

## LAPD Chief Bratton used 'force of personality' to lead

by Frank Stoltze

It's the end of an era at the Los Angeles Police Department. One man dominated that era. Chief William Bratton transformed the department with his management skills and through force of personality.

Bill Bratton had done it in New York, and he had no doubt he could do it in Los Angeles: turn around a police department amid rising crime, sinking morale, and officers who used excessive force.

"It was the perfect storm, if you will, for me to go sailing into."

When he first arrived at the LAPD in 2002, Bratton, 62, said he focused on a positive message.

"An expression of optimism that these things could be fixed. By nature, I'm an optimist. I don't look at the glass half full, I look at the glass overflowing."

During his final week as chief, Bratton sat in his 10th floor office at the new downtown police headquarters. He reflected on the many persuasive tools at his disposal.

"I used my personality to great effect," said Bratton. "Anger. Oftentimes, I will consciously drum up the anger to get across a point. I have an expression that's called 'the look.' And you don't want to get on the wrong side of 'the look.'"

The chief said that changing the LAPD required a command performance in more ways than one.

"You know, you've got the catchy soundbite, or the theatrics that I'll engage in from time to time," said the chief. Bratton said he would use terms like "knucklehead" and "nitwit" to attract attention in the news. "There's only so many minutes in a newscast, so to get your space in the newscast, sometimes force of personality works."

In one of his more memorable performances, he walked out of a downtown gym in shorts and a T-shirt to address a proposed law that would regulate paparazzi.

"If you noticed since Britney started wearing clothes and behaving, Paris is out of town not bothering anybody, thank God, and evidently Lindsay Lohan has gone gay, we don't seem to have much of an issue."

Bratton said the proposed paparazzi law was "grandstanding and foolishness, a waste of city time on this issue. LAPD has no intention of participating in this farce."

The chief's target was Councilman Dennis Zine, who had proposed the law. Zine said he resented the



Bill Bratton on one of his final days as chief of the Los Angeles Police Department

comments. "I don't think he showed us much respect at all. He didn't respect the council. I think his attitude was that we were people who were here to obstruct what he was trying to do. Sometimes a lot of arrogance. There's no question he burned bridges here."

At the same time, other politicians were careful not to cross Bratton. Political scientist Fernando Guerra, who sits on KPCC's board and leads the Leavy Center for the Study of Los Angeles at Loyola Marymount, said the chief knew he enjoyed more favor than many elected officials – and he used that as leverage.

"He went out and endorsed candidates, endorsed initiatives, endorsed people for office that had nothing to do with the city of L.A.," said Guerra. "And that gave him power because people knew he was popular and that you wanted his endorsement."

Government watchdogs said the practice compromised the integrity of the chief's office and Bratton shouldn't have done it.

Bratton's strong leadership also generated important support from business leaders, who politically backed the chief. "I deal with a lot of CEOs in my capacity as an investment banker," said Lloyd Greif, President & CEO of Greif & Co., who also sits on the board of the Los Angeles Police Foundation. "He's a chief we can identify with because we see him as an equal."

Former L.A. City Councilman Jack Weiss, who chaired the public safety committee, said Bratton moved easily among different worlds. "On the one he's a street guy and street cops relate to him and respect him," said Weiss. "And yet, when he walks into a high-priced restaurant or a cocktail party on the Westside, he connects. He is always current on the latest issue of *The New Yorker*."

During his seven years as chief, Bratton revived morale at the LAPD, presided over a historic drop in crime, and built a sophisticated anti-terrorism division. But it is something else that he said that most satisfied him.

"Myself, personally, the most significant accomplishment here is that the African-American community for the first time in three generations feels pretty good about this department, and in this city that's quite an accomplishment."

Many black leaders say important progress has taken place on the chief's watch. They add there's a lot of work still to do. Bratton concedes the point. He noted that the police rank-and-file gradually embraced the changes he sought.

"I did not feel that I had this department – had it meaning that it was *mine* – until just a few months ago."

That's when a judge, convinced the LAPD had made substantial progress wiping out bias and brutal policing, lifted federal oversight of the department.

Bratton takes pride that he's appointed most of the current command staff and, ever the optimist, he believes the LAPD will continue on a path of reform, even under a less colorful chief.