

SUMMARY OF PANELS FOR THE THIRD ANNUAL HARRY F. GUGGENHEIM SYMPOSIUM: "CRIME, JUSTICE & POLITICS: LOOKING AHEAD TO '08

By Joe Domanick with Ted Gest

OVERVIEW

There were several headlines to come out of the first annual John Jay /CMCJ, Guggenheim Symposium national survey on public perceptions of crime. Chief among them is that voters think crime is as important an issue as health care and the economy, and want politicians to address it.

Paradoxically, the banner headline to come out of the symposium was that most of the participants believed that street crime and other traditional public safety issues, would play little or no part in the '08 presidential election campaign.

Professor Al Blumstein of Carnegie-Mellon University best summed up the consensus, pointing out that the 1980s and '90s were decades where the public was "exercised about crime." Politicians consequently responded by making criminal justice laws that were "acts of passion," as opposed to reasoned policy, grounded in data-driven social science. We're currently in a different era, Blumstein maintained, and not involved in a major crime wave. As a result, crime is currently a *local*, not a national concern, and will therefore not be an issue in the '08 presidential elections.

But many participants believed that criminal justice *related* issues would be central in the election -- front and center in the case of terrorism and national security, and deeply imbedded in the debate about illegal immigration, where a heated and intensifying controversy is developing over the criminalization of immigration, and

whether local police should enforce immigration laws. As Jeremy Travis, the president of John Jay College, sardonically put it: “We already have our demons for the election: terrorists and immigrants.”

PANEL SUMMERIES

MONDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2007

“Criminal Justice in a Watershed Election Year: Inaugural John Jay Poll on Public Attitudes towards Crime.”

The conference opened with the panel responding to the disparity between the nearly 15-year decline in reported crime in the United States, and public perceptions that crime -- as reflected in the findings of the Guggenheim survey -- remains a major problem. Those findings were eye-opening, given the historic drop in the violent-crime rate since 1994 – which reached the lowest level ever recorded in 2005 – and raised the question of exactly where these perceptions are coming from.

According to the survey, over 80 percent of the respondents said that reducing crime is the most, or a very important issue, for the President and Congress to address in the '08 election. Two-thirds, moreover, believed that crime had increased in America in the past year. In fact, reported violent crime *had* increased by 1.9 percent in 2006, mainly in mid and smaller-sized cities. But according to the annual FBI compilation for 2006, the rate of crimes per 100,000 people (overall), *declined* to its lowest level in 30 years.

Moreover, the respondents believed that the “biggest increases in crime occurred in the area of youth crime,” when in fact juvenile crime is sharply down from levels in the 1990s.

So what is causing the disparities between the reality and perception of among the survey participants? **James Lynch, a Distinguished Professor at John Jay College**, helped kick off the discussion by quoting W.A. Thomas: “What’s perceived to be real is real in its consequences.

“The perception of crime is part of a bigger rowboat,” said Lynch. “In the past we had moral panics in relation to drugs. Today, people think that immigrants are disproportionately involved in crime, and there is [a cry] to criminalize immigration. Perception is different than reality, There are massive misperceptions about crime...and immigrants have a lower participation in crime than do native-born Americans.

Most people get their news from television, and, said Lynch, “People who get most of their information about crime from television, overestimate the crime problem.”

Moreover, he added, “Even if crime has gone down, the public looks at the situation and says: ‘I don’t feel safer.’” Crime has dropped, but in the last year in [specific places] like Orlando, rural areas, and cities of 75,000 to 100,000, crime is getting worse.

Professor Richard Rosenfeld of the University of Missouri-St. Louis, said that it would be a positive turn of events if crime were not an issue in the 2008 elections. When crime became enmeshed in electoral politics, as it did in the 1990s, he pointed

out, the results were a glut of ill-conceived laws and policies. “When politicians focus on crime,” cautioned Rosenfeld, “bad things happen.

“Prison reentry came into the national conversation because the Bush administration was able to enact legislation that brought reentry onto the radar screen. We should take advantage of initially small gains on build on them. When crime goes up and we focus on crime, everybody moves to the right. “

Michael Thompson, Director, Justice Center, Council of State

Governments, cited some sobering statistics from around the country indicting how the criminal justice may be operating and expanding on auto-pilot, irrespective of the consequences of what it’s doing. “Two thirds of prison admissions in Kansas are for probation and parole violations,” he noted. And “Vermont has one of the five fastest growing prison populations in the nation, yet its crime hasn’t gone up.”

Bobby Vassar, Chief Counsel Majority Staff of the U.S. HOUSE

Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism and Homeland Security, responded to a question about how politicians and the press can do a better job with criminal justice, with a question of his own: Are you challenging public views or catering to them? The public’s perception of [crime and the criminal justice system] is not being challenged, it’s being catered to – it’s a question of leadership vs. pandering. Until we start dealing with the cradle to prison pipeline, crime will continue unabated.” At the presidential level, Vassar said, the tendency has been to “talk about how awful you will treat people who commit crimes.”

Policing the Hood Panel: Crime, Race and Young People

Garry McCarthy, the Director of the Newark Police Department, and a veteran of the New York Police Department, talked about how surprised he was when he took over the Newark PD, to find that the department had no central narcotics bureau; and that 60 percent of the cops on the force were working Monday-Friday, 8 a.m-4 p.m. shifts – both indications that the department was far from maximizing its crime prevention potential. Cautioning that law enforcement cannot “stop the crime problem McCarthy gave Newark commanders authority they had previously lacked, to make decisions at the precinct level.

The public, added McCarthy, has to “demand high performance” from its police and “have high expectations – if they don’t demand it, they’re not going to get it.”

“Police have to *affect* crime,” he continued, “rather than just respond to it.” McCarthy also spoke about the exceptional effectiveness of COMSTAT in doing precisely that --and how pushing authority and responsibility down through the ranks really works. In Newark, before he arrived, the police were accountable, but they had no authority at the precinct level to craft a solution and do something about it -- a fatal flaw in the effective use of COMSTAT.

But he cautioned that COMSTAT is not a panacea, and that other, less dramatic tasks -- such as how civilian complaints are handled, and how quickly you get out-of-commission patrol vehicles back onto the street, are also very important.

McCarthy spoke about community policing as well. Real community policing he said, “is not just chasing the radio, not just doing community relations, but walking and chewing gum at the same time. It’s walking young kids to school, but at the same

dealing with the older kids hanging out on the corner, drinking beer [and blasting their boom box.”

McCarthy also complained that while police departments had made big, positive changes over the past decade, “they were only part of the criminal justice system [and that] major change has been coming *only* from cops – not prosecutors,” or politicians who condone, support or acquiesce “to weak federal gun laws, which are facilitating murder and mayhem in our urban centers.”

David E. Chong, the Police Commissioner of Mount Vernon, New York, discussed the concentration of crime and poverty in his city of 100,000 – the poorest area in wealthy Westchester County. Mount Vernon, he said, is a tiny city of just four-and-a-half miles, but it has over 20 percent of all the county’s parolees. Twenty-five percent of the population is 19-years-old and younger, and commits 70 percent of the crime. Chong mentioned that his department, the community and other police agencies needed to learn how to better share “intelligence” with each other, if they wanted to do a better job of stemming juvenile crime.

Chong also complained that “The press loves the shock stories,” and overplays them, focusing obsessively on sensational cases, at the expense of the bigger, more conceptual picture. **McCarthy** jumped in and added, “The press – they love to hate.”

Professor Alex Piquero of John Jay College, discussed his work on racial profiling (driving while black or brown) and concluded that the problem is more complex than generally assumed, and very possibly overstated.

The New York Daily News columnist, **Errol Louis** spoke about “spaces of silence” – areas like Crown Heights in Brooklyn where routine crime is not as well covered by the press -- or not dealt with intensively by the police -- as it is in other, more affluent sections of the city. In such areas, Louis said, the attitude is “You don’t have to police harder -- or police at all, as long as general crime rates in the city are going down.” “There is,” added Louis “a hard lack of sympathy,” for the people living in these neighborhoods -- people look for reasons not to care when minorities are victims.”

Louis’ advice to the press: Find the "spaces of silence" where nothing gets covered; [and] avoid doing stories that lead people to believe the crime problem is too big to solve – it is not.”

Luncheon Keynote Address: Laurie Robinson, Former U.S. Assistant Attorney General, Director of University of Pennsylvania MS program in criminology

Robinson gave a “Top Ten” list of why she believed crime will be an issue in the ‘08 elections.

Reason #10: Crime IS a hot issue again in many localities across the country.

While the latest Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) report does suggest a slowdown in the rise of violent crime in many jurisdictions (and a decline in others) for the first half of 2007, this is still a *mixed picture*. The violent crime increases for both 2005 and 2006 shown in the FBI’s Uniform Crime Reports remain the backdrop.

All crime, to paraphrase Tip O'Neill, is local – and in local communities facing gang, gun violence and homicide problems, crime badly undermines the quality of daily life.

Reflecting that, we're seeing crime becoming a political issue in a growing number of communities. In the last nine months, it has been the key topic in mayoral races in Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Dallas, to name three examples. Crime wasn't just "one" issue in Philly's mayoral campaign. It was "the" banner issue in the race. Michael Nutter's successful come-from-behind campaign was dominated by his promised ability to deal competently, intelligently, and strategically with violence on the streets of Philadelphia.

Reason #9: Some of the likely candidates, such as Hillary Rodham Clinton and Rudy Giuliani, have important credentials on crime. It's a natural issue for them: Rudy Giuliani because of CompStat and the NYC crime drop. Hillary Clinton because of the legacy of 100,000 cops and the '90s crime decline. Giuliani gave a preview of this in late November, when he lashed out at Romney, proclaiming: "He wasn't particularly good at reducing crime. *I* was the most effective in the country at reducing crime. Murder went up when he was governor. Robbery went up. Violent crimes went up."

Romney, of course, hit back, asserting that crime in Massachusetts fell 7% when he was governor. According to the Washington Post, *neither* candidate was exactly "on the money" with their facts and statistics.....

Reason #8: The states are very focused on crime-related issues. There's a tremendous amount of state legislative activity on crime right now that fuels attention to

the issue. States are grappling with everything from prisoner reentry, sentencing, and how to curb prison building costs, to parole, sex offenders, school crime, gangs, and delinquency. Why are they doing this? They are close to their constituents, and they recognize these are real problems demanding action.

Reason #7: The Department of Justice and its woes. The Gonzales departure, U.S. Attorney firings, and Michael Mukasey's confirmation have surely turned the spotlight onto the Department of Justice. This makes it likely that candidates will face questions as the campaign proceeds such as, "Who will you appoint as Attorney General?" and "How will you ensure the integrity and legitimacy of Justice Department functions?" Crime may well become part of that discussion, as enterprising reporters inquire how a new Administration will handle prosecutorial decision-making to shield it from political influence.

Reason #6: Immigration. No one has any doubt that immigration is already front and center as a top issue in this election. But woven throughout that discussion is the question of crime – crimes *committed* by illegal aliens comes up repeatedly in the debate (often uninformed, I might add, by many facts), and the issue of *gangs* – such as Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13), a Salvadoran-born gang that has the full attention of law enforcement nationally. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is now a major player in gang crackdowns nationally. In areas like Northern Virginia, the issue of immigrant gangs dominates the news, as well as the attention of lawmakers and law enforcement.

Missing, by the way, is much discussion of the problem of illegal aliens as victims of crime – a serious, and usually hidden, problem. These individuals are often too intimidated to report their victimization to authorities.

Reason #5: A Len Bias” event. It is not unlikely that a crime event of some kind – a Virginia Tech, Columbine, or Polly Klaas – will again make national headlines and push crime back into center stage in the 2008 campaign. By contrast, we saw candidate Guiliani attempt a “Willie Horton”-like ambush in late November: He attacked a Romney judicial appointee for releasing a prisoner who went on to commit a double murder in Washington State. Instead, I’m referring to a true tragedy that galvanizes public attention.

And here, I would argue, a likely next question may be: What is the federal government doing about crime? Where in the world has the federal leadership been on crime since 9/11? And the Democratic response may well be, “The Bush Administration has been ‘MIA’ on state and local crime! They’ve cut \$2 ½ billion in grants to state and local criminal justice and offered lackluster leadership on crime research!”

I would contend that federal officials – no matter what their views from the standpoint of political philosophy on federal government *spending* for state and local government functions – cannot duck these tough issues that have broad national implications. The Bush Administration’s silence on the problem of local crime has been a failing.

Reason #4: Homeland security. One way or another, the question of terrorism, of course, will loom large in the 2008 elections. The Republicans naturally see it as their issue – Giuliani and Bush can fight over who has more ownership of 9/11. But the Democrats have a big issue here, too – not only the many problems within the Department of Homeland Security – but this all leads to the question, as the International Association of Chiefs of Police has put it, whether the Bush Administration has made **homeland security** a priority at the expense of **hometown security**.

As an aside here – and further on the point of all the cuts in federal dollars to state and local law enforcement – many local cops are scornful about the DHS money as a time when they don't have the resources to handle the difficult day-to-day crime problems they're facing.

Reason #3: Swing States. In the *next* phase of the campaign, all focus will turn, of course, away from Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina and the primary contests to the important swing states. And, remembering the Tip O'Neill adage, let's look at places where homicide rates are rising (or decline is slowing). Guess what? Many of these are in swing states – Philadelphia, Milwaukee, Cleveland, Orlando, Trenton, St. Louis, Newark. Gangs are a large public concern in a number of those jurisdictions – even in unexpected places like Nevada. And according to FBI figures, four in 10 of the nation's largest cities (over 100,000) with the highest homicide rates – Baltimore, Newark, St. Louis, and Philadelphia – are in swing states.

Reason #2: The Supreme Court. Two cases on the Supreme Court's docket this year – which will be argued this term and likely decided by June – throw explosive crime issues into the middle of the 2008 campaign.

The first is the Court's death penalty case, Baze v. Rees, addressing the subject of lethal injections. It will be argued in January. It has resulted in a *de facto* moratorium on most executions across the country – thereby giving unusual prominence to the issue of the death penalty and its effectiveness in an election year.

But that's not the only crime issue taking center stage on the Supreme Court's docket this year.

The second, of course, results from the Court's dramatic November 20th decision to take the appeal in a case involving the District of Columbia law banning possession of handguns. The case provides the Supreme Court with the opportunity for the first time in 69 years to re-examine the Second Amendment right to keep and bear arms. From the standpoint of crime issues, it's hard to think of a more volatile piece of "political dynamite" to be throwing into the middle of a presidential election!

And my #1 reason why crime will be an issue in the 2008 election:

By February, we'll already be a year into the campaign. Every other issue will have been exhausted. The only issue left to discuss.....will be crime.

Crime and Punishment Panel, Part I: The Politics of Incarceration: Sentencing, Parole, and the '08 Election

Professor Al Blumstein of Carnegie-Mellon University talked about the 1980s and '90s as decades during which the public was “exercised about crime.” Politicians consequently responded by making criminal justice laws that were “acts of passion,” as opposed to reasoned policy, grounded in data driven social science. We’re now in a different era, Blumstein maintained, and not involved in a major crime wave. As a result, crime is currently a *local*, not a national concern, and will therefore not be an issue in the '08 presidential elections.

Regarding incarceration trends, Blumstein pointed out that many states are searching for ways to reduce prison costs, because the expenses of incarceration are growing too onerous. (In late December, in fact, governor Arnold Schwarzenegger proposed cutting California’s prison population by over 22,000 inmates as a way of saving more than \$780 million by 2010.)

But states are also encountering resistance. Blumstein cited New York as an example. ” When [New York Governor Elliot] Spitzer tried to close some prisons, he had to back off because of opposition from up-state politicians [whose districts’ economies are dependent on prison money.]”

Blumstein also noted that the U.S. incarceration rate has quadrupled from the early seventies to the present -- from 110 to about 500 per 100,000; and that three strikes, mandatory minimums and other law passed as "acts of passion" should be sunsetted.

Mike Lawlor, Co-Chair, Judiciary Committee, Connecticut State Assembly, spoke about how as a prosecutor in the '90s, he had been part of the tough on crime

movement then sweeping the nation, but has since had second thoughts. Lawlor pointed that many in the Connecticut State Legislature have as well; or at least feel that simply making laws tougher as a way of reducing crime has reached a point of diminishing returns, and was actually making the situation worse.

As a result, Lawlor noted, the reaction to the recent murder of three family members of a Connecticut family by two convicts on parole, was far different than what it might have been in the '90s. This time, when several politicians suggested making already tough laws even tougher, they were met by derision by many in the Legislature, and the proposal was a non-starter. Instead, officials have focused on the need to improve technology, so that, for example, more information about convicts is provided to parole boards. When a questioner noted that in any large-scale reentry effort, such incidents seemed inevitable; Lawlor responded that the risk could be greatly reduced by a far greater allocation of resources to parole and probation departments, which would then be used to reduce case loads and provide better screening, evaluation and scrutiny of prisoners, both prior to release, and once they're paroled.

Lawlor also criticized reporters who didn't know the difference between probation and parole, and kept stressing the maximum possible sentence a suspect could receive, when in reality, such sentences are highly improbable.

The Rev. Vivian Nixon, Executive Director, College & Community Fellowship, CUNY Graduate Center, spoke about the system lacking the capacity to serve the 60 percent of former convicts who recidivate; and about framing prisoner reentry as a civil rights issue.

Crime and Punishment Panel, Part II: America's Prison Systems in Crisis: What's working? What's Not?

Pat Nolan, a prison reform advocate working with the (Christian) Justice Fellowship, is a former California State Assemblyman – a once conservative, law and order Republican who was convicted of corruption -- and served time state prison. Nolan characterized prisons as places built “for people we’re afraid of, but filled “with people we’re just mad at – people who we treat very badly.”

What we should be doing instead, Nolan emphasized, “is treating prisoners with dignity,” “dignity works” – it’s effective. Criminal justice policies, he added, should consequently be geared to “straightening families – placing prisoners in institutions closer to families, and making visiting and phoning inmates far easier. The aim, he said, should be to “heal the entire family in terms of things like substance abuse, [and in] dealing “with the family’s anger at the prisoner.”

Nolan cautioned that we should remember that “the criminal justice system does not exist as an end in itself;” and that “the people who work in it, need to be held accountable. Equating prison with punishment,” he added, “is flat wrong.” Losing control over your life is punishment in and of itself, and “just as disruptive.”

Gary Fields, who covers prisons for the Wall Street Journal, discussed the successful housing of inmates at Louisiana’s Angola State Prison.

He also noted the large number of mentally ill prisoners in many institutions, and that most criminals have stopped their violent behavior by the time they enter their 40s.

Professor Candace McCoy, CUNY Graduate Center, John Jay College, added that: “Prisons cannot be our default position. They are a failure of our imagination.”

McCoy spoke about a new study she co-authored, entitled “Unlocking America: Why and How to Reduce America’s Prison Population.” The report “focuses on how we can reduce the nation’s prison population without adversely affecting public safety,” and reassess who should be in prison, who should not, and alternatives to incarceration. (The mentally ill, for example, said McCoy, should not be in prison, nor should most non-violent criminals.)

What’s really changed in America’s criminal justice system, said McCoy is not things like the number of arrests, but “parole policies – the end of the [criminal justice] line. That’s changed from 40 months total time served, to 56 months – 16 months more.”

The panel also discussed prospects of positive change in the criminal justice system in '08. One of those changes – a federal sentencing policy modifying the disparities in sentencing guidelines between crack and powder cocaine, and making retroactive -- has since been enacted. Another, “The Second Chance Act,” is currently working its way through Congress. Nolan described the bill as a “terrific first step.”

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2007

Real and Imagined Threats: The Politics of Homeland Security

Stephen Flynn, of the Council on Foreign Relations, worried that in response to the War on Terror, we’ve militarized local police, and reduced their crime fighting

capabilities in favor of anti-terrorism. We should concentrate more, he emphasized, on better informing the citizenry about real terrorism threats, and how public can best to a serious or catastrophic event.

Flynn also discussed the need to get the business community involved in anti-terror work, and not simply rely on law enforcement.

Mark Mershon, head of the FBI's New York office, described the Joint Terrorism Task Force of federal, state and local officials. He also discussed the shift of FBI resources from basic criminal investigations to antiterrorism work, saying that much of the "violent criminal program has been cannibalized."

Deportations and the Criminalization of Immigration

Dan Kowalski, the Editor of *Bender's Immigration Bulletin*, noted that the "next hot issue" will be an attack on so called "anchor babies" born in the United States of undocumented parents. Traditionally, under the 14th Amendment, it has been the "birthright" of all people born in the U.S. to become citizens. Opponents said Kowalski, are gearing up to challenge that right.

Kowalski also pointed that charges that immigrants were increasing crime in America were false. In fact, he said, crime rates have decreased as immigration has increased. Immigrant high school dropouts also have a lower crime rate than do native born high school dropouts; and immigrants also have lower incarceration rates than native born Americans. "The longer immigrants stay in America and become like us," he added, "the higher their incarceration rate."

Mesa, Arizona Police Chief George Gascon, was extremely concerned about the political pressure he was facing to have his officers enforce immigration law and arrest the undocumented for the “crime” of being in the United States illegally. Gascon felt that not only was it morally wrong to do so, but policy folly as well.

He pointed to the situation in France and other European countries, where the immigrant populations are angry, alienated and divorced from the mainstream culture, and noted some of the problems those nations are experiencing as a result. If we go down the wrong path, warned Gascon, we could be “headed for internment camps.” Gascon also said that law enforcement’s public concerns about the threat posed to Americans by Mexican gangs such as MS13, are vastly overblown.

Steve Montiel, the Director of USC Annenberg’s Institute for Justice and Journalism said that there was an enormous amount of denial about the racial prejudice he felt was a very important underlying factor driving the illegal immigration debate.

Awards Luncheon: Keynote Speaker Joyce Purnick of the New York Times, spoke about “Why New York City’s felony crime rate has dropped 70 percent since 1993.” She said no one really knew why the city’s crime rate had fallen so dramatically, but listed the possibilities, starting with “[former New York Mayor Rudolph] Giuliani’s explanations”: 1) COMSTAT; 2) The NYPD’s adoption of the “Broken Windows” policing philosophy; 3) His (Giuliani’s leadership); 4) Getting guns off the street; 5) Ending welfare.

She then listed some alternative possibilities, including why the decline has continued: 1) The Expansion of the NYPD; 2) "The Bloomberg administration's efforts to take guns off the street;" 3) "The break-up of the concentration of poor people in the city" as a result of their moving out of a NYC, because it had become too expensive for them to live in; and the replacement of those poor people with immigrants who commit relatively little crime.

The Politics of Gun Control 2008

Neither major political party wants to touch the gun control question in this year's political campaigns, and even a Supreme Court ruling might not force the issue, panelists said. In fact, mayors who are campaigning for tighter restrictions on gun availability have "changed the language" by talking about "crime control" rather than gun control, said John Feinblatt, criminal justice coordinator for New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg. Feinblatt conceded that the outlook is "dismal" for any significant gun control measures in the current Congress. "Neither party wants to take this on," he said. Prof. Robert Spitzer of the State University of New York-Cortland, author of "The Politics of Gun Control," noted that many Democrats still blame gun control for the defeat of their 2000 presidential candidate, Al Gore.

Spitzer sees the possibility that gun control could be a "sleeper issue" in 2008, in large part because of the "wild card" presented by the pending Supreme Court case on whether Washington, D.C.'s handgun ban violates the Constitution's Second Amendment. Even if the court strikes down the ban, however, candidates who have

avored other gun control could avoid the issue by saying they agree that total bans on guns are inappropriate, Spitzer said. Seattle Police Chief Gil Kerlikowske said law enforcement leaders would continue to fight for "reasonable and common sense" curbs on firearms despite the political odds against them in the short term.

Journalism Workshops: Issues & Politics

Workshop 1: The Year in Crime: Presentation of CJJ Survey on Major Crime Stories of the Year

Led by Ted Gest, the President of Criminal Justice Journalists, and CMCJ Senior Fellow , the panel discussed “How well the news media did in covering the major crime stories and issues” of 2007” – including, the “rise in crime in many cities, capital punishment, drugs, guns and gun control; gangs and the crime aspect of immigration.”

While the panel of journalists shared their own opinions, they mainly focused on the observations of three national media experts: Lori Dorfman, Berkeley Media Studies Group; Tom Rosenstiel, Project for Excellence in Journalism; and Al Tompkins, Poynter Institute; and of criminologist James Alan Fox, of Northeastern University – all of whom were specifically interviewed for the panel.

Workshop 2: Covering the Politics of Crime, Punishment and Terrorism in an Election Year

Panel moderator and CMCJ and IJJ Senior Fellow, Joe Domanick, talked about journalists developing “alternative narratives” that better reflect the realities of the criminal justice system and quoted some comments by Pat Nolan made earlier in the symposium: “The face of the prisoner has to change, Nolan said. “We need stories about how we’re not safer, tied to personal stories of the success of ex-offenders, and showing that rehab and treatment programs [actually] work – that’s the way for journalists to tell a true alternative narrative about the criminal justice system.”

Domanick also talked about looking at the work of John Jay College Professor Todd Clear, who’s studied the destructive effective that our mass incarceration policies have had on minority communities, of as one of the great “alternative narrative” stories journalists have missed.

Other issues discussed were breaking down newsroom walls and seeing the criminal justice as part of a larger, complex political and socio-economic system that should be covered by political and other beat reporters, as well as criminal justice journalists; and how reporters can get editors and readers interested in criminal justice issues on an on-going basis in an election year.

In the audience, Steve Montiel talked about covering immigrants as part of the fabric of larger community, and how reporters should NOT go with their gut when covering issues involving race.

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