

HOW DO YOU PROFILE J. EDGAR KELLY WITH ALMOST NO MENTION OF DOMESTIC SPYING?

In 1974, the NYT made history with a story that reported,

An extensive investigation by the NYT has established that intelligence files on at least 10000 U.S. citizens were maintained by a special unit of the CIA

In 2005, the NYT again made history by exposing illegal domestic wiretapping.

Yet today's NYT managed to publish a 2,500-word story depicting Ray Kelly as some sort of J. Edgar Hoover figure with little mention—much less criticism—of the domestic spying Kelly's NYPD conducts on New Yorkers.

Much of the article vents complaints that Kelly has gotten remote, that he no longer cooks spaghetti for his officers. It buries an on the record quote from the president of the Sergeants Benevolent Association saying, "Among the rank-and-file, and even among the brass when I have talked to them, they are dying for a change" in the second-to-last paragraph.

But the five paragraphs addressing the rising number of scandals associated with the NYPD are striking for the way they deal with revelations of the domestic spying operation Kelly now oversees.

After years of undeniable success, Commissioner Raymond W. Kelly is going through turbulent times, confronted with a steady drip of troublesome episodes. They include officers fixing traffic tickets, running guns and disparaging civilians on Facebook, and accusations that the Police Department encourages

officers to question minorities on the streets indiscriminately. His younger son has been accused of rape, though he has not been charged and maintains his innocence. On Thursday, in an episode that Mr. Kelly said concerned him, an officer killed an 18-year-old drug suspect who was unarmed.

[snip]

He has built a counterterrorism machine with tentacles in 11 foreign cities, irritating federal agencies. There has been no successful terrorist attack on his city while he has been commissioner. He has instead been engulfed in the past year largely by familiar police corruption story lines, of human beings succumbing to greed or audacity.

Over the past year, two officers charged with raping a woman were fired after being acquitted of rape but found guilty of official misconduct. A broad ticket-fixing scandal flared in the Bronx; when the accused officers were arraigned, hundreds of officers massed in protest, some denouncing Mr. Kelly. Eight current and former officers were charged with smuggling illegal guns. Narcotics detectives were accused of planting drugs on innocent civilians. An inspector needlessly pepper-sprayed four Occupy Wall Street protesters, invoking memories of the scrutiny and mass arrests of protesters during the 2004 Republican National Convention, and giving the nascent movement its first real prime-time moment.

Civil rights advocates have assailed the department's expanded stops of minorities on the streets. Several officers denigrated West Indians on Facebook. Muslims have denounced the monitoring of their lives, as Mr. Kelly has dispatched undercover officers and

informants to find radicalized youth.

This year began with the revelation that a film offensive to Muslims, which included an interview with Mr. Kelly, had been shown to many officers.

The foreign intelligence “irritates federal agencies.” “Muslims have denounced” domestic spying. An inaccurate and counterproductive film is “offensive to Muslims.” The NYT seems anxious to dissociate itself from any criticism of the domestic spying, as if it’s something only the targets should worry about, as if incorporating Islamophobia into police training has no negative effects.

Worse, the juxtaposition of the irritated federal agencies with the proclamation that there has been no successful attack seems to be an attempt to justify the domestic spying. Never mind that the two most serious attempted attacks—by Faisal Shahzad and Najibullah Zazi—were not discovered by Kelly’s domestic spying. Never mind that the investigation into Zazi’s plot was significantly harmed when the NYPD tipped Zazi off to it through his imam, whom the NYPD believed to be a reliable informant.

With the transition, “[h]e has instead been engulfed ... by familiar police corruption story lines, of human beings succumbing to greed or audacity,” the article logically distinguishes the domestic spying from the other things, the real scandals, according to the NYT.

And look at the one real reference to the domestic spying itself.

Muslims have denounced the monitoring of their lives, as Mr. Kelly has dispatched undercover officers and informants to find radicalized youth.

Rather than stating what would be a fact—that undercover officers and informants are

monitoring the lives of Muslim community members at large, it suggests that NYPD's intelligence officers are selectively targeting "radicalized youth." Which in turn delegitimizes the concerns of the Muslim leaders refusing to eat breakfast with Ray Kelly.

Look at their evidence for the assertion that Kelly "has dispatched undercover officers and informants to find radicalized youth." A 2006 article reporting on revelations of NYPD infiltration of the Islamic Society of Bay Ridge made in the course of the Shahawar Matin Siraj trial. The article claims to be unable to determine the real extent of the spying, so instead includes credulously repeated quotes insisting the NYPD is not engaging in spying at mosques.

The police would provide no details about the unit and how it operates beyond what came out at the trial. So its scope, the guidelines under which it works and its successes and failures, beyond Mr. Siraj's conviction, could not be immediately determined.

[snip]

During the trial, a senior police official acknowledged that mosques had at one time been a focus of the department's efforts, but he said that investigators had significantly broadened their scope since then.

"We don't investigate mosques, we investigate people," the official said. "We're not in every mosque – that's not where we need to be. That's Intel 101. We're in the graduate program. The bad guys aren't hanging around the water cooler after Friday prayers anymore."

My favorite part of the reliance on this article is the date: May 28, 2006, just 13 days after (we now know) a document addressed to Kelly himself described plans for further infiltration

of mosques, two by name, as well as the 16 other Shia mosques and cultural centers in the vicinity of NYC (or rather, as the AP reported, 15 other Shia sites and one erroneously labeled as such).

How do you write a profile of Ray Kelly without noting that he has been personally overseeing broad-based domestic spying based on religion?

One way you do that is by making no mention of the AP series exposing these things, or even the NYT's own Michael Powell reporting that the NYPD targets not "radicalized youth" but "preradicalized" Muslim men.

The Police Department was open about its ambitions in a 2007 report, "Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat." The authors claim to detect a path from "preradicalization" to "jihadization," driven by a fundamentalist ideology "proliferating in Western democracies at a logarithmic rate."

The department is intent on finding young Muslim men in a "preradicalization" state before they embark on jihad.

By simply ignoring the mounting evidence of the abuses included in the NYPD's domestic spying program, you can—as the NYT does—dismiss it as the concern of federal agencies or those being targeted.

In the past, the NYT treated abusive domestic spying as important news. When it happens to scary brown people in its own city, however, the NYT appears to treat it as the irrational whining of purportedly legitimately targeted groups.