing

Lecture by Jeremy Travis

President, John Jay College of Criminal Justice

At the

Central Police University

Taipei, Taiwan

August 19, 2013

Dear Esteemed Colleagues:

It is a great honor for me to be invited to speak with you today. I have enormous respect for the Central Police University of Taiwan and for your mission to educate the police professionals of this country. I am very grateful for the warm welcome that has been provided to me for this, my first visit to Taiwan. Your hospitality is deeply appreciated.

The generous welcome you have extended to me also carries a larger meaning. It is clear to me that my hosts, the officials of the Central Police University, share with me a sense of optimism about the possibilities for future collaboration between John Jay College and this prestigious University. So it is my strongest hope that my visit this week is the first of many, and that we will soon host a delegation from Central Police University on our campus at John Jay College in New York City.

The topic of this lecture is “Toward a New Professionalism in Policing.” But before sharing my thoughts on the future of the concept of professionalism in policing, please allow me to offer some observations about the strong similarities between John Jay College and the Central Police University. One of the most striking facts about our similarities is that we share a very famous alumnus – Dr. Henry Lee. Dr. Lee graduated from Central Police University in 1960. After rising to the rank of Captain in the police department of this city – at age of 25, the youngest in the history of Taiwan – he then came to America, and attended John Jay College of Criminal Justice and received his masters degree in forensic science in 1972. So John Jay College and the Central Police University can both claim credit for the education of Dr. Henry Lee who is, by most objective measures, the world’s most famous and most influential forensic scientist.

I have known Dr. Henry Lee for nearly twenty years. Between 1994 and 2000 I served as Director of the National Institute of Justice, appointed by President Bill Clinton. These years were a time when the power of forensic science was first becoming apparent to the practitioners in law enforcement and criminal justice. Under my leadership, NIJ developed a very robust portfolio of research projects designed to advance the state of science in this area. We also sought to encourage police departments, prosecutors, judges and defense lawyers to embrace the power of this new technology. Dr. Henry Lee was a national figure at that time. He had achieved public prominence due to his spell-binding testimony in the trial of O.J. Simpson in 1994-95. So, as my colleagues at NIJ and I were launching our national forensic science program, we invited Dr. Henry Lee as our keynote speaker for our first national conference. Needless to say – and if you have heard Henry deliver a speech you know what I am referring to – Henry was a mesmerizing, engaging speaker who conveyed his passion for the power of science to help the police solve crimes. It is fair to say that no other scientist has had as much influence on the development of the field of forensic science.

I spoke to Dr. Lee two weeks ago as I was preparing for this visit. He asked me to convey his best wishes to the faculty, students and administrative leadership of the Central Police University. It is one of his fondest dreams that someday he might be invited to a meeting between John Jay and CPU to facilitate a strong partnership between the two academic institutions he values so highly.

But our common bonds extend far beyond one man. As I came to know your University better, I was struck by the parallels in the history of our two institutions. Let me provide some detail about our shared history. The Central Police University has a longer history than does John Jay College – you were founded in 1936 when the Police Academy of the Ministry of the Interior was merged with the Chechiang Provincial Police School to establish the Central Police College. Perhaps the most critical date in the evolution of the Central Police University was the year 1957. The police school had been closed in 1950, then reopened in 1954, and then, in 1957, with decisions by the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Education, the police school was expanded to a four-year college. As I read your history, it was this decision that provided the academic foundation upon which you have built a first class university.

Now note the striking similarities in the John Jay story. In 1964, seven years later following the decision to expand your college to a four-year institution, John Jay College was created as a four-year college, sponsored by the City University of New York. Our first classes were offered in the Police Academy of the New York City Police Department. Our first students were all police officers who were returning to the classroom to secure their college degrees. In fact, the first name of our college was the College of Police Sciences, before we decided to name the institution after John Jay, a prominent New Yorker who was a key leader of our revolution against the British and the first Chief Justice of our Supreme Court.

We also trace our founding to a period of unrest in our country, just as your college had to survive the upheaval associated with your civil war. During a period of riots and civil disturbances in the mid-1960s in the US, several national commissions were formed to examine the reasons for this unrest. They all recommended that the universities of our country should provide strong educational opportunities for our police officers. The idea reflected a profound insight: an educated police officer is a better police officer. So, in this environment John Jay College was born.

There are other similarities that are equally striking. You expanded to offer masters degrees in the 1970s; we did the same. You offered a PhD program in your graduate school in 1994; we first accepted PhD students in our criminal justice doctoral program in 1980 and added a doctoral program in forensic psychology in 2004. Your college was closed in 1950; ours barely survived a plan to close it in 1976. Both John Jay College and the Central Police University engage with practitioners, offer in-service programs for policy professionals, build international partnerships, stress the importance of scholarly research and host international research conferences.

So, Dr. Henry Lee was right. We share similar history; we have similar missions; and we can have a shared future of collaboration and partnership.

Let me now turn to the main topic of my presentation today – the topic of police professionalism. I have spent many years throughout my professional career focusing on the role of the police in our society. For six years I served as legal advisor to the New York City Police Department, working under four different Police Commissioners during a time when the NYPD was combating a rapid rise in crime and implementing the concept of community policing. For six years as Director of the National Institute of Justice I was responsible for

overseeing the research agenda on the Clinton Administration's national initiative to promote community policing and respond to the epidemic of violence that was sweeping the country. Since then I have continued to work with police departments through the National Network for Safe Communities, a program at John Jay College that brings together seventy cities to help their police departments implement more effective responses to crime. Finally, I was honored to serve as a member of the Executive Session on Policing and Public Safety at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

I mention these points of engagement with policing issues to make a simple point: in the United States, and I suspect around the world, the policing profession has been under enormous strain as our societies have experienced rapid change and shifting political expectations. In the American context, the police had to adapt to a time of sharp increases in violence, first in the 1960s, then again in the mid-1980s as crack cocaine exploded in our inner cities. The role of the police has been criticized from a variety of perspectives. The police in America have been held to account for tensions between law enforcement and communities comprised of racial minorities, for the police role in political surveillance, for failure to reduce crime, and for poor responses to the needs of crime victims.

This is one reason why so many scholars and experts – and I include myself here – believe that a proper understanding of the role of the police is so critical to the future of our societies. We believe the police stand at the complex and contentious intersection between the people, the state, and the strong societal currents that are shaping modern history. Allow me to state this observation in a different way: I believe strongly that if we can develop a modern, professional police function – one that supports respectful relationships between the state and the citizen and promotes safe and healthy communities – then we will have a better chance of securing a bright future for our society.

I was privileged to be invited to serve on the Executive Session at the Kennedy School at Harvard. The Executive Session was comprised of a group of two dozen scholars and police leaders who met twice a year over three years to discuss ideas about the future of policing. At one point in our discussions, Professor Christopher Stone¹ and I led a discussion about the concept of “professionalism” in policing. We argued that it was important for the police to develop a set of values, or guideposts, which would shape the evolution of police agencies as they faced the challenges of a rapidly changing world. We thought that these values were universal, not limited to policing in America. Today I would like to share with you the critical components of the concept that Professor Stone and I developed which we titled, in a paper published by Harvard and the National Institute of Justice, “Toward a New Professionalism in Policing.”² I look forward to your reactions to our ideas.

In our article we posited that there were four building blocks – four pillars – of the “new professionalism” in policing. These are the values of accountability, legitimacy, innovation and

¹ At the time, Christopher Stone was the Daniel and Florence Guggenheim Professor of the Practice of Criminal Justice at the Kennedy School of Government, and the leader of the Executive Session on Policing and Public Safety. He had previously served as President of the Vera Institute of Justice in New York City for several years and played an integral role in police reform projects in the U.S. and in countries around the world, including Brazil, South Africa, Chile, and France. He is now the President of the Open Society Foundations.

² For all subsequent information given here, please refer to the original Kennedy School publication: Christopher Stone, Jeremy Travis, *Toward a New Professionalism in Policing* (Harvard: Harvard Kennedy School of Government, 2011).

national coherence. To introduce these concepts, please allow me to quote from the introductory paragraph of our article:

Across the United States, police organizations are striving for a new professionalism. Their leaders are committing themselves to stricter *accountability* for both their effectiveness and their conduct while they seek to increase their *legitimacy* in the eyes of those they police and to encourage continuous *innovation* in police practices. The traffic in these ideas, policies and practices is now so vigorous across the nation that it suggests a fourth element of this new professionalism: its *national coherence*. These four principles – accountability, legitimacy, innovation and coherence – are not new in themselves, but together they provide an account of developments in policing during the last 20 years that distinguished the policing of the present era from that of 30, 50 or 100 years ago.

Let us now spend some time understanding each of these principles in greater detail. Again, I am very eager to know whether these principles resonate with your experience in policing in Taiwan.

Accountability

In our view, a police agency that aspires to be viewed as “professional” must accept an obligation to be held accountable for its actions. This notion of accountability had many dimensions. We are very familiar with the concept of vertical accountability up the chain of command. Police agencies have instilled in their members a deep respect for authority and for the role of commanders in making tactical, strategic and policy decisions about the deployment of resources and the role of the police in carrying out the core mission of the police.

But in our view of the “new professionalism” we have observed new dimensions of the concept of accountability. In many American cities, the government has created new forms of external, vertical accountability. Police departments are now accountable for their actions to legislators, courts, civilian review boards, inspectors general, independent monitors and government auditors. Police departments are typically uncomfortable with these relationships, but we view these developments as very positive. They reflect a deeper understanding that in the modern era the police cannot act alone and will be most effective – most professional – when they recognize the importance and the positive value of these external forms of oversight.

Finally, when we write about accountability, we also envision a broader meaning of the term. Ultimately, in our view, the police must view themselves as accountable to the public – to the communities they serve, the citizens who come to them for assistance, the victims of crime who call the police in a time of crisis, the criminal suspects they investigate, arrest and detain, and to the larger public that looks to them as impartial and trusted enforcers of the law. This notion of accountability is perhaps the most difficult for police to incorporate into their daily operations, but it is also the most powerful force for the evolution of a modern approach to policing. Only by inculcating a strong ethic of accountability to the public will the police build the trust and confidence of the public, attributes which are indispensable to the work of the police.

Legitimacy

One of the most influential concepts in American policing – indeed around the world – is the concept of “community policing.” There are many definitions of “community policing” but one common element to all definitions is that the police should strive to do their work with the active engagement of, and indeed the consent of, the community they serve. This idea is embodied in the principle of “legitimacy” which is now an integral part of the police reform discussion in the United States.

When Professor Stone and I identified “legitimacy” as one of the four pillars of the New Professionalism in policing in our article, we had reminded our readers that the “[p]olice receive their authority from the state and the law, but they also earn it from the public in each and every interaction.” This is true in every legal system, every culture, and every nation. The idea that the police should “earn” their authority in every interaction with the public is not always an easy concept for police to embrace. But we have been impressed with the ways this concept has emerged as one of the key building blocks for modern policing. This is particularly true for those police departments that have taken the philosophy of community policing seriously as a framework for reforming their operations.

Please allow me to tell a short story that illustrates the point. Nearly thirty years ago, in the mid-1980s, I was working as Special Counsel to the New York City Police Commissioner, a visionary leader named Benjamin Ward. He inaugurated the NYPD transition to community policing by launching a pilot program in one neighborhood in Brooklyn. The first step in this process was to make special assignments for ten police officers, each of whom would be responsible for a ten-square block area in a police precinct. Their specific assignment was to go to the homes and businesses of their area to ask the residents simple questions – what are the crime problems facing the neighborhood? How can we work together to address those problems? In every neighborhood, these officers had the same experience: someone would call the police to say that there was someone at their door impersonating a police officer! The police had become so far removed from a constructive and trusting relationship with the citizens that the citizens could not believe the police had come to offer their assistance. To use the language of the Stone-Travis article, the police had lost their “legitimacy” – they had lost the trust of the public. Looking forward, in our view, a professional police agency is one that works diligently, in every interaction, to build that sense of legitimacy.

Innovation

The third pillar of the new police professionalism is a commitment to innovation. We believe strongly in the concept of a “learning organization,” by which we mean a police agency that is continually engaged in self-assessment and self-improvement. We also note that there is an important role for empirical research in this aspect of the new professionalism. Indeed, in the American context, some of the most important innovations in policing can be traced to research conducted by scholars based in universities, or independent agencies committed to the improvement of policing such as the Police Foundation or the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) in Washington, DC, or in some cases by analysts in police agencies themselves. Breaking with a traditional culture in which the police were suspicious about the involvement of researchers in examining the policies and practices of the police, there is now much more

openness to the idea of experimentation, innovation and objective examination of the effectiveness of the way the police carry out their mission.

To give you a sense of the power of research-based innovation, allow me to cite a few examples of the impact of some of the landmark studies I have in mind. Based on these studies, police in the U.S. have embraced new approaches to deployment of police as a response to calls for assistance, domestic violence, drug markets, violence among gang or groups, assignment of officers to foot patrol, “hot spots” where crime is concentrated, the use of deadly force, the conduct of investigations using eyewitnesses, policies on how best to secure confessions, among other policies. In short, these studies have resonated through the world of ideas about policing in the US, and beyond. But the larger point is that these successes should point the way to a more robust focus on the processes of innovation and the involvement of the research community in supporting police reforms.

You will not be surprised if I make a related observation at this point in my talk. The statement that innovation is a pillar of the new professionalism also implies a role for universities such as the Central Police University and John Jay College. Because we are so deeply involved in the preparation of students who become police officers and police leaders, because our professors are committed to scholarship that examines critical police functions, and because we provide high level training and professional development courses for police executives, we have a special responsibility to support this dimension of the evolution toward professionalism in policing in our countries.

National Coherence

The fourth pillar of the new professionalism is “national coherence.” This principle may make more sense in an American context than it does here in Taiwan, but I would welcome your observations on this point. Professor Stone and I believed it was important that all across our country policing should share some fundamental values. We believe that true professionalism would mean that a police department anywhere in the fifty United States would be equally engaged in promoting accountability, securing legitimacy and supporting innovation. We hoped that police agencies anywhere in our country would follow the research on “best practice” and would discard old policies once they had been shown to be ineffective.

In the American context, the struggle for this level of “national coherence” is complicated. Our systems of law enforcement are highly decentralized. We have well over 18,000 separate police agencies across the United States. Although they must all follow the law and adopt practices consistent with our Constitution, we recognize that the federal government has very little leverage to demand compliance with national standards. So, when we wrote about national coherence, we are responding to this challenging American environment and noting that the policy discussions about effective policing in our country were increasingly national conversations. So our description of this fourth principle was both a hope and an assessment of the current policy discussion.

I would welcome your observations about the goal of “national coherence” in the context of Taiwan. I suspect there are significant differences from the American reality, but I would also

not be surprised to learn that you face the same challenges of securing consistency in core practices across the country.

So I have sketched out a framework for thinking about the evolution toward a “new professionalism in policing” that is built on these four pillars of accountability, legitimacy, innovation and national coherence. Christopher Stone and I posited this model as a hypothesis, based in part on our own experiences and our research, but also recognizing that our model might not fit neatly with a variety of different contexts, both in our country and in other countries.

I welcome your question and comments. And I thank you again for this opportunity to speak with you, to learn from you, and to take this first important step in building a new partnership between the Central Police University and John Jay College of Criminal Justice. As Dr. Henry Lee predicted, the future for collaboration between our two universities on these important questions – including the future of police professionalism – is very bright indeed.