

Association for a Better New York Speech
Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus R. Vance, Jr.

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[Brief introductory comments]

We all know that public safety is the key to the quality of life and economic vitality of our City. As District Attorney, my business is Public Safety.

Now, law enforcement and business are vastly different fields. But in our mutual desire to *innovate*, to *proactively* seek out new opportunities to advance our missions, and to *invest* in our great city, my Office shares common pursuits with Manhattan's greatest enterprises.

New York businesses get better by being proactive; not resting on their laurels. New York City is the most vibrant and competitive marketplace the world has ever known. What that means is that from the corner bodega on up, Manhattan is not the kind of market where you can just sit and wait for people to find you. This is true whether you're a hip new restaurant in Harlem or an elite fashion house in the Garment District, a tech startup in the Flatiron or a multinational media conglomerate in Midtown.

The same applies to law enforcement. At the Manhattan District Attorney's office, to keep up with the ever-changing ways that people commit crimes, we can't just *react* to crimes as they happen. Rather, using 21st century data analysis, we now identify the individuals *driving* crime, and work *proactively* to get them off of our streets. Then we take the proceeds of that criminal misconduct, and we *invest* them in our communities and in strategies that will help to keep our streets safe.

When I came into office in January of 2010, crime was at an historic low. And when I say crime was low, I mean crime was lower than anyone previously thought possible. Thank you, New York City Police Department, Robert Morgenthau, Dick Brown, Dan Donovan and so many others in this room.

But I saw a dichotomy: there was a sense of safety in the city because violence had declined, but lives were still being lost in barrages of gunfire. The year I became District Attorney, there were 234 shooting victims in Manhattan, and 70 homicides. That was a 90% reduction in murders from 1974, the year Bob Morgenthau came into office, but the fact we lived in the safest, big city in the country was no consolation to the families of those victims.

And so I pledged to do even more to reduce violent crime. I began with the idea that if the District Attorney's office was to play a role in driving crime even lower, further progress was unlikely unless the office modernized its approach. That is how what we call intelligence and data-driven prosecution was born.

Let me tell you what that means. For decades, when the police arrested someone, Manhattan prosecutors, and as a young man I was one of them, essentially viewed our job as to build the case before we got to court on information supplied by the Police Department, do our level best in the courtroom, and move on to the next one. This was understandable. Violent crime was rampant and it was all we could do to keep up with prosecuting the

crushing volume of cases coming into the system. But as a result, we often didn't have time to think about the case in the context of the community outside of the courtroom.

Thankfully, when I ran for District Attorney, violent crime had decreased. And I saw an opportunity for our office to play a role to push crime even lower. In doing so, I wanted our Assistants to take responsibility for — and be proud of — their ability to reduce crime in neighborhoods around Manhattan through proactive initiatives undertaken by our office.

At that time, across our city, public agencies, private partners, and civic groups were unlocking the power of Big Data to spur innovation and improve the delivery and quality of municipal services. The city was deploying new, analytics-based systems to attack problems as ingrained and diverse as structural safety, emergency response, economic development, and tax enforcement — and achieving staggering results in the process. New York City was a national laboratory for a full-blown data revolution, and we were experiencing the most significant public sector advancements in a generation.

Most importantly for our work, the NYPD had emerged as a worldwide leader in data-driven policing. When Commissioner Bratton implemented CompStat in 1994, the police reset their entire operational focus. They began to identify the people and locations actually *driving* crime. The NYPD built an international model for harnessing and analyzing crime data, empowering departments across the globe to redeploy resources where they could be most effective.

The DA's Office needed, in my opinion, to take what we had learned from CompStat, and apply it to our crime fighting strategies. So, in our first year in office, we assembled the Crime Strategies Unit to be the functioning arm of our intelligence and data-driven prosecution strategy. Something similar, but still very different from the NYPD's CompStat program.

The Crime Strategies Unit is the first of its kind in a prosecutor's office. Like CompStat, the unit identifies the crime drivers and crime hot spots, block by block, building by building, neighborhood by neighborhood. But that is just the beginning. CSU collects, connects and analyzes that and other data from seemingly unrelated cases. It makes sense of that data, creating actionable intelligence and pushes that intelligence to ADAs throughout the office who use it to make better investigations and build stronger evidence for trial.

A District Attorney's office as large as ours collects massive amounts of data and intelligence as we investigate and prosecute over 100,000 cases a year. The police may make a gun arrest and have the case for 24 hours; we may have that same case for 18 months, and in that time period interview dozens of witnesses and develop multiple informants. Before we built CSU, that intelligence was scattered across thousands of legal pads in the offices of hundreds of ADAs. Before CSU, two shootings committed in the same neighborhood might be prosecuted by two different attorneys, in two different bureaus, located in two different buildings. Those very capable ADAs might try cases in two adjacent courtrooms, and never realize the defendants belong to or had links to the same gang.

We built CSU to break down those silos, enabling us to gather, organize, analyze and share actionable intelligence. CSU does this in full partnership with the NYPD, other law

enforcement agencies, and community members, in order better understand the particular needs of and problems in our neighborhoods.

The question is, after four years, does the intelligence and data driven philosophy that underpins CSU work? The answer, I believe, is an unequivocal “yes.” In my first term, homicides in Manhattan fell by 44% and shootings by 42%.

I am particularly proud of how we have used data-driven prosecution to bring down *violent* crime. Working closely with CSU, our Violent Criminal Enterprises Unit has brought 19 indictments against gun traffickers, 14 indictments against gang members, taken more than 900 illegal guns off the streets, and prosecuted more than 300 gang members. In Manhattan, overall violent crime fell by 19% since 2010, and we reclaimed for many, many communities their buildings, corners, and blocks in their neighborhoods to economic development and restored a sense of peace and security to those neighborhoods and around the borough.

Data-driven prosecution also helps us identify and target the *places* where crime is concentrated. Last April, after a three-year investigation, my Office indicted 62 members of three rival gangs that were terrorizing a small section of East Harlem, shooting and killing each other, and local residents in the process. As of last month, one year later, we have secured guilty pleas from each and every one of those defendants. In so doing, we removed 62 individuals who were driving the violence in East Harlem. *Prior* to the takedown, from about October 2009 to April 2013, there were seven homicides, and 46 non-fatal shootings in that small section of East Harlem. *Since* the takedown in April 2013, there have been just two homicides and three non-fatal shootings. And in East Harlem overall, we have a 76% reduction in shootings since 2010.

Or, take the areas around the Manhattanville and Grant Houses in West Harlem. Last Wednesday, following a lengthy data-driven investigation by CSU and our Violent Criminal Enterprises Unit, we announced the largest indicted gang case in our city’s history, charging 103 defendants from three different gangs. These defendants are accused of being responsible for at least two murders, 19 shootings, and 50 shooting incidents in just the past four years. About a quarter of them are younger than 18. For years, families in this neighborhood trying to go about their daily lives were held hostage, because local gangs manifested their hatred for one another in murders, shootings, stabbings, and gang assaults.

The goal of CSU is to take players like these off the streets en masse based on sound data analysis and in furtherance of an overarching goal of reducing violence. And as we have seen time and again, removing the crime drivers in a given community can lead to an immediate, positive impact on public safety and economic development.

This is especially true when we form new and innovative partnerships with the NYPD. As you may have read in the *New York Times*, my Office and the NYPD have teamed up on a new initiative called “Extreme Collaboration,” marking a new era of cooperation between us. With murder rates at historic lows, our agencies will work in lockstep to apply our proactive crime strategies to target persistent crimes like identity theft, grand larceny, narcotics, and domestic violence.

Intelligence-driven prosecution works. It has taken many of the worst offenders off of

our streets, and we have remade Manhattan into a national model for *innovative, proactive*, 21st-century crime fighting strategies. Today, jurisdictions as far-flung as San Francisco and Delaware and many in between are working with my Office to replicate CSU. You can already find a brand-new “Crime Strategies Unit” right across the river in Brooklyn, and one in Staten Island.

But I also understand that effective crime fighting isn’t only about taking people who cause crime out of a neighborhood. It’s also about what we put back in.

We’ve all come to realize that you can’t arrest your way out of intransigent crime problems like gangs and gun violence, or the sale of drugs. We have to be smart, and invest in strategies that prevent crime from occurring in the first place. We would all agree, I think, that a crime prevented is better than a crime prosecuted. We would all rather *prevent* a 15 year old from carrying a loaded gun than *prosecute* him for doing so. So by strategically *investing* in our neighborhoods and our markets, we are *proactively* preventing crime.

Take, for example, our “Saturday Night Lights” youth initiative, which earned the “Outstanding Contributions to Community Partnerships for Public Safety” award from U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder, which is the Department of Justice’s highest award. Saturday Night Lights, or “SNL,” provides world-class sports training in a safe environment, in target neighborhoods, 5-9 p.m., Friday and Saturday nights, for neighborhood kids 11 – 18 years old.

Since we created the program in 2011, we have enrolled more than 3,500 young people aged 11-18. Many receive truancy prevention and tutoring support that we also provide in a program we call “Advocate to Graduate” to improve academic achievement and graduation outcomes. Next month we are opening our ninth SNL athletics and academics program in the Manhattanville Houses, the epicenter of last week’s West Harlem gang takedown.

We do all this because protecting kids and keeping them out of trouble is among my highest priorities and a crime fighting strategy. I would much rather watch our kids learn about teamwork and develop leadership skills on a basketball court from a back bench in the bleacher, than watch a 15-year old be sentenced for gun-related violence in a courtroom, as I all too frequently do.

Some of the most important reinvestments we make are in our public safety infrastructure. High-tech security camera networks, particularly in and around public housing, are vital for ADAs to build cases and for police to prevent crimes. As part of our new “Extreme Collaboration” partnership with the NYPD, my Office will provide the police with more than \$20 million, as a beginning investment, from forfeiture dollars recovered in criminal cases to pay for new technology. That money will go for security cameras, fiber-optic information systems, and hand-held tablets that will feed police officers data about suspects in real time.

Through forfeitures, settlements, and restitution, since 2009 we have brought in over \$1.1 billion in revenue to the City and State. And we are investing in law enforcement projects *around* the City and State – projects that make the criminal justice system more fair and more efficient. We are funding technology infrastructure in courtrooms across the city, to ensure

fairer and speedier trials through the efficient display and handling of evidence. We are funding the expansion of telephone forensic technology and license plate readers, to aid in criminal and homeland security investigations. And we are funding the recently-announced Task Force on Behavioral Health and the Criminal Justice System, which will develop a realistic plan to better address the needs of individuals with behavioral and mental health issues. These are just a few examples of how we are taking the proceeds of criminal misconduct and *investing* them in programs that enhance public safety and the fair and just administration of the law.

I began my remarks today with the observation that to go into business in Manhattan – and to *stay* in business in Manhattan – you have to be *innovative*, you have to be *proactive*, and you have to be willing to *invest*. And that is how it should be, because in Manhattan we aren't content to hit some reasonably good marker of success, and then just coast.

Manhattan's not a place where the achievement of some arbitrary metric means you stop trying to achieve more. This is true no matter how you came to be here, and no matter your station in life. This is true of every great Manhattan enterprise, from the corner bodega on up. This is true of our artists and it's true of our teachers, and it's true of all of you in this room.

This is no longer a Manhattan where we accept that there is always going to be a little bit of crime, and keeping it low means we've done all we can. This is no longer a Manhattan where we write off a single block as ungovernable. This is no longer a Manhattan where we cede *any* ground. This is a Manhattan where the ambition of our crime fighting strategies matches the ambition of our entrepreneurial pursuits.

I am often asked what caused the decrease in crime since the early 1990s. To me, the most important cause is the change in our collective expectations. When I was an Assistant District Attorney a generation ago, we expected crime to get worse each year. And you know what? It did. But now, each year we expect crime to get better; and you know what, it has because we accept personal responsibility to our communities to ensure that it does.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.