

Nothing went wrong, until exactly the right circumstances came together. A cop in a hurry and slightly out of synch with the driver's side configuration was unlucky enough to catch the failsafe in its disabled half second. The result was a tragic accident, but a normal one because the obscure glitch in the modified technology needed only a slight misstep by the human operator to set disaster in motion.

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We will next look at a case where the "normal accident" explanation emerges as one of several possible explanations of a racially charged, high visibility instance of a police operation gone terribly awry. Equipment failures play a minor yet critical role. The case involves erroneous information, complex interactions between organizations, split second response times, and a situation spiraling out of control. The case also illustrates the limitations on human operators trying to mount a measured response in a complex, rapidly developing situation where little is going as expected.

The Tragedy of Eleanor Bumpurs

Eleanor Bumpurs was an African-American woman living in a New York City Housing Authority development. In her mid-60s, Bumpurs was emotionally disturbed, overweight, not in the best of health, and she had fallen behind on her rent by less than \$100, which was enough to set the wheels of New York City's housing bureaucracy in motion.²¹

A letter was promptly generated, asking Mrs. Bumpurs for the back rent under the threat of eviction. She ignored this. New York City Housing Authority officials knocked on her door. She wouldn't let them in, shouting through the locked door that appliances and fixtures in the apartment weren't working and she wouldn't pay the rent until they were. The repair crews came but Mrs. Bumpurs wouldn't let them in either. The amount of rent she owed grew.²²

The phone worked better, at least for communicating with Mrs. Bumpurs, who remained adamant about not admitting anyone into her apartment. Her reasons simply confirmed Mrs. Bumpurs's tenuous hold on reality. She was afraid to open the door because she believed that enough people were already infiltrating her apartment through the walls and floors.

Housing Authority officials persisted, actually getting Mrs. Bumpurs to open the door. Since Mrs. Bumpurs held a knife as she recited a litany of what was wrong inside the apartment, housing officials chose not to enter.²³ The legal steps proceeded apace, however, inching closer to where the Housing Authority would have the right to summarily evict Mrs. Bumpurs from her apart-

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ment. Less relentlessly, housing officials solicited help from the Human Resources Administration and tried to get in touch with Mrs. Bumpurs' relatives.²⁴

Housing officials and maintenance workers finally gained entry into the apartment, as Mrs. Bumpurs watched with knife in hand. Fighting their way through noxious odors, workers found human waste festering in cans in the bathtub with flies flitting all about. The things Mrs. Bumpurs had claimed weren't working, were. She blamed all of this on, among others, Ronald Reagan, who was president at the time. The Human Resources Administration engaged a psychiatrist/consultant to go see Mrs. Bumpurs.²⁵

But things were moving on yet other administrative tracks, none of them involving the police. The eviction process reached the Sheriff's Office, which enforces the civil judgments of the New York courts. The sheriffs were gearing up for an eviction even as the psychiatrist managed a face-to-face interview with Mrs. Bumpurs, who greeted him knife in hand, though she did put it down at one point. The psychiatrist ended up more concerned about Mrs. Bumpurs' seriously deteriorated mental state than the knife, which she seemed to carry more as a reserve weapon against her imaginary demons than against people. The alarmed doctor recommended that Mrs. Bumpurs be hospitalized, a request that the city's Human Resources Administration began to dutifully process.²⁶

All the bureaucratic processes were coming to a head simultaneously, so it was decided to evict and then hospitalize Mrs. Bumpurs all at once. A convention of sheriffs, Housing Authority officials, New York City Housing police (a separate department, since incorporated into the NYPD), movers, social workers and psychiatric personnel convened outside Mrs. Bumpurs' apartment door, lending credence to her delusion of being assaulted from all sides by demonic legions seeking entry to her home.²⁷

Mrs. Bumpurs acted predictably. She wouldn't let the officials in, and raged at them from behind the door, threatening to "fix" them if they entered. The gaggle of officials, laborers, housing police and medical personnel were thwarted so they began to speculate about what Mrs. Bumpurs had inside. Perhaps the smells now emanating from Mrs. Bumpurs' apartment related to her "history of lye throwing." (No such history existed; the smells came from roach spray.)²⁸ Perhaps this defiant woman was going to furiously fling her considerable bulk, and perhaps her knife and blinding lye, at anyone in her vicinity.

Then, and only then, were the police called. Two members of the NYPD Emergency Services Unit responded, as was routine in such cases. The officers had the means to deal with emotionally disturbed persons. Their equip-

ment was designed to restrain and pin a disturbed person in close quarters. The emergency service officers had body armor to protect themselves, "moon suits" for entering toxic spaces, and, if all else failed, a shotgun.

A chorus of warnings and concerns greeted those first two emergency service officers. Earlier speculation had grown to near factual status. Mrs. Bumpurs, in keeping with her non-existent "lye throwing history," could very well have been cooking up some lye in her apartment by that time. Though Mrs. Bumpurs had yet to strike out with that ever-present knife, she was now presented as the slasher behind the door. All of this seemed to be confirmed when officers punched out the lock, and peeped through to see Mrs. Bumpurs standing with her knife in what looked to them like a cloud of mist or steam.

The two ESU officers called for backup.²⁹

An ESU sergeant arrived, along with three additional officers. The warnings about Mrs. Bumpurs were repeated, so the sergeant told the officers to gear up. That meant, for the first officer through the door, a protective vest, goggles, gas mask and a large U-shaped bar with a long handle designed to pin and help subdue an unruly individual. The next two officers bursting into the apartment also had on vests, masks and goggles and carried plastic shields. Their job was to help subdue Mrs. Bumpurs once she was pinned by the bar. The fourth cop through the door carried a shotgun, a reserve but ready weapon should any of the cops come into harm's way. The sergeant was the last of the five officers to enter the apartment. The sixth cop remained on guard in the hall.³⁰

The cops bursting into her apartment "must have been quite a sight for ... Eleanor Bumpurs, who had imagined that people were after her.... Here were six men, all but two dressed like spacemen, carrying bizarre equipment and pleading with her to drop her knife."³¹ Mrs. Bumpurs, knife in hand, resisted and tried to fend off the oncoming cops.

Nothing worked; Mrs. Bumpurs maneuvered around the pinning bar, so the officer tried to use it as a ram. Another officer tried to use his shield to disarm Mrs. Bumpurs and then to pin her arm against the wall. She was neither pinned nor disarmed. This roiling mass of cops and the emotionally disturbed Mrs. Bumpurs struggled across the living room. As Mrs. Bumpurs pushed back against the shield being pressed against her, the officer with the iron bar fell and, according to the cops in the room, Mrs. Bumpurs advanced on the fallen officer with her knife. From a distance of two feet, the shotgun-wielding officer fired, pumped, and then fired again. With only seconds having elapsed since the officers had burst through the door, the incident was over and Eleanor Bumpurs lay dying.

Criminal and Organizational Post-Mortems

The Eleanor Bumpurs case played out as a high profile failure and embarrassment of the NYPD. Eleanor Bumpurs was African American; the cops were white. The case became a cause célèbre for activists, was featured in a book-length rendering of "racial atrocities,"³² and remains a mainstay in activist litanies of racially motivated police brutality. A Bronx grand jury returned a second-degree manslaughter indictment against the cop who shot Mrs. Bumpurs.³³ The grand jury concluded that the second, lethal shotgun blast was an excessive and needless use of force because medical evidence indicated that Mrs. Bumpurs' knife hand had been hit by the first shot. The ESU officer was acquitted more than two years later.³⁴

As a result of the Bumpurs case, the NYPD endured a storm of criticism and instituted a number of new policies for dealing with emotionally disturbed persons. These included mandatory simulation training for ESU officers in which actors played mentally disturbed individuals, the acquisition of better equipment, and the development of more deliberate approaches during interactions between police and emotionally disturbed individuals.³⁵

Trials, new policies and required training can minimize but can never eliminate outcomes such as occurred in the Bumpurs incident. That is because officers will always confront dynamic situations that unfold in seconds. Their ability to accurately read such situations is limited, and may well be complicated by false reports. Equipment will fail, and so will procedures, forcing officers into time-pressured improvisations as likely to fail as to succeed. Situations threatening to spin out of control will also elicit from officers responses that have worked in the past, even if those responses may violate procedures. In all of this, disaster lurks, with its occasional emergence all but certain.

But these disasters often flow from a larger organizational context, as did the tragedy of Eleanor Bumpurs. The mess that the Emergency Services cops walked into that day had been created by a variety of organizations. The Housing Authority's rent collection mechanisms had relentlessly painted Mrs. Bumpurs into a legal corner that took no account of her mental incapacity. The local housing officials, who did realize Mrs. Bumpurs' precarious mental state, engaged the sluggish social service bureaucracy on her behalf but did not disengage the eviction process bearing down on her.

Involved social service workers could have put the eviction on hold with an emergency rent payment but wrongly thought that Mrs. Bumpurs had to be interviewed first.³⁶ The psychiatrist, who days before helped settle Mrs. Bumpurs at least a bit while interviewing her, neither recommended nor attended the simultaneous eviction-hospitalization that was sure to set her off.

of the eviction, frustrated, agitated, which they compounded in determining how the police from line analysis was that Mrs. Bumpurs, but because of something about the circumstances that came to-

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As we look briefly at America's first nuclear reactor at Three Mile Island, we find that it sits in the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania. When the accident occurred, it was the first time in the history of the plant for five years but its second major problem in only six months. The power plant was operating with reliable equipment, including a turbine room and cooling tower,

In 1979, a pump feeding water into the reactor was in a serious situation, since the most common problem is that it overheats. An over-temperature, which is catastrophic. Superheated water, without coolant, can cause a pipe to burst. Water is needed in abundance. When the water flow, the water pressure, began to rise. One second later, a relief valve failed to close, as it should have, and the water level rose. The valve began to leak. The reactor started to overheat. The operators, who were automatically informed, began to slow down the reactor.

Human intervention.³⁸

At the time, the reactor was alerting the operators with warning lights and alarms. The problems confronted the operators were similar to those that confronted Mrs. Bumpurs' apartment. 1. Of the control panel's two hundred indicators, many of the indicators were outside of normal range.

The second problem the power plant operators faced was that the control panel was generating false and contradictory information. The control panel falsely reported that the still open valve bleeding off vital coolant had closed. The temperature of the water in the vicinity of the valve was also being misreported in a way that reassured operators that the valve was working as usual. But because the reactor had decided to take itself down a few notches, which required less coolant, the operators reduced the water flow. This, plus the leaking valve, brought the coolant to a level below the reactor core, which now began superheating itself, generating excess steam and setting off chemical reactions that produced radioactive gases that began blowing through the relief valve and out into the world. At this point, the operators were thoroughly perplexed, and ran through a variety of actions, none of which seemed to work.

The operators' predicament was similar to what the police officers faced outside of Eleanor Bumpurs' apartment. When the cops arrived on the scene they had to make sense of the various members of the thwarted eviction committee, who were excitedly sounding multiple alarms with an air of authority, even though some of those alarms were patently false. When the cops entered the apartment in a manner partially responsive to the false data, their tactics not only didn't work, they helped fuel Mrs. Bumpurs' agitated, weapon-wielding response that was ended by the fatal shotgun blast.

Three Mile Island killed no one, but came close. With the incredible heat the reactor core was generating, the water in other pipes running in and out of the reactor building began to overheat. Filled with steam and superheated water, the pipes began banging and shaking, ready to blow. Just as in Eleanor Bumpurs' apartment, nothing was going right.

What the Three Mile Island operators still had—and the ESU officers didn't have, after they had entered the apartment—was time. Though the power plant operators acted urgently not knowing what their time cushion was, the scene was not the one of split second chaos and improvisation that accompanied the attempted seizure of Mrs. Bumpurs. Still, the control room operators made a number of wrong decisions, some of which "over-steered" the reactor.

Over-steering is a common decisional blunder in time-pressured crises.³⁹ Think of the tendency to jerk the steering wheel back to the left when your car starts to skid to the right. At Three Mile Island, over-steering involved, among other things, reducing the injection of coolant into the system nearly to zero. Fortunately, this occurred with enough time to correct the skid. In 1986, however, operator over-steering helped the Chernobyl nuclear reactor in the Ukraine blow sky high, with numerous fatalities and radiation spewed over much of Europe.⁴⁰

The second shot that killed Eleanor Bumpurs may or may not have been a case of over-steering by the officer handling the shotgun. Testimony by the

police officers described Mrs. Bumpurs as still aggressive after the first shot, while autopsy evidence indicated that the first shot disabled her knife hand.⁴¹ However, the two shots were seconds apart, and over-steering not only involves misjudgment but misperception as well. In general, over-steering by police officers in close-quartered, chaotic confrontations that transpire in a matter of seconds can be expected. Even continuous, careful training can do little more than reduce the frequency with which such situations produce erroneous judgments and misapplied force that may well be deadly.

The Three Mile Island reactor was finally brought under control by an operator who had been called in from home.⁴² With a fresh eye, he looked at elements of the system that his fellow operators had categorized as non-problematic, including the true culprit; the stuck open relief valve whose indicators reported a closed condition with near normal temperatures. When the operator isolated that valve from the system, temperatures started going down, as did the pressure inside the reactor building and the piping that serviced it. Thus was complete disaster averted.

Three Mile Island was still a major failure. The reactor had partially melted into itself, creating a radioactive slagheap that took more than ten years to clean up and then seal forever. Similarly, the Bumpurs incident, despite its predominant "normal accident" characteristics, was a major failure that helped create racially charged imagery that hobbles the NYPD, and policing in general, to this day.

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Perrow's conclusion about nuclear power plants was that the risk of "normal accidents," however small, presented too great a potential for catastrophe. He argued against any further investments in nuclear power and proposed that serious consideration be given to shutting down nuclear power plants already in operation.⁴³ Perrow's argument was buttressed by the meltdown at Japan's Fukushima Daiichi plant after the tsunami of March 2011, when conditions engineers hadn't accounted for overwhelmed all protections to create a wide-ranging catastrophe that will take decades to fix.

The Death of Amadou Diallo

The NYPD shooting of Eleanor Bumpers in 1984 was set up by ill-advised moves and misleading information generated by multiple agencies that had dealt with her case for months. When, on the day of her eviction, stymied authorities called for reinforcements, the police got the last minute call to deal with the desperate and delusional Mrs. Bumpers.

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The large cast of government agencies and the months of robotic, tunnel-vision actions that set the stage for Eleanor Bumpers' death is not the usual formula for controversial police shootings and assaults. Most often the questionable use of force involves just two characters—the police (one or more officers) and civilians (again one or more) that those officers feel are suspicious or threatening—and these cases play out, start to finish, in minutes.

Over a decade after Eleanor Bumpers' death, two high-profile NYPD cases occurring within eighteen months of one another followed the one act/two-character model while repeating the racial subtext from the Bumpers case. In both cases, adrenalized white cops misinterpreting a situation delivered grievous injury or death to black males who had committed no crime.

The first case, in August 1997, involved Abner Louima, who had been a spectator to a fight between two women that had spilled out of a club where Louima had been partying. When the police waded in, Louima was caught up in the action and one of the officers, Justin Volpe, mistakenly believed Louima had hit him. With Louima in his custody, an enraged Officer Volpe, along with other officers, beat Louima on the way to the station house. There Volpe sodomized Louima with a broomstick.⁴⁴

The Louima case was not a normal accident—it was a case of brutality with malice aforethought delivered in a rogue moment by an officer who had lost all professional bearings. The patent excessive force and lack of restraint by Volpe, along with the victim's race, were front and center as the case played out in the courts, the media and public discourse.⁴⁵ Four other officers were charged with covering up for or abetting Volpe, with all but one acquitted at trial or on appeal. His criminal trial earned Volpe a thirty-year prison sentence; civil trails ultimately cost the City of New York \$9 million.⁴⁶

The fallout from the Abner Louima case was ongoing when, in February 1999, Amadou Diallo, a twenty-two-year-old immigrant from West Africa was killed in a fusillade of 41 shots fired by four plainclothes officers on anti-crime patrol in the Bronx.⁴⁷

Diallo had been standing alone just after midnight atop the entryway stoop of the row house where he lived. The cops, driving by in an unmarked car, decided something was amiss with this man outside a building entrance in the middle of the cold night. The unmarked car reversed and stopped in front of Diallo's building, with the officers quick-stepping out of the vehicle and shouting commands meant to freeze Diallo. As the cops swarmed towards him up the stairs, Diallo backed into the vestibule while reaching for his wallet, which the cops mistook for a gun. The firing commenced, and ended only when the first two officers up the steps had each emptied their 16 round magazines, and the other two officers had followed-up with nine more shots. Amadou Diallo was dead.

The Amadou Diallo shooting echoed the Bumpers case in some respects: white officers, black casualty; misapprehension by the officers about the individual before them; a chaotic, split-second and tragic denouement. A major difference in the Diallo case was that no other agency contributed to the misunderstandings that determined the tactics employed by the officers. The Diallo case strips police encounters with citizen/suspects down to the bare essentials. Namely, how do officers think, perceive, analyze and react under intense time pressure in uncertain situations? When do officers' thoughts, perceptions and interpretations combine in ways that produce deadly consequences for innocent individuals such as Amadou Diallo?

Diallo, of course, had every right to be taking in the air outside his dwelling, whether at high noon or midnight. The officers, however, did not think about Diallo's behavior in this way. The most experienced Street Crimes officer, from the front passenger seat, set the tone: "Hold up! Hold up! What's that guy doing there?" So, the first articulated thought about Diallo, who belonged on the stoop, was that he was out of place in a way that required some kind of rapid response. "Hold up! Hold up!" was enough to send the unmarked cruiser into reverse, coming to a stop in front of Diallo's building.

The tone of the encounter was thus set.

The two officers on the passenger side, including the officer who first spotted Diallo, flung open the car's doors and advanced between parked vehicles towards Diallo's stoop, announcing themselves as police, with one officer flashing a badge. Whether the multi-lingual Diallo understood right away it was police approaching him is unknown. Language barriers may have been in play, but aggressive body language by the cops may also have set off alarms in Diallo that drowned out their words. Cops are trained to convey commanding posture and tone to control situations that might turn dangerous. And the officer who set the encounter in motion led the charge believing that Diallo might be a push-in burglar or a long-sought serial rapist whose general description Diallo matched.

Whatever he saw or heard, Diallo said not a word but instead turned and ran into the vestibule.

This only put the two cops in the lead more on edge as they arrived, guns drawn, at the top of the stoop where they encountered Diallo at the inner door of the vestibule. Diallo had one hand on the doorknob as he turned towards the cops who were now in full-throated shouts—"Don't make me shoot you!" yelled one—to make Diallo to show his hands. And then one of the closest officers saw Diallo reaching in his pocket and drawing out a black object that ... had ... to ... be ... a ... GUN! The officer shouted out "GUN!" and then emptied his weapon at Diallo, as did the officer alongside who, in the chaos of ricocheting bullets, tripped backwards and fell, which convinced the

case in some respects: officers about the incident. A major contributor to the misperception by the officers. The Diallo case is down to the bare essentials: analyze and react under pressure. officers' thoughts, perceptions, produce deadly consequences?

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two officers bringing up the rear that their partner had been shot, so they started shooting into the vestibule as well.

Forty-one shots and seconds later Amadou Diallo lay dead, and one of the officers could only repeat, as he gazed at the wallet in Diallo's hand, "Where's the f***ing gun?"

When What We See Isn't

What the cops thought they saw was totally wrong, but nonetheless mobilized them to a series of actions that left them cursing over an innocent corpse.

Malcolm Gladwell, in his book *Blink*, uses the Diallo case, among others, to explore how people perceive, interpret and respond to rapid-fire situations, and what kind of training might help us, or officers on patrol, get fooled less often.⁴⁸

As the Diallo case shows, misreads that intensify situations increase the potential that things will end tragically. Witness the Trayvon Martin case in Florida, whose legal resolution remains up in the air as this book goes to press. In that "policing" encounter, George Zimmerman, a community resident on neighborhood watch saw, in Trayvon Martin, a crime waiting to be committed, and initiated an encounter. Though emerging facts indicate each individual misread the other to some extent, only George Zimmerman, who ended the encounter with a fatal shot, remains alive to justify what he saw and believed.

Law enforcement is, of course, held to a much higher standard in such situations. So, it is not surprising that the police dispatcher asked Zimmerman to back off pending the arrival of officers. Officers are better trained and more experienced in recognizing and correctly interpreting signals that suspect and/or agitated individuals convey. These abilities are critical since, as the Diallo case demonstrates, even with police an initial "false read" can set things on a tragic path where the first misinterpretation produces erroneous responses and further wrong assumptions as the situation gains velocity and grows more intense.

The cascading misinterpretations went like this for the officers in the Bronx that night. Diallo's relaxed posture on his own porch became the arrogant ease of a felon lying in wait. *Let's go check him out!* Retreat to the vestibule became escape. *Don't let him get away!* A cowering, diminutive Diallo twists around to see what's coming. *A shooter's crouch!* Out the wallet comes to placate his pursuers. *He has a gun!*

Every interpretation is wrong, but understandable, especially as an incident races on chaotically, each action a second or two after the last, and the officers were in fact acquitted after trial. But "normal accident—law enforcement style" doesn't cut it as a general explanation for such cases. What went on in

the Diallo and similar cases needs to be addressed by modifying tactics, rethinking deployment policies and training in techniques that help officers better read and manage individuals and themselves so as to prevent encounters from needlessly escalating. Officers should be as versed in techniques for decelerating and moderating situations as they are in techniques for forcefully controlling them.

This author helped develop a program mandated by the New York City Council in 2001 as a result of the Louima assault, the Diallo shooting and the death of Patrick Dorismond, another minority club-goer who ended up in a fatal struggle with an undercover officer in 2000.⁴⁹ John Jay College of Criminal Justice, where I teach, was selected to mount a credit-bearing program where NYPD officers, studying together outside any "official training," could consider how issues of organization, management, psychology, and community dynamics shaped their jobs.

Some classes explored how subtle, reflexive and unconscious stereotyping based on difference, which often translates to race, influences decisions. Those classes incorporated research approaches that Gladwell referenced in his incisive analysis of the Diallo shooting. As Gladwell convincingly argues in the context of the Diallo case, stereotyping is in motion from the moment we set eyes on a situation or individual. Understanding the power of stereotypes, and reflecting on how they get established and operate *in us*, can raise the threshold against instant misreads that lock incidents on to tragic paths. Such "training aforethought," by making snap judgments based on stereotypes less likely, buys time for the application of tactics designed to keep officers safe while preventing situations from spinning out of control.

The NYPD also made organizational changes after the Diallo shooting that were designed to make encounters between special unit officers and citizen/suspects less combustible. First, street crime unit officers were put in uniform. Diallo, who as a street vendor dealt with officers on regular patrol, would less likely have fled the approach of uniformed officers that night. It's not clear if Diallo realized at first, or at all, that the men rushing at him in street gear were cops. The all-units-in-uniform mandate was later modified, however, with some units reverting to plainclothes.⁵⁰

Next the NYPD moved to decentralize the Street Crimes Unit, setting up eight commands across the city. Before Diallo the street crime teams operated under a central command that sent units to crime "hot spots" across the city. Identifying a "hot spot" could mean rapid deployment of a hastily put together unit within a precinct or across the boundaries of several precincts without local commanders being notified. Diallo was shot by four officers—three were street crime unit "rookies"—who had never worked together before and were

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patrolling an unfamiliar neighborhood.⁵¹ Other African immigrants who worked long hours lived on Diallo's street, but the officers didn't have such "local knowledge" to help them see Diallo for what he was rather than what they wrongly made him out to be.

When What We Want Can't Be

The Diallo killing also occurred as productivity pressure was intensifying on the street crimes operation. Officers were being added in an attempt to maintain the high rates of crime reduction that such units had helped the NYPD achieve throughout the mid-1990s. But the pressure to keep reducing street crime at the mid-90s rate was pushing operations up against mathematical and practical limits by 1999.

Mathematically, if your operations reduce crime by 10% a year for five years (Year One: $1000 - 100 = 900$; Year Two: $900 - 90 = 810$; Year Three: $810 - 81 = 729$; Year Four: $729 - 73 = 656$; Year 5: $654 - 65 = 589$) you're doing just fine except with that senior commander who wants to know why the 100 solved cases from the "Year One" glory days shrank to a paltry 65 last year. Crime reduction rates also slow as the "pool" of crimes diminishes, but that doesn't stop bosses from obsessing about keeping up those 10% declines. Such a command mentality in the NYPD was fueling pressure on the Street Crimes operation to keep its numbers up.

Practically, any new crime-fighting program will have difficulty maintaining its initial crime reduction rates. When the program starts, crime is everywhere and a good percentage of criminals are so blatant, drug-addled or inept that they are easy pickings. As the program goes on, the "low hanging fruit" perpetrators go to jail or find more legitimate pursuits. The remaining criminals occupy higher ground. Smarter to begin with, they are also smart enough to adjust to a given anti-crime program's techniques.

When you add the mathematics to the practicalities, any anti-crime approach is likely to have a point of diminishing returns, where more troops will not mean higher crime reduction and previously successful tactics can be stalemated as the criminal element changes how it operates. In the stalemated condition especially, it often makes more sense, despite a program's historical successes, to radically overhaul or even end a program—which eventually occurred with the street crimes approach.⁵²

William Bratton, who as NYPD Commissioner was an early architect of the NYPD's "street crimes" approach, had some interesting thoughts on how to deal with a program with a history of success that reaches a point of diminishing returns. Bratton, three years after he left the NYPD, had just finished

a presentation to graduate students at John Jay College when he was pointedly asked about the very recent Diallo shooting. In response, Bratton was dubious about adding street crime officers in pursuit of ever more elusive productivity goals. He suggested instead redeploying some street crime unit officers to community policing and other assignments that would help solidify and build upon the remarkable crime drops the program had achieved. Bratton termed the redeployment a "peace dividend," a way of looking at things that, had it won out over "keep those numbers up," might have spared the life of Amadou Diallo.⁵³

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Our next "normal accident" focus will be police chases. The pursuit by police of vehicles whose occupants are suspected of some offense is the single most dangerous activity of law enforcement—for the suspects, for the police and for innocent bystanders. Police chases that go wrong carry a small, but real, risk of ending in catastrophic accidents with multiple fatalities, years of lawsuits and substantial liability judgments against agencies and even officers. Just like the nuclear power plants that Perrow felt should be put in mothballs, many law enforcement agencies have taken steps to severely limit the pursuit of suspects fleeing in their vehicles.

Pursuit to the Death in Minnesota

Everett Contois was drunk and on a joyride one August night in 1995. He and three other teenagers were careening down a rural road in Blaine, a suburb of Minneapolis, when they passed a police cruiser occupied by Officer William Bott, who clocked the speeding car at 111 miles an hour. Bott gave chase.⁵⁴

The car full of teenagers kept ahead of Officer Bott by running lights and stop signs at speeds between 60 and 80 miles an hour. Then Contois sped past a second officer, John Burch, who joined the chase, becoming the closest pursuer.

With Burch hot on his tail, Contois went through four more stop signs and ended up on a dead end street in a residential neighborhood. To get away, Contois drove over two lawns and a retaining wall in order to get to the next street over and then sped off again. Officer Burch was right behind as the pursuit wound its way back to main roads.

What Officer Burch did next was right out of the police chase videos we see on TV. He drove alongside the rear fender of the fleeing vehicle then cut his wheels in order to ram Contois' car. The purpose of the maneuver is to throw the suspect's vehicle into a spin, bringing it to a stop. On the third try, Officer Burch did indeed throw the fleeing car into a spin. The car spun across the