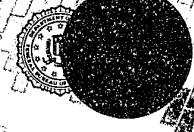


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Policing Mass Transit

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United States
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Washington, DC 20535

William S. Sessions,
Director

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Notable Speeches



New York City Police Commissioner Raymond W. Kelly delivered this speech at the Second Annual FBI Symposium on Addressing Violent Crime through Community Involvement.

Toward a New Intolerance of Crime and Violence

Fearing crime, or becoming one of its victims, is to lose a fair measure of freedom in a democratic society. And, my premise is that we have gotten far too accustomed to, and accepting of, crime and violence.

The public and law enforcement alike have acquired a new tolerance to both. Why? Perhaps the numbers are just too overwhelming. Perhaps it's because we know that law enforcement can't work miracles. We know that the problems that land on the doorstep of law enforcement stem from vast social failures that the police alone will never solve.

Yet, the police can't withdraw either. We are engaged in addressing society's worst problems, and the public looks to us for solutions. They look to us for leadership. We can ill-afford to become numb to violence and the community erosion it causes. People rely on the police to make a difference.

I believe the vehicles to help us regain some ground over violent crime are there. One is gun control; the other is community policing. We need to focus on both to make the kind of breakthrough that will make measurable differences in public safety.

There's no doubt about how violent we've become. The homicide rate in America is now about 10 for every 100,000 Americans. In Canada, the rate is 5 for every 100,000 Canadians, and in Japan, it's less than 1.

The fact is that we have become too tolerant of murder. In New York City, there has somehow arisen a new benchmark for homicides. Over 2,000 homicides a year is considered bad; up to 2,000 is somehow "expected" or "acceptable." The old chestnut of laying things end-to-end to get a sense of proportion becomes frighteningly macabre when you realize that 2,000 bodies laid end-to-end would stretch for over 2 miles.

So, of course, it is *not* acceptable...simply familiar. We have grown accustomed to the staggering numbers.

We were not always as tolerant. In an issue of *The American Scholar*, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan writes how shocked the America of 1929 was when seven mobsters were murdered on St. Valentine's Day. "It would appear," Senator Moynihan wrote, "that the society in the 1920s was simply not willing to put up with this degree of deviancy." But now, it seems, we are. The fact is: Our larger cities regularly reach a body count of one-half dozen or more over 2- and 3-day periods, but rarely do we call them "massacres" anymore.

Society's increasing tolerance of crime and antisocial behavior, in general, is abetting our own enslavement. The erosion of freedom caused by crime is so pervasive that we are in danger of failing to notice it at all.

It is an accepted practice that the elderly stay home at night. They are easy prey, so they make themselves scarce. They check before getting into elevators. Women of all ages take similar precautions. And, increasingly, we worry about our children's safety going to and from school, and even *in* school.