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Good Cops Have Reason To Welcome Ray Kelly Back

By C. J. Sullivan

RAY KELLY made New York City history this month when he accepted Mayor-elect Mike Bloomberg's offer to become police commissioner. Kelly is the first New York police commissioner to be appointed to serve separate terms under two different mayors.

Yet Ray Kelly's appointment has some concerned, from snide comments on talk radio about his being "Jelly Kelly" -- as in soft on crime — to others who worry that with Kelly, we will see a return of the high crime rate that plagued the city under Mayor David Dinkins. Some in the police department have told me they fear that there may be "a return to the past of 2,000 murders a year and making cops social workers instead of doing true police work."

Let's look at Kelly's tenure under Dinkins. In 1990, Kelly authored the "Safe Streets, Safe City" program. That program was a great success of the Dinkins administration, which never got the credit it deserved. The program put thousands of police officers on the street and got the ball rolling on crime reduction.

After Kelly took over as police commissioner in 1992, each of his 14 months at the helm saw a reduction in the crime rate. Kelly set the table for the later success of Rudolph Giuliani's first police commissioner, William Bratton. Under Kelly, cops also made quality arrests. In 1993, 38 percent of felony arrests led to indictment. That is a higher rate than Bratton, Howard Safir and Bernard Kerik were able to generate. And it was Ray Kelly — not Giuliani or Bratton — who got the formerly ubiquitous squeegee men off the street corners. Bill Bratton's 1998 book confirms this.

There's no love lost between Bratton and Kelly. It's no secret that Kelly wanted to stay on. But the new mayor wanted his own person running the police department and Bratton got the nod. Now, some of Bratton's top people may be afraid that Kelly will seek revenge for their switch in loyalties. And some are probably right to fear for their jobs because their assumptions may be correct. But given Kelly's background, one would hope that the better angels of his nature would guide him.



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Ray Kelly becomes Mayor David Dinkins' police commissioner as his wife, Veronica, holds the Bible.

Commissioner Kelly would often spend his Sundays at black churches looking to recruit African Americans to the police department. In a city that is 28 percent black, blacks make up 10 percent of the force. That is not being soft on crime; it is being smart. If blacks want to see changes at the NYPD, they are going to have to join the force. And, maybe under Kelly, they will feel welcomed.

Kelly is taking over as commissioner at a tough time. Recessions usually see a jump in the crime rate. With a falling tax base and cops deserving raises, it is going to be rough going. You have to question why Kelly is resigning from Bear Stearns — where he has worked as the chief of global security since March, 2000 — and giving up a salary of $600,000 a year to become police commissioner for $150,500.

If you ever met Ray Kelly, there is something monastic about him. He is a small yet muscular man who listens hard and watches you with an unblinking eye. He isn't becoming commissioner for the glory and it certainly isn't about the money. Maybe it truly is the challenge that Kelly wants.

I think Kelly believes he was forced out of a job that he had just started years ago. Ray Kelly has some unfinished business, and he is not the type of man to walk away from a job not done — and not done well. Let's hope he can pull it off.

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