The moral panic that has been raging throughout Europe in recent years about “street violence” and “delinquent youth,” which are said to threaten the integrity of advanced societies and call for severe penal responses, has mutated, since the French presidential elections of 2002, into a veritable law-and-order pornography. In this heated symbolic climate, everyday incidents of “insecurity” are turned into a lurid media spectacle and a permanent theater of morality. The staging of “security” (sécurité, Sicherheit, seguridad, etc.), henceforth construed in its strictly criminal sense—after crime had itself been reduced to street delinquency alone, that is to say, in the final analysis, to the turpitudes of the lower class—has the primary function of enabling leaders in office (or competing for office) to reaffirm on the cheap the capacity of the state to act at the very moment when, embracing the dogmas of neoliberalism, they unanimously preach its impotence in economic and social matters. The canonization of the “right to security” is the correlate of, and a fig leaf for, the dereliction of the right to work, a right inscribed in the French Constitution but flouted daily by the persistence of mass unemployment amid national prosperity, on the one side, and the growth of precarious wage labor that denies any life security to the growing numbers of those who are condemned to it, on the other.

At the beginning of 2002, as the presidential election campaign commenced, all the mainstream media and political parties in France chose to focus obsessively on the supposed ascent of “l’insécurité,” in spite of the decrease in street crime officially recorded during that year. Driven by the logic of commercial and electoral competition, no one deemed it worthwhile to pay the slightest attention to the results of a series of solidly documented reports produced by INSEE (the National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies) and other studies on the relentless rise of casual employment, the tenacious roots of mass joblessness in the urban periphery, and the correlative consolidation of a vast sector of the “working poor”—according to the new label freshly imported from America,
along with the policies of industrial withdrawal and economic deregulation that fuel their ranks.

Witness this hardly noticed study, soberly entitled “Sensitive Urban Areas: Rapid Increase in Unemployment between 1990 and 1999,” published in March of 2002. Just as the presidential campaign was heating up, which reveals that work instability and social insecurity became at once more prevalent and more concentrated during that decade, notwithstanding renewed economic growth and a drop in the official jobless figures at the national level.2 Thus the share of precarious workers—those employed on short-term contracts, as temporary staff, in subsidized jobs, and in government-sponsored training programs—rose from one in eleven in 1990 (or 1.98 million people) to one in seven in 1999 (3.3 million). Among the 4.7 million residents of the 750 “sensitive urban areas” designated as such by the 1996 Urban Renewal Pact—amounting to one out of every thirteen French inhabitants—the proportion of those in precarious positions bordered on 20 percent.

So much to say that, for youths lacking recognized educational credentials living in France’s neighborhoods of relegation, insecure wage work is no longer a deviant, fleeting, and atypical form of employment. Rather, it is the modal path of entry into a world of work now haunted by the specter of impermanence and unrestrained flexibility.3 And this is for those “privileged” enough to get paid employment, since at the same time unemployment among 15–24-year-olds in these districts kept on climbing: between 1990 and 1999 the proportion of youths who looked in vain for a job rose from 19.9 percent to 25.6 percent nationwide; for their compatriots living in those urban areas coyly labeled “sensitive,” the increase was much sharper, from 28.5 percent to nearly 40 percent. If one adds those holding precarious jobs to those out of work, it turns out that, whereas 42 percent of the youths in these dispossessed districts were economically marginalized in 1990, that figure had jumped to some 60 percent by 1999—before unemployment resumed its relentless forward march to push this rate higher still. And these figures do not include the growing ranks of those regularly employed at the lower end of the wage ladder, with earnings woefully insufficient to cover basic household needs.4

In light of these statistics, attesting to the silent normalization of social insecurity under an alleged Left government, one can better understand the pitiful electoral score achieved among the working class by the Socialist Party candidate who boasted at his campaign meetings of having slain the dragon of unemployment and who, unaware of the spectacular deterioration of the (sub)proletarian condition during his term in office, was promising the return of “full employment” by the end of the next term—a truly obscene slogan for the residents of housing estates subjected for two generations to the rampant desocialization of wage work.5 in the first round of the 2002 presidential contest which resulted in his stunning elimination, Jospin lost 2.5 million votes from his 1995 total. He captured only 14 percent and 19 percent respectively of the vote of manual workers and noncredentialed white-collar workers (compared to 23 percent and 20 percent for Le Pen), about half of what he had drawn five years earlier. Among those with less than a high-school education, Jospin’s share plummeted from 25 percent to 16 percent in five years. Had the leader of the Socialist Party retained an additional three percentage points of the workers’ vote, he would have garnered the 195,000 ballots needed to take second place and likely gone on to win the second round against a feeble Chirac (who had the lowest score of a sitting president in the history of the Fifth Republic in the first round).6

On the main television channels, the nightly news has mutated into a chronicle of run-of-the-mill crimes that suddenly seem to teem and threaten on every side—here a pedophile school teacher, there a murdered child, somewhere else a city bus stoned or an outer-city tobacco instigated by a group of unruly youths. Special broadcasts multiply at peak listening times, such as this episode of the program “This Can Happen to You,” which, under the rubric of “school violence,” unwinds the tragic story of a child who committed suicide as a result of a racket on the playground of his primary school—a completely aberrant case, but one instantly converted into a paradigm for the sake of boosting audience ratings.7 Magazines are full to bursting with features about “the true figures,” the “hidden facts,” and assorted “explosive reports” on delinquency in which sensationalism vies with moralism; they periodically draw up the frightful cartography of “no-go areas”; and they tender essential “practical advice” for dealing with dangers decreed omnipresent and multiform.7

On all sides one hears the obsessive lament about the idleness of the authorities, the ineptitude of the justice system, and the fearful or exasperated indignation of ordinary folks. At the beginning of 2002,
the Plural Left government led by Lionel Jospin multiplied conspicuous measures for repressive show that even its most obtuse members could hardly fail to realize would have no traction on the problems these measures were supposed to treat. One example that verges on the caricatural: the ruinous purchase of a bullet-proof vest for every single gendarme and police officer in France when upward of 90 percent of them never encounter an armed villain in the course of their entire career and when the number of law-enforcement agents killed on duty had dropped by one-half in ten years. The right-wing opposition was not to be outdone on this front and promised to do exactly the same as the government on all counts—only faster, stronger, and tougher. With the exception of the nongovernmental Left and the Greens, all the candidates for elected office thus promoted “security” to the rank of absolute priority for public action and hurriedly proposed the same primitive and punitive solutions: to intensify police operations; to zero in on “youths” (meaning working-class and immigrant youths), “recidivists,” and the so-called hard core of criminals encrusted in the defamed suburbs (which conveniently excludes white-collar crime and official corruption); to speed up judicial proceedings; to make sentences tougher; and to extend the use of custody, including for juveniles, even though it has been demonstrated time and again that incarceration is eminently criminogenic for them. And, to make it all possible, they demanded in unison an unlimited increase in the means devoted to the lawful enforcement of social order. The head of state Jacques Chirac, himself a multirecidivist offender responsible for the organized looting of hundreds of millions of euros in public funds while mayor of Paris for two decades, impervious to all sense of shame, dared to call for “zero impunity” for minor offenses perpetrated in the neighborhoods ringing the city, whose residents have taken to nicknaming him “Supervoleur” (Super-thief) in reference to the multiple scandals in which he has been directly implicated. But this new political-discursive figure of “security” that unites the most reactionary Right and the governmental Left in all the major countries of Europe does not merely reiterate the “old persistent and indestructible myth” of modern society, described by Jean-Claude Chesnais in his History of Violence in Western Society from 1800 to Our Times, according to which violence is a phenomenon resulting from a long-term evolution, yet always totally unprecedented, springing up suddenly and intrinsically urban.* Its originality resides in drawing most of its force

*According to Chesnais, the endlessly reactivated modern myth of violence is “an old, familiar monster with three heads: novelty, continuity, and urbanity. For violence,
of persuasion from these two contemporary symbolic powers that are science and America—and, better yet, from their cross-breeding, that is, American science applied to American reality. Just as the neoliberal vision in economics rests on models of dynamic equilibrium constructed by an orthodox economic science “made in the USA,” the country that holds a near-monopoly over Nobel prizes in that discipline, so the law-and-order vulgate of the turn of the century presents itself in the guise of a scholarly discourse purporting to put the most advanced “criminological theory” at the service of a resolutely “rational” policy, a policy deemed ideologically neutral and ultimately indisputable since it rests on pure considerations of effectiveness and efficiency. Like the doctrine of generalized subordination to the market, the new security doxa comes straight from the United States, which, since the abrupt collapse of the Soviet empire, has become the beacon country of all humanity, the sole society in history endowed with the material and symbolic means to convert its historical particularities into a transhistorical ideal and then to make that ideal come true by transforming reality everywhere in its image. And so it was to New York that, over the past several years, French politicians (as well as their British, Italian, Spanish, and German colleagues) of the Left as well as the Right have traveled as one on a pilgrimage, to signify their newfound resolve to crush the scourge of street crime and, for this purpose, to initiate themselves into the concepts and measures adopted by the authorities in the United States. Backed by the science and policy of “crime control” tested in America, the new one-track “security-think” that now rules in most of the countries of the First World, and many of the Second, presents itself in the form of a concatenation of scholarly myths, that is, according to Pierre Bourdieu, a web of statements that intermingle “two principles of coherence: a proclaimed coherence, of scientific appearance, which asserts itself by proliferating outward signs of scientificity, and a hidden coherence, mythic in its principle.”

*In summer 1998, the Association of French Mayors sent Gilles de Robien (UDF) and Jean-Marie Bockel (ps) on a mission to New York to observe there the virtues of “zero tolerance.” To publicize his book État de violence (State of Violence), a rote compilation of all the ultrarepressive clichés of the moment, the Nouvel Observateur published on 8 November 2001 praised Socialist senator Julien Dray as “Jospin’s ace” because he had fully assumed the law-and-order turn negotiated by the Socialist Party after 1997. The supposedly progressive weekly noted with approval: “Known as an ‘agitator’ of ideas, it is on the stomping ground of Giuliani, the highly repressive mayor of New York, that he went for lessons.”
One can examine the texture and take apart the operant mechanisms of the scholarly myths behind the neoliberal law-and-order reason circling around the planet in four steps. The first considers the notion, spread by leading “security experts,” that, as America pacified its “supercriminal” society, countries like France overtook the United States on the dangerousness ledger and would therefore benefit from the importation of US-style penal measures. The second scrutinizes the contention, ardentely promoted by the Manhattan Institute and associated think tanks on both sides of the Atlantic, that it is the police that made crime melt away in the American metropolis in the 1990s. The third shows that, if the New York City police had an impact on the incidence of offenses (a proposition for which there is scant empirical support), it was not through the wholesale moralizing suasion postulated by the “broken-windows theory” of policing, but due to bureaucratic expansion and intensified surveillance that violate the neoliberal mantra of small government. Lastly, it turns out that the aggressive campaign of class-cleansing of the streets waged by the New York City authorities under Rudolph Giuliani was guided not by criminological theory but by a folk belief embedded in the occupational lore of the police called “breaking-balls theory.”

**“Supercriminal” America Pacified and Overtaken by France**

According to the first media and political myth, until recently the United States was ravaged by astronomical levels of crime but, thanks to exacting innovations in policing and punishment, it has “solved” the crime equation after the manner of New York City. During the same period, owing to their laxity, the countries of old Europe have let themselves be caught in a lethal spiral of “urban violence” that has caused them to suffer an uncontrolled epidemic of crime on the American pattern. Thus, such a self-styled “expert” on the question as Alain Bauer, the chief executive officer of Alain Bauer Associates, a “security consulting” firm, who happens to be an influential adviser to French Socialist cabinet members and a grand master of the Grand Orient (the main French Masonic order), could announce with fanfare in a leading national newspaper that, following a “historic crossing over of the curves” depicting the crime statistics of the two countries in 2000, “France is more criminogenic than the US.”*

This astonishing “revelation,” instantly propagated by all the mainstream media (Agence France Presse, France-Info, the main commercial television channel TF1, etc.), demonstrates that, on the topic of “ insecurity,” one can say anything and everything and be taken seriously so long as one joins in the catastrophic and repressive refrain of the day. In reality, thanks to the International Crime Victimization Survey (ICVS), it has been well established for a solid decade that the United States has entirely ordinary rates of crime when these are measured by the prevalence of victimization—rather than by the statistics of crimes reported to the authorities, which are not constructed and collated on the same basis across countries and which, as all “specialists” worthy of the name know, are a more reliable indicator of the activity of the police than of criminals. The US victimization rates have long been comparable to, and even generally lower than, those of a good many other advanced countries, with the notable and readily explicable exception of homicide.* Thus, among the eleven postindustrial nations covered by the ICVS in 1995, that is to say, before the full-scale implementation of “zero tolerance,” the United States ranked second after England for car theft and robbery as well as for assaults and threats; tied third with France, and far behind Canada and England, on the burglary scale; came in seventh, trailing Switzerland, Austria, and Holland, among others, for sexual offenses; and right at the tail of the pack (ninth) for the incidence of personal theft, with a score half as high as that of the Netherlands (see table 15). In all, a combined index of victimization covering eleven types of offenses puts the United States of 1995 in seventh position (with 24.2 percent of its residents having suffered one or several crimes during the previous year), well below Holland (31.5 percent).

*The title of the article in Le Figaro, 18 June 2001, deserves to be quoted in full: “The stunning results of a comparison between the criminal statistic of the [French] Ministry of the Interior and those of the FBI: France is more criminogenic than the United States.” Stunning indeed since this comparison is devoid of validity—a fact that even Bauer implicitly acknowledges when he concedes that “the statistical design [used] is haphazard, relative, partial, fragmentary, and biased.” On the rise of these new consultants and advisers on security, fake researchers and genuine propagandists—salesmen, see Pierre Rimbert, “Les nouveaux managers de l’insécurité: production et circulation d’un discours sécuritaire,” in La Machine à punir, ed. Gilles Sainatti and Laurent Bonelli, 161–202 (Paris: L’Esprit frappeur, 2001).

*The International Crime Victimization Survey (whose existence Alain Bauer, like the leading government experts on this matter, seems unaware of) is a questionnaire survey of households conducted about every four years since 1989 by criminologists at the University of Leiden under the aegis of the Dutch Ministry of Justice and the United Nations’ Interregional Criminological Justice Research Institute (based in Rome). It measures and compares the prevalence, incidence, and evolution of rates of victimization in some fifteen advanced countries.
and England (30.9 percent), but also behind Switzerland, Canada, and France (fifth with 25.3 percent).12 The least "criminogenic" countries then were, and by a wide margin, Ireland (16.9 percent) and Austria (18.9 percent). Yet it is to New York City, and not Dublin or Vienna, that the politicians and the new experts in crime control rushed from across Europe in search of the holy grail of security.

Only its stupendous homicide rate distinguishes America from the countries of western Europe: with ten murders for every 100,000 inhabitants at the beginning of the past decade, and six per 100,000 in 2002, that level remains nearly five times higher than those of France, Germany, or England. It is for this reason that the legal scholars Franklin Zimring and Gordon Hawkins entitled their canonical work on the criminal question in the United States, Crime Is Not the Problem: Lethal Violence in America:13 America has a highly specific problem of deadly violence by firearms, especially acute in its collapsing ghettos and linked, on the one hand, to the free possession and circulation of some 200 million guns and handguns (four million Americans carry one on a daily basis and one-half of all households have one at home) and, on the other, to the weakness of the social-welfare system, the cultural force of acquisitive individualism, rigid racial segregation, extreme poverty at the bottom of the class structure, and the deep rooting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Prevalence Rate</th>
<th>Rate of Lethal Violence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Holland</td>
<td>31.5 (1)</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England &amp; Wales</td>
<td>30.9 (2)</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>26.7 (3)</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>25.6 (4)</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>25.3 (5)</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>25.2 (6)</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>24.2 (7)</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>24.0 (8)</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>18.9 (9)</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>18.9 (9)</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Ireland</td>
<td>16.8 (11)</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Prevalence rate = percentage of persons victimized at least once during that year

behind the United States and Canada (39 percent), and far at the rear of Holland (48 percent) and England (54 percent).

So the assertion that America was "supercriminal" but is no longer so thanks to the coming of "zero tolerance," while France is infested by crime (understand: because it failed to import this policy as a matter of national emergency), does not pertain to criminological argumentation but to ideological claptrap. This does not stop Alain Bauer, its author, from giving lessons in "methodology" to the French authorities who consult him with deference (as evidenced by his testimony before the senate Information Commission on Crime on March 28, 2000); or enjoying the reputation of being a rigorous "criminologist" (no joke intended) among supposedly trustworthy journalists; or serving as president of the Steering Committee of the National Observatory on Crime inaugurated with great pomp by interior minister Nicolas Sarkozy in November 2003.

It Is the Police Who Make Crime Melt Away

A recent report by the Manhattan Institute—a major promoter of the "class cleansing" of the streets and nerve center of the worldwide campaign to penalize poverty”—asserts it with emphasis: the sustained drop in the statistics of reported crime in the United States over the past decade is due to the energetic and innovative action of the law-enforcement forces, after they were finally freed from the ideological taboos and legal yokes that previously shackled them. The paradigmatic case for this is offered by the spectacular turnaround achieved in New York by the Republican mayor Rudolph Giuliani under the leadership of his master police chiefs William Bratton and William Safir. But there is a catch: here again facts are more stubborn than ideology, and all scientific studies converge in concluding that the policy did not play the key role that the advocates of the penal management of social insecurity assign to it as a matter of petitio principii—from far from it.

The first proof is that the drop in reported criminal violence in New York began three years before Giuliani ascended to power at the end of 1993 and continued at exactly the same pace after he took over city hall. During the last two years in office of his predecessor, David Dinkins, the homicide rate had sagged by 4 percent and 7 percent respectively, but the vast majority of New Yorkers believed that it was on the rise due to increased media coverage of crime (exacerbated by the reverberations of two major racial clashes involving a black-led boycott of Korean stores in the Flatbush area of Brooklyn in 1990 and a murder-riot between blacks and Hasidic Jews in Crown Heights in 1991). Better still: the incidence of homicides committed without the use of firearms in the city had been falling slowly but steadily since 1979; only gun-related murders declined sharply after 1990, after having taken off between 1985 and 1990 due to the boom of the crack trade; and neither of these two curves displays any particular inflection under Rudolph Giuliani.17 Digging further, one finds that, based on official data from the NYPD, the aggravated assault rate in the city started to drop in 1988, the robbery rate in 1980 (except for a moderate surge in 1987–90), burglary in 1980, and vehicle theft in 1990. The aggregate index for all property crimes, combining burglary, larceny-theft, and motor vehicle theft, fell for 14 consecutive years from 1988 to 2002 (or during 18 of 22 years since 1980).18 So clearly crime has fallen precipitously in New York, but this fall started long before Giuliani and Bratton came on the scene.

The second proof is that the ebbing of criminal violence is just as marked in cities that did not adopt the New York policy of "zero tolerance," including those that opted for a diametrically opposed approach,

*Alain Bauer’s proclamation—"We can confirm, without serious risk of being contradicted, that France has just overtaken the United States in its crime rate" ("La France plus crimino-gène que les États-Unis," Le Figaro, 18 June 2001)—would be visible if not for the fact that the law-and-order drivel of the country’s premier private merchant in security services is regularly relayed by the media and mistaken for criminological truths by state decision-makers and local elected officials, bamboozled by the profusion of figures that lend a scholarly appearance to his delirious discourse. The heist is capstoned with his book (coauthored with Émile Perez, controller general of the national police and former secretary general of the police inspector’s union), L’Amérique, la violence, le crime. Les réalités et les mythes, published in 2000 by Presses Universitaires de France in a series with the resounding title “International Criminality.” Under the appearance of a scholarly tome, it delivers a mindless compilation of official data downloaded en masse across the Atlantic from the web sites of the US judicial authorities (such as the Bureau of Justice Statistics), crudely wrapped in the most overused clichés about America—on the Wild West, the wicked city, race riots, drugs, the police—seemingly issued straight out of Hollywood B movies.

**In his chronicle on the program “Mots croisés” (on the public television channel France 2), on which the CEO of the security firm had just appeared, Dominique Dhombres writes: “Alain Bauer, the criminologist [sic], was once again accurate and instructive in his deliberately dispassionate and statistical approach of the phenomenon.” Le Monde, 23 October 2002.

14 It is this neocconservative institute, founded by Anthony Fischer (Margaret Thatcher’s mentor), that canonized the “broken windows theory” and the policy of “zero tolerance,” and then pushed for their export to Europe and Latin America, after having (successfully) campaigned for the dismantling of public aid during the 1980s. Loïc Wacquant, Les Prisons de la misère (Paris: Raisons d’agir, 1999), 14–22.
such as Boston, San Francisco, and San Diego—these cities applied variants of "problem-solving policing," which strives to establish ongoing relationships with residents aimed at preventing offenses, rather than dealing with them ex post by all-out penal sanction. In San Francisco, a policy of systematic "diversion" of delinquent youth toward job-training programs, counseling, and social and medical treatment made it possible to deflate the number of jail admissions by more than one-half while reducing criminal violence by 33 percent between 1995 and 1999 (compared with a 26 percent drop in New York City, where the volume of jail entries swelled by one-third during the same period).

As third proof, from 1984 to 1987 New York mayor David Dinkins had already implemented an aggressive and assiduous law-enforcement policy similar to that deployed after 1993, under the code name "Operation Pressure Point." This campaign was accompanied by a sharp increase in criminal violence, and especially homicides, because during those years the street commerce in drugs was booming. Whence it emerges that, contrary to the claims of the promoters and importers of the "Bratton model," the policing strategy adopted by New York during the 1990s is neither necessary nor sufficient to account for the crime drop observed in that metropolis.

The comparison with Canada, a neighboring country endowed with a similar economic, demographic, and political structure, and whose overall level of crime is practically identical (with the notable exception of the incidence of murders, which is three times lower than south of the border), confirms this conclusion. With a few rare exceptions, between 1991 and 2001 all the regions of Canada recorded a marked decline in homicides, armed robberies, and burglaries of the same magnitude as that observed in the United States, even as the strategies of the law-enforcement forces, judicial expenses, and resort to confinement remained unchanged there. Indeed, owing to fiscal constraints, the ratio of police supervision in Canada (given by the number of officers divided by the total population) fell by 9 percent, and the country's incarceration rate sagged by 7 percent, against increases of 10 percent and 47 percent respectively in the United States during that interval.

As criminologist Marc Ouimet notes, "such a similarity of trends for different kinds of crime, for different regions in the same country, and for two different countries, supports resorting to general explanations to account for the declines" and points toward two exogenous forces driving this remarkable parallelism between the United States and Canada: the one-fifth drop in the number of people in the 20- to 34-year-old age bracket on both sides of their common border and the marked drop in unemployment in both countries, which allowed unskilled lower-class youths to find work and thus encouraged them to withdraw from the criminal economy.

In point of fact, six factors, all of them independent of the activity of the police and the justice system, have acted in combination to sharply curtail the incidence of violent offenses in the large cities of the United States in the 1990s. First, flourishing economic growth, unparalleled in the country's history in its scale and duration, effectively provided jobs and supplied incomes to millions of young men hitherto doomed to idleness or illegal trades, including many in the ghettos and barrios where unemployment retreated noticeably. But the boom did not for that dent the endemic poverty of the segregated neighborhoods of the American metropolis, because most of these new jobs remained casual and underpaid: even as the unemployment rate in New York was cut by nearly one-half between 1993 and 2000, the city's official poverty rate remained unchanged at 20 percent throughout the decade of the 1990s. In fact, it was above all young Latinos who directly benefited from the improvement in the state of the deskilled labor market, as they stand ahead of blacks in the "hiring queue" of urban low-wage employers. For blacks, the euphoric economic climate acted indirectly by raising their hopes for future mobility and by encouraging a growing fraction of teenagers to pursue postsecondary schooling, which in turn greatly reduced their probability of being involved in violent street crime, either as victims or as perpetrators. Notwithstanding the persistence of underemployment and the extremely low level of wages in the new service sectors, detailed statistical studies suggest that the direct and indirect impacts of the rapid decline in aggregate unemployment explain about 30 percent of the decrease in the national crime rate.

The second factor is the twofold transformation of the drug economy. To begin with, the retail trade in crack in impoverished neighborhoods gained structure and stability, so that resort to violence as a means of

*We shall list here separately the various factors other than policing strategy, whose simple addition suffices to account for the crime drop in New York during the closing decade of the twentieth century, to discount the police as a lead cause. But, of course, these factors interacted dynamically with each other, as well as with the very condition they helped produce (a declining incidence of lawbreaking). The daunting conceptual and operational complexities involved in teasing out the workings of the two-way relationship between crime and penal policies (whether at the front end with policing or at the back end with incarceration) are laid out in William Spelman, "What Recent Studies Do (and Don't) Tell Us about Imprisonment and Crime," Crime and Justice 27 (2000): 419–94.
regulating competition between rival gangs receded abruptly. At the end of the 1980s this trade experienced explosive growth and, given that barriers to entry were virtually nonexistent, new entrepreneurs, often young and independent, were constantly coming forward to engage in barriers to entry were virtually nonexistent, new entrepreneurs, often young and independent, were constantly coming forward to engage in deadly territorial struggles: in 1991, 670 of the 2,161 homicides recorded in New York City were linked to narcotics trafficking. A decade later, demand had settled down and the sector had become “oligopolized,” so that the number of dealers fell and relations between them were less conflictual. This translated into a precipitous plunge in the volume of drug-related homicides—it dropped below the one-hundred mark by 1998—since the greater part of that criminal street violence is violence between criminals. Next, crack lost favor with consumers, who returned to other opiates and narcotics, such as marijuana (consumed in the form of a cigar called a “blunt”), heroin, and methamphetamines, the trade in which generates less brutality because it is dominated by sellers operating within networks of mutual acquaintance rather than through anonymous exchanges in public places. It is difficult to quantify the overall impact of this twofold reorganization of the drug economy on violent crime in New York City, but it is sensible to think that it may be of the same order of magnitude as that of the expansion of the wage-labor economy.

Third, as noted earlier, the number of young people (especially those between 18 and 24) shrank, which translated almost mechanically into a decline in street crime, since these age categories are, always and everywhere, statistically the most inclined to violent law breaking. This demographic evolution alone accounts for at least one-tenth of the drop in offenses against persons during the period under consideration. To which one must add, in the case of New York City, the ghoulish statistic of candidates for crime put out of commission by the AIDS pandemic among heroin users (19,000 deaths recorded between 1987 and 1997), those killed by drug overdoses (14,000), gangsters slain by their colleagues (4,150) and put behind bars or deported (5,250), making a total of some 43,000 “troublemakers” physically eliminated over a decade, equal to the number of convicts sent from the city every year to expiate their misdeeds in the penitentiaries that dot the upstate countryside. The recessive effect of the decrease in the young and criminal population was moreover amplified by a strong upsurge in immigration, especially of predominantly feminine migration streams coming from countries such as the Dominican Republic, China, and Russia. Emigrants from these countries arriving in New York during the decade of the 1990s had access to “ethnic niches” that facilitated their entry into the local economy so that, thanks to their commercial activity and consumption, they revitalized declining districts on the edges of the large black ghettos, enabling their inhabitants to “reclaim public space and deter outdoor criminal activity.”

But economic and demographic causes are not the only ones operating here. One must include, among the forces that have cut crime in the United States, a generational learning effect, christened the “little brother syndrome” by criminologists, by virtue of which the new cohorts of youths born after 1975–80 drew away from hard drugs and the murderous lifestyle associated with them in a deliberate refusal to succumb to the macabre fate they had seen overtake their older brothers, cousins, and childhood friends fallen on the front line of the “street wars” of the end of the 1980s: uncontrolled drug addiction, imprisonment for life, violent and premature death. Witness the “truces” and “peace treaties” signed by the gangs that controlled the ghettos of Los Angeles, Chicago, Detroit, and Boston in the early 1990s, which sharply reduced the number of homicides of poor young males. For their part, the organizations left or arising inside the zones of relegation of the US metropolis, such as churches, schools, the gamut of associations, neighborhood clubs, collectives of mothers of child victims of street killings (such as MAD, Mothers Against Drugs, in Chicago, and Mothers ROC, Mothers Reclaiming Our Children, in Los Angeles), mobilized and exercised their capacity for informal social control wherever they still could. Their awareness and prevention campaigns, such as operation “Take Back Our Community” organized by the Grand Council of Guardians (the black police association of New York City), have accompanied and bolstered the spontaneous withdrawal of many youths from the predatory economy of the streets. One should underline here, with Benjamin Bowling, the fact that, like the improvement of the economy, these collective initiatives of the residents of poor neighborhoods have been totally blacked out in the dominant discourse on the fall in criminality in the US, and have even been virulently denigrated by Rudolph Giuliani and William Bratton.

Finally, the levels of criminal violence recorded by the United States at the beginning of the 1990s were abnormally high by historical stan-

"The largely unplanned social experiment in multiculturalism of bringing together people speaking 121 different languages seems to have worked out very well in the sense that it put a break on spiraling crime rates and even helped turn the tide." Andrew Karmen, New York Murder Mystery: The True Story behind the Crime Crash of the 1990s (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 225. Few European politicians intent on establishing their law-and-order credentials would dare draw the logical policy implication of this empirical teaching of the great New York crime tale: that the state should increase immigration in order to depress urban violence.
dards and were therefore very likely to turn downward, in keeping with the statistical law of regression toward the mean. This was all the more likely as the factors that had stimulated them to jump outside the norm (such as the initial takeoff in the crack trade) could not persist. By placing it in the longue durée of the twentieth century, the historian Eric Monkkonen has shown how the period 1975–90 was atypical of the basic trends in violent crime in New York City: between 1900 and 1960 the homicide rate in America's symbolic capital stood a notch below the national average; it left this bracket after the race riots of the 1960s to come to rest at three times the countrywide figure, due to the lightning development of a drug economy regulated by armed confrontation; the swift ebb of the decade of the 1990s simply brought it back to around the national average where it had been a quarter-century earlier.

There remains one major factor to recount, or rather to discount: the incarceration boom. At the national level, the most sophisticated and comprehensive review of existing simulation and econometric studies concluded that, under the most favorable set of hypotheses, "between 79 percent and 96 percent of the violent-crime drop [of the 1990s] cannot be explained by prison expansion," and that this drop would have occurred even in the absence of the country's stupendous carceral buildup.* In New York City specifically, there is moreover a glaring disconnect between policing, prosecution, and imprisonment, in that both the indictment rate and the conviction rate for felony arrestees dropped steadily after 1992.25 This suggests that, under the CompStat regime, the city police did make vast numbers of arrests, but a growing share of these arrests were based on weak, vague, or false charges that could not be sustained in court. So that, contrary to public perception, police activism did not translate into a greater ability to produce guilty pleas and convictions of serious offenders. That the city penal machine was growing more inefficient as it was getting more voracious is confirmed by the data assembled in table 16 below (page 263), showing that the ratio of arrestees over jail admissions dropped from 39 percent in 1993 (107,000 divided by 273,000) to 34 percent in 1998 (130,000 divided by 376,000). This interpretation is further supported by the fact that the number of arrests for misdemeanors was nearly equal to the volume of jail entries at the beginning of the period but came up to nearly twice that figure at the end.

The conjunction of the six factors briefly reviewed above—the economic boom and the restructuring of the street drug trade, the shrinking share of young lower-class males, the generational learning effect and grassroots efforts at prevention, and the long-term cyclical evolution of the homicide rate—is amply sufficient to explain the crash in violent crime in the American metropolis over the past dozen years. But the long and slow pace of scientific analysis is not the rapid and spasmodic tempo of politics and the media. With the help of a new wave of think tanks led by the Manhattan Institute, Giuliani's propaganda machine pounced on the inevitable lag in criminological research to fill the explanatory gap with its prefabricated discourse on the efficacy of police repression, disinterred as the sole remedy for the congenital wantonness of the dangerous classes. This discourse was all the more seductive in that, being framed in the trope of "responsibility," it echoed the individualistic and utilitarian thematics carried by the neoliberal ideology, now hegemonic on both sides of the Atlantic. But let us admit, for the sake of argument, that the police have had a discernible impact on crime in New York City. The salient question would then remain to figure out how it could have produced this outcome.

*William Spelman, "The Limited Importance of Prison Expansion," in The Crime Drop in America, ed. Alfred Blumstein and Joel Wallman, 97–129 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), citation at 108 and 125. Note, however, that two tacit assumptions make even these low figures significant overestimates of the role of carceral growth. First, the counterfactual posited throughout by Spelman (ibid., 105–7, 127) is that "the billions of dollars invested in prison beds over the past two decades" would not have been available for and invested in other social welfare and/or crime prevention measures. Second, all "62 combinations of possible assumptions" examined measure only the crime-suppressive effects of imprisonment (ibid., 111–13). The crime-generative effects of hyperincarceration are never factored into the analysis, despite mounting evidence that the massive lockup of young black men has profoundly deleterious impacts upon the social fabric of the lower-class neighborhoods from which they come that cannot but stimulate and entrench illegalisms there. Loic Wacquant, "Deadly Symbiosis: When Ghetto and Prison Meet and Mesh," Punishment & Society 3, no 1 (winter 2001): 95–133; Todd R. Clear, Dina R. Rose, Elin Waring, and Kristen Scully, "Coercive Mobility and Crime: A Preliminary Examination of Concentrated Incarceration and Social Disorganization," Justice Quarterly 20, no. 1 (spring 2003): 33–64; and Jeffrey Fagan, Jan Holland, and Valerie West, "Reciprocal Effects of Crime and Incarceration in New York City Neighborhoods," Fordham Urban Law Journal 30 (2003): 1551–1600.

Behind "Zero Tolerance," Bureaucratic Reorganization and Activism

According to the planetary mythology diffused by neoliberal policy institutes and their allies in the political and journalistic fields, the New York police laid low the hydra of crime by implementing a very specific policy, called "zero tolerance," which professes to pursue without fail
or respite the most minor infractions committed in public space. Thus, after 1993, anyone caught panhandling or loitering in the city, playing their car stereo too loud, throwing away empty bottles or writing graffiti on the streets, or even violating a mere municipal ordinance, was supposed to be automatically arrested and immediately thrown behind bars: “No more D.A.T.s [desk appearance tickets, requiring one to report later to the local police station where charges may then be laid]. If you peed in the street, you were going to jail. We were going to fix disorder and prevent anyone from breaking them again.” This strategy, claimed its mastermind William Bratton, “would work in any city in America” and it would work just as well “in any city in the world.”

In reality, this policing slogan of “zero tolerance”—which has made its way around the globe when, paradoxically, it is scarcely used any longer as a law-enforcement strategy in the US, where even some conservative politicians deem it offensive—is what Kenneth Burke calls a “terministic screen” that conceals, by the very fact of amalgamating them, several concurrent but quite distinct transformations in day-to-day law enforcement. The New York police department effectively underwent four sets of concurrent changes:

1. A sweeping bureaucratic restructuring, entailing the decentralization of services, the flattening out of hierarchical levels, the lowering of the age of its managers (through the firing of three out of every four top-ranking officers), and the devolution of direct responsibility to precinct captains, whose remuneration and promotion depend partly on the standardized crime “figures” they produce (which creates strong pressure to manipulate statistics, for example, by multiplying the number of false arrests to display activism).

2. A stupendous expansion of human and financial resources: the number of uniformed officers leaped from 27,000 in 1993 to 41,000 in 2001, amounting to half as many police as the whole of France for only eight million residents! This growth in personnel was only possible thanks to an increase in the police budget of 50 percent in five years, which allowed it to top 3 billion dollars in 2000, despite reductions in local government spending (in the same period, funds for the city’s social services were amputated by 30 percent). During his second term of office, for example, Rudolph Giuliani allocated $80 million to a program called “Operation Condor” that enabled city police to work a sixth day of overtime every week. Meanwhile, for contrast, the municipal libraries cut back their opening hours and services due to a budget shortfall of $40 million (amounting to one-sixth of their funding).

3. The deployment of new information technologies, including the famed CompStat program (a scientific-sounding abbreviation that tritely means “computer statistics”), an electronic data-gathering and data-sharing system making it possible to track and scan the evolution and distribution of criminal incidents in real time. This pooling of geographically coded police intelligence is then coupled with monthly meetings of police commanders to “brainstorm” over tactical moves and expeditiously reallocate staff and resources to “hot spots.” (In 1996, CompStat won the “Innovations in American Government” prize given by the Ford Foundation and the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. It was soon elevated to the rank, not only of supreme tool for scientific policing, but of “paradigm” for public management generally.)

4. Finally, a thoroughgoing review of the objectives and procedures of every service, according to schemas worked out by consultants in “corporate reengineering,” and the implementation of targeted “action plans” focused on the possession of firearms, drug dealing in public places, domestic violence, traffic violations, etc.

All in all, the New York City police was a bureaucracy rightly reputed to be cowardly, puffing, and passive, as well as corrupt, and set in the habit of waiting for crime victims to come and file complaints, which it was content to merely record with a constant concern to make the least possible waves in the media and the courts. Under Giuliani, it was transmogrified into the veritable simile of a zealous “security firm,” endowed with colossal human and material resources and an offensive outlook. This much one can grant without contest. But, if this bureaucratic mutation had a pronounced impact on crime—and no one has so far succeeded in conclusively documenting any*—this impact had

*This statement is excerpted from Turnaround, the “autobiography” in which Bratton offers a paean to his own life and brief stint as NYPD head with the assistance of a journalist specialized in rose-tinted biographies of sporting and political stars. William W. Bratton and Peter Knobler, Turnaround: How America’s Top Cop Reversed the Crime Epidemic (New York: Random House, 1998), 329. 309. After being summarily fired by Rudolph Giuliani (who deemed the popularity of his chief of police excessive relative to his own), Bratton reconverted as an international “consultant in urban security” to better sell his expertise in the four corners of the planet, where he was summoned by politicians anxious to demonstrate publicly their resolve to fight crime. In 2002, he was named chief of the Los Angeles Police Department but, curiously, “zero tolerance” has been invisible in his reorganization of policing there (in part because there he simply lacks the very high density of officers to population that he built up in New York).

*Based on a painstaking statistical analysis of available official data, the John Jay College criminologist Karmen finds, for instance, that contrary to the claims of city
little to do with the *particular policing strategy* adopted by the forces of order at ground level. It was a byproduct of shifting from reactive to proactive policing, from desk jobs to street patrols, a shift which mechanically generates more activity, and thus more deterrence and neutralization. As for the role of CompStat in stimulating efficiency and spreading tactical innovations across the city’s 76 police precincts thanks to the weekly meetings of their commanders it stipulates, it pertains to “problem-solving policing” and not to “zero tolerance,” as one of the coinventors of the “broken windows theory” readily concedes.  

Paradoxically, if the crime control approach of Giuliani stands out in his bureaucratic overhaul of city hall, it is as a *violation* of neoliberal principles of small government and reduced public expenditures. Along with his counterparts in Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Cleveland, the Republican mayor of New York was an aggressive proponent of the so-called New Management Strategy, which purports to import business protocols into public administration. But he definitely did not apply the principles of debureaucratization, downsizing, and privatization to policing, on the contrary. During his first five years in office, Giuliani boosted public safety funding by 20 percent in constant dollars and cut social services expenditures by 9 percent, despite mounting human needs (by contrast, Dinkins had held the public safety budget constant and increased that for social services by 19 percent between 1990 and 1993). This amounts to a transfer of nearly one billion dollars from social services to public safety, with the brunt of the monies going to pay for the increase in uniformed staff, whose average wages and long-term benefits are much higher than those of civilian employees. In short, the alleged success of law enforcement in New York came, not by following the model of “the entrepreneurial city,” publicly celebrated by Giuliani and his Manhattan Institute mouthpiece, but thanks to a “big-government” strategy of increasing budget and personnel, expanding the scope of public service, and boosting the missions of a high-cost bureaucracy well beyond its usual perimeter.

From “Broken Windows” to “Breaking Balls”

This excessive zeal can be readily detected in table 16 above which shows that, under Giuliani, the city police became a wildly hyperactive machine for mass arrests out of all proportion with public need. Between 1993 and 1998, the volume of arrests in New York ballooned by 41 percent, driven mainly by arrests for minor offenses (the number of misdemeanants caught boomed by 71 percent), even as the total number of offenses reported to the authorities plummeted by 46 percent. As a result, by the third year of Giuliani’s first term, the city police were making more arrests than there were offenses reported to them, and the number of complaints for police brutality (including excessive use of force, abuse of authority, and offensive language) had jumped 50 percent. In 1998, the New York Police Department made 1,164 arrests per 1,000 recorded offenses, as against 454 five years earlier. This grotesque ballooning of police stops and bookings puts us on the path to the fourth scholarly myth of the new law-and-order doxa.
tifically proven criminological theory, the celebrated "broken windows theory." The latter postulates that the immediate and stern repression of the slightest violations or nuisance on the streets stems the onset of major criminal offenses by (re)establishing a healthy climate of order—a queer illustration of the popular French adage "he who steals an egg steals an ox." Resserting the norm dramatizes respect for the law and thereby stems deviance. Now, this so-called theory is of dubious scientific status, to say the least: it was formulated twenty years ago by the ultraconservative political scientist James Q. Wilson and his acolyte George Kelling (the former chief of police of Kansas City, since reconverted into a Senior Fellow at the Manhattan Institute) in the form of a short text of nine pages published, not in a criminological journal subject to peer review by competent researchers, but in the cultural magazine _The Atlantic Monthly_. And it has never received even the beginnings of an empirical verification since then.

In support of the "broken windows theory," its advocates cite as if by rote the book _Disorder and Decline_, published in 1990 by the Chicago political scientist Wesley Skogan, which traces the causes of, and evaluates the remedies for, social and ecological dislocations in urban areas on the basis of a battery of surveys in 40 neighborhoods in 6 US cities. But, upon close reading, it turns out that this work shows that it is poverty and racial segregation, and not the climate of "urban disorder," that are the most potent determinants of crime rates in the metropolis. Moreover, its statistical conclusions have been invalidated due to an accumulation of measurement errors and missing data; and its author himself grants the illustrious "broken windows theory" the status of a mere "metaphor." Indeed, no study designed to validate the ratchet (or scotch) effect postulated by this theory (according to which the suppression of minor offenses would limit the incidence of major ones), such as the survey carried out by Albert Reiss in Oakland, California, and that of Lawrence Sherman in the federal capital Washington, has succeeded in turning up evidence for it. The comparative analysis of systematic data collected in 196 districts of Chicago on the basis of interviews and daily video recordings has even conclusively shown that there exists no statistical relation between the visible indicators of "disorder" in a given area and its crime rates (with the possible and partial exception of burglary).


At the conclusion of a painstaking examination of the question, legal scholar Bernard Harcourt argues that if the New York police department contributed to the decline in crime, it was not by reestablishing civility and communicating a message of stern refusal of impunity, but by the simple fact of having massively increased the intensity of the surveillance it wields: in 1990 Giuliani's city had 38 police for every 100,000 inhabitants; ten years later it deployed twice that number, and their action was strongly targeted on dispossessed populations and districts. In short, it is the accentuation and concentration of police and penal repression, and not the moral mechanism of the restoration of the norm postulated by the so-called theory of Wilson and Kelling, that would account for police effectiveness in the case—itself still hypothetical—where policing would have played a significant role in reducing crime.

But there is a still more comical side to this tale: the adoption of permanent police harassment of the poor in public space by the city of New York had, _on the admission of its own inventors, no link whatsoever with any criminological theory_. The famous "broken windows theory" was in reality discovered and invoked by city officials only a posteriori, in order to dress up in rational garb measures that were popular with the (mostly white and bourgeois) electorate, but fundamentally discriminatory in both principle and implementation, and to give an innovative spin to what was nothing other than a reversion to an age-old police recipe, periodically put back to work and in fashion. Jack Maple, the "genius of the war against crime" and Bratton's right-hand man, who was the initiator of "quality-of-life policing" in the subway before it was extended to the streets, says so explicitly in his autobiography published in 1999 under the cowboyish title _Crime Fighter_: "Broken Windows' was merely an extension of what we used to call the 'Breaking Balls' theory," issued from conventional police wisdom. This folk notion stipulates that if the cops persistently go after a notorious bandit for peccadilloes, he will, for the sake of peace and quiet, end up leaving the neighborhood to go and commit his lawbreaking somewhere else. When he does the local rate of crime automatically diminishes. Maple's innovation consisted in "modernizing" this notion as "Breaking Balls

*One can only hope that the experts of the Institut des Hautes Études de la Sécurité Intérieure, who played a decisive role in spreading the scholarly myth of the "broken window" in France, will be eager to read and recommend (and, indeed, to publish in translation) Harcourt's meticulous critique of the theoretical corruptions and juridical perversions that underpin the doctrine and implementation of "zero tolerance" in the United States.*
Plus" (to use his own expression), by linking identity checks to judicial databases so as to arrest the maximum number of villains sought for other offenses or already under judicial supervision via probation or parole.46

The architect of Giuliani's policing policy openly sneers at those who believe in the existence of "a mystical link between minor incidents of disorder and more serious crimes"—the core crime-inducing mechanism postulated by "broken windows." The idea that the police could reduce violent crime by cracking down on incivilities seems to him plainly "sad," and he gives a wealth of examples refuting this preposterous notion drawn from his professional experience in New York and New Orleans. He even compares a mayor who would adopt such a policing tactic to a doctor who "give[s] a face-lift to a cancer patient" or an underwater hunter who catches "dolphins instead of sharks." And, to avoid all ambiguity, Maple hammers the point home: "Quality-of-Life Plus" is not 'zero tolerance'. Quite the opposite, it implies directing police activity onto those social categories and territories presumed to be central crime vectors to avoid wasting finite resources of time and personnel to enforce the law.47

This insider view confirms external observations suggesting that, in order to be applicable at ground level, the rhetoric of zero tolerance must mutate into its very opposite, selective intolerance and targeted enforcement, in definite places and times, of certain statutes chosen because of their high practical or political value—such as those repressing the long string of lower-class "antisocial behaviors" appearing in Bratton's discriminating list of street nuisances.48

The Architect of "Zero Tolerance" Rejects the "Broken Windows Theory"

[Following] reports of a dramatic drop in violent crime [in New York], many people credited the "Broken Windows" notion that the crooks had suddenly taken to the

*In their approving review of the implementation of zero tolerance in New York in the 1990s, two noted police scholars remark: "Properly applied, assertive policing" devolves into "selective enforcement as part of overall strategies, targeted to specific problems, whether related to drugs, guns, youths or social clubs. . . . All are directed towards particular problems based on their geographical and temporal crime distributions that we know generally falls into clusters. . . . Thus it is not only not viable but undesirable to practice zero tolerance everywhere all the time." Eli B. Silverman and Jo-Ann Della-Giustina, "Urban Policing and the Fear of Crime," Urban Studies 38, nos. 5–6 (May 2001): 954. My emphasis.

Jack Maple would no doubt be astonished to read the following statement in "Memorandum No. 31," drafted by the "experts" of the Institut des Hautes Études de la Sécurité Intérieure, the pseudoresearch arm of the French Ministry of the Interior charged with conducting studies justifying the punitive turn of the Plural Left government, to guide mayors in elaborating "local security contracts" for their city:

American studies have shown that the proliferation of incivilities is nothing but the early warning sign of a general rise in crime. The initial deviant behaviors, no matter how minor they seem, inasmuch as they become general, stigmatize a neighborhood, attract other forms of deviance into it, and herald the end of everyday social peace. The spiral of decline is set off, violence takes root, and with it every kind of crime: assaults, burglaries, drug trafficking, etc. (see J. Wilson and T. [sic] Kelling, "The Broken Windows Theory").

It is on the basis of these research findings that the New York chief of police put in place a battle strategy called "zero tolerance" against the authors of incivilities, which seems to have been one of the causes of the very marked reduction of crime in that city.49

One finds it hard to curb a mounting sentiment of incredulity in the face of such an outpouring of falsehoods, not to say transatlantic tripe, and the gullibility to which they attest. For the tactic of permanent police persecution of the poor in the streets implemented in New York is nothing other than the systematic and deliberate application of folk "theories" based on the professional common sense of policemen. It pertains not to criminology but to "crookology," as Jack Maple would say (he was fond of defining himself as a "crookologist"). But, precisely, such common sense does not, in this instance, make much sense.

*France also has its academic "crookologists," the most active being political scientist Sébastien Roché (presented by his publisher as "one of the experts in matters of insecurity most frequently consulted by cities as well as national ministries"). With
A rigorous and thorough evaluation, by two of the country’s best specialists, of the scientific inquiries conducted over the past twenty years in the United States with the aim of testing the effectiveness of the police in the fight against crime concludes, soberly, that neither the number of officers thrown into the battle, nor internal changes in the organization and culture of law-enforcement agencies (such as the introduction of community policing), nor the strategies that target places and groups with a strong criminal propensity (with the “possible and partial exception” of programs aimed at outdoors drug trafficking) have by themselves any impact on the evolution of offenses. In a final twist of irony, among all the various police strategies reviewed, the authors spotlight “CompStat” and “zero tolerance” as “the least plausible candidates for contributing to the reduction of violent crime” in urban America in the 1990s, and they conclude: “There is one thing that is a myth: [that] the police have a substantial, broad, and independent impact on the nation’s crime rate.”

Like Russian dolls, these four scholarly myths from across the Atlantic nest into each other so as to form a kind of logical chain, with the air of an implacable syllogism, making it possible to justify without resistance the adoption of an aggressive policy of “class cleansing” of the city streets. This policy is fundamentally discriminatory in that it rests on an equivalence between behaving outside the norm and being an outlaw, and it targets neighborhoods and populations suspected beforehand, if not held guilty on principle, of moral deficiencies, nay legal offenses. If it is true that US society, for so long “supercriminal,” has been pacified by the action of the police just when other countries have been struck full force by an “explosion” of crime; that New York City, Mecca of the new American policing religion, has crushed criminal violence thanks to its policy of “zero tolerance”; and that this policy itself was articulated in conformity with a sound criminological theory (“broken windows”), then indeed how could one not rush to import these notions and instigate the measures for which they seemingly supply a rational foundation?

In reality, the four key propositions of the new “made-in-U.S.A” security vulgate now being diffused throughout Western Europe are devoid of scientific validity, and their practical efficacy rests on a collective faith without foundation in reality. But, strung together, they function as a planetary launching pad for an intellectual hoax and an exercise in political legerdemain that effectively taps class fears and ethnic prejudice to justify the rolling out of the penal state. By giving a pseudo-academic warrant to sweeping police activism, these scholarly myths contribute powerfully to legitimating the shift toward the penal management of the social insecurity that is everywhere being generated by the social and economic disengagement of the state.

A figure aplenty, Roche applies himself with an energy that commands admiration to "extending" to France an American theory that has been invalidated in the United States, and the policies associated with it, even if he suggests using other channels to operationalize them—such as enrolling social workers in the machine to fight crime among the poor. See especially his book *Tolérance zéro? Incivilités et insécurité* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2002), where, confusing correlation with causation, he maintains that "incivilities" lead to criminal offenses—as rain would invariably lead to fair weather—whose publication was rushed so as to fall right between the two rounds of the spring 2002 presidential election, with the effect of throwing a little scholarly fuel on the raging law-and-order fire.

"The two criminologists insist: "The most plausible hypothesis is that these police actions interacted with other criminal justice policies (such as imprisonment) and social forces (such as the aging of the population or the decline of outside retail drug markets). . . . Some form of interaction is more plausible than a claim that changes in policing were the sole or greatest contributor to the drop in violent crime." John E. Eck and Edward R. Maguire, "Have Changes in Policing Reduced Violent Crime?" in *The Crime Drop in America*, ed. Blumstein and Wallman, 245 and 248.