Introduction

Questions about a police shooting interrupted our regularly scheduled community-police meeting, whose agenda was organized around preparing for the twentieth anniversary of the 1992 Rodney King Uprisings. A day earlier, Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) officers had shot and killed an Arab American teenager they said was driving into oncoming traffic on the 101 freeway (Curwen and Blankstein 2012).1 His killing came just two months after George Zimmerman, the self-appointed block club captain of a Sanford, Florida, neighborhood, stalked, shot, and killed a Black teenager named Trayvon Martin, sparking what would become the international Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement.

We began observing monthly community-police meetings at LAPD’s Lakeside Station in South LA four years prior to these incidents. Community-Police Advisory Board (CPAB) meetings are the clearest example of community-police engagement that arose from the ashes of the 1992 LA uprising. Yet, given the intervening decades, neither of us expected that police brutality, particularly police killings, would again become front-page news when we began this research.

Thirty or more mostly elderly and middle-aged Black attendees, including as well a few Whites, Latin@s, and Asians, crowded around a square arrangement of tables in the Lakeside community room. The meeting chair, Captain Albert Himura, called the meeting to order, after which several residents shot up their hands to question the merits of police action. The group was animated, angry that Sanford police allowed a killer to walk free that night. Longtime attendee Nicole Williams claimed this questionable action reflected other problems, such as retaliation from police if people stand up for their rights: “They see the police as a gang,” she said, referring to young people in the neighborhood. “If I turn [an abusive officer] in, his partner’s gonna get me.”

The Captain and several others pushed back. Captain Himura dismissed the problem out of hand: “Have them bring this to my attention,”
he said. “Or have them bring it to you and you bring it to my attention.” Every police car was equipped with a mic and a camera. “Ninety-five percent of the time,” he said, the tape vindicated his officers. But he was “absolutely” willing to “discipline his officers,” particularly now that cameras had become ubiquitous. Several residents, including Vera Fisher, the civilian co-chair, were righteously indignant on behalf of police and dismissed the rallies and protests as underattended. Ms. Williams conceded that the young people she knows through her after-school police partnership program said they’ve noticed a difference in LAPD.

The sole Latin@ attendee was a first-timer named Enrique Alves. “Our justice system says Zimmerman’s guilty until proven innocent,” he said, stumbling over his words, “I mean, innocent until proven guilty.” People nodded, ignoring the slipup but also his point. It seemed to regalvanize Himura however: “If people want to march, I’ll facilitate it,” he informed the group. They would have to let him know in advance though, or else a bunch of young people in hoodies might show up and his officers would think “It’s a gang!”

A middle-aged Black woman raised her hand and cautiously noted that she sometimes wears a hoodie: “People do get profiled.” She suggested that officers might be more successful if they were less intimidating. Right on cue, this prompted Williams to digress on “black-on-black violence.” “There’s no justice for them,” she said heatedly, referring to victims, “and they’re right here in our community.” She argued that the homicide rate is rising in Lakeside and that only residents can keep their community safe. “The police don’t live here.”

Gerry Torrance’s hand had been up forever, even while people jumped into the discussion right and left without waiting for Himura’s recognition. He and several of the less excitable members were silently exchanging glances about this, while Gerry configured his raised hand entertainingly into a gun, a peace sign, and a radio antenna while waiting to speak. Once recognized, he began speaking slowly and deliberately: “I was here for the 1992 riots. And I was here for the 1965 riots as well. We need to go back . . . and find those people, find people that said good things about LAPD. Nothing came about from ’65 or ’92 . . . they [those involved in the violence] just went back into their houses.” He continued, arguing that the fallout from the uprisings was a wasted
opportunity—“All youth know now is to split!”—punctuating his remarks by slapping his hands past each other quickly and loudly.

Officers’ responses to Gerry dovetailed. Captain Himura responded first: Lakeside needs to develop press contacts. He volunteered Mrs. Kwon, who had been very quiet, and her circle of Korean grocers as well as Nicole Williams and Gerry Torrance to attend a media event on April 29 at the epicenter of the 1992 violence. They were to talk about peace, improvements in safety in the intervening years, and how Lakeside didn’t want to go back to “the way it was.” “We’re not going back,” Williams affirmed sharply.

Officer Gus Fernandez, a community policing officer, asserted that the media were “poking around,” trying to capture discontentment surrounding the anniversary. He asked those who wanted to relate a positive message about police to find him and he’d put them in touch with the media. The media was out there looking for confrontation, he said, and it isn’t there. Almost as an afterthought he added: “It really had nothing to do with the acquittal of the officers anyway—mostly it was Damian Williams drunk out of his mind.”

Interactions like these, between residents like Williams and Torrance, officers like Fernandez, and police administrators like Himura, help disclose the nature of community-police partnerships. In this example, the Captain positioned himself as the concerned patriarch, directing the conversation, channeling complaints, and finally organizing an event for the purposes of legitimizing LAPD’s post-uprising efforts. Himura lauded Lakeside’s complaint process, deflecting concerns and gesturing at technology as objective evidence of police trustworthiness. The disciplinary process was sound, he argued, because of his vigilance regarding discipline, while a breath later he admitted to finding the vast majority of civilian complaints baseless. Fernandez, a community policing officer known as a Senior Lead Officer (SLO; pronounced “slow”), was unusually trusted and empowered by the top brass. He extended the official messaging on police integrity by revising the historical record: one rebellious Black man, drunk and out of control, stirred up rioting for its own sake in 1992. The subtext for Fernandez was that there are few lessons to be learned from drunk and disorderly residents. The message of LAPD’s trustworthiness and transparency advanced by
Fernandez and Himura was the same message disseminated at the anniversary media event ultimately orchestrated through Himura.

Community voices like those of Gerry Torrance and Nicole Williams reveal complex social dynamics. Torrance, a lifelong South LA resident, lived in the neighborhood where the uprisings broke out. He had grandchildren in rival gangs (“I don’t give a shit, you are still relatives”) and has made pointed comments about police use of racial profiling. While Torrance sometimes seemed to doubt LAPD’s post-1992 changes, he also deferred to police and spread responsibility to community youth. Like Williams, who ran the Mission: Responsibility after-school program for disadvantaged youth, Torrance remained invested in groups like CPAB while accepting certain realities about the impact of police on his community. Likewise, Williams’s plea for the community to address “black-on-black violence” seemed less a call for more aggressive policing than an expression of beleaguered feelings and a defiant hopefulness regarding the potential of partnerships like CPAB. This set of residents believed in their own power as well as the idea that they should not have to manage such problems on their own. As tax-paying residents, they felt reasonably entitled to safety, and that, in part, motivated their engagement. Still, as the comment about hoodies and other subtext suggest, attendees were caught in a catch-22, and the slice of residents involved in CPAB ran the gamut from police enthusiasts to mild skeptics.

Finally, the sidelining of Enrique Alves hints at questions of community belonging. Latin@ voices generally were marginalized within the official English CPAB meetings. The less official community-police meetings for Spanish speakers, held separately on different nights and with different goals, were called (sometimes) Hispanic Outreach (HO). There was little crossover between HO and CPAB meetings. CPAB was not welcoming to all Black residents either—although Himura had connections with gang leaders and interventionists, he did not encourage either group to attend. Less controversial groups than gangs fared poorly in CPAB, and one need not imagine the skepticism or even hostility that groups like BLM and LA’s Coalition Against Police Abuse (CAPA) might engender.

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LAPD holds hundreds of CPAB and other community-police meetings every year, and such efforts are ubiquitous in police stations, community
centers, high schools, churches, and other public spaces around the country. The city of LA, the state of California, and the federal government have spent millions of dollars on community-based initiatives since the 1940s as the centerpiece of the police reform agenda. The federal government has invested millions more establishing community-based policing as a national model for police reform over the last forty years, now spearheaded by the Community-Oriented Policing Services (COPS) office chartered by the Clinton administration (Escobar 1999; Murakawa 2014; Sides 2003; J. Simon 2007). Departments across the country claim to be employing community-based strategies on a regular basis. US soldiers have also deployed community policing strategies abroad, referring to them as “counterinsurgency,” while funneling surplus equipment and providing military training to domestic police departments (K. Williams 2011).2 While lawmakers and reformists extol the virtues of community, the United States incarcerates more people and at a higher rate than any other nation in the world by a wide margin (Alexander 2010; J. Simon 2007). This book is an attempt to investigate what, precisely, community policing is and does, in the very place that made it a political buzzword in 1992—South Los Angeles.

We spent five years attending police-sponsored events to understand the inner workings of LAPD’s community policing program in Lakewood Division. At these events we conducted participant observation, speaking with neighborhood residents, criminal justice practitioners, government officials, community activists, and LAPD officers and administrators. We also followed participants to citywide events and meetings in other divisions to better contextualize our findings. The Limits of Community Policing synthesizes hundreds of hours of observations and thousands of pages of fieldnotes, interview transcripts, and internal LAPD documents.

In this book, we address three main points. First, against the common narrative that community policing has democratized policing, we argue rather that the state has used community discourse to justify the expansion of policing initiatives and police power. Working with civilians to control communities is one way that police expand state power. Race “riots” throughout US history have moved communities of color to cry out for better relations with government institutions, even though police are often directly involved; brutality has been a weapon, a cause, and an
outcome of these disturbances. In a race- and class-stratified society, police reinforce divisions and hierarchies. Complaints about police have provoked the contemporary “community policing era,” but community discourse has worked mainly to strengthen criminal justice institutions. Police have deployed ideals about community to create and extend networks of individuals, organizations, and businesses across their territory, silencing antipolice discourse and becoming power brokers over neighborhoods’ apparatuses of governance and social control.

Second, we argue that police governance over the community works to limit civilian power. Police attempt to turn civilians into appendages of the state—their “eyes and ears” on the street, as well as their “mouths” during crises. Such partnerships leave little room for the public’s needs—or their authority. Co-governance becomes an exercise in repurposing community activists to share the responsibility of achieving police institutional goals. The meeting forum invites the public to share complaints, yet officers work hard to negotiate those complaints down to those most enforceable according to police standards. Information flows up to police from community partners, while messages about police integrity are pushed down to community partners. Small acts of resistance to these tactics by aggrieved individuals and groups are normal, but there is little internal avenue for them to coalesce into larger efforts.

Third, disputes about who does and does not count as “community” complicate mobilization. Under the umbrella of such a strangled partnership, internal community conflicts problematize intercommunity collaborations. People do not always consider themselves to be part of the same community just because they share space and can see the behavior of others as a nuisance or a danger that confirms their outsider status. In poor segregated urban neighborhoods already marked for social exclusion, these perceptions are often rooted in dominant racial interpretive frameworks and competition over scarce social and material resources. The promise of changing grim circumstances keeps residents engaged. Yet this engagement does not necessarily heal these divides but can encourage them instead.

Our observations suggest that interventions like CPAB have evolved within a long line of LAPD public relations tools—vehicles through which to showcase “goodwill and optimism,” as SLO Fernandez put it—and widen enforcement capabilities while smothering independent
community power. Contemporary community-based tactics are more similar to those that were implemented throughout the twentieth century than police and community policing scholars typically admit. While racial conflict appears to have improved on the surface, this is part of the community relations strategy. Outside of CPAB meetings, police continue to target neighborhoods of color while maintaining a rhetoric of accountability. Until police departments are forced to adapt directly to the needs of communities of color, grassroots organizations will lead initiatives that push for these changes. Below, we address these points in greater depth.

The Origins of Community Policing

Traditionally, criminological narratives position community policing as the third era in the evolution of US policing. In the “parochial” or “political” era, police were the direct tool of local politicians to acquire, maintain, and administer local political power. Police were not independent crime fighters, crime preventers, or public protectors, but rather tightly involved in the affairs of neighborhoods and accountable only to local political bosses (Kelling and Moore 1988; S. Walker and Katz 2002). Pelfry (2000) argues that the well-known New York Tammany Hall political machine perhaps best characterizes policing during this era. Officers corralled neighborhood groups to the polls and intimidated political opponents, as well as providing some limited social welfare services and suppressing or enabling vice depending on their own or their bosses’ discretion. While LAPD’s 1999–2000 Rampart scandal brings to mind very specific images of similar forms of police corruption, policing scholars regard the corruption of the police during the parochial era as epiphenomenal, insofar as officers were simply stewards of a larger politically corrupt system.

Kelling and Moore (1988) indicate that public dissatisfaction with this overall system led to a reform of police beginning in the 1920s. Political campaigns to reform police struggled to gain traction until several high-ranking and well-regarded police administrators took up the mantle. During this second era, which scholars refer to as the “reform” or “professional” era, police retreated from politics. To combat the parochial nature of the job, administrators professionalized policing, which involved
not only insulating departments from the vulgarities of politics and providing job security for officers, but also outfitting departments with organizational technologies, such as patrol cars, radios, 911 systems, and standardized weaponry. Policing became less about order maintenance or political patronage and more strictly about reacting to crime; police training came to reflect this. Success became a matter of performance measurement instead of elections, orienting around criteria such as 911 response times and arrests. As one of our LAPD administrators, paraphrasing Kelling and Moore (1988), put it, the archetypical officer put forth the “just the facts, ma’am” detachment of Dragnet’s Joe Friday.

Collective acts of violence throughout the last century highlight how many problems in US policing persisted despite (or perhaps because of) attempts at professionalization. The twentieth century in the United States had more mass urban violence than any other period in history (Abu-Lughod 2007). The first half of the century can be characterized by massive outbreaks of White mob violence against Blacks and Mexicans, which mainly occurred in the quickly integrating northern and southwestern regions of the country (Bell 2013; Delgado 2009). In response to the larger problem of White supremacy, of which White mob violence was a key component, civil rights groups pressed the federal government to respond as they asserted their rights to full citizenship (Murakawa 2014). The relative intransigence of the White political establishment produced protest, and the rage of exploited Black and Brown communities exploded into a different wave of collective violence between the 1960s and 1970s. In contrast with White riots, where the actors were in many ways direct extensions of the White political establishment, the second wave produced political panic and eventually federal and state-level organized commissions calling for government institutions to build closer ties with minority communities (Abu-Lughod 2007).

Police were at the center of all these explosions of violence. Early in the last century, police sanctioned, aided, and facilitated White mob violence, some of which police officers themselves led. Largely White police forces tended not to be progressive bastions protecting the rights and bodies of communities of color, but rather stood in opposition to civil rights, maintaining a strict color line (Bell 2013; Sides 2003). Jim Crow, after all, was the law to be enforced, particularly for Blacks in the South and Latin@s in the Southwest, but segregationist policies
underwrote urban development in the rest of the country as well. As civil rights legislation took hold in cities across the country and communities began integrating, White civilians regularly called police to interfere and disrupt these efforts with violent confrontations. Compared with the relative dearth of municipal services such as water, sanitation, education, and health, local police forces were built up and specifically began concentrating on enforcement in communities of color (Escobar 1999; Sides 2003). Incidents of police brutality and misconduct were high going into the 1960s, as was racially disparate treatment by the criminal justice system more broadly (Mirandé 1987; Sides 2003).

External oversight agencies throughout the twentieth century were largely responsible for forcing police to adopt reforms in what Walker and Bumphus (1992) call the “scandal and reform” process. Historically, a pattern emerged: Police engaged in some pattern or practice of misconduct or abuse that reached a boiling point, and the people responded with collective acts of violence. Soon after these events, the state organized a “blue ribbon” or “riot” commission to examine the causes of the outbreak. The formation of the Christopher Commission following the Rodney King beating incident, as we discuss in Chapter 1, remains perhaps the preeminent example of reforms brought on as a result of police misconduct in modern US policing. Walker and Bumphus (1992) explain that of all the various external oversight mechanisms, these commissions have the greatest degree of independence from the department. They typically (although not always) employ nonsworn, civilian staff to engage in fact-finding investigations, draft a report, and make disciplinary and policy recommendations.

Several reports found that a “siege mentality” had developed in some departments that produced violent and antagonistic relationships with the residents of the neighborhoods most subject to coercive policing practices (Greene 2000a; Pelfry 2000). As Kelling and Moore (1988, 8) put it:

[D]espite attempts by police departments to create equitable police allocation systems and to provide impartial policing to all citizens, many minority citizens, especially blacks during the 1960’s and 1970’s, did not perceive their treatment as equitable or adequate. They protested not only police mistreatment, but lack of treatment—inadequate or insufficient
services—as well. . . [C]ivil rights and antiwar movements challenged police. This challenge took several forms. The legitimacy of police was questioned: students resisted police, minorities rioted against them, and the public, observing police via live television for the first time, questioned their tactics. Moreover, despite police attempts to upgrade personnel through improved recruitment, training, and supervision, minorities and then women insisted that they had to be adequately represented in policing if police were to be legitimate.

From the perspective of these scholars, although professionalization was intended to morph policing into a respected occupation and legitimate the exercise of state power, the result was, frustratingly, a hardening of ungrateful attitudes—particularly residents in Black and Latin@ neighborhoods—toward police. This had some limited impact on White communities as well—“the public” in Kelling and Moore’s formulation above was made distinct from “students” and “minorities”—and by the end of the 1970s, public dissatisfaction led to the advent of the “community policing” era (Greene and Pelfry 1997).

Criminal justice scholars argue that the community policing movement, although widely variegated in practice, had a core intent to engage the local community and bridge social distance between police and residents (C. C. Johnson and Roth 2003). Beginning in the mid-1980s, a flurry of articles emerged that defined programmatic, philosophical, and tactical elements, and were meant to institutionalize police-community engagement (Bayley 1986; Cordner 1995; Goldstein 1987; Morgan 1985; Skolnick and Bayley 1988). One element involved a visible, accessible, and caring police presence in the community. Block clubs, neighborhood watch groups, and community meetings organized by or with police were a centerpiece to this strategy. Scholars encouraged police patrols to enhance nonemergency service, intervening independently of emergency radio dispatch. Such patrols, particularly on foot and bike, were intended to improve communication and prevent crime, while mini-stations and mobile substations, liaisons with other public institutions, and “house calls” to area businesses and residences were also encouraged. Central to these deployments was enhanced flexibility and ability for officers to solve community problems directly and holistically rather than just responding to atomized 911 calls “on the queue.”
Scholars recommended decentralizing the police command structure to empower individual officers to engage neighborhood problems and follow through over the long term, rather than using performance measures such as arrest or citation quotas.

Finally, scholars stressed the idea of increased police accountability to the public. Rather than self-assessments or periodic political purges, community policing required a dialogue with the policed. As a carrot to untrusting residents, policing began to incorporate ideas about “procedural justice” (Sunshine and Tyler 2003; Tyler 1990)—that is, opportunities for residents to participate in the policing project directly and democratically. Tyler (1990) and his colleagues argue that public perceptions of legitimacy increase when people feel they have been treated with respect and can voice their opinions about an event or interaction. When civilians trust the police, they are more likely to obey the law, be respectful and cooperative, accept proceedings, such as an arrest, and call the police in the future (Walker and Archbold 2014). Research suggests that civilians, in other words, are more concerned with having their day in court than with the outcomes they receive.

Police evolution from a parochial to a professional to a (now) community-engaged institution has become close to disciplinary gospel. Yet the institution of US policing is embedded within its own set of political and historical contexts and operates according to certain logics that are lost in such a narrative. While we take these up specifically relating to LA in Chapter 1, we rehearse the argument here. Policing has become the hard edge of executive power, gradually absorbing its methods and subjects from the military, militias, and slave patrols as the United States established itself as a nation that encouraged enslavement, expanded its borders at the expense of native populations, and became a powerhouse of capitalist production (Hadden 2003; Mirandé 1987; Rousey 1996; K. Williams 2007). To imagine a reverse scenario, policing’s priorities have never been to protect the enslaved from their enslavers, native and Mexican land from Anglo prospectors, or the working class from exploitation.

In a basic sense, police are chartered to maintain order. Because social progress—pushing back against oppression—is usually somewhat disorderly, “order” tends to maintain the existing social and political investments in capitalism and White supremacy. As Reiman (1979) expresses
it, police focus closely on the conduct of the “dangerous classes,” while mainly ignoring the crimes of the powerful. While officers’ daily tasks are more mundane than this suggests and they can individually effect genuine protection, this is not the cornerstone upon which their authority rests.

To maintain order, police must have the latitude to identify threat. When charged with guarding against unspecified threat, proscribing the conduct of state agents is counterproductive. Quoting Supreme Court Justice Samuel Miller, Wagner (2009) argues that the power of police as protector is essentially infinite: “The [police] power is, and must be from its very nature, incapable of any very exact definition or limitation” (6). The lurking danger identified by Wagner is the threat of race, but the legal architecture established as a result has its echo in class, anti-Muslim, and other antiprogressive suppression (Mirandé 1987; Sexton 2010; S. Smith 2006; K. Williams 2007). The result of this is police immunity from public accountability at the systemic level as well as the level of the line officer.

Executive agencies have always crafted internal policies within their broad mandates. Known as administrative law, such policies can be curtailed by judicial review, yet the deference to the police continues here as well. Alexander (2010) has documented the series of court cases that demonstrate how police departments craft their own policies divorced from any dialogue with the law or the citizenry. Due to the publicization of various abuses, the US Justice Department and federal courts have required a number of local departments to submit to consent decrees. Although this oversight imposes a variety of rules, enforcement evaporates as soon as federal oversight ends. Civilian oversight boards, when established, tend to rubberstamp police procedures and are often resisted by officers (Human Rights Watch 1998; Skolnick and Fyfe 1993). Police chiefs and federal oversight come and go, but by and large police agencies retain their autonomy.

Co-opting the Community

In the community policing era, ideals regarding community, democracy, and accountability quickly become the talking points for police reform. What Vitale (2017) calls the “liberal approach” to police reform
tends to emphasize individual “bad apples” acting within an otherwise sound organizational structure. The current crisis in policing has, however, expanded the focus from the individual to the organization, while deploying the same tools to address the problem. In Vitale’s words:

If entire police departments are discriminatory, abusive, or unprofessional, then [the liberal approach] advocates efforts to stamp out bias and bad practices through training, changes in leadership, and a variety of oversight mechanisms until legitimacy is reestablished. They argue that racist and brutal cops can be purged from the profession and an unbiased system of law enforcement reestablished in the interest of the whole of society. They want police to be better trained, more accountable, and less brutal and racist—laudable goals, but they leave intact the basic function of the police which has never been about public safety or crime control. (2017, 33)

Beyond individualistic approaches of training and purging bad apples, the liberal approach also focuses on institutional measures, such as community policing. Such reforms embrace police organizations, again, as fundamentally sound, requiring only internal tweaks to correct occasional injustices and restore police legitimacy. Criminologists have traditionally encouraged this perspective, treating police as an organ of the state that is consistently sensitive and responsive to changing community needs. Policing, in this view, is constantly reshaping and adjusting itself to align with what the public wants with respect to police service.

A key example of these assumptions of the liberal paradigm is the final report of former President Barack Obama’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing (2015). Convened in response to the flood of national coverage on police killings of young Black people and the resulting urban rebellions, the Task Force produced a document calling for increased education, training, and technology for officers, but also the institutional rebuilding of trust, legitimacy, and oversight between police and community. It is far from clear that such a relationship has cooperative roots to which it should return, however. Yet the answer to questions involving racism and police brutality, the Task Force hints, is community policing—largely the same sets of reforms that were ubiquitous by the 1990s.
During the civil rights era, federal lawmakers similarly moved to re-inforce police legitimacy in ways they argued would benefit marginalized communities. The Safe Streets Act of 1968 defined local crime as a problem for federal intervention. Unlike civil rights legislation, Safe Streets targeted Black and Brown subversion rather than White aggression, committing four hundred million dollars to remake local police, courts, and correctional systems. Safe Streets, built on the fear of Black protest, dictated the adoption of community-oriented approaches, such as “team policing”; lowered requirements for eavesdropping and wiretapping warrants; and facilitated the creation of federal and local crime control partnerships. Through Safe Streets, the federal government began auctioning off military equipment and integrating military tactics and personnel into local agencies (Balko 2013; Domanick 2016; Kraska 2007). Community integration on the one hand, militarization on the other.

Community governance scholars point out that state-civilian collaborations, intended to improve the state’s legitimacy, often result in the expansion of its enforcement and regulatory capacities (Foucault 2010; Rose 1996; Vitale 2017; Wacquant 2009). The genesis of this approach can be found in the twin discussions of crime and protest during the civil rights era. When Black and Brown protesters took to the streets to demand their rights as Americans—at the same time as antiwar, socialist, and feminist protesters who were often White rose up—government at all levels struggled with how to react, ultimately (and grudgingly) granting new federal civil protections against discrimination. The seeds of a new era of social control were planted. Black protesters were first framed as schizophrenic (Metzl 2011); after it became clear that pathologizing individuals was insufficient, protest was rearticulated as criminal activity. Community demands could be engaged in a process of endless dialogue, while militants became enemies of the state. Out of this crucible came new strategies: the creation of a police state in the poor communities of color and the turn to community partnerships to help manage it.

At the same time as criminal justice scholars were defining the community policing canon, proponents of the War on Drugs and tough-on-crime politics were justifying the need for saturation policing and surveillance. The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 was one response, extending the Safe Streets legacy of federal support for strengthening local law enforcement capacities. The act
provided funding to put one hundred thousand more cops on the street, toughened sentencing laws, enshrined a host of new criminal offenses, and allocated nine billion dollars for prison construction (J. Simon 2007; US Department of Justice 1994; US Government Accountability Office 2005). The 1994 Crime Bill also established the federal COPS office, which has provided thirty billion dollars to local jurisdictions to support community policing, an undisclosed amount of which almost certainly went to militarization efforts (Balko 2013). In addition to providing a militarized response to drugs within poor communities of color, these laws also helped to concretize the new face of community under which law enforcement was to operate. This has become a standard—police departments now risk losing legitimacy if they do not claim to practice at least some sort of community-oriented approach (Walker and Katz 2002). Yet under this mandate police have also incorporated a drastic turn to saturation patrols, intrusive surveillance, and criminalization in Black and Brown communities (Stuart 2016; Wacquant 2009). Both community policing and mass incarceration have attracted an impressive number of commentators, but are seldom in the same conversation (but see Vitale 2017); the extent to which these trends move together and support one another has been largely neglected.

What we do know about mass incarceration, however, is that it plays a significant role in maintaining contemporary racial hierarchies. Richie (2012, 3), for instance, argues for a broader concept, the “prison nation,” that expands prison logics of exclusion society-wide: “A prison nation refers to the dimensions of civil society that use the power of law, public policy, and institutional practices in strategic ways to advance hegemonic values and to overpower efforts by individuals and groups that challenge the status quo. . . . A prison nation depends on the ability of leaders to create fear (of terrorists or health reform); to identify scapegoats (like immigrants or feminists); and to reclassify people as enemies of a stable society (such as prisoners, activists, hip-hop artists).” It is not just the expansion of prisons that is the concern, but rather the expansion of all of the enabling processes that leverage community resources—surveillance, spatial regulation, broken windows policing, and the capitalization of urban space. At a fundamental level, the prison nation relies upon governmental and civilian collaborations to identify ever-growing numbers of enemy outsiders who must be contained, controlled, and removed from the community.
The Eyes, Ears, and Mouths

Governmentality scholars refer to the processes by which civilians adopt state-centered sensibilities and collaborate within state-sponsored institutions as the “responsibilization” of the citizenry (Garland 2001; Herbert 2006; Rose 1996). Such institutions reeducate the public to govern themselves according to state-oriented logics. Under public pressure, police agencies began admitting their failings, alluding to the many constraints upon the policing institution that limit its capacity to fight crime. From there, policy makers began asserting that “crime control is beyond the state” (Garland 2001, 123). The final turn institutionalized community-based programs that connected nonstate actors to formal governmental processes. Community policing is a prime example.

Community-based policing initiatives are intended to integrate residents of police-controlled territory into various police projects. Community-police meetings are an ubiquitous tactic, operated either by the department or precinct directly or by a civilian review board. In the federal COPS survey of community policing practices, Johnson and Roth (2003) report that by 2000 more than 93 percent of large agencies and over 55 percent of small municipal/county agencies reported holding regular community meetings; over 56 percent and nearly 21 percent of the same agencies reported the presence of “citizen action/advisory boards.” They also note that the field teams sent by COPS to observe “community-policing practices,” including meetings and community boards, found that these terms “turned out to have wide ranges of meanings in actual practice” (C. C. Johnson and Roth 2003, 5–3). Federal money may have enabled the spread of community policing, but it did not ensure its standardization—a concern or a feature, depending on one’s perspective.

Although the promise of community partnership envisions democratic and cogovernance styles of community partnership, police afford themselves considerable latitude in constructing such partnerships, while civilian power is much more contingent (Goldstein 1987; Morgan 1985; Skolnick and Bayley 1988). One style is to create for civilians the role of police “eyes and ears.” Skogan and Hartnett (1997, 134) evaluated community meetings in Chicago, where police informed residents of the
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best collaborative practices: ‘A sergeant described the [Chicago community policing program] to residents by telling them, ‘You’re the eyes and ears... But we do the need the whole body. We are the hand and feet. We are the ones who chase and arrest them. ’... As another sergeant put it, ‘We need your input and information about felons, drug corners. We need you here every month.’” Such a role envisions community members as an extension of the police corpus, filling needs for intelligence around which police can form strategy and tactics.

Yet research suggests that resident complaints, one key outcome of the eyes and ears function, do not always result in the enforcement that residents might prefer. At meetings, residents complain about a wide range of community problems from graffiti to drug dealing to violence. Herbert’s (2006) ethnography of police-community meetings in Seattle found that police were more likely to resort to traditional patrolling strategies than community-based strategies when identifying and responding to crime. Officers attending meetings frustrated the public with their slow and inefficient responses to complaints, while some officers avoided meetings altogether. Skogan’s (2006) evaluation of community policing in Chicago found police similarly resistant to mobilizing in response to public request.

In addition to the eyes and ears, police also position civilians as “mouths”: those who will volunteer to partner with police and take back messages of police support to their communities. It is no secret that community policing is often adopted or revamped by departments facing periods of crisis. The effort is seen as crucial to building police legitimacy. In analyzing the parallels between overseas military counterinsurgency and domestic efforts at policing, Williams (2011, 98) identifies the federal Weed and Seed program as comparable to the military strategy of Clear-Hold-Build, outlined in army field manuals: “Create a secure physical and psychological environment. Establish firm government control of the populace and area. Gain the populace’s support.” Weed and Seed similarly involves the “weeding” of gangs and other oppositional groups and “seeding” the area with groups friendly to and cooperative with the state. Community policing uses civilian nonprofits to recruit its own membership groups and uses them to push its messaging back to such nonprofits and then back out onto the streets. Together, the eyes, ears, and mouth functions produce responsibilized
citizens that serve to protect police legitimacy, provide intelligence, and represent police viewpoints to skeptical neighbors.

Responsibilization of residents is always a work in progress, often interrupted by political events or crises precipitated by police themselves such as police killings of residents known as “officer-involved shootings” (OISs). The management of these interruptions can hinge on the success of volunteers’ internalization of their roles. People's feelings about the police vary within any community, so responsibilization can be complicated. Many people in impoverished communities believe that police cause more harm than good, while those who live in constant fear of deportation or criminal profiling often avoid contact with law enforcement altogether (Coutin 2003; Rios 2011). These orientations toward law enforcement not only condition who composes the face of community policing by volunteering to attend meetings and staff initiatives, but also how they will engage once they attend.

Intercommunity Conflict

Communities undergoing rapid social change often experience conflict between the settled and settling populations. Research suggests that investigating the relations between groups—such as rules implicit to a particular neighborhood—can tell us much about the way communities change and engage with both formal and informal social control (Ewick and Silbey 1998; Greenhouse, Yngvesson, and Engel 1994; C. G. Martinez 2016). For instance, Ewick and Silbey (1998) discuss how parking practices in a neighborhood could provoke an informal community response. Neighbors claimed the parking spaces they dug out of the snow by placing chairs in them. A neighbor who moved a chair would violate community rules and would be subject to informal sanction. Similarly, Martinez’s (2016) ethnography shows that rules of racial avoidance are deployed in a transitioning neighborhood in South LA to prevent violence. The violation of such carefully crafted rules can trigger violence between Black and Latin@ residents. Although the characteristics of neighborhoods differ, the nature of localized disputes can reveal the boundaries of social order.

Disputes between Black and Latin@ neighbors over social and material resources are becoming increasingly common (Kun and Pulido
Segregation meant that large urban centers around the country were recognized as Black spaces in previous eras, but these are beginning to Latinize at an accelerating rate (Bonilla-Silva 2004). Negative racial attitudes between these groups emerged within a larger context of White supremacy, such that each group can reproduce pervasive stereotypes emphasizing Black danger or Latin@ illegality (Feagin and Cobas 2014). Conflicts over limited economic opportunities often erupt in the most strained sections of large cities, although there is little reason to believe that Blacks and Latin@s are in direct competition for employment opportunities (Telles, Sawyer, and Rivera-Salgado 2011).

Internal conflicts problematize community governance. Herbert (2005) argues that in a community policing context, the community is a political “trapdoor” that buckles under the weight of the responsibilities police place upon it. From their perspective, police confront a community that is politically ill equipped, disunited, or resistant to police expectations. This reduces the community’s capacity to perform crime control. Studies show that historically bad police-community relations, racial/ethnic diversity, and intragroup conflicts can impede sustained public involvement in community partnerships (Grinc 1994). Language differences can also reinforce existing social cleavages, further entrenching residential disunity (Herbert 2005).

Conflicts occur not only between groups of residents, but also between residents and businesses in yet another dimension of localized conflict. Herbert (2005) shows that White business owners have significant influence over partnership operations in communities of color, which can work against the residential population. He explains that scholars have reason to be skeptical regarding community governance due to concerns that “localized associations will run roughshod over the desires and rights of those less well organized” (2005, 856). The potential threats that new businesses pose to the community become clearest when their interests are at odds, as we discuss in Chapter 4. While many of our study participants welcomed the arrival of new businesses for the promises of improving the local economy, businesses that sold alcohol were thought to potentially amplify existing crime and disorder and were less welcome. Despite this, and given that some businesses directly support LAPD, police advocated for new business franchises.
Studying Police-Community Collaborations in South Los Angeles

Communities of color such as South LA have been the subject of sociological study since W. E. B. Du Bois’s Atlanta School and later the Chicago School produced their first ethnographies around the turn of last century (Morris 2015). Common sense of the time showed neighborhoods with large concentrations of migrants and ethnic and racial minorities, removed from communities of assimilated Whites, to be the natural order, but the closer sociologists have looked, the more they have found invisible hands designing urban life. Much of the public as well as many researchers continue to see poor urban communities as strange, dangerous places where undesirable people live in undesirable conditions and engage in undesirable conduct. When scholars identify neighborhoods like Lakeside as the product of social and economic forces, urban policing is often the point of application by which such forces exert influence. Given its history and LAPD’s prominence, Lakeside is an ideal setting in which to deepen our understanding of the social processes through which police govern communities.

The South Bureau is the largest of the four LAPD bureaus that divide the city of Los Angeles—the others are Central, West, and the Valley. Within these bureaus are twenty-two police divisions or areas (i.e., precincts), each with its own centralized station and distinctive community policing style. The Lakeside Division station, where our fieldwork began, sits on the corner of a heavily trafficked street a full floor higher than the surrounding buildings. Squad cars line the streets around the station and helicopters sometimes land on the roof. Fast-talking young men roam the building’s front steps, handing out bail bond information from their vans plastered with advertising decals, a cutthroat service made necessary by the legal system’s principle of wealth (or credit) for freedom (L. D. Johnson 2015). Through the glass doors of the front entrance is the lobby where two officers peer down from behind a tall desk and direct the two lines of civilians queued in front of them. Pictures of notable police administrators stare down from the wall across from the main desk.

Lakeside, cut out of LA’s geography along census tract borders for easy statistical tracking, is a distressed community. Census numbers during our research placed unemployment at about 40 percent, while about 30
percent of residents lived under the poverty line. Public services were strained as a result and private investment was limited. In 2011, organizers felt that no other facilities were capable of hosting a job fair, so Captain Himura agreed at the last minute to host five hundred job-seeking residents at the station. Schools with some of the nation’s lowest graduation rates sat only a few blocks away. Many structures were in physical disarray—burned out, boarded up, or needing repairs. Secondary streets were lined with single-family, ranch-style homes and two- and three-story apartment complexes. Some homes were freshly painted with manicured lawns down picturesque palm-tree-lined streets, and many were also wrapped in wrought iron and had barred windows. Used tires,
mattresses, clothing, and trash lined many alleyways. Lakeside sometimes served as an informal way station into and out of LA’s Skid Row, and a growing population of homeless people began to shelter there and set up tent cities along the nearby freeway.

South LA’s racial makeup was changing quickly. Popularized in song and film, South LA historically had been a Black community, but the Black population had dropped dramatically since the mid-1980s,

Figures 1.2 and 1.3. A tree-lined street and a helicopter over a house in South LA.
accompanied by a simultaneous rise in the Latin@ population. Blacks fled poverty, police harassment, and gang warfare while also being subject to forcible removal through incarceration. Many moved outside the city, to places like Antelope Valley to the north and San Bernardino to the east (Sides 2003). Fleeing poverty, military repression, and civil war in their homelands around the same time, Central American migrants moved to central city areas like Boyle Heights and Pico Union, as well as Lakeside, sharing space with both long-term and newly arrived Mexican immigrants (Vigil 2002). The few hole-in-the-wall southern-style restaurants that remained competed with new fast-food restaurants and taquerías. Schools began hiring more Spanish-language personnel and organizing events to connect with Latin@ parents. On weeknights, Black kids rode their skateboards in local parks and Latin@ kids played soccer on the tennis courts nearby.

Crime and punishment were interwoven throughout the social fabric. Residents complained of trash dumping and graffiti, car and home burglaries, and physical violence and homicide. They linked much of this to gangs or the homeless. Following a national trend, fear of crime remained high despite historic lows in the actual crime rate (Baumer and Wolff 2014). Despite the relative lows, South Bureau divisions routinely ranked among LA’s highest in terms of property, violent, and particularly gang crime. Although such statistics should be examined skeptically, South LA has the largest concentration of gang members registered in the statewide gang-tracking database. Despite crime levels that rivaled the lows of the early 1960s or those of wealthier, Whiter communities in more crime-prone times, Lakeside’s police presence remained undiminished. Wailing sirens, buzzing helicopters, and the occasional crack of gunfire contributed to the neighborhood soundtrack. Various groups, such as neighborhood associations, civil rights groups, community organizations, and government-run groups, organized public safety initiatives with various goals, but all recognized Los Angeles as hosting one of the most active criminal justice systems in the United States. LA sends more people to state prisons than any other county in California. Most of the people in the system are Black and Brown. Blacks are vastly overrepresented, while Latin@s are by far the most numerous group under formal correctional supervision (Muñiz and McGill 2012). Crime and overincarceration do not have a simple cause-and-effect relationship. Structural
Figures 1.4 and 1.5. Kids playing soccer and the "no soccer" sign.
disruption of this magnitude cannot help but increase crime and poverty, producing physical and mental health challenges, reducing employment and earnings, disrupting families, increasing debt, destabilizing housing, reducing informal social control, and elevating legal cynicism within such neighborhoods (for a review, see D. S. Kirk and Wakefield 2018).

South LA is like segregated areas in other large cities in many respects. Like LA, cities in the Northeast and Midwest were among the largest recipients of Black migrants during the Great Migration from southern states. All developed distinctive segregationist policies restricting Black and Brown life and erupted into “race riots” in the twentieth century. Other US cities too became large industrial centers that began shedding manufacturing jobs in the 1970s, while replacing some with service positions, which accompanied large influxes of Latin@ migrants. Other cities also have hyperactive criminal justice systems and cases of police brutality that have become national symbols (Taylor 2016). While none of these things mean that our findings necessarily are generalizable to all urban US cities, the problems that confront civilians and police on South LA streets are often similar, in kind if not degree. Our observations may deepen future understandings of these common social processes.

This collaborative investigation draws on field data collected between summer 2008 and spring 2013 in one South Los Angeles Division. Armed with notebooks and pens, we began by attending public safety meetings and events at the Lakeside police station. We soon expanded to other specialized public safety forums and neighborhood associations within the division. We observed and participated in community carnivals, emergency preparedness fairs, day-in-the-park events, Officer Appreciation Day (OAD) celebrations, and other community events. Quests for ride-alongs and interviews took us all over the division, as we sat down with gang interventionists, resource providers, community leaders, and school teachers, observing social dynamics in schools, parks, and churches.

With time, we began walking into the station past the guarded front desk and through “Personnel Only” doors without question. We submitted to fingerprint and background screenings to obtain the name tags and nameplates that identified us at the station. Group leaders and police officials knew us as doctoral student researchers from the University of California, Irvine. But new participants or officials did not know this
Introduction

until we introduced ourselves. Upon meeting us, several were surprised that we were not undercover detectives, “or at least a probation officer,” as one SLO told Danny.

We were both in our mid- to late twenties when we began fieldwork. Looking back through the eyes of a meeting participant, it is perfectly logical that two people matching our description would be cops. Most LAPD officers are Latin@ or White (in that order) and in their late twenties or early thirties (LAPD 2017). The two of us probably looked like buddy cops right out of a Hollywood movie. Danny is the Latino guy, Aaron the White guy. Our dress depended on the formality of the event, but we often wore jeans. Danny usually wore an untucked collared shirt, Aaron usually a blank T-shirt under an unbuttoned collared shirt with the sleeves rolled up. Aaron has the build of a long-distance runner, lean and tall. Danny has the build of a weekend futbolista, solid and imposing.

Collaborations are rare in ethnographic research. Most scholars recognize ethnography as a solo venture of situated scientific discovery (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). Traditionally, cooperative ethnographies have been produced by husband and wife teams (for a critical review, see Ariëns and Strijp 1989). But multiresearcher ethnographies examining marginalized populations (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009) and criminal justice settings (Conley and O’Barr 1990) are becoming more common. Bourgois and Schonberg (2009, 12) explain that ethnographers perform at least two functions in the field: “Ethnography is an artisanal practice that involves interpretive and political choices. On the one hand, the researcher merges into the environment, relaxing into conversations, friendships, and interactions and participating in everyday activities. On the other hand, the observer is mentally racing to register the significance of what is occurring and to conceptualize strategies to deepen that understanding.” The ability to have two ethnographers doing this simultaneously is invaluable.

We almost always collected field data together. After conducting observations, we would each expand our notebook jottings into typed fieldnotes. Our typed accounts described each meeting, summarizing the exchanges and sometimes transcribing the dialogue. As a practical matter, we often wrote separately to preserve the first-person nature of ethnographic accounts and let the fieldnotes express how our personalities
and positionalities shaped the social dynamics we observed. Sometimes we cowrote fieldnotes to construct thicker descriptions of especially lengthy or complex gatherings. We each developed closer relationships with different police and community participants. This allowed us to gain broader access and coverage and generated distinct perspectives on the same events. Collectively, our observations amounted to hundreds of hours of fieldwork and thousands of pages of fieldnotes.

We always exchanged fieldnotes. Collaborative research lends to the validity of data collection methods, offering thicker description through coinciding accounts (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995; May and Pattillo-McCoy 2000). We systematically compared our observations to identify significant departures in action and language, skipping purposefully over minor deviations in personal or spatial descriptors. When comparing notes, we paid closer attention to interactions and language use. We did not always agree on the specifics of what we heard, saw, or felt, so when inconsistencies emerged, we discussed how they deepened our understanding of the setting. We think that these disagreements add robustness to our fieldwork (see Bourgois and Schonberg 2009, 11). In practice, for most major issues there were few significant departures. In either case, both sets of fieldnotes stand as finalized data, and we both stand behind the data and interpretations, no matter the author. Rather than a challenge to validity, diverging accounts highlight the complexities of different social worlds. The “truths” that ethnographers observe depend on the personal and academic background of each ethnographer, and different interpretations may be equally true (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995; May and Pattillo-McCoy 2000).

We organized and analyzed our fieldnotes using qualitative data analysis software, systematically coding fieldnotes for significant and recurrent themes. When identifying a key theme, we adopted a two-stage process for fleshing out its meaning. We began by first elaborating on the theoretical significance of an individual fieldnote excerpt in a short, preliminary memo. Then we wrote lengthier, more substantial memos relating two or more excerpts or memos to explain their theoretical significance.

To situate our observational findings within a larger context, we analyzed LA City and LAPD documents. In 2009, we obtained an informal archive of community policing documents from the files of Dr. Cheryl
Maxson at UCI. Some are easily accessible in the public domain, while others are internal memoranda and administrative directives. Our goal was to understand LAPD’s plans to implement community policing in the early 1990s. These documents are, in some cases, more than twenty-five years old. Because they are physical copies, we sorted and hand-typed all passages that dealt directly with the organizing concept of “community policing” through our open coding procedure. The themes gleaned from these documents informed interviews with former and current LAPD administrators who shepherded the community policing project in its early years and were integral to crafting parts of Chapters 1 and 3.

We also collected in-depth interviews. We employed a sampling method for those attending various community policing functions that was part purposive and part convenience. The former reflected our desire to speak with key stakeholders, while the latter acknowledges the inaccessibility of some desired interviewees. Interviewees included community residents and activists, police officers, and prosecutors. Our conversations with them lasted between thirty minutes and three hours and took place in coffee shops, restaurants, business and government offices, personal residences, and borrowed interrogation rooms. Study participants consented to be tape-recorded, with a few exceptions. When participants (nearly always police officers) gave consent for interviews but not recordings, we handwrote notes during the interview and typed out detailed reports immediately afterward. We steered research participants to talk about what community meant, what problems they confronted, and who should take charge of the response and how. Many conversations continued long beyond the formal interviews. We use pseudonyms for all participants as well as places and landmarks in all fieldnotes and transcripts to protect the privacy of the people who were so generous with their time.

Organization of the Book

The world of community policing is removed from more spectacular police violences in kind but not in logic. The task of community policing is not only to rebuild bridges that may never have existed but also to repair social systems that have never fully materialized and heal rifts
between marginalized populations caused by the state in the first place. Our job in the succeeding pages is to understand the relatively mundane world of community policing in light of shifting political, economic, and demographic contexts.

We begin by looking back at LA’s history of change, conflict, and police intervention. Chapter 1 traces the dynamics of policing in Black and Brown LA and its shaky foundation going back to the 1940s. This intersecting history demonstrates not only how similar and cyclical mass violence has been but how the department’s responses have been patterned as well and what that means for contemporary community policing. Chapter 2 continues by looking through the eyes of Ms. Mayfield, a CPAB member, to examine change and conflict in Lakeside. We look back at how the neighborhood has changed at the social, economic, and demographic levels. Then we explore how racial attitudes and intergroup conflicts have emerged as a result. We end by discussing the past and present of Black-Latin@ solidarity.

Then we explore the social arrangements of community governance internal to and outside of the station. Chapter 3 focuses on the power dynamics involved in organizing community meetings, focusing on Lakeside Captains Himura and Patton. We discuss the split between English and Spanish meetings, their goals, and the techniques that Captains employ to responsibilize the community. Chapter 5 examines the role of Senior Leads and the Community Relations Office in governing the business community. Officers define businesses as members of the community and claim to serve them as they would any other civilian. In the process, officers criminalize their customers to maintain a stable market environment, while leveraging their authority as gatekeepers to shape both the security and composition of Lakeside.

We open the doors of the meeting room and focus on the contests and challenges of police-community collaboration. Chapter 4 reveals how community status shapes complaints. We juxtapose three complainants—Mr. Palmer, Ms. Carter, and Sra. Santos. Their encounters in meetings demonstrate how much police restrict residents in their capacity as the faces of community policing. Through three meeting leaders—Mrs. Fisher, Sr. Mendoza, and Ms. Coleman—Chapter 6 explores how power struggles with police and racial antagonisms between Blacks and Latin@s problematize the goals of community policing. These can
diminish the influence community leaders have in shaping police action and their relationships to community groups more broadly. The chapter ends by examining the experience of Ms. Coleman, who attempts to hold LAPD accountable for their treatment of community volunteers.

This book concludes by taking the reader through another discussion of race, crime, and policing in the community. This time we explore the 2013 Christopher Dorner case and demonstrate that the CPAB is not an adequate forum for police oversight and accountability. Policing as an institution remains largely unaccountable, and the past fifty years of legal decision making at the federal level have solidified, not dissolved, this impunity. Despite a wealth of community rhetoric, collaborative meetings, like other community-based initiatives, reflect mainly the needs of the state. Community policing remains the state’s response to mass protest surrounding issues of police brutality and maintenance of the racial order, but if it remains undemocratized, democracy itself will again take to the streets. We turn now to LA as the site of our research.