Introduction

Over the past twenty years, two very different stories have dominated the popular understandings of crime in New York and Los Angeles. To judge from the major metropolitan newspapers and the stated views of political and community leaders, LA has been plagued by gangs, and when law enforcement has tried to respond to the problem, the results have been worse than simply ineffective. In 1992, the release of the verdict acquitting LA policemen on charges of beating Rodney King set off an episode of urban anarchy; in retrospect, earlier anti-gang law enforcement crackdowns in the late 1980s and early 1990s were seen as contributing substantially to its causes [Christopher, 1991 #3129]. A series of subsequent scandals and reports of disorganization in law enforcement led to the replacement of two chiefs of police and the loss of elected office of two successive heads of the LA County District Attorney’s office (LA DA). As of this writing, in spring 2000, the LA Police Department (LAPD) and the LA DA’s office remain mired in revelations that anti-gang officers in the Rampart and other divisions of the LAPD regularly stole and sold drugs, and on occasion even shot and framed alleged gang members [Parks, 2000 #3127] [Chemerinsky, 2000 #3128]. While crime declined in LA in the 1990s, virtually noone has seriously suggested that local law enforcement deserves the credit.
In New York in recent years, the media and political leaders have not attributed crime to youth gangs but to a diffuse culture of chaos, and the police department, closely controlled by the mayor, has been seen as extraordinarily successful in reducing crime through tight professional management of police personnel. Notorious instances of police abuse have occurred, but in contrast to the experience in LA, they have been resolved relatively quickly through locally organized prosecutions. And, while suspicions of racism and brutality haunt the NYPD, New York's mayor, police chiefs, and local prosecutors have enjoyed widespread support and enviable professional reputations. New York's police leadership has been disseminating its management philosophy throughout the country and, indeed, the world [Bratton, 1998 #2502]. New York's Mayor Giuliani, credited by the usually reserved New York Times for having produced a "marvel" of law enforcement [Silverman, 1999 #2708], p. 3., was easily reelected in 1997 and was set to run for U.S. Senate when health problems intervened.

Judging from media reports, popular opinion, political discourse and the institutional cultures surrounding police departments, it would seem that the fundamentals of crime and law enforcement in the two largest metropolitan areas in the U.S. must be strikingly different. But if we look at crime rates and the routine realities of law enforcement over the last 15 years, the differences evaporate. The overall picture is one of basic similarity colored by differences which do not consistently support either the understandings in New York or the perspectives in Los Angeles that are conveyed by media, popular culture, and law enforcement leaders.

The contrast between the divergent portraits represented in popular cultures and the similar histories of criminal violence and police activity in the two cities are so extreme as to warrant an inquiry into metropolitan crime myths. By characterizing the views of crime and law enforcement in the two coastal cities as myths, I do not mean to assert only that they are fundamentally wrong. Myth, a concept familiar in anthropology and historical theology but unfortunately usually heard only as a summary criticism when voiced in application to contemporary Western societies, is a useful technical term in the analysis of culture.

Three features are salient in assessing whether a
belief is a myth. First, myths are not necessarily false; they are ideas about matters that, under current states of evidence and by the use of the logic of empirical research, cannot be established as true or false. Second, myths are not just guesses about the unknown; they are beliefs that resonate deeply because they address immediate existential concerns which they would resolve with presumptions. Third, myths are not just emotionally evocative fantasies about central matters; they are profoundly consequential for the distribution of power in society.2

The sharp differences between LA and New York3 in their stories about crime and law enforcement call for at least three inquiries. First we need to document and reveal the systematic patterns in how crime and law enforcement are differentially interpreted in the two cities. Second, we should look at the evidence of crime and law enforcement activity independently of media commentary, political spin and police claims, in order to analyze the patterns of difference and similarity in the two cities. When we find that the myths are powerfully contradicted by the two metropolitan histories of crime and law enforcement, we are led to a third question. If patterns of crime and law enforcement cannot explain differences in the popular cultures that have emerged to interpret crime in LA and New York, what does? The evidence bearing on this question is not as neatly organized as are statistics on crime and police activity, nor as ready-at-the-fingertips as are the publications of major metropolitan newspapers. But three critical factors can at least be suggested in this brief space: different immigration experiences, the structure of the two criminal justice systems, and the parochial concerns of metropolitan crime news.

Overall we find that to explain differences in the stories told about crime and law enforcement in LA and New York, we must look at institutional and contextual factors that shape the generation of popular culture in the two regions. There are vast institutional stakes involved in sustaining a presumption that something as telling about collective life as crime must tell a fundamentally unique story in each city. In the end we are left intrigued about a larger question, whether the more basic myth that is shaping metropolitan crime myths is that NY and LA are fundamentally different metropolitan areas.

1. Crime news in New York and LA
Newspapers in New York and Los Angeles have promulgated many similar themes about crime and law enforcement in recent years: a terrifying rise of criminal violence in the late 1980s, amazing declines in the 1990s, a concentration of violence among youth and minorities, and stunning instances of police brutality. But closer inspection reveals patterned differences.

In each city’s news, crime has been portrayed with an organizational character that is juxtaposed against the character of the organization of law enforcement; but the relationship between crime and official control in each city has been the obverse of the other. In New York, crime has been depicted as produced chaotically, with law enforcement agencies portrayed as professionally managed. In Los Angeles, crime has been attributed significantly to organized street gangs, with law enforcement described as chaotic, professionally compromised, and struggling unsuccessfully with its own organizational disorder. If we take the coverage by the major city newspapers as an indication of popular culture, the general, everyday, presumptive understandings in the two urban areas appear to form a dialectic of dialectics.

"Organization and Chaos in Images of Street Violence"

In Los Angeles, gangs have long been the leitmotif for understanding crime. In the early ’90s, the Los Angeles Times used “gang” in its headline or first paragraph to refer to local street youth groups at about ten times the rate as did the New York Times. The relationship diminished somewhat through the decade, but a recent check shows that the comparison remains extreme.

Table 1: Stories on “Gangs” in Metropolitan Newspapers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LA Times</td>
<td>1393</td>
<td>775</td>
<td>2168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NY Times</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


At first glance, “gang” suggests that some form of organization is at least partially governing crime. When we
look beyond the raw counts and examine how the two newspapers use "gang," sub-themes emerge to enrich the contrast. In New York "gang" more often takes on the nature of a verb, while in LA’s constructions "gang" functions more like a noun. New York stories may be of offenders who "gang up" on someone, or who, in an adverbial phrase, attack "in a gang." Note that when used as a verb or adverb, "gang" describes a kind of attack but does not conjure up explanatory ideas or suggest why the attack occurred. Even when "gang" is used grammatically as the subject, as in "A gang of youths attacked...," the reference to gangs often functions as a description of the kind of action rather than as a cause.

In LA’s crime stories, gangs are postured as entities that pre-exist criminal victimizations, providing the motivation that explains them. There are great numbers of LA crime stories of the following sort (all taken from the Los Angeles Times index of its 1991 editions). “Martha Naverette...became the 100th victim of street-gang violence in greater Los Angeles during 1991.” Here the victim was not necessarily “ganged up” upon but the message is that street gangs caused her death.

“Gang” in LA’s crime culture is used as an adjective in ways that indicate not how violence was done but why: crimes are characterized as “gang confrontations," described as part of “gang warfare," labeled “gang-related” or as “drive-by” shootings, even when the only direct evidence reported is that of an assailant acting alone or of a victim’s injuries. “Retaliation” is another common way that the gang idea implies an explanation. As situationally specific behaviors, retaliatory shootings may look no different than other shootings; the message is that they have pre-situationally formed motives.

Sometimes particular gangs (Bloods, Crips, White Fence, 18th Street, Trucha Salvadoreña) are named as the symbols that violence honors, but even when they are not, classic formulas such as “gang-infested area of Los Angeles” implies that gangs exist as live creatures, here as vermin, with ongoing destructive appetites. Just mentioning that a victim was “gang-related," or that attackers were gang members brings an explanatory thrust: “one youth was shot to death and two were wounded by gang members...” "Gang" here is a powerfully resonant part of a noun-phrase; reading such descriptions we already have images of why the event occurred: because revenge, or territory-claiming or even
senseless attacks are the sorts of things gangs do.

When there is no description of “ganging up” or some other distinctive way that violence was situationally enacted, the assertion that, in any case, the crime was “gang” violence suggests that there was organization independent of the moment of victimization. Note how this formulation can ironically work a lack of evidence so that it satisfies the classic form of causal explanation. In order to avoid tautology, explanatory variables should be “independent,” i.e., they should vary or be shown to exist independent of the dependent variables that they would explain. “Ganging up” doesn’t explain crime because it does not imply organization independent of the situation of victimization. It tells how the crime was done by not why. But an article asserting that situationally undistinguished violence was by a “gang” can suggest why, because it implies the existence of an entity that transcends moments of violence. Such a report can lend a hard sense of causality to an account of crime just because it does not describe how the crime was done. In LA, the very fact that there is no situational evidence of distinctive gang activity supports rather than undermines the gang myth.

“Gang” news organizes the reader’s otherwise chaotic perception of crime. What is available for reporting on violence is usually mute result and brute fact, most commonly, that someone was shot. By suggesting gang involvement, what otherwise might be nothing more than a naked, unnerving description of victimization is immediately encased in explanatory imagery. If it does not put readers at ease, the gang connection at least suggests that order and discipline is available for their understanding. Often no offender is identified, either in the LA or New York stories on crime. But as the news in LA uses “gang” in crime stories, even if readers do not know who to target, they learn what to aim at: those gangs! New York stories about attacks by a “gang of youths” do not offer the reader even that shred of abstraction for orienting and grounding anxieties.

If New York does not use the street youth gang as a central trope for conceptualizing its problems of urban criminal violence, what does it use? Significantly, youths and street violence also loom large in New York’s crime news coverage. But if the hermeneutic lenses for perceiving youth crime in Los Angeles come in a variety of gang colors, in New York the prevailing interpretive posture at the end
of the 20th century has been a caricature of existential philosophy. News coverage in New York stresses the randomness, wildness, and senselessness of crime. Images of chaos prevail.

One of the most famous street crimes in the nation in the early 1990s was the rape and near-fatal violent assault of a young, female, Wall Street professional who was jogging in Central Park. This attack was characterized as a "wilding," a term introduced into popular culture by this application. In early 1990 (January 19), the New York Times found it advisable to provide a definition of wilding as a phenomenon in which brazen urban youths rampage through streets. In this case the attack had been a group effort, the attackers had been youths, many of the assailants had prior involvements with criminal law enforcement, and the attackers had associated with each other in their neighborhood before the event. Yet no effort was made to characterize the offenders as members of a gang.

In another story from 1990, the New York Times reported that "loosely organized groups of young people who rob, rape or kill for money or fun are on the rise in New York City" (December 11, B, 3). Just when the facts would seem to invite a gang label, the interpretation turns sharply away, leaving an overall impression not of social organization but of youth running in, around, and over superficial symbols of order. In other stories, the New York public learns that stabbings in Central Park are the work of a random, deranged killer (June 23, I, 1), that there is a wave of brutal, random crime in New York City (Aug. 9, B, 1 1990), that the increase in the murder rate in 1990 was caused by drug-related random violence (April 23, A, 1 and Sep. 6, B, 1), and, to quote newspaper pidgin English, "New York City like Wild West" (August 6, B, 1). For their crime mythology, Manhattan writers here favor the symbolic world of the frontier, of humanity forced by the accumulated, incomprehensible forces of history to live on a territory which, while old, has evolved beyond the reaches of civilization.

The suggestion of chaos is heightened in stories about "drug gangs," which, despite the intersection of youth, collective associations, and illegal drug markets everywhere, are rare in LA's crime news. "Gangs" in LA are youth "street" gangs, associations that form around collective symbolic identities, which are understood to be compelling for adolescents and young adult men independent
of specific acquaintance fights, assaults on strangers, or drug sales. But in New York, the imagery is of drug markets giving rise to vicious collaborations to exploit illegal opportunities. Thus even where there are gangs in New York's crime news, they tend to be indicators of the inherently chaotic realities of contraband markets.

One can already see how the style of reporting criminal violence in New York leads the public to look in wild desperation to criminal justice officials, not only for practical action but also for cognitive direction. This inclination is promoted more directly when "gang" news is about the "mafia" or "organized crime" gang, e.g.: "Law enforcement officials said yesterday that Vincent Gigante's racketeering conviction was unlikely to immediately weaken the Genovese crime family's powerful...." Note the reliance on law enforcement expertise. We learn about "crime families" with the assistance of law enforcement expertise. When New York crime is not described as chaotic but as organizationally produced, as in news on "organized crime," professional criminal justice officials are already at least partially in cognitive control, even if the "family's" power remains unchecked.

In LA, the contrast of organized street gangs and the disorganized law enforcement system opens a distinctive cognitive space for intermediary actors. One genre of crime stories reports the efforts of "neighborhood organizations" and "community groups" to mobilize efforts against gang violence. Representative stories include: the head of the "Community Youth Gang Services Project" denies that they are operating as informants for police; United Neighborhoods Organization mobilizes against gang violence.

Another intermediating organization often mentioned in LA gang stories is the school: A "31-year-old 'gang counselor' suffers anxiety attacks from stressful occupation but refuses to give up." Vandalism does $27,000 damage to an elementary school, and gang graffiti is found in the bathrooms. A "fight erupted between rival gangs an escalated into a brawl between black and Latino students" at Inglewood High School.

In contrast, apart from the small number and special category of "organized crime" stories, the "drug gang" story in New York stresses barbarism, a set of people beyond the reach of sympathetic efforts at social control.

They called themselves the Cut Throat Crew, and the
authorities say that in one horrific incident, the drug gang more than lived up its name -- by beating, trying to rape and then throwing a customer off an apartment roof to her death.

When the gang was not demanding payment from its customers, investigators said, it was solidifying control of a $150,000-a-week heroin empire on the Lower East Side, squelching competition through violence and using children as young as 14 to ferry drugs to customers.7

One would not expect to find “counselors” employed to work with New York’s “drug gangs” or mafia “families.” The New York conception of local gang problems does not set the stage for innovative programs of intervention through schools, neighborhood associations, and city-funded alternative activity programs such as night basketball and summer camps; it cries out to law enforcement agencies as a desperate community’s last chance.

“Organization and Chaos in Images of Law Enforcement”

LA’s gangs shade into youth culture, and thus the social worlds of schooling. LA’s crime news thus carves out a large role for amateur intermediaries, such as community groups, and non-law enforcement professionals, for example school counselors. The trope of the non-law enforcement intermediary amplifies the dialectic between gang-organized youth and the police. The work of the intermediaries implicitly casts the police as, at best, irrelevant and, at worst, through alienating “at-risk” youth, routinely counterproductive, even when they are not racist and corrupt.

The cognitive space that is filled in LA with neighborhood groups, charitable and publicly funded anti-gang programs, school counselors and school-sponsored conflict resolution sessions, in New York is filled by references to the multiple law enforcement offices that are constantly supervising disorder, each poised within its particular jurisdictional boundaries to sweep down and pick up some of the bad guys. Robert Morganthau, who long ago became a venerable institution as Manhattan’s district attorney, is credited with descending on the “Cut-Throat Gang” of drug dealers. “Strike Force” agents, from the FBI and prosecution offices of the Justice Department, track the destinies of mob families. A police expert on Chinatown gangs, commenting on the background to acts of violence by young men in the “Flying Dragons,” explains the gang’s links
with economic power groups in Chinatown, immigrant labor management, and home country “tongs.”

The contrastingly different images of the etiology of criminal violence in New York and LA have been complemented by opposite images given to law enforcement over the last decade. In Los Angeles in the 1990s, the image of organized street gangs was first used to create an inverse portrait of a disorganized police force in the context of the spring, 1992 “rebellion/riot” following the verdict in the prosecution of LAPD officers for beating Rodney King. Early news reports attributed the outbreak of the anarchy to marauding bands of gang youth. Indeed, the LAPD set up this interpretation by its dramatic “gang sweeps” in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Drawing personnel from distant bureaus, the LAPD assembled large forces that on given nights entered south Central, low income African-American neighborhoods in a kind of blitzing action, arresting scores of young men based on perceptions of their gang affiliation. For lack of evidence of criminal behavior other than curfew violations, the vast majority were released after a night or two in jail. When the verdict acquitting LAPD officers of beating King was announced in far off Simi Valley, it instantly reverberated through south Central, and young men were soon seen on t.v., vandalizing stores, setting buildings on fire, moving in carloads through the center of the city, beating non-African Americans whom they had dragged out of cars. The most famous videotaped street assault was carried out by a set of young men including “Football Williams,” who was identified as a gang member and was later arrested in a publicity event personally led by LAPD chief Daryl Gates.

In a report scheduled to be released on May 1, 1992 but, since May 1 turned out unexpectedly to be the 3rd day of the King riots, delayed several weeks, Ira Reiner, then District Attorney of Los Angeles, opened with the declaration:

As the 20th century draws to a close, Los Angeles is generally acknowledged to have the worst street gang problem in the United States, if not the world (Reiner 1992, 1).

According to this report, every other black adolescent in LA was a member of a street gang.

The “King riots” added to the disgrace that the much-aired videotape of the police beating of Rodney King had already brought the LAPD. An investigating commission was
established and its report damned the police department [Christopher, 1991 #3129]. Gates was removed as chief (although his removal had to await his decision to retire), a new chief was brought in from Philadelphia and, after his penchant for accepting “comps” in Las Vegas was publicized, his contract was not renewed. For years the department was depicted in LA politics and news as in chaos. Later in the 1990s, when a veteran LAPD African-American police officer took over as chief, it appeared for a brief period that the LAPD was on the way toward tight internal discipline and a recovery of professional respectability. Then, as the ironic result of an internal investigation launched by the new chief, Bernard Parks, the “Rampart” scandal broke. It was revealed that LAPD officers had extorted money from drug dealers, had themselves dealt drugs, and, apparently in connection with these crimes, had shot citizens and covered up the shootings by framing the victims. The events initially reported occurred in the Rampart division, although similar allegations later appeared in other areas of the city. Notably, the officers involved had been acting in “anti-gang” units. As the scandal grew more intense, reports began to appear of widespread abuse of youths’ rights by anti-gang officers.

Thus the dialectical relationship in LA in the 1990s between images of gang-organized criminality and organizationally undisciplined police officers was not a matter of coincidence. The former image was the solid foundation on which the latter image was rapidly constructed. An obverse dialectic emerged at more or less the same time in New York. Just as the perception in LA about the nature of crime as organized by gangs led to the disorganization of law enforcement, in New York the perception of a baffling chaos as the breeding ground of crime shaped the organization of law enforcement. The dialectical relation between the construction of crime and law enforcement was no more coincidental in New York than was the opposite dialectic in LA.

Under Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, the NYPD became famous for a “zero tolerance” policy which in police rhetoric and popular understanding meant two things. One was that, if the law did not mandate less punishment for first offenses, neither would the police. The second was that minor infractions would be treated as seriously as major crimes. New Yorkers were treated to a series of stories describing the NYPD not only punishing homeless men for urinating in public but also arresting well-dressed Wall Street workers
for smoking marijuana in public. Property was seized from unlicensed street vendors; trespassers and “squeegee men” were arrested; parking law scofflaws had their cars impounded and sold. Earlier, the Transit police had mounted a campaign against graffiti, and for the first time in years, subway trains began to appear free of graffiti. William Bratton, the chief of the transit police, rode on his subterranean success to become Mayor Giuliani’s first head of the NYPD.

Chaos, not just crime, was being attacked. Citing the “broken windows” theory promoted by university academics, James Q. Wilson and George Kelling [Wilson, 1982 #2999], Giuliani and his police chiefs argued that signs of disorder regularly escalated through a series of steps into serious criminal violence. Broken windows, graffiti, abandoned cars left for weeks on the streets, were interpreted by street criminals as signs that an area was not being supervised, and thus as a license to use areas criminally, for example to hold drug markets openly. Contraband drug markets in turn bred chaotic struggles over distribution rights that led to violence.

But the “broken windows” theory was only the street side of the alleged transformation of law enforcement. Within the NYPD, the leadership proclaimed a revolution in management style, and it was this new internal policy, particularly a tightening of discipline within the supervisory ranks, that was said to have given effect to “zero tolerance” policies [Bratton, 1998 #2621]. Within police administration, the anti-disorder effort was thought to decrease crime not by garnering a new-found respect for order in the hearts of the masses but through more practical means. When the police stopped young men on minor infractions, such as jumping subway turnstiles, they would check them for outstanding warrants, unpaid fines, and they would frisk them for concealed weapons. It became riskier to carry guns, and the suppression of spontaneous gun violence, it was reasonably thought, would significantly reduce homicide.

The mayor and the police leadership took great pride in claiming that they had reduced crime not simply by being tough with all miscreants but by exercising sophisticated discipline within police ranks. Computer tracking of crime trends began in this period, and the top echelon of NYPD leaders began holding review meetings with subordinates in which they would be held accountable for knowing what the
data showed about their areas of responsibility and for allocating their personnel in response. On one side, the audience for police leaders was the bad guys on the street, on the other, perhaps more personally important side, it was elite business school trained CEOs on whom they modeled their administration. [Bratton, 1998 #2502] [Silverman, 1999 #2708], p. 89.

If we compare the experiences of the two cities with police brutality cases in the 1990s, we get a sobering reminder that we are dealing with mythology. One might think that the greater public respect, apparent managerial discipline, and organizational unity of the NYPD made a difference in lowering the level of police brutality, but there is no clear evidence to that effect. As the LAPD was rocked in the 1990s by publicity over the brutalization of Rodney King and of latino “gang” members by Rampart Division officers, NYPD officers were revealed to have engaged in mind-boggling brutality against Abner Louima and Amadou Diallo. Louima, a black Haitian immigrant, had been arrested for a brawl outside a nightclub. In a Brooklyn precinct station, a white officer “shoved a broken-off broom handle up his rectum, then waved the feces-covered stick under his nose and threatened to kill him...” [Morganthau, 1999 #3124] p. 42. Amadou Diallo was killed in a completely gratuitous, tidal wave assault by four white members of “the city’s élite Street Crime Unit” (SCU) [Chua-Eoan, 2000 #3123] p. 26. Diallo, a West African immigrant, was at the time isolated, unarmed, and innocently engaged. The police fired 41 bullets at him in a matter of seconds on the apparent perception that he was acting evasively and pulling out a gun (it was a wallet). Addressing more routine practices of the NYPD, the New York State Attorney General, issued a probing critique suggesting racism in stop-and-frisk practices [Spitzer, 1999 #2930].

But there are notable differences in the social meanings and organizational implications of police scandals in the two cities. In New York, even when extreme police brutality has surfaced, there has been no parallel in recent years to the LA riots following the verdict in the prosecution of officers in the Rodney King case. The “Mollen Commission” investigated a scandal about NYPD drug dealing that broke in 1992, eventually implicating 6 precincts in widespread drug trafficking, massive perjury and brutality related to corruption. Mayor Giuliani responded by abolishing a city council-created police oversight committee in favor of a new commission of his
creation; his police chief, Bratton, developed a plan to train police to testify truthfully. Both Giuliani and Bratton continued to enjoy widespread public support. The ink on the Mollen report was barely dry when the New York Times was referring to the NYPD as “a marvel of American law enforcement” [Silverman, 1999 #2708], p. 3. Even in reporting the police killings, local and national news media treat the NYPD with respect. Time magazine, for example, wrote of the “élite” SCU (the Special Crimes Unit, which killed Diallo) that “It had been tremendously successful. Though making up less than 2% of the police force, the SCU accounted for more than 20% of the city’s gun arrests....The murder rate plummeted” [Chua-Eoan, 2000 #3123] p. 26.

In New York, scandals lead to commissions that recruit locally prominent lawyers, who use their experience as a stepping-stone to prosecutorial and judicial office. (See the review in [Chin, 1997 #3125], Vol. 1 Pp. xii–xvi.) The same process through which the city officially damns the police department functions as a moral certification for new legal leaders. This pattern, which is barely known in LA, is so well-established in New York that, when police scandals break, New York’s would-be elite appreciate the opportunities for professional-elevation-through-public-service that will ensue.8

In the two famous New York police brutality cases of the late 1990s, prosecutions were handled by African-American-led district attorneys. While Robert Johnson, the black Bronx D.A., lost the trial of in the Diallo case, the racial composition of the legal drama was not lost on the public. The Louima cases were successfully handled by Zachary Carter, the African-American head of the U.S. Attorney’s office for Brooklyn. If the public could not take assurance that police brutality would be less likely in NY in the future, there were grounds to believe that in some fundamentally important respects, the law enforcement system in the area works admirably.9

Meanwhile in Los Angeles, not only has the LAPD been in crisis during virtually the entire decade of the 90s, the L.A. District Attorney’s office has suffered continuous public attacks. Two successive heads of the prosecution office, Ira Reiner early in the decade and Gil Garcetti at the end, lost reelection bids. And the LA police commission and mayor have failed to regain apparent control of the LAPD, with the mayor firing the head of the police commission and the U.S. Justice Department threatening to
take over control of the LAPD because of a lack of responsiveness to the civil rights violations revealed by police scandals. Three years after a beating of a suspect, eighteen months after the revelation of the beating in an internal LAPD investigation, there is no end in sight to the probe of the Rampart Division anti-gang officers for brutalizing suspects, stealing drugs from them and from the police evidence lockup, and in one instance, for planting a gun and framing a defenseless suspect who became paralyzed from a police shooting.

2. Crime and Policing Patterns

The New York and LA myths about crime and law enforcement imply several patterns in the histories of the two cities. In LA, where “youth gangs” were distinctively portrayed as responsible for crime, one might reasonably expect to find that youth violence rose relatively more rapidly when overall crime rates in both cities soared. Given the claims made in NY that policing policies uniquely brought about a “turnaround” in crime, one might think that there was a dramatic decline in New York’s crime unmatched in LA’s experience. With respect to measures of law enforcement activity, the two metropolitan crime cultures lead us to expect an unusual concentration of police activity against adolescents in LA, at least in the period before the LAPD scandals of the 1990s; and in New York, an intensification of law enforcement activity that could have brought about the decline of crime in the 1990s.

What data may we consult to assess these implications? Apart from public medical examiners’ offices, the police generate virtually the only readily available, regularly produced data about crime and police activities, but we must be especially wary of police statistics in this analysis. After all, the police in LA and New York have been strong advocates of their respective city’s myths. Although we have no satisfactory alternative to the data generated by law enforcement activity, some police data are generally accepted as being “harder” than others. For measuring crime, these are data describing the annual number and some demographic characteristics of victims of homicide, while for measuring police activity, they are statistics describing the annual number and some demographic features of people arrested for homicide. In the following discussion, I cite only population data, homicide counts by year and age, and arrest counts by year and age. With these limited resources we can still generate telling analyses.
We are especially interested in "gang" crime and police action against "gang" crimes, but the police never have reliably produced "gang" statistics over a period of several years, much less by using the same coding procedures in different cities. Still, to measure events relevant to gang-aged youth, we can carve out a reasonable age category for organizing the standard victimization and arrest data. Homicides generally drop significantly after early childhood and rise sharply in late adolescence, thus "adolescent" homicide is defined here as crime by or to 16-19 year olds.

Table 2: Homicides, number and rate per 10000 population*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[758]</td>
<td>[983]</td>
<td>[845]</td>
<td>[426]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NY</td>
<td>2.</td>
<td>3.</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[1450]</td>
<td>[2262]</td>
<td>[1566]</td>
<td>[638]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sources: Population data: U.S. Census Bureau, 1980 Census of Population, General Population Characteristics, New York, Volume 1, Chapter B, Part 34, issued August 1982; California, Volume 1, Chapter B, Part 6, issued July 1982; 1990 Census of Population; General Population Characteristics, New York, Volume 1, Part 34, Section 1 of 2, Issued May 1992; California, Volume 1, Part 6, Section 1 of 3, Issued July 1992; U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census of Population, http://factfinder.census.gov/bf. All inter-census years estimated from differences between prior and post decennial year figures. Homicide data from California Department of Justice, Criminal Justice Statistics Center, Special Request Section; State of New York, Division of Criminal Justice Services, Office of Justice System Analysis, Bureau of Statistical Services. Unless otherwise noted, in all tables and figures in this paper, "LA" is the city, not the county.

We note first that homicide rates, when examined over the period 1984-1998, do not sustain the claim that the police in New York did something distinctive to lower the crime rate. If we look at the changes between 1990 and 1998, the perception in New York of a greater decline is modestly consistent with the New York myth. The drop in LA is 57% compared to a drop in New York of 73%. Something miraculous arguably happened, but the difference in the decline in the two cities does not make an overwhelming case
for attributing saintly powers to the police in New York, and if we look within a longer time frame, the city differences diminish further. Thus contrasting the rates in 1984 and 1998, the rate of homicide dropped 60% in New York and 50% in LA. It remains to be seen whether in a few more years, as the time span for perceiving change grows, LA might catch or surpass the New York drop. At the least, there would seem to be reason for substantial celebration in LA as well as in New York. It is not the historical experience with crime victimization but the lack of morally eligible candidates that explains why no-one has been raised to hero status on LA’s collective shoulders.\textsuperscript{13}

It is especially revealing to observe that New York started this period, in 1984, with a substantially lower homicide rate than was being suffered in LA. Homicides in New York jumped up much more in the late 1980s than they did in LA, rising fully 50% from 1984 to 1990 as compared to only 18% in LA. Much of the perception of an incredible decline in New York in the 1990s can be explained by the city’s exceptionally accelerated increase in the late 1980s. As a mayoral candidate in 1993, Rudolph Giuliani was eager to blame the incumbent administration for New York’s crime crisis, but a rapid rise in criminal violence was a national phenomenon in the late 1980s (the national homicide rate of 14-17 year olds tripled from 1984 to 1998, rising from 4.2\(12.1\) per 100,000; from 1984 to 1991, the homicide victimization rate of black males aged 14-17 went from about 18 to about 72/100,000 [Fox, 2000 #3131], pp. 295, 300), and there has been no serious argument that a breakdown in police activities was the cause. New York and LA were part of this national rise, and if there was any miracle in the New York story it was that the rising wave moved through the two cities with a slightly different historical timing that was blessedly fortuitous for Rudolph Giuliani’s career.

A closer look at the dating of changes in crime rates gives one further pause in reading New York’s slightly larger drop as justifying the superlatives bestowed on New York’s mayor and police department. As noted, the LA experience suggests that enormous declines in crime were occurring in this historical period, independent of police policies. To put a finer point on this observation, note that the 57% drop in LA between 1990 and 1998 came during a time when, because of the turmoil in the LAPD started by the so-called Rodney King riots and extending through the Rampart scandal, the department’s management was in almost constant chaos.
But note also that, even looking only at the drop in New York, the details do not fit the story that credits the toughness of the new mayor or the new management policies that his police chiefs brought in. Giuliani and his new police chief, William Bratton, only came into office in January, 1994. Their new policies started at the earliest only in 1994. But in the period 1990 to 1994, the homicide rate in NY had already dropped 33%. It appears that whatever was happening to reduce crime in NY before the start of Giuliani’s administration essentially continued, picking up a slightly greater pace in the overall period 1990-1998. Had there been no acceleration in the rate of decline, and had the pre-Giuliani trend simply continued, the 1998 rate still would have been less than half the 1990 rate. Note also that the drop in NY in the period 1994-1998, when the NYPD/Giuliani regime was touted as having achieved miracles, was only slightly faster than the drop in LA. Homicide in New York was dropping twice as fast as it was dropping LA in the period 1990-1994, before Giuliani and Bratton came into power. If mayoral policies and police management are to be credited with lowering crime rates, these comparative data suggest that it was the regime of Mayor David Dinkins that should be credited.

The image of New York’s exceptional drop, and the exuberant crediting of its police for it, was not created out of whole cloth. The New York crime myth was a product of 3 powerful and common biases in the popular reading of crime data. The first is a practice of not looking comparatively at the experience in other cities, especially the experience in LA. As the country’s second largest city and because of police debacles of the 1990s, LA was strategically positioned for any serious examination of the effects of police management on crime rates.

The second bias in the New York view was due to the frequent habit of looking at raw homicide numbers, not rates. There were significant population changes in both cities in the 1990s, with growth in LA running at a much faster rate than growth in New York, 14% as compared to about 6%, but in this case the biasing effect of raw numbers is not that a contrast of rates would produce a significantly different measure of relative change. It is, rather, that New York newspapers and politicians could correctly and with great emotional impact point to a much larger number of lives saved by the crime decline. Whether we compare rates or the raw changes in numbers of homicides, NY’s 1998 homicides stand at about 27% of its 1990 homicide
total, while LA’s are at about 43%. That decline in New York is given powerful additional human weight when it is observed, as it frequently was, that a specific large number of people, in the contrast of these two years, 1624 people, would have been dead had rates remained what they were in 1990 but were in fact alive at the end of 1998. In LA the comparable figure would be 557, and even if the difference is significantly due to the much larger size of the New York city population as compared to the city of LA (8 million v. 3.5 million), politicians in New York were eager to brush aside statistical niceties about “rates” versus raw numbers by invoking images of the very numerous bodies they could claim their policies had kept warm and mobile.

Finally, the time spans guiding the New York perceptions were misleading. The decline in the 1990s in NY seemed to be especially dramatic in part because the decline started from a significantly higher peak relative to rates in the prior decade. And more generally there seems to be a lag in media and popular cultural recognition of changes in crime rates. Rates began falling significantly during the mayoral administration of David Dinkins, but the search for someone to credit only began after Rudolph Giuliani was in office.

If a comparative view of the historical record of homicide victimization substantially undermines the celebration of law enforcement policies in New York, what light is shed on the myth of gang violence in LA by a similar inquiry? Here we can usefully focus on data describing adolescent homicides and arrests of adolescents for homicide.
Table 3A: Male Homicide Victims 16-19 years old per 10000 Males 16-19, and (number)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>6 (63)</td>
<td>12 (125)</td>
<td>12 (135)</td>
<td>5 (60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NY</td>
<td>5 (110)</td>
<td>12 (232)</td>
<td>9 (164)</td>
<td>3 (57)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 3A offers a strikingly similar picture for adolescent homicide victimization in LA and NY, especially for the period from the mid-1980s to 1990. As we have seen, these were the years in which the news media, law enforcement, politicians and community groups were intensely exercised about youth street gangs, attributing to them major responsibility for the increase in the city’s crime rate. Again as we saw in detail above, no similar attribution was made in New York.

Now, these data can be still reconciled with a view that youth street gangs are much more prevalent in LA. It is not inevitable that a city with a distinctive problem of violent youth gangs would have a higher youth homicide rate. But if youth gangs are not raising the homicide rate beyond what it otherwise would be, it is not immediately clear why political, police and communal demands for punitive attentions should focus on them. Note moreover that to the extent that there is a difference between the increase in youth violence in the two cities during the 1984-1990 period, it was New York that had the greater increase not just in overall homicide but specifically in adolescent homicide. These data make us doubly curious, not only as to
why in LA in this period there were community supported, mayoral encouraged, DA and police organized "sweeps" of black poverty areas to arrest gang members, but also why a distinctive story about subcultures of youth deviance did not arise in New York.

Consider now the comparative change in the two cities over the entire 15 year period. In both cities there was a startlingly rapid rise in the victimization of adolescent males in the late 1980s, the homicide rate doubling on both coasts. And there was a startling drop in victimization of adolescent males in both cities in the late 1990s. As with the total homicide rates reviewed earlier, New York shows slightly more dramatic changes, rising more up to 1990, but only because it started at a slightly lower base rate, and then dropping further in the 1990s.

These patterns would, by themselves, not suggest a different explanation of crime in the two cities. The straightforward reading of these data is that, to the extent gangs were the vehicles for youth homicide in LA, a causal imputation is spurious. It may well be that street gangs have in recent years been a greater phenomenon in LA’s youth culture in than in New York’s, but if so, it appears that their role in guiding youth violence has been to channel it in the sense of giving it a particular symbolic twist and selectivity of targets, not to cause it in the sense of increasing its frequency.

Table 3B: Percent of all homicide victims who were 16-19*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NY</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Male and female. Sources: see Table 3A.

The doubling of youth homicide in the late 1980s was, of course, phenomenal; it would provoke a search for understanding among the most somnambulant organs of popular culture. With Table 3B, we begin to see why popular culture in LA might especially focus its imagination on youth gangs. Even if adolescents were not becoming more violent in LA more rapidly than in New York, it is true that in the late 1980s, and ever since, they have been a bigger part of the LA crime story than they were earlier and than they are in
New York. Note (from Table 3A) that between 1990 and 1998, adolescent homicide rates dropped enormously in LA, by 58%. But the 1998 percent of all LA homicide victims who were adolescents was still 67% higher than it had been in 1984, while in New York, adolescents contributed a relatively steady percentage to the overall city homicide victim statistics.

It was easy to look too quickly at elements in this historical picture and believe that youth gangs were becoming more violent in LA or at least a bigger problem in the city, even when youth homicide victimization plummeted. Youth violence was becoming worse in LA over this fifteen year period, but only as compared to other forms of violence. Youth violence did shoot up in the 1980s, and when it declined significantly in the 1990s, other forms of violence declined even more rapidly, leaving youth violence as a larger part of the overall violence problem in LA.

Some of the biases that we previously found to be sustaining the myth of a police-engineered “turnaround” in New York have supported the gang myth in LA. In particular, news reports and official commentary on crime in LA almost never make a comparative reference to trends in New York or any other city. But something else has been distorting the understanding in LA: the changing absolute size of the youth population in the city’s overall population, which has been increasing twice as fast as in New York (at about the overall rate of population increase, 14%, noted above). [check this] Continuously there was a rapidly increasing number of adolescents in the city over the fifteen year period, and this may have enhanced sensitivities that were profoundly irritated by the crime rate increases in the 1980s and sustained by the larger role of youth crime in the city’s pathologies in the 1990s.

In the 1980s, the gang myth was literally institutionalized in LA’s culture. The California Attorney General’s office pressed police departments across the state to label more and more events as “gang” crimes. LA’s police chief and District Attorney in the late 1980s and early 1990s, invented catchy labels, such as “Operation Hammer,” for mass arrests of alleged “gang” members. Community groups, including many that had been severely critical of LA police chief Daryl Gates, thanked him for organizing the sweeps and remained supportive up to the release of the videotape of the Rodney King beating.

Reactions of South Los Angeles residents to the police
incursions into gang-infested neighborhoods over the past two nights were nearly unanimous: Get the gang-bangers off the streets—fast and for good. And while some argued that innocent people often get caught up in the sweeps, most of the residents agreed that the Police Department must increase its raids to eradicate gang violence. Los Angeles Times, July 4, 1989, II, pp. 1, 4.  

The Los Angeles Times published stories on “gang” crimes at a frenetic pace up through the early 1990s, as we have seen. Once set so powerfully in motion, the fact that youth violence in the 1990s declined to a fraction of its earlier rate was not sufficient to kill the gang myth.

The histrionic mobilizations of LA law enforcement against “gangs” in the first half of the fifteen year period obscured the double structure of the gang myth. The gang myth is not only a superficial popular cultural lens for interpreting LA’s crime, it is also superficial for understanding what has been happening with the area’s law enforcement.

Table 4: Homicide Arrests of Males 16-19*
Number and Percent of all homicide arrests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>243/19%</td>
<td>343/33%</td>
<td>179/32%</td>
<td>98/27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NY</td>
<td>198/18%</td>
<td>413/29%</td>
<td>339/27%</td>
<td>168/21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Sources: California Department of Justice, Criminal Justice Statistics Center, Special Request Section; New York Police Department, Office of Management and Planning, Crime Analysis and Program Planning Section.

Arrests are key tools for investigation. If homicides are thought to occur because of the activities of gang youths, then arrests of youths thought to be gang associates would be a logical investigative strategy. When a set is suspected of involvement, it makes sense to arrest members and try to develop evidence by turning each against the others. One might reasonably expect an aggressive police department to be making a lot of homicide arrests, especially where it is thought that there are communication networks, like gangs, among those who are likely to know about homicides.

If youth gangs are thought to contribute significantly
to criminal violence in LA, we might expect the police in LA to intensify arrests of adolescents when crime rates soar more than do police in cities which also have soaring crime rates but where there is no prevailing belief that youth gangs distinctively contribute to crime. Table 4 shows that from 1984-1990, when crime rates soared in LA, adolescent arrests did rise by 41%, and when crime rates fell in the period 1990-1998, adolescent arrests dropped by 71%. But the swings in New York do not indicate that the gang myth actually guided police arrest practices in LA. As we saw earlier, homicide jumped even more in the 1980s in New York, where, from 1984-1990, arrests of adolescents for homicide rose much more than they did in LA, by 108%, and then dropped by 50% in the 1990s.

A comparison of police practices in arresting adolescents in New York and LA continues the portrait of substantial similarity that we saw in homicide rates in general, a portrait that reveals somewhat more extreme shifts in New York. Read as reflections on the myth of a distinctive police policy in New York, these data are also disconfirming. Before the Giuliani administration took office, when crime soared in New York in the 1980s, the police were hardly passive in their response, nor did they respond more vigorously in the 1990s, at least as regards arrests of adolescents for homicide.

But these data do not allow us directly to compare crime rates with police practices. Perhaps myth-consistent differences between the two cities would appear if we examine how many adolescents the police arrest in each city for each adolescent homicide, during each of these four years. Perhaps the police in LA are consistently arresting more adolescents for each adolescent homicide than are the police in New York, and perhaps the New York police under Mayor Giuliani brought about their city’s crime decline in part through an unusual commitment to arrest a great excess of adolescents per youth homicide.
Table 5: Adolescent homicide arrests per adolescent homicide victim

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NY</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Sources for LA and for NY victims, as in Table 3A; for NY arrests: New York Police Department, Office of Management and Planning, Crime Analysis and Program Planning Section; "adolescent" is 16-19, combined male and female.

Table 5 indicates a difference between the two cities over this fifteen year period but again, not one that sustains the myths about crime and law enforcement in either city. In LA, arrests of youths for homicide, per homicide, drop in the 1980s, when youth homicides soar, as well as in the 1990s, when youth homicides dramatically decline. It is notable that the decline in police activity in LA was substantial in the late 1980s, even as crime rates were soaring, the gang myth was raging, and the police had broad community support to act aggressively against young suspects. The decline of police activity in rounding up adolescents on murder charges to get evidence on adolescent homicide, and to intimidate or otherwise deter would-be youth killers, did not wait for the early 1990s, when the LA police were supposedly "demoralized" by the publicity about police racism that was stimulated by the O.J. Simpson trial and by the historical staining of the reputation of the LAPD when the videotape of the beating of Rodney King was played and replayed around the world. The per-homicide arrests of adolescents dropped by half in the late 1980s and again by half from 1990 to 1994.

The "sweeps" against gang members staged by the LAPD in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and the damning of gang criminals by LA’s police chief and District Attorney in appearances on national t.v. news shows as well as in the local news media, were essentially publicity stunts. Other than the capture of a handful of youths on outstanding arrest warrants, it appears that these mass arrests made no significant contribution to law enforcement. The gang myth in LA is thus revealed to be a double myth, one that not only misleads with regard to the causes of crime but that has also masked what the police fundamentally do to enforce laws against major crimes.
Note also that in both cities, throughout this fifteen year period, the direction of change in police practices runs either independently of or opposite to the direction of change in crime. At the end of the period, in 1998, the number of adolescent homicides in LA is about equal to the number in 1984 (65 and 69, respectively), but the average number of adolescents arrested per adolescent homicide is less than half what it was in 1994. In New York, as murders of adolescents more than doubled in the late 1980s, the number of adolescents arrested per adolescent homicide remained constant. There was little change in this measure of police activity up to 1994. It was only at the end of this fifteen year period, when adolescent homicide rates were at a celebrated low point, that youth arrests per homicide reached their height. To put it conservatively, it is far from clear that the intensification of law enforcement in New York preceded and caused rather than followed the decline in violent crime, at least for adolescent homicides. One might reasonably suggest that in the 1990s, the NYPD become more active only after crime began to drop dramatically.

It is arguable that rises and declines in criminal activity control the confidence and vigor of police activities more directly and obviously than that police action controls criminal activity. For the police to deter crime, they must reach an audience that is diffuse, indefinite, and at best only partially and loosely organized. With regard to the police, there are much more easily identifiable hearts and minds to control. The police continuously engage in a closely inspected discourse with the local media and politicians about official versions of crime realities. And a declining crime rate makes it easier for police to arrest more suspects per offense. Instead of imagining that what the police do affects the level of criminal activity, we should investigate how the historic reputations of law enforcement leaders are indirectly shaped by criminals as they cumulatively produce what becomes an official image of the ebb and flow of the sources of disorder.

3. How Metropolitan Contexts Shape Crime Myths

If a comparative examination of the histories of crime and policing in LA and New York does not justify the distinctive stories developed in the two metropolitan cultures, why have they taken such divergent forms? That the answer is far from simple is indicated by the impermanence of the dominant themes. The image of gang
organized crime and chaotic law enforcement is no more rooted in the southern California landscape than is the obverse image of chaotic street violence and professionally organized law enforcement in New York. Indeed, today’s myths reverse earlier images.

In the 1950s and 1960s, New York, not LA, was the ethnic city where gangs flourished. Organized crime covered not just the current entertaining interest in marginal remnants of mob “families” but labor racketeering on The Waterfront, a successful movie in which Marlon Brando played a longshoreman caught between loyalties to a neighborhood-based gang, a girlfriend, and the welfare of his coworkers. West Side Story, first a Broadway musical and then a successful movie, depicted interrelations of school, urban youth and immigrant cultures shaping street gang violence. Social research followed suit [Bloch, 1958 #2331]. Writing in the mid 1970s about New York Times gang stories, Walter Miller noted that:

Media coverage in New York ... has been characterized by a period of considerable attention to certain types of gangs, a period of virtually no attention, and a period of renewed attention. [Miller, 1976 #3126], p. 98.16

Los Angeles was still a predominately non-“ethnic,” “white,” native born American city well into the 1960s. Carefree blond surfers not black and Latino street gangs dominated the image of LA youth. This image changed abruptly during the Watts riots of August, 1965, but even as late as 1970, the county population was still 80% “white” [Waldinger, 1996 #1985]. Miller found an “upsurge” in LA gang stories in the early 1970s.

On the law enforcement side, for decades after the second World War, the LAPD enjoyed a reputation for professionalism, lack of corruption, and disciplined internal management. Indeed, popular culture in LA often contrasted the LAPD with the corruption and slovenly appearance of the NYPD. There were six major scandals about bribery, contraband sales and brutality by policemen, and at times about prosecutors and judges as well, over the period 1894–1994, known under labels that described the heads of investigating commissions: Lexow, 1895; Curran, 1913; Seabury, 1932; Hefland, 1954; Knapp, 1972; and Mollen, 1994. Mollen Commissioner Harold Baer noted that over “the past hundred years, New York City has experienced a twenty-year cycle of corruption, scandal, reform, backslide and fresh scandal in the New York City Police Department” [Chin, 1997
The LAPD, in contrast, enjoyed a relatively pristine image for over half a century, stretching from a corruption scandal in the 1930s to the Rodney King beating in the early 1990s, much of it under the leadership of a police chief revered for imposing militaristic discipline within the department, William H. Parker. The image of the LAPD was established nationally by the t.v. show, Dragnet, whose star, Jack Webb, wrote scripts in close association with the LAPD. As the neatly attired detective “Joe Friday,” Webb each week would confront the disorganized lives of LA residents. Often still dressed in house robes at midday, the witnesses Webb/Friday confronted were routinely messy in reporting the relevant evidentiary details, and the policeman as routinely had to exercise patient indulgence as he pressed witnesses for “the facts, Ma’am, just the facts.” The chaos was out there in the socially unorganized sprawl of LA, not in the police department. Arrests, controlled by careful preparation, were relatively inconsequential parts of the show.

It is, however, not simply a matter of chance that the urban cultures of crime have developed in a contrasting fashion in the two cities. In the late 1980s, criminal violence shot up across the nation, and all organs of popular culture were exercised in trying to make sense of the very real heightened level of terror on many city streets. The materials available for weaving narratives were distributed differently on the two coasts.

In southern California, the extraordinary demographic transformation documented elsewhere in this volume was well in progress. From 1980 to 1990, in Los Angeles but not in New York, there was a dramatic change in the percentage of the adolescent population that was born outside of the U.S. In LA County, the figure changed from 14% to 39% in only ten years; in New York City, there was a modest rise, from 23%
to 27%. Figure 1 gives a sense of the stunning contrast that emerged in the histories of the two areas.

**Figure 1: Proportion of 15 to 19 year olds in Los Angeles County and New York City who were Born Outside the United States, 1970-1990**

![Graph showing the proportion of 15 to 19 year olds born outside the United States in Los Angeles County (LACounty) and New York City (NYCity) from 1970 to 1990.](image)


It has long been a pattern in U.S. cities that rapid increases in migrant youth population (which after the first and second world wars significantly included blacks coming to northern cities from the rural south), lead to gang formation [Thrasher, 1963 #3132]. Even though the evidence here indicates that gangs may not raise the level of violence beyond what it otherwise would be, gangs are, if nothing else, flashy symbolic vehicles that dramatically change the urban cultural landscape [Katz, 1988 #63], chapter 4.
Gangs should be understood as one crystallization of a much broader phenomena. Immigrant youth are brought beyond neighborhood boundaries and into contact with each other, and with adolescents from older resident populations, by the urban school system. Home styles reflecting adult sensibilities, both immigrant, "country" and bourgeois identities, are massively replaced after primary school. "Middle" schools or "junior high" schools become steaming grounds of cultural creativity, where adolescents energetically devise new cultural clothes, seeking to mediate their interactions with masses of peer strangers through daily efforts to block, provoke and dominate emotionally powerful attentions. The collective activity of fashioning new styles for wearing clothing, encoding hand gestures and novel body postures, writing graffiti and designing bizarre hair styles, offers compelling audio-visual materials for popular culture, whether in the form of music videos, Hollywood movies, or city news coverage. Even while adolescent violence in LA jumped in parallel with adolescent violence in New York, it was the LA area that was featured in entertainment culture, such as Compton (MTV music videos on "gangsta rap" and hip hop music), East LA (the movie Colors), and south Central (the movie Boyz 'n the Hood). Gangs are a small part of this feverish cultural creativity, but a part disproportionally represented by all popular culture institutions.

The demographic and cultural changes in the LA area over the last 30 years have been without parallel. As put by Sabagh and Bozorgmehr in this volume, LA has experienced "the most dramatic increase in the foreign-born population for any large metropolitan area in the US, and one of the largest in the world." A snapshot comparison of the New York and LA regions reveals significant differences in the immigrant population: "...currently over half of New York’s and about two-thirds of LA’s population are of immigrant stock (foreign born and children of the foreign-born)." But, as they note, the cultural impact on LA has been far greater when the contrast is seen historically. The New York city population was x million in 1960 and grew only to 8? million in 2000; 20% were foreign born in 1970 as compared to 23% in 2000. LA County grew from x million in 1960 to 9? million in 2000; and the two-thirds "immigrant stock" of the current LA population contrasts with the 7% foreign born of 1960. [but that's not the same...] [in 1960 about 7% were foreign born, in 1990, 28% (in 2000?). In 1960, 10% of LA County residents were foreign-born; in 1990, 32% [Bozorgmehr, 1996 #3153], Table 1, p. 348, or almost 3
The institutions of popular culture in LA have been heavily pressed to provide some summary understanding of this sea change in the region's collective life. The very swiftness of the increase in population size and in the immigrant population has created a vast gap between social reality and the official representation of LA, for example in political office. Moreover, a great segment of the area's population remains in shadows because of illegal residential status. By 1992, "1.5 million people [had] either received amnesty...or were still unauthorized residents in LA." If the immigrant population was not being officially counted or represented in the area's public life, still in everyday life LA residents, or anyone who moved around the city outside of the most affluent, most western neighborhoods, were confronted on all sides with blaring evidence of these changes. In New York, by contrast, much of the new Spanish-speaking residential population was never hidden in the shadows in a similar manner because, as Puerto Ricans, they entered as citizens. The extraordinarily seductive appeal of the "gang" trope in LA must be understood against a background of a huge demographic "dark figure." In lieu of alternative representations of the area's new realities, the colorful visibility of youth gangs struck an especially high profile.

The social worlds of immigrant and minority youth produce more than just an entertaining culture, of course. They also regularly produce a range of what are defined as problems, not only by the police but by school and other social welfare authorities. Even neglecting the stories on given acts of interpersonal violence, gang news would be a major phenomenon in LA because, in what has become a recurrent American pattern, the funding and mission of numerous urban social intervention programs are tied to the gang metaphor. The city council often supports, as "gang-intervention programs," a variety of social welfare services (job training, personal counseling, recreation facilities) that in other Western societies would not need the guise of crime prevention to get governmental support.

Gang news in LA is thus elaborately fabricated, but not out of whole cloth. It is, in fact, supported by a distinctive if ironic pattern in LA's crime. As we have seen, although youth homicide rose and fell in LA as in New York, in LA the remarkable decrease in adolescent homicide was exceeded by an even more remarkable decrease in homicide
in other age groups in the population. In the 1990s, youth crime ironically became an increasing problem in LA even as it fell dramatically. In these circumstances, the visibility of gangs as ubiquitous social phenomena in LA has become an irresistible explanatory resource.

What, then, of the contrasting images of law enforcement professionalism? In LA, the disgrace of law enforcement in the 1990s has been closely related to the gang myth. As noted, the County District Attorney, which is the office with the immediate responsibility for supervising and enforcing legal constraints on the police department, was deeply complicit in the civil liberties abuses of the LAPD’s anti-gang campaigns. Local district attorneys are always somewhat complicit in police abuses, since they depend on police generated evidence in their routine criminal prosecutions, and since the police apparently routinely fabricate or misrepresent evidence (e.g., by using anonymous “informant” evidence to ground requests for search warrants) throughout the nation. But in LA, when the County DA is compromised, there is no realistic alternative office to supervise the police department.

Consider the comparative structures of the criminal justice systems in New York and LA, particularly the relationship of police to prosecution offices.

--Insert Maps 1 here
The LAPD is only one of 49 police departments overseen by the LA County D.A., and the federal prosecutor, the Central California U.S. Attorney office, has an even larger jurisdiction. In contrast, the NYPD is within the jurisdiction of seven prosecution offices, one for each borough (or county) that makes up New York city, plus two federal-level, U.S. Attorney offices. Just across the Hudson River, the U.S. Attorney’s office in New Jersey has occasionally come across evidence of official corruption crossing state lines and worked with New York prosecutors. The Attorney General in New York state has occasionally played an important role in supervising the NYPD, for example in a recent investigation on racial profiling [Spitzer, 1999 #2930]. And special prosecution offices are established from time to time to focus on official corruption.

One might think that the monopoly status and larger size of the county prosecutor in LA would make it more powerful with regard to the city police department, as compared to the smaller offices whose jurisdiction covers
only parts of the NYPD’s operations. But the social interaction within law enforcement offices in the two cities works in a manner opposite to this common sense view. It is revealing that, within recent years, the LA law enforcement officials who have made political careers have come from the police department (Tom Bradley, Ed Davis), not the prosecution offices. In New York, the opposite has been the case, with Rudolph Giuliani first coming into the public eye through anti-corruption prosecutions he conducted as an assistant U.S. Attorney in Manhattan.

In both metropolitan areas, the district attorney’s office is an attractive stepping stone in a political career. But in LA, there is essentially only one stone available. There is no need to take the risk of taking the initiative to bring innovative or controversial cases. One can rely on sensational murder cases or, if they are not conveniently available, anti-gang actions, to launch name recognition. If the LA County D.A. can survive his tenure without scandal, he is virtually guaranteed a clear shot at statewide office. The inability of LA District Attorneys to avoid implication in LAPD scandals unexpectedly undermined their political prospects in the 1990s.20

In New York, the situation is more complex. Seven prosecution offices, each with its own public relations or press officers, each with its own social network in legal, business and political communities, continuously jockeys for professional, sometimes public esteem. As in LA, New York prosecutors are compromised by the routine necessity to rely on police evidence that they cannot independently test. But there is a tradition in some of the New York prosecution offices of taking risks in bringing cases against other law enforcement agencies.21

The revelation of police misconduct generates a distinctive ambivalence in the image of law enforcement in New York. On the one hand, New York has been as scandalized by brutal police action as has LA; there is no good evidence that police corruption or brutality is better controlled in New York than in LA. On the other hand, whenever the NYPD is officially condemned, some other part of the area’s law enforcement community emerges with more prestige, and the image of law enforcement often takes on new appealing elements. Thus the recent Diallo and Louima cases, in which blacks were brutalized or killed by white policeman, were handled by African-American led prosecution offices, at the county level in the Bronx and at the federal level in
Brooklyn. The Thomas Dewey model of advancing a political career through targeting official misconduct is deeply embedded in New York culture but virtually unknown in LA.

A dialectical relationship between the themes of chaos and organization, as applied to crime and law enforcement, has emerged within each metropolitan area through systematic if not inevitable processes. LA’s immigration history has generated a youth culture represented vividly by street gangs, whose visibility provided the basis for a thorough-going, open conspiracy in local law enforcement to violate the civil rights of minority youth. When the law enforcement conspiracy unexpectedly backfired, the gang myth became the basis of law enforcement’s disgrace.

In New York, the rapidly rising wave of criminal violence demanded some metaphoric effort at comprehension, and the relative lack of growth in the immigrant youth population during the 1980s and the early years of the 1990s, plus one of the recurrent periods of resistance in the New York Times to describe youth violence with the gang metaphor, led to “chaos” as an interpretive solution. The “zero tolerance” law enforcement policy of the Giuliani administration made compelling local sense against this popular cultural background. And even when extraordinary evidence of extreme police brutality indicated a lack of management control and professionalism in the NYPD, some arms of the unusually differentiated local law enforcement system have emerged out of the ensuing climate of outrage with even brighter images of professional respectability.

That there is a dialectic of dialectics in the myths generated by the two cities is also not accidental, because the image of each city has not developed independently of the image of the other. Many of the “gang” stories in the New York Times have actually been about LA gangs, especially in the early 1990s. New Yorkers understood the chaos of their youth violence against the background of LA’s gang-organized violence. And in LA, New York’s strange “wilding” assaults highlighted the long-familiar outlines of comprehensibly motivated “drive-bys.” Meanwhile, as LA has emerged as the nation’s second largest city, popular culture in LA has quietly switched alter ego from San Francisco to New York. (Would the current volume be as obviously compelling a project were it a comparison of LA and San Francisco?) Looking at the two cities, it becomes clear that the relative lack of management leadership in LA is not simply myth. Apart from agencies representing artists, LA
is now the central home office of virtually no major institutions. Even the Hollywood studios are increasingly run out of New York, having been bought up by multinationals over the last decade. The leadership gap in prosecutorial law enforcement in LA receives little comment because it fits smoothly into the invisibility of political power, which resides not in the city’s recent affable mayors but in distant and low profile County supervisors, and with the invisibility of economic power that is exercised in distant institutional headquarters.

That the crime stories in New York and Los Angeles have been myths is not, however, due to any difference in the residents’ gullibility. Crimes that are statistically representative are always systematically unrepresented in crime news, because crime news everywhere is never essentially about crime [Katz, 1987 #2330]. Like crime in the movies, crime in the news is about portraying existentially ambiguous features of personal identity and of the social landscape, for example the nature of urban collective identity. It is not surprising that the popular cultures in LA and New York generate distorted views of the area’s criminal realities. When looking at sensational cases of deviance, people are not so much curious to see what is most typical but what is most hidden in the backgrounds of their lives. In both cities, the institutions of popular culture offer people a series of broken mirrors to catch a reflection of faces they cannot otherwise see. What may be a bit surprising in all of this is that New York and Los Angeles seem to be working out a dialectical culture of fantasies in which they will increasingly find each other as their distorted reflections.
1. Ref to NYPD official who spoke at the Neiman conference.

2. We are most familiar with myths as described by classicists and by anthropologists. In those contexts, myths explain troublesome events and patterns in a people’s contemporary life by reference to cosmological and primordial causes from pre-historical times. But we should also recognize that science itself is a myth system, at least on its theoretical side. Theory does not simply summarize empirical findings, it also, and more importantly, explains how the current state of knowledge became what it is and shapes the path of inquiry by grounding the bets that are inevitable in research. This essay is not a general brief against myths. Indeed, elsewhere I have argued that we should exploit religious myth as a source for social psychological theory [Katz, 1996 #610]. Troublesome problems arise with myths only when they cannot be acknowledged as the basis of social policies.

3. In writing of “New York” and “LA,” I am following colloquial usage, which truncates the West coast name to create a two-syllable parity. No-one says “NY,” an awkward formula to execute which offers no syllabic economy, but even Los Angeles residents who otherwise are disgusted with the area find the familiar shorthand irresistibly charming. The masses appear to agree with an Armenian family friend who once commented, when complaining about the lack of community in the area, “In LA, only name o.k.” There is a small and seemingly hopeless campaign, carried on by some who would claim old-family status or mark their awareness of the Spanish origins of the city’s name, to use the full form, which offers a speaker the opportunity to give the “g” a hard pronunciation.

4. In Los Angeles, the association of crime, ethnic minority youth and gang organization dates from the 1940s and the “Sleepy Lagoon” murder case. For a brief report on this infamously racist prosecution of Mexican-origin young men, see [Verge, 1993 #2334].

5. The figures reported in Table 1 were produced by excluding articles that did not meet any one of three criteria. First, “gang” had to be used as a noun or adjective. Stories about
“ganging up” on someone were excluded. Included were stories that mentioned a gang problem, gang crime, gangs, a gang member, a “gang beating,” “gang attack,” “gang shooting,” “gang rape,” or anti-gang organizations in law enforcement, communities, or schools. Second, an article was excluded if it lacked an indication that a persistent or organized group was responsible (e.g., stories about “a gang of youth attacked”). Still included under this criterion were stories about anti-gang law enforcement or anti-gang community organizations or activities; organized crime gangs and drug gangs; “gang shootings” and “gang retaliation.” Third, the story had to indicate that the gang was local to the newspaper’s home area. This criterion was necessary to exclude counting as “New York” stories the many articles that were published in the New York Times about gangs outside of New York, for example in LA. For the New York Times the article had to be relevant to New York City; for Los Angeles Times, to Los Angeles County. These are areas of roughly similar population size. The story had to refer to a "gang" event or member in the area, or, if it was a national or state story, mention some relevance to local issues. The initial, pre-sifted figures were LA, 3080, NY, 1517. The two “Times” papers hold similar positions in the local media framework. It is possible that other local newspapers, such as the New York Daily News and the Los Angeles Daily News, use “gang” more often. A check of New York Daily News stories for 1998 did not show a pattern different from that in the New York Times (There were about 20% more “gang” stories than the New York Times but still only about one-quarter of the number for the Los Angeles Times, and, again, many of the Daily News “gang” stories, about one third, were about “drug gangs,” “mafia” gangs, or a “gang” of corrupt city workers/Sanitation supervisors).

In any case, the newspaper counts are offered as indicators of local culture. Even if the New York Times has shied from using “gang” as a sensational term, city differences in editorial style would not explain why “gang” has been a rallying cry in political discourse in LA but not in New York over the last 15 years. I mention, both to disclose bias and as supportive evidence, that, in the early 1990s I published Los Angeles Times Op Eds critical of the “gang” focus in local culture and law enforcement and that, fortunately at least for the current argument, they had absolutely no apparent effect [Katz, 1991 #3142; Katz, 1992 #3140; Katz, 1992 #3141].
6. Experts Say Gigante Had Reduced Role, So Conviction Won't Hurt Crime Family, By SELWYN RAAB. July 26, 1997, Saturday. Section 1; Page 25; Column 5; Metropolitan Desk

7. 39 Charged in Crackdown on Lower East Side Drug Gang, By KIT R. ROANE May 16, 1998, Saturday Section B; Page 3; Column 3; Metropolitan Desk

8. My awareness of this appreciation was developed in part through extensive interviews that I conducted with the U.S. Attorney in Brooklyn in the late 1970s. Warren Christopher, who served as head of the commission investigating the LAPD after the Rodney King riots, fits this model; the exceptional nature of his professional career in LA proves the rule.

9. Carter described the attack on Louima as "'the most depraved act that's ever been reported or committed by a police officer or police officers against another human being'"... and "said that the court system is making 'some progress toward getting police officers--at least in this extreme circumstance--to testify against the police officers who were responsible.'" Giuliani "praised the verdict ... as a shining example of police officers who were willing to testify so that justice could be done." New York Times June 9, 1999. P. 1, Metropolitan Desk.

10. Other logically useful data are produced in ways that make them too problematic for confident interpretation. Conviction data, which would be useful to compare with arrests to assess overcharging practices, are generated by other agencies (courts, prosecutors) and, as a practical matter, are not easily meshed with police generated reports. "Offense" data are primarily constituted by arrests, but other, less systematic factors are added to produce figures differing from arrest, which we have in any case; and different agencies, city and state, produce different offense figures. Supplemental homicide reports, which provide a richer array of data on given cases, are not produced by systematically similar processes across police departments. And data on robberies, assaults, etc., or statistics that summarize the rate of commission of all types of crime, are too subject to victim and police interpretations, which are close to the very matters we wish to investigate.

The proportion of homicides in which the contributing circumstance was gang-related increased from 6.0 percent in 1978 to 11.4 percent in 1987 (Bureau of Criminal Statistics and Special Services 1987). From about 1988 to 1992, “LAPDs Gang Tracking System (GTS) [grew]...-- over 50% per year, from 12,000 records to 65,000 in only four years” (Reiner 1992, xxvii).

12. For a similar finding about the decline of non-gun homicides from 1985-1997 in New York City, see [Zimring, 2000 #3130]. Zimring and Fagan suggest that the decline in gun homicides after 1994 is substantially explained by regression to the mean (what I discuss below as the unusual high point reached in New York in 1990), but might in part be credited to police policies, although the timing indicates that if policing had an effect, it was by the substantial increase in the size of the New York force from 1991-1994, not necessarily because of changes in management strategy or administration philosophy. See also [Fagan, 1998 #3150], which compares New York’s declines with the largest decline experienced in any five year period, from 1950-1996, in the 12 other largest U.S. cities, and finds New York among the top 5 and LA among the bottom two. They conclude: “How much of the decline [in gun deaths] can be claimed by law enforcement alone simply cannot be determined...The trend in nongun homicide for more than a decade remains a pleasant mystery that shrouts the whole explanation of variations in New York homicide in fog.” (at pp. 1322-1323). The comparative picture I am presenting is tailored to factors relevant to the current argument (the 16-19 year old age group; the fifteen years from 1984-1998, which roughly capture a distinctive period in popular and political cultures in LA and New York) and will therefore differ from comparisons made for other purposes.

13. After the 1992 riots, LAPD officers were openly contemptuous of expectations that they should try to bring crime down through arrests. One Sergeant was quoted in the Los Angeles Times as follows: “An officer can go down an alley where gangsters hang out or he can go down a main street where nothing is happening. Why would you choose to go down the alley when the public doesn’t seem to support you for your efforts?”. [Cannon, 1997 #3133], p. 25. I suggest we read this as evidence about how the LA public was blocked from crediting the police for the subsequent decline in crime, not as demonstrating what the LA police actually did or, more precisely, did not do.
14. For assessing gang influence, male figures are more telling than combined sex figures. Of the adolescents arrested for homicides, about 95% are male, and among adolescent homicide victims, about 90% are male. For New York, for the four years in question, the percentage of 16-19 year old homicide victims that were male ranged from 87% in 1984 to 93% in 1994. In LA, the range was between 91%-92% for these four years. Population rates that combine male and female figures would unnecessarily dilute and obscure what is going on in contemporary American urban youth violence.

15. As to the lack of opposition from community groups, this story went on to cite Paul Hoffman, legal director of the So Ca chap of the ACLU, as saying they were looking into the possibility that police had acted improperly. Six months later: "Black leaders, including frequent critics of the Los Angeles Police Department, said Wednesday that a panel created last year by Chief Daryl F. Gates has improved communication and crime-fighting efforts in the city's black communities." These included Joseph Duff, president of the LA chapter of the NAACP; a spokesman for the Nation of Islam; Mark Ridley-Scott of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference of Greater Los Angeles, and Urban League president John Mack. LA Times, Thurs. Jan. 18, 1990; B, p. 3 (Metro) "Gates' Forum Credited for LAPD-Black Dialogue"

16. Miller writes that “The Times maintained what was essentially a moratorium on the use of the term ‘gang’ to refer to regularly congregating youth groups for a period of approximately six years between 1966 and 1972....in late 1971, the moratorium was lifted as suddenly as the Times had claimed that gangs had vanished.” .... “A year prior to the Times report of one hundred gangs in the Bronx and many more in other boroughs, police and Youth Authority officials stated conclusively [to Miller in interviews] that the last gang had disappeared from the streets of the city and that there was no gang problem in New York.” [Miller, 1976 #3126], Pp. 96-97.

17. Parker loved the show. In his words: "Dragnet was one of the great instruments to give the people of the United States a picture of the policeman as he really is. It was most authentic. We participated in the editing of the
scripts and in their filming.... This program showed the true portrait of the policeman as a hard-working, selfless man, willing to go out and brave all sorts of hazards and work long hours to protect the community." [Cannon, 1997 #3133], P.23

18. The connections between Hollywood and the LA policies on gangs were not indirect. I draw here on comments over the years from acquaintances who have been in high positions in the music and film industry. “Industry” executives, some of whom were leaders of the southern California branch of the ACLU, were personally intimidated by “thug-like” minority vendors of gang culture who would regularly bring armed associates to business meetings. Through sometimes bitter internal struggles, they pressed the civil liberties organization to lay low while they encouraged law enforcement to conduct “Operation Hammer.”

19. Cf Blumstein on national pattern here.

20. And the U.S. Attorney’s office in Los Angeles has never taken initiative in overseeing official misconduct in law enforcement. For law graduates with bright career prospects, the federal prosecution office in LA offers unrivaled possibilities for obtaining trial experience, especially in large narcotics cases, that is invaluable in the market for civil litigation jobs in large law firms. For personal career advancement, there is no need to take risks in opening controversial cases against the police, or, for that matter, against any target. Unless the Justice Department or public outcry creates the initiative, LA’s federal prosecution office never takes responsibility for overseeing the LAPD or any other significant part of the area’s governmental life.

21. My understanding of the different cultures in prosecution offices in LA and New York is based on interviews I have conducted with federal and county prosecutors on scattered occasions, and, in particular on an observational and interview study in the U.S. Attorney’s office located in Brooklyn in the late 1970s and interviews with assistant U.S. Attorneys in L.A. in 1980. In one memorable case, the federal district attorney in Brooklyn successfully prosecuted then-Queens district attorney Gold for corruption (the charges included embezzling money by falsely claiming expenses for a trip to a National District Attorneys’ Conference in Las Vegas). Gold, whose defense included the claim that exculpating documents were in a
briefcase which was stolen while he was urinating in a public restroom, had himself risen to prominence years before by prosecuting a NYPD brutality case.

22. As noted earlier, Walter Miller in the early 1970s found that the New York Times and other newspapers changed their use of the gang metaphor in abrupt fashion not grounded in street realities. The Times and the Daily News have recently been running an increasing number of "gang" stories. We may be on the cusp of another sea change in New York crime coverage.

23. Such relationships are common. Usually, however, the dialectic is that of a city which, as an economic powerhouse, pits itself against what is seen as a corrupt ceremonial and political capital, for example Milan, with its anti-corruption crusading magistrates, and Rome; manufacturing elites in Lyon rebelling against corrupt royal Paris in the late 18th century; Monterrey, Mexico, a base of the anti-corruption PAN party that promoted Vincente Fox, and Mexico City; and, at the start of U.S. history, financing and marketing New York versus ceremonial Washington. In the U.S., the lack of a city that is both a political and economic center enables these collective tensions to play out culturally in less constant directions. In the current juxtaposition of coastal cities, LA, despite its politically neutered status, is cast in the role of a frivolous, ceremonial, superficial cultural capital by the presence of "Hollywood," while New York plays the role of the professionally righteous, managerially elite city.