

The Promise and the Perils of Police Professionalism

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Introduction

In the ongoing story of police reform—which in the Anglo-American world has largely been the story of efforts to make policing both more effective and more “democratic”—the ideal of professionalism plays an ambiguous role. On the one hand, there is a long tradition of calls for the police to be more “professional.” In the United States, in particular, there was a period in the mid-twentieth century when virtually every effort at police reform marched under the banner of police professionalism,¹ and echoes of that period can be heard today in arguments for a “new professionalism” in law enforcement.² In the United Kingdom, where police reformers often hearken back to Sir Robert Peel, the term “professional” is often used to sum up what was distinctive about the style of law enforcement that Peel pioneered, and—to take a particularly important, present-day example—Peter Neyroud’s recent review of police leadership and training places heavy emphasis on the importance of developing “a new and vibrant professionalism in policing.”³ Nor are Britain and the United States unique in this regard. The ideal of police professionalism has long attracted reformers throughout the English-speaking world, and it continues to do so.⁴ For example, calls for police professionalism are heard loudly today in South Africa, where it is seen as a critical component of efforts to reduce corruption among law enforcement officers and to tame the use of deadly force by the police.⁵

On the other hand, professionalism has a bad reputation among many police reformers, particularly in the United States. For much of the past three decades, in fact,

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¹ See, e.g., President’s Commission on Law Enforcement & the Administration of Justice, Task Force Report: The Police 20-21 (1967); Gene E. Carte & Elaine H. Carte, Police Reform in the United States: The Era of August Vollmer 114-15 (1975); David Alan Sklansky, Police and Democracy 35-37 (2008); Josh Segal, “All of the Mysticism of Police Expertise”: Legalizing Stop-and-Frisk in New York, 1961-1968, 47 Harv. C.R.-C.L. L. Rev. 573 (2001).

² Christopher Stone & Jeremy Travis, Toward a New Professionalism in Policing (Harvard Kennedy School/NIJ, Mar. 2011).

³ Peter Neyroud, Review of Police Leadership and Training 14 (2011).

⁴ See, e.g., Mark Clark, *The Importance of a New Philosophy to the Post Modern Police Environment*, 28 Policing 642 (2005) (regarding Australia); Canadian Ass’n of Chiefs of Police, Professionalism in Policing Research Project: Recommendations (2012).

⁵ See David Bruce, *Beyond Section 49: Control of the Use of Lethal Force*, SA Crime Quarterly No. 36, June 2011, at 6-8; Gareth Newham & Andrew Faull, *Protector or Predator? Tackling Police Corruption in South Africa*, Inst. Security Studs. Monograph No. 182, at 46-47, 51, 53 (2011).

the “professional model” has been taken by many American police reformers to encapsulate what they are *against*. Community policing, the enormously influential if often frustratingly vague reform agenda that took root in the United States in the 1980s and became something of an orthodoxy in the 1990s, was to a great extent conceived and defined as a rejection of police professionalism.⁶ In Britain, meanwhile, the identification of Peel’s Metropolitan Police as “professional” has always been in some tension with the notion, attributed to Peel, that the police are merely citizens in uniform—that “the police are the public and the public are the police.”⁷

The ambiguous role played by professionalism in the story of police reform—sometimes hero, sometimes villain—owes something to the elusive nature of the concept. Police professionalism means different things to different people, and sorting out those various meanings is a necessary part of thinking sensibly about how, if at all, the ideal of professionalism can usefully be employed in current efforts at police reform. But it is not all a question of semantics. The rhetoric of professionalism is not infinitely elastic. It comes with a certain set of connotations. It has certain inherent advantages as a loadstar of police reform—and certain inherent disadvantages, as well.

Four Meanings of Police Professionalism

When Chief Constable Neyroud calls for moving British policing from “a service that acts professionally” to “a professional service,”⁸ his phrasing should make clear, if it was not clear already, that there is something protean about the concept of police professionalism. And indeed the language of police professionalism has been applied to at least four different ideas, alone or more typically in combination.

Sometimes professionalism simply means *high expectations*. Professional police are police who are held to demanding standards of conduct, whatever those standards may be. Professionalizing a police service, on this understanding of the term, means laying down the law: serving notice that slack performance, unkept appearance, rude manners, and loose ethics will no longer be tolerated. This is the sense in which Peel’s Metropolitan Police are often said to be the first “professional” law enforcement service. It is a large part of what American reformers in the mid-twentieth century meant when they called for police professionalization. And it is part of what South African reformers have in mind today when they promote the ideal of professional policing.

Sometimes police professionalism means, instead, that the police should be *self-regulating*, in the manner of the legal profession or the medical profession or the accounting profession. Greater operational independence for the police is not, in the main, what reformers in South Africa today have in mind, but institutional autonomy—and, more specifically, freedom from political interference—was very much part of the

⁶ See David Alan Sklansky, *The Persistent Pull of Police Professionalism* (Harvard Kennedy School/NIJ, Mar. 2011); Stone & Travis, *supra* note 2, at 8-12.

⁷ A point noted, for example, by Neyroud, who acknowledges the “challenge in developing the professionalism or the occupation of policing in a way that avoids insularity and distancing of police officers from the public.” Neyroud, *supra* note 3, at 44-45.

⁸ *Id.* at 11.

agenda of mid-twentieth-century police reformers in the United States,⁹ and it is part of what police professionalism has come to mean in Britain, as well. Thus, for example, Lawrence Sherman argues that the Cold Bath Fields riot of 1833 “helped establish for the police one of the hallmark characteristics of a profession: the right to operational independence.”¹⁰ Neyroud’s “professionalism” similarly has more to do with institutional autonomy than with high expectations: that is what he means when he contrasts a “professional service” with a service that merely “acts professionally.”

Neyroud’s version of operational independence, though, is a good deal different from the kind promoted by mid-twentieth-century American reformers. It has less to do with freedom from political second-guessing and more to do with standards of competence and achievement administered by a self-regulating professional society, together with a body of accumulated expertise—knowledge and best practices—over which the society and its members take collective responsibility. It draws in part therefore on a third meaning of professionalism: the sense in which professionals are distinguished from amateurs. Professional policing, in this sense, means policing that is reflective and knowledge-based, a matter of *expertise* rather than common sense, intuition, or innate talent. One way this may be done is through greater reliance on, and perhaps greater input into and responsibility for, the work of academics who study policing and crime control.¹¹ Even among academics, though, there is disagreement about how much of policing can realistically be governed by social science.¹²

Fourth and finally, police are sometimes said to be “professional” when their actions are guided by *internalized norms* rather than by rules enforced through a bureaucratic command structure or a formalized system of external oversight. This was never a central theme of the police professionalism movement in the United States,¹³ nor is it stressed by Neyroud. But it has always been latent in the rhetoric of police professionalism,¹⁴ and it has sometimes been seized upon by reformers as an alternative to rigid, top-down, command-and-control approaches to policing—an alternative that may fit better with the realities of the police work and the large amount of discretion inevitably entrusted to front-line police officers.¹⁵ It is a discernible thread, for example, in current discussions of police professionalism in South Africa.¹⁶

⁹ See Sklansky, *supra* note 1, at 34-38.

¹⁰ Lawrence Sherman, Professional Policing and Liberal Democracy (Benjamin Franklin Medal Lecture, Nov. 1, 2011).

¹¹ A strategy sometimes described as “evidence-based policing.” See, e.g., *id.*; Neyroud, *supra* note 3; David Weisburd & Peter Neyroud, Police Science: Toward a New Paradigm (Harvard Kennedy School/NIJ, Jan. 2011).

¹² See Malcolm K. Sparrow, Governing Science (Harvard Kennedy School/NIJ, Jan. 2011).

¹³ See Egon Bittner, *The Rise and Fall of the Thin Blue Line*, in *Aspects of Police Work* 357 (1990); Stone & Travis, *supra* note 2, at 7.

¹⁴ See Segal, *supra* note 1.

¹⁵ See, e.g., Clark, *supra* note 4; Robert M. Regoli, Eric D. Poole & Charles Hou, *The Effects of Professionalism on Cynicism Among Taiwanese Police*, 4 *Police Stud.* 67 (1981).

¹⁶ See, e.g., Bruce, *supra* note 5, at 8-9.

It should go without saying that these four meanings of police professionalism—standards, self-regulation, expertise, and norms—are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, they can reinforce each other, and often have done so. Still, they do not necessarily travel together. The mid-twentieth-century American version of police professionalism, as already suggested, heavily emphasized high standards, organizational autonomy, and, to a lesser extent, accumulated expertise, but gave short shrift to the notion that the actual “professionals”—individual police officers—should exercise broad discretion guided by internalized, occupational norms. It claimed autonomy “primarily for the institution of policing, and only secondarily, and then only in a severely limited sense, for its functionaries.”¹⁷ In contrast, the police professionalism being advocated today in South Africa pretty plainly is not meant to include greater institutional autonomy for law enforcement, nor does it put much emphasis on expertise; it is most about high standards and internalized norms. Neyroud’s version of police professionalism is closer to the United States model in these regards, but it places a good deal more emphasis on expertise and somewhat less emphasis on organizational autonomy.

A debate about police professionalism can easily turn into a debate about semantics. If professionalism means arrogance and a lack of accountability, no one favors it; if it means thoughtful, reflective, ethical policing, no one is against it. Part of thinking sensibly about police professionalism is being clear about what we want the term to denote.

Given the varying and sometimes conflicting ways in which the concept of professionalism has been employed in discussions of police reform, there is a case for abandoning the term altogether and substituting less ambiguous language, simply in the interest of clarity. That case has never proven fully persuasive, however. The reason is that the rhetoric of police professionalism has certain inherent, enduring attractions.¹⁸

The Promise of Police Professionalism

The ideal of professionalism retains its allure in policing for some of the same reasons it retains its allure in other fields: it conjures up a body of practitioners who bring meaning and dignity to their work through dedication, collection self-improvement, and ethical commitment, aligning their own interests with the interests of those they serve. If anything, that ideal has even greater appeal in law enforcement than in medicine or law, probably the two most paradigmatic professions, because aligning the interests of police officers—the personification of state violence—with the interests of the public has for decades been thought a particularly pressing and particularly vexing problem throughout the Anglo-American world.

For police reformers, professionalism offers an antidote to corruption and underperformance, and a way of emphasizing that the police have, or should have, special skills and knowledge that can be written down, taught, and continually

¹⁷ Bittner, *supra* note 13, at 426; *but see* Segal, *supra* note 1 (suggesting to the contrary).

¹⁸ Some of the discussion that follows is drawn from Sklansky, *supra* note 6.

improved. It offers, too, an avenue of reform that promises to enlist the police themselves in the cause of reform, by offering them pride, respect, and status.¹⁹ Notwithstanding the considerable ambiguity of the term “professional,” the language of professionalism allows reformers to appeal to a shared, off-the-shelf image of a “true” profession, a profession characterized by “continuous training, ethical standards and professional pride.”²⁰

The attractions of police professionalism for the police themselves are considerable. Some of the skepticism that community policing has always elicited, and continues to elicit, has to do with the sense that the police will never embrace it enthusiastically, because it does not seem like “real police work.”²¹ Police, it is said, want to be part of an elite crime-fighting force; they did not sign up to be social workers. This is plainly an oversimplification: it takes too little account of the challenges and rewards of community policing, the diversity and sophistication of today’s police officers, and the ways in which even veteran officers can be won over to the philosophy of community policing.²² But it probably is true, at least for many officers, that the kind of law enforcement called to mind by the rhetoric of police professionalism remains glamorous and exciting in ways that community policing often is not. That means that it may be easier to enlist the allegiance of the police themselves, or at least some segments of the police, in a reform program when it is couched in the language of professionalism.

Nor should the past achievements of police professionalism be minimized. In the United States, for example, the police professionalism movement of the mid-twentieth century did succeed in reducing corruption, tightening standards, and raising the bar for what counted as success in law enforcement.

It should be said, too, that in important respects police professionalism is more appealing today than in the past. For one thing, claims of expertise are more credible now, because law enforcement as a field knows more than it used to about how to fight crime. The police may not know as much as they think they know, but the state of knowledge about effective crime control is undeniably better today than it was in the mid-to-late twentieth century. And one thing that is now apparent is that the police can, in fact, improve their effectiveness by careful, objective analysis of crime data—often an important part of what people mean now when they speak of police professionalism. Calls for police professionalism today often include calls to embrace one or more of several other trends in modern policing—“evidence-based policing,” “intelligence-led policing,” and “predictive policing”—each of which relies heavily on quantitative analysis of crime rates and patterns of offending.²³

¹⁹ See Sklansky, *supra* note 6, at 7.

²⁰ Stone & Travis, *supra* note 2, at 3, 7, 8, 12, 18, 20, 21.

²¹ Jerry Ratliffe, *Intelligence-Led Policing*, in *Environmental Criminology and Crime Analysis* 263, 269 (Richard Wortley & Lorraine Mazerolle eds., 2008); see also, e.g., Jerry Ratliffe, *Intelligence-Led Policing* 9 (2008).

²² See, e.g., Susan L. Miller, *Gender and Community Policing: Walking the Talk* (1999).

²³ On “evidence-based policing,” compare Sherman, *supra* note 10, and Weisburd & Neyroud, *supra* note 11, with Sparrow, *supra* note 12. On “intelligence-led policing” and “predictive

Yet another attraction of police professionalism in some quarters today is fiscal. As police departments face tighter budgets, the kinds of programs associated with community policing can seem like luxuries, and professionalism can appear to hold the promise of greater efficiency: doing more with less. From one perspective, the ideal of professionalism actually sits in considerable tension with the ideal of efficiency: in other fields, historically, professionalism has arisen partly in explicit opposition to a purely business-oriented approach. Being a professional lawyer or a professional physician is supposed to mean paying less, not more, attention to money. But public managerialism fits reasonably well with the emphasis on quantitative analysis shared by evidence-based policing, intelligence-led policing, and predictive policing, so advocates of versions of police professionalism incorporating one or more of those data-driven approaches can make claims of efficiency that deserve to be taken seriously—even if, for reasons to be discussed below, those claims should also receive a certain amount of skepticism.

The Perils of Police Professionalism

Professionalism in law enforcement can mean so many good things—integrity, rigorous standards, esprit de corps, expertise, continuous self-improvement, efficiency—that someone new to the subject of police reform might wonder how anyone could be against professional policing. The most important reason, perhaps, is the unhappy history of the police professionalism movement in the United States.

From roughly the 1950s through the 1970s, police professionalism was more or less synonymous with police reform in the United States. Part of this was just a matter of terminology: particularly in the 1960s and early 1970s, virtually every effort to improve American policing was called “professionalization.”²⁴ But the labeling reflected something substantive. Despite the ambiguities that have always surrounded the concept of police professionalism, the reforms that marched under that banner in mid-twentieth-century America tended to share three central features: they focused law enforcement agencies on crime suppression, pushing to the side other traditional functions of the police; they sought to have police departments operate objectively and scientifically, free from political influence; and they worked to centralize, rationalize, and bureaucratize lines of authority within law enforcement agencies.²⁵

As already noted, this movement can credibly claim some significant successes. Nonetheless by the early 1980s it was widely discredited. It was blamed for making police departments throughout the United States insular, arrogant, resistant to outside criticism, and—perhaps most disastrous of all—feckless in responding to the social ferment of the 1960s and 1970s. Community policing, the reform movement that coalesced in the 1980s and that became, in the 1990s, the new orthodoxy of police reform, was very

policing” and their connections with police professionalism, see Sklansky, *supra* note 6, at 3-5; Stone & Travis, *supra* note 2, at 17.

²⁴ See sources cited *supra* note 1.

²⁵ See, e.g., Robert M. Fogelson, *Big-City Police* (1977); Peter Manning, *Police Work: The Social Organization of Policing* 120-21 (2d ed. 1997); Sklansky, *supra* note 6, at 1.

consciously a reaction against police professionalism. It emphasized the plurality of police functions rather than a single-minded focus on crime control; it prioritized community input and involvement over expertise and technical analysis; and it favored decentralization over centralized authority and locally tailored rather than globally rationalized solutions.²⁶

Community policing has its own weaknesses, beginning with a set of ambiguities that are, if anything, even deeper than the ones plaguing professional policing. (Who or what is the community? In what ways should the police “partner” with the community, whatever or whoever it is?) Still, community policing is widely seen as a spectacular success, at least by observers outside law enforcement. It rebuilt trust between the police and the public, it bolstered the perceived legitimacy of the police, it refocused the police on issues of concern to their constituents, it leveraged police resources, and it made law enforcement more attentive and accountable to community interests. Scholars across the ideological spectrum now take community policing as a model for how other governmental services might usefully be reformed.²⁷ And even advocates of a renewed emphasis on professionalism in law enforcement tend to agree that “[c]ommunity policing was an important improvement on the style of policing it challenged.”²⁸

It is true that some police leaders have been saying for close to a decade now that it is time to move beyond community policing, and it is true that some more recent movements in American policing—including intelligence-led policing and predictive policing—represent a return, in key respects, to what community policing rejected: a heavy focus on crime suppression, an emphasis on expertise and objective analysis, and a reliance on centralized control.²⁹ But most thoughtful police executives and most thoughtful students of American policing want to build on community policing, not to discard it. That is true notwithstanding budget pressures, in part because the trust and perceived legitimacy that community policing helps to build are so critical to success of the police mission,³⁰ and in part because one of the strengths of community policing is precisely that it can allow the police to leverage their assets by tapping into the knowledge, the resources, and the abilities of organizations and individuals outside of law enforcement.

Most advocates of a renewed emphasis on police professionalism seek to incorporate the core lessons of community policing, creating a “new police professionalism” that avoids what gave the professional model such a bad name in the 1960s and 1970s. They reject, for example, the pervasive, unquestioning faith in

²⁶ See, e.g., Sklansky, *supra* note 1, at 74-105.

²⁷ See, e.g., Michael C. Dorf & Charles F. Sobel, *A Constitution of Democratic Experimentalism*, 98 Colum. L. Rev. 267, 328-32 (1998).

²⁸ Stone & Travis, *supra* note 2, at 5.

²⁹ See Sklansky, *supra* note 6.

³⁰ See, e.g., Tom R. Tyler, *Why People Obey the Law* (1990); Tom R. Tyler & Jeffrey Fagan, *Legitimacy and Cooperation: Why Do People Help the Police Fight Crime in their Communities?*, 6 Ohio St. J. Crim. L. 213 (2008); Tracey L. Meares, *Praying for Community Policing*, 90 Cal. L. Rev. 1593 (2002).

random patrol and central dispatch as tactics for maximizing the effectiveness of police personnel—a characteristic feature of professional policing four decades ago, at least in the United States. And most advocates of “professional policing” today, in the United States and elsewhere, argue that professionalism means, in part, accountability, outreach, and an attentiveness to community concerns.

There is reason to fear, though, that any philosophy of policing built around the ideal of professionalism will tend to emphasize technology, objectivity, and expertise at the expense of imperatives that are at least as important for the police in advanced democratic societies, but harder to pursue—such as trust, legitimacy, fairness, accountability, and racial equality. It was precisely the downplaying of these values that led many advocates of community policing to frame their movement as a rejection of professional policing. The architects of police professionalism in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s were, at times, as explicit as anyone could want about the importance of fairness, accountability, and community partnerships.³¹ The problem was that these values got lost in the shuffle, and the worry is that a revival of police professionalism, no matter how it is packaged, could have the same consequence. And there is evidence that some newer versions of police professionalism—intelligence-led policing and predictive policing, in particular—are, in fact, having a similar consequence in some quarters, leading police again to over-hype technology, overpromise expertise, and under-emphasize trust, cooperation, consultation, and accountability.³²

Police Professionalism in Perspective

Police professionalism is an ambiguous term that carries good connotations but that can be blamed for some unfortunate developments. In these regards it like many other things: medicine, for example, or democracy. Few people suggest that we should give up on drugs or elections. What should we make of the ambiguous role that the goal of professionalism has played in police reform?

One possibility is that police professionalism is like medicine: a good thing when done right. This is probably the position of most people who argue in the United States or the United Kingdom today for a renewed emphasis on professionalism in policing. That is the point of talking about a “true” professionalism.

Another possibility is that police professionalism is like democracy—an example of what philosophers call an “essentially contested concept.”³³ There is no hope of getting broad agreement on a definition of “democracy,” but democracy still seems worth pursuing, in part because the arguments about the definition of democracy are themselves important and valuable. Those arguments help focus our attention on the best way to be true to a set of historic exemplars: the “demands, aspirations, revolts and reforms” through which our societies have gradually rid themselves of practices and

³¹ See, e.g., O.W. Wilson, *Police Administration* 58-59, 82, 91, 388-91, 420 (1950); O.W. Wilson, *Police Administration* 182-85 (2d ed. 1963).

³² See Peter K. Manning, *The Technology of Policing: Crime Mapping, Information Technology, and the Rationality of Crime Control* (2008); Sklansky, *supra* note 6.

³³ W.B. Gallie, *Essentially Contested Concepts*, 56 *Proc. Aristotelian Soc’y* 167 (1955-56).

institutions now widely condemned in retrospect as inegalitarian and illegitimately hierarchical.³⁴ Arguing about the meaning of democracy is a way of arguing about how to be true to the spirit of Magna Carter, the American Revolution, the abolition of slavery, and so on.

But there is reason to doubt that police professionalism is either like medicine or like democracy. There is reason to believe that the problem with police professionalism in mid-twentieth-century America was not simply that it was implemented poorly, but that professionalism was the wrong loadstar to begin with. The point of any explicit model of philosophy of policing is to emphasize particular aspects of the police mission that, for one reason or another, need emphasizing. Mark Moore, a particularly thoughtful and influential advocate of community policing in the 1980s, argued for that framework partly on the basis that it “challenge[d] the police in the areas in which they are least likely to make investments in repositioning themselves”—namely, “forging a relationship with the community” that would allow the police to “enlist their aid, focus on the problems that turn out to be important, and figure out a way to be accountable.” Moore did not doubt the importance of developing “more thoughtful, more information-guided, more active attacks on particular crime problems.” But he suggested that this agenda—which was fundamentally an elaboration of key strands of police professionalism—would “take care of itself,” because it was “much more of a natural development in policing.”³⁵

Relations between the police and the public were never as bad in Britain as they were in America in the 1960s and 1970s. And relations between the police and the public in the United States are better now than they were then. But it remains true in the United States and likely in Britain that working with communities to build trust, legitimacy, and accountability, rather than strengthening expertise, is the hardest task facing large law enforcement agencies, and the one that most needs emphasis, encouragement, and assistance. A society like South Africa, where police corruption remains a much larger problem, may well be different in this regard: there, the ideal of professionalism may well focus the police on precisely the issues—such as integrity and self-regulation—that deserve their greatest attention. But in a society such as the United States or Britain, where corruption is a less pressing problem for the police than engaging openly and productively with the public, a focus on professionalism in any guise may focus the police on the wrong priorities.

For similar reasons, it is likely a mistake, at least in a society such as the United States or Britain, to think of police professionalism as an “essentially contested concept”—that is to say, as a goal that eludes definition but that is nonetheless, and partly for that very reason, worth pursuing. Outside of policing, professionalism is sometimes said to an “essentially contested concept,” but the people applying that term usually mean only that it is hard, maybe impossible, to reach agreement about what

³⁴ *Id.* at 186.

³⁵ U.S. Dep’t of Justice, National Inst. Of Justice, *Perspectives in Policing* No. 5, *Debating the Evolution of American Policing* 5 (Francis S. Harmann ed., Nov. 1988) (quoting remarks of Prof. Mark Moore).

constitutes a profession.³⁶ At least in the context of policing, and probably more generally, professionalism is not an “essentially contested concept” in the philosophers’ sense, because arguing about the meaning of professionalism are not a helpful way to structure discussions about how best to emulate a set of an agreed-upon set of role models. For good reason, there is no widespread agreement that police officers should be more like doctors, or like lawyers, or like any other, specific example of professionalism. There may be aspects of how lawyers and doctors operate that seem worth emulating in policing, and arguing about the “true” nature of professionalism is a way to argue about which aspects those are. But that seems a far less pressing question than the questions to which other organizing principles of police reform—community policing, say, or even the Peelian Principles—direct our attention.

Conclusion

The rhetoric of police professionalism is neither well defined nor infinitely elastic. The term has at least four different meanings: high standards, self-regulation, expertise, and internalized norms. These meanings overlap, and advocates of police professionalism rarely intend only one of them. But they usually do not intend all four. It helps to be clear, when discussing police professionalism, precisely what combination of these four meanings of the term are contemplated.

Ambiguity is not the reason, though, that professionalism has a bad name among some police reformers, especially in the United States. The bad reputation stems from the directions that police reform took in the United States from roughly the 1950s through the 1970s, when law enforcement was suffused with the rhetoric of professionalism and dominated by an institutional ideal that was technocratic, hierarchical, bureaucratic, and—far too often—aloof and arrogant. The community policing movement was to a very great extent a reaction against this version of police professionalism.

The debate about police professionalism today, especially in the United States but to a lesser extent elsewhere in the Anglo-American world, is in part a debate about rhetoric and in part a debate about substance. To the extent that the debate is about rhetoric, the question is whether community policing really was a rejection of “professionalism,” or simply a rejection of a particular kind of policing that called itself professional, and whether the language of professionalism is helpful in steering present-day police in the right direction. To the extent that the debate is about substance, it is about whether aspects of the professional ideal pursued in the 1950 through the 1970s are worth reviving and extending, albeit more thoughtfully and in some sense more “professionally” than was done the last time around.

³⁶ See, e.g., Jane Green, *Education, Professionalism and the Quest for Accountability: Hitting the Target but Missing the Point* 13-14 (2011); Eric Holye & Peter D. John, *Professional Knowledge and Professional Practice* 1 (1995); cf. Jeremy Waldron, *Is the Rule of Law and Essentially Contested Concept (in Florida)?*, 21 L. & Philos. 137 (2002) (noting that the term “essentially contested concept” is often used loosely “to mean something like ‘very hotly contested, with no resolution in sight’”).

The answers to both these questions likely depend on the specifics of the society at issue and the particular challenges for policing in that society. In a society like South Africa, where the most pressing tasks for police leaders and police reformers are to rein in corruption and the use of deadly force, the ideal of professionalism, with its connotations of high standards and internalized norms, may be an effective way to use occupational pride to advance an agenda of integrity and restraint. It is less clear, though, whether professionalism is a useful frame for thinking about police reform in the United States or the United Kingdom, where police corruption is not as pressing a concern, and where a case can be made that the major challenges for policing remain centered around building and sustaining the right kind of relationship with local communities. What is needed in that kind of society may not be a more ambitious form of police professionalism, but instead renewed commitment to the agenda of community policing.³⁷

³⁷ For preliminary thoughts about the shapes that might take, see Sklansky, *supra* note 6, at 12-13.