

Columbia University GSAPP
Fall 2015
Advanced Studio
Jeanne Gang with teaching assistant Abraham Bendheim

Station House:

Designing the 21st-Century Community-Focused Police Station



Clockwise from top left: The Annual Three King's Day Parade in the East Harlem community; the New York Police Department 23rd Precinct Station, East Harlem; a pop-up police station in Times Square; a futuristic vision of policing in the *Minority Report*.

Design Challenge

In the United States the professional police force grew out of a colonial justice system imported from England that included sheriffs, constables, and night watches. Unlike some nations, the United States rejected the idea of a national police force, opting instead for local, 24-hour, city-run operations. The first metropolitan police department in the United States originated in New York City in 1845 and consisted of three districts.

The city began building its station houses and court buildings shortly thereafter. Since then, the practice of policing in the US has undergone numerous transformations, upheavals, and reforms. Today, the police are entering a new era of data-driven intelligence, however, a brief focus on community policing in the 1990s and 2000s was never fully realized and remains largely misunderstood by both the police and community members.

In December 2014, escalating mistrust throughout the United States between police officers and the communities they serve prompted President Obama to convene the Task Force on 21st Century Policing. This task force was challenged with assessing the state of law enforcement procedures and policies, identifying best practices, and providing recommendations to rebuild trust between citizens and their local police. The final report offers insightful recommendations for rethinking policing practices and strengthening community relations, yet does not address the built environment or provide physical implementation strategies at the scale of individual communities.

In this Advanced Studio, students will be challenged to explore how architecture can contribute to the important conversation about rebuilding trust between citizens and police by designing a new community-focused police station for East Harlem. Students will examine spatial concepts of trust-building and probe the ways in which architecture might set the scene for more equitable relationships between police officers and the people they serve. Students will speculate how the use of social media and other digital information and tools might play a role in this new chapter of community-focused policing. Ultimately, students will address current challenges and propose solutions, making visible design's deep relevance to the world outside the studio.

Design Methodology

Part 1 – Research: 4 weeks

As architects, our role is to extract the variety of interests and constraints at play, and ultimately piece together disparate knowledge, perspectives, and needs into ideas that generate physical form and inhabitable space. We will approach the design challenge through an intense period of research integral to the design process, resulting in a visual documentation of the history of the institution (“the police”) and its physical spaces, with a focus on current police stations and their associated activities, programs, and flows. The research phase will also result in an assessment of the recommendations that have emerged from recent national efforts to improve police-community relations, as well as a site-response and spatial analysis of the East Harlem neighborhood.

Interviews with local activists and community organizers of all ages, public officials, members of law enforcement, citizens returning to their communities from periods of incarceration, and theorists will be an essential component of the research phase. Listening to their stories, we will begin to develop a better understanding of citizen-police dynamics to inform our design work.

As the final component of the research phase, students will develop a sensitive architectural intervention for a specific location that supports their findings.

Part 2 – Designing the Station House: 10 weeks

In this phase, each studio member will begin to focus work toward designing a community-focused police station for the twenty-first century, refining and hybridizing program informed by their research and the specific site and culture of the East Harlem community.

Addressing the threshold of the station, which is the locus of interaction between police and citizens, we will reconfigure how this interface is perceived and experienced.

Organizing movement through the station, students will navigate the complexity of the required program, designating between secure zones and those that are more publically accessible.

Through an iterative process of modeling, drawing, and making, students will develop their architectural proposal toward a compelling level of completion that includes material selection.

Key References

Brown, Dr. Lee P. 2012. *Policing in the 21st Century: Community Policing*.
Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse.

President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing. 2015. "Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing." Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services.

Zedner, Lucia. 2006. "Policing Before and After the Police: The Historical Antecedents of Contemporary Crime Control." *British Journal of Criminology* 46 (1): 78–96.