



The NYPD Tapes: A Shocking Story of Cops, Cover-ups, and Courage

Graham A. Rayman

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In May 2010, NYPD officer Adrian Schoolcraft made national headlines when he released a series of secretly recorded audio tapes exposing corruption and abuse at the highest levels of the police department. But, according to a lawsuit filed by Schoolcraft against the City of New York, instead of admitting mistakes and pledging reform Schoolcraft's superiors forced him into a mental hospital in an effort to discredit the evidence. In *The NYPD Tapes*, the reporter who first broke the Schoolcraft story brings his ongoing saga up to date, revealing the rampant abuses that continue in the NYPD today, including warrantless surveillance and systemic harassment. Through this lens, he tells the broader tale of how American law enforcement has for the past thirty years been distorted by a ruthless quest for numbers, in the form of CompStat, the vaunted data-driven accountability system first championed by New York police chief William Bratton and since implemented in police departments across the country. Forced to produce certain crime stats each quarter or face discipline, cops in New York and everywhere else fudged the numbers, robbing actual crime victims of justice and sweeping countless innocents into the police net. Rayman paints a terrifying picture of a system gone wild, and the pitiless fate of the whistleblower who tried to stop it.

The NYPD Tapes: A Shocking Story of Cops, Cover-ups, and Courage Details

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Shirley says

"The NYPD Tapes: A Shocking Story of Cops, Cover-ups, and Courage" by Graham A. Rayman is a well documented account of an NYPD officers struggle to expose cover ups that were taking place in the police department. CompStat is the statistical model that is used by the NYPD to track the occurrence, the frequency, and the types of crimes that are most prevalent in certain areas. This data could then be used to reduce the crime rate in the city by identifying the "hot spots" and increasing police presence in those districts. Commanders and officers alike were held accountable, based on these statistical findings, to demonstrate that they were continually lowering the crime rate in each of the precincts.

Adrian Schoolcraft became aware of the fact that these statistics were being manipulated to make it appear as if the crime rate was lower in the precinct than it really was. Crimes were being downgraded from felonies to misdemeanors, officers were expected to meet a monthly quota of arrests, tickets, etc, and in some instances victims were encouraged to drop the charges altogether. Adrian began secretly making recordings at work as a means of substantiating what was taking place and the pressure that he was under from his supervisors to meet these expectations. When Schoolcraft's whistle blower status is discovered, the NYPD has him committed to a psychiatric hospital where he is forced to spend six days. This is just the beginning of the horrific journey that Adrian will have to face in his courageous effort to stand up for what he believes in. In the process other officers come forward as well to reveal that these practices are not just relegated to one precinct but is a far more systemic problem.

This book is a real eye opener!!! It is a must read for those who have an interest in Policing and in the Criminal Justice System. The storyline is quite complicated but it is thoroughly explained and relatively easy to follow. I would highly recommend this book!

I received this book for free through Goodreads First Reads. Thank you.

Bethia says

When Michael Bloomberg took the credit for cleaning up the gritty, crime-ridden streets of New York City, Americans felt satisfied that government and law enforcement were working together to reduce crime and homelessness. What we didn't know is the crimes were still being committed, they were just being downgraded and under-reported in the crime stats. Crime victims were bullied and ignored. Robbery and rape victims went on the record as mere victims of lost property and simple harassment. Meanwhile, those streets were not cleaning themselves up. Patrol officers were given unlawful quotas to meet and were browbeaten and disciplined for not complying. So people were arrested. Mostly young black males. They were arrested for standing on the street. For walking down the sidewalk. For being visible. Over half the charges were later dropped, the jails becoming day-care centers for holding prisoners who had committed no crimes, then were sent home without seeing a judge. This book details the efforts of one law officer to right these wrongs, and how the system crushed his efforts.

Lerz says

Subject matter is very interesting, but the writing leaves something to be desired. Overall, still an enjoyable read.

Ev says

Good story of police corruption, but I had a hard time with the author's writing style. This cop had a swat team come into his house, put him in handcuffs and took him against his will to a psychiatric hospital for 6 days.....for no reason. This story is still lost in the court system so there isn't really a satisfying ending. In fact, it seems it hasn't even begun.

Daniel says

The subject matter was fascinating...there are major issues with crime reporting stats and quotas in the NYC PD. But the author did not convey these issues in the most readable way.

Emily says

I won this book and once I started reading it, I couldn't put it down. It documents the story of Adrain Schoolcraft and the the horrible treatment he received from the NYPD, when he tried to reveal the quota and downgrading of crimes to make CompStat look better. This book is well written and an easy read. I enjoyed it very much.

Silly says

I won this book from First Reads. Looks like a good book. Thank you.

Claire says

An overview of the case of Adrian Schoolcraft, an NYPD cop who blew the whistle on alleged corruption within the department (minimizing and masking crimes) by recording conversations with his peers and superiors, a decision that has arguably ruined his life and career.

The story is very interesting and complex, and in some ways very compelling. Schoolcraft, the central, complicated figure, is drawn well. He's not idealized. If anything, I would have liked to learn more about his

inner workings, but as he was described and shown to be a fairly introverted, private person.

Good characterization aside, I did have a few issues with the book. The narrative wasn't as strong as I'd hoped...I didn't feel a lot of the suspense or interest that would keep me riveted. As a reader, I would have preferred that all the loose ends/lawsuits been wrapped up before the book was released. As such, it wasn't much of an epilogue.

All in all, though, an interesting read for those interested in crime and criminal justice literature.

Ko says

Very good book to read if interested in becoming a police officer. It will open your eyes to the political pitfalls.

Helen Williams says

I started reading this book and then had something come up and had to stop. I was able to pick it back up while on vacation and couldn't put it down. It was well written, easy to follow and well documented. It is a shame that the people we put our faith & trust in are so underhanded. I salute Adrian and Larry Schoolcraft for their fortitude & for sticking to their guns. A great read.

Janosmarton says

(For more NYC-related book reviews and NYC political history, check out <http://janos.nyc>)

This weekend I plowed through Graham Rayman's NYPD Tapes, one of the most startling and gripping nonfiction books I have read in a very long time. It is the story of Adrian Schoolcraft, a police officer who spent two years collecting evidence of rampant fraud in the NYPD, only to suffer astonishing retaliation, including a six-day forced stint in a psych ward. The book casts an appalling light on former NYPD Commissioner Ray Kelly's police force, and reminds the reader that whistleblowing, for all its hagiographic treatment after the fact, is a deeply unpleasant process.

Adrian Schoolcraft's personal story is so crazy that you literally cannot believe a summarized version of it. That's how Rayman, the former Village Voice journalist, felt. That's how I felt when I first read Rayman's reporting on the story in 2011. At that time I thought, "This is either the wildest story happening in New York City right now, or it's a fabrication."

Schoolcraft was an aimless but decently productive young adult when he joined the NYPD in 2002, and served with an above average record during his early years on the force. Over time he became increasingly frustrated with his supervisors' quota system, which required a certain number of stops, summonses and arrests. This meant harassing people who should have gotten off with a warning or left alone. Equally pernicious was the brass's obsession with continuously "reducing" crime, which led to officers being dissuaded from properly taking down crimes or offering to help victims at all. On top of all of this, the drive for stats forced patrol cops to work constant overtime. (For which, I might add, they are well compensated.)

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Around 2007, Schoolcraft took matters into his own hands by purchasing a digital tape recorder and recording everything- precinct meetings, chitchat with fellow officers, lectures from his superiors, hours and hours of daily life at the precinct. His discontent was well known by this point and when word of his cooperation with Internal Affairs hit the precinct, Schoolcraft was ostracized and harassed until one fateful afternoon in 2009, when he left work for home 45 minutes early.

By the end of the evening his house had been stormed by the NYPD and he was locked to a hospital gurney in the Jamaica Hospital psych ward, where he was committed for six days, unable to leave despite the absence of charges against him. He eventually fled to upstate New York to live with his father, and for nearly six years has led a Kafkaesque existence as his lawsuit against the NYPD slowly winds through the court system alongside his own trial by the NYPD, which suspended him without pay in 2009.

In complete contrast to this wild tale, Schoolcraft's larger grievance about how things are run at the NYPD are exactly as one would expect. An obsession with statistics that will make the NYPD look good? Quotas for small offenses ordered from the top? Rude treatment of crime victims to deter complaints? All of this is intuitive to even a casual observer of City life. The difference here is both the messenger, who is a police officer, and the evidence, which is 1,000 hours of recorded conversations, some of which has been used in subsequent litigation, like the stop & frisk trial.

The NYPD's denial of a quota system has always been ridiculous. In 2006 I was given an open container violation on the Upper West Side. The police officer was mildly apologetic, explaining that he was under enormous pressure to deliver a certain number of monthly open container and public urination violations, and he had picked on me and my friend because we looked well-dressed (my friend Alex was taking us somewhere fancy) and thus were unlikely to have complications when they ran our licenses.

Of course, my silly anecdote has been buttressed by such widespread reporting from serious people that it makes you wonder whether the NYPD is only able to lie so brazenly because their people have guns around their belts. Whistleblowers with far more credibility than even Schoolcraft have come forward, to no avail. Quotas are one of the few issues where street activists and the PBA's Patrick Lynch are actually on the same side, since patrolmen obviously get no satisfaction out of running around looking for petty offenses. Likewise, evidence of downgrading crimes to protect stats, Schoolcraft's other main accusation, is also widely supported by evidence supplied by Schoolcraft and other NYPD whistleblowers. For years the media and City Council barely touched these issues, perhaps because they were enthralled by the amazing crime reduction numbers being delivered by the NYPD's beloved "CompStat"-based strategy.

CompStat hard at work.
CompStat hard at work.

If Schoolcraft has a co-star in NYPD Tapes, it is CompStat (short for 'Complaint Statistics'), a seemingly brilliant strategy adopted by the NYPD in the '90s to track specification information about where and how crimes were happening. From back of the napkin humble origins, CompStat became an uncontrollable beast, as the NYPD leadership pushed relentlessly for evidence of "activity" (stops, arrests, etc.) to go up and crime to go down. Commanders who met these goals were rewarded, and those who failed were reamed out and humiliated.

These high-stakes, schizophrenic goals could only lead to one place- lots of police activity harassing people

on the street, with widespread efforts to downgrade crimes from felonies to misdemeanors and refuse victim complaints. This is literally the worst type of policing imaginable. Schoolcraft's supervisor and main antagonist, Steven Mauriello, comes across as a total jackass in his relentless pursuit of stats and complete disdain for actual civilian complaints about crimes (Consider hits like "They don't own the block. We own the block. They might live there, but we own the block. We own the streets here."), but he isn't lying every time he berates his officers for putting him into a bind with his commanders. This crisis, which had consumed the NYPD by the end of the 2000s, ran all the way to the top, where Michael Bloomberg and Ray Kelly had run the show since 2002.

One interesting stat-juking nugget was the reference to "ghost 250s", the forms used to record stop & frisks. Because people aren't required to give their names when being stopped, officers boosting their numbers could just fabricate encounters and put "refused name" on the top. This situation got so out of control that one lieutenant had to pep talk his officers after a run resulted in 96 stops, all with "refused name." The significance of this incident couldn't have been grasped by Rayman, who seemed to have written this book in 2012, but these ghost stops may well explain how the NYPD was able to drop its stops from 686,000 in 2011 to fewer than 2,000 per week by the end of 2013. Maybe the actual number of stop & frisks have actually been relatively steady for the past two decades, or the increase was meaningless pat-downs to make numbers- which is of course no consolation to the person being frisked.

It would be amusing if widespread ghost numbers triggered the citywide backlash to stop & frisk and foisted Bill de Blasio into office. At the time, some thought the number of stops were actually being under-reported, particularly in instances where cops couldn't find any contraband or after the fact justification. As it turns out, cops were being pushed, prodded and incentivized to get as many stops as possible. The 100,000 or so stops today may still represent a lot of unproductive contact between police and (mostly) young men of color, but if Schoolcraft's recordings are to be believed, today's street stops might be more justified than those during the past decade.

An additional sidebar takeaway from NYPD Tapes is the use of steroids in the police force. Michael Marino, the commander who oversaw Schoolcraft's forced psychiatric stay, was caught up in a steroid scandal, but got off with a slap on the wrist, as it seems did the other officers involved. He was recently awarded a lucrative pension plan. I am curious about the use and abuse of steroids in the NYPD, especially after past scandals, and the supposed random testing that now goes on. Perhaps it could explain the volatile temperament of some officers. It must have pained Rayman to publish the NYPD Tapes with such an unsatisfactory conclusion: Schoolcraft's lawsuit was ongoing, the stop & frisk lawsuit was ongoing, the mayoral election was almost a year away, police reforms were still being discussed in the City Council, and there was talk of Ray Kelly staying on atop the NYPD.

In early 2015, 18 months after NYPD Tapes was published, things have come a long way. In late 2013, the City Council passed certain police accountability reforms, and may pass more in the aftermath of Eric Garner. The stop & frisk lawsuit was victorious, and Bill de Blasio, who ran hard against Bloomberg's stop & frisk policy, approaches policing more open-mindedly than Bloomberg. William Bratton has replaced Ray Kelly, and though he is not universally loved, he comes across as more sophisticated and aware of community sentiment than Kelly. The only thing that hasn't changed is Adrian Schoolcraft's litigation.

Schoolcraft is now on his third or fourth legal team, and seems difficult to work with, as whistleblowers sometimes are. The latest update is that Jamaica Hospital sided with the NYPD account of Schoolcraft's detention, finding, in a twist of dark humor, that Schoolcraft's behavior was "paranoid and persecutory delusions because he believed he was being persecuted for having reported his supervisors' irregularities and corruptive behavior." What a crazy delusion for a police officer handcuffed in a hospital by his commanding

police officers without knowing the charges against him, after exposing their corrupt practices! Hard to find a better case of “just because your paranoid, don’t mean they’re not after you.”

This has been a really important year for discussing policing issues, and a full read of NYPD Tapes is essential to understanding the conversation. For example, the City Council is pushing to put 1,000 more cops on the street. This seems like a strange thing to do when crime is at an all-time low. (Assuming that the NYPD isn’t hiding dead murdered bodies like Snoop and Marlow.) But NYPD Tapes leaves me with no confidence in what the crime numbers actually are, or what exactly the City Council or Commissioner Bratton envision this new surge of officers doing.

Not only do we have a long way to go before we figure out police-community relations in this City, but as NYPD Tapes makes clear, we might not even have a good read on what crime is actually happening in the City, an irony of the CompStat era. We need to do much, much better at understanding the workings of the 34,500-person weaponized force that protects this City.

Mike Gabor says

A very chilling and thought provoking account of a NYPD officer who blew the whistle on the skewing of the Compstat statistics on crime here in NYC. Being a resident of the city I found the book very interesting. I've lived here all my life and remember very well how crime was running rampant back in the 1990's. I give all the credit in the world to the NYPD for getting a handle on things but now it seems that they have gone overboard in trying to keep the crime rate at these low levels. Serious crimes are being down graded, people are being subjected to stop and frisk just to keep numbers up, and pressure is being put on patrol officers to keep their numbers up.

With a new mayor and police commissioner taking office next month I'm curious to see how these matters will be handled.

Dio Aufa Handoyo says

A story that highlights how difficult it is to go against a whole establishment even though it is the right thing to do. Also depicts a stark warning against managing a public service institution in a business-like, numbers-oriented way - it is incredibly important to recognize that there are aspects of public service, in this case policing, that cannot be quantitatively tracked but is the ultimate measure of productivity. A great example highlighted in the book illustrates this point nicely: talking to people might prevent them to commit a felony but difficult to measure, while court summons are measurable yet pisses people off and distances the police from the people, which might lead to more crime. Great food for thought.

Connie Murphy says

Really enjoyed this book...Very insightful!

Lara says

Really interesting story about the NYPD and what went wrong and how it all came out, and as the main whistleblower is from Arlington, Texas, that added a little bit of extra appeal for me. I feel like the writing could have been stronger; a few too many irrelevant quotes for my liking, and there's so much police lingo included within those quotes that doesn't really get explained. I guess I would have liked a little more depth. But it's kind of fascinating that such a good idea could spiral into such systematic abuse of the law by the very folks meant to be enforcing it. Worth a read for those interested in police or legal matters.

Received this book through First Reads.
