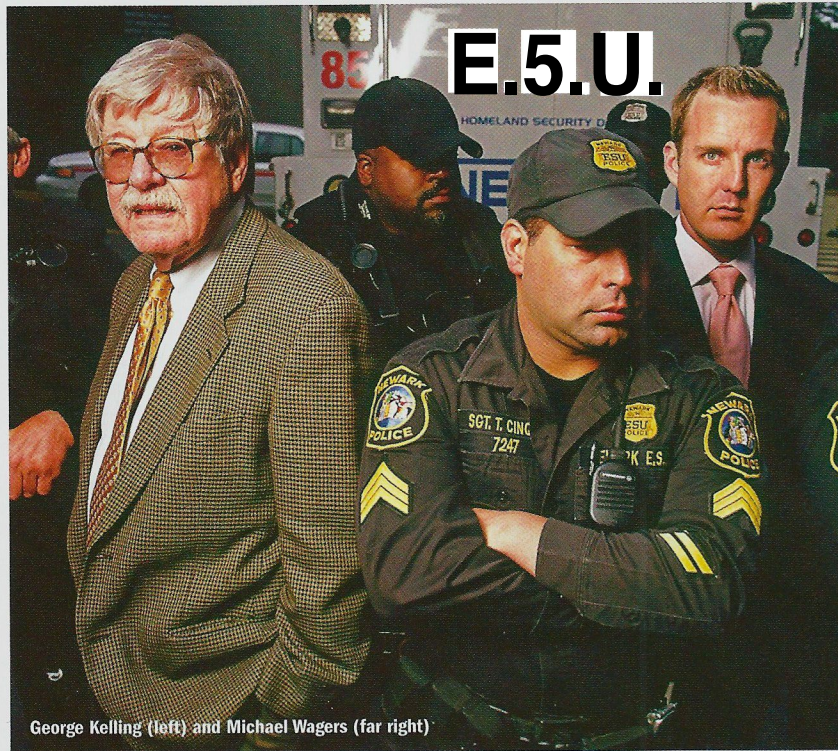


# Taking the Law into Their Own Hands

AN INFORMAL GATHERING CREATED BY THE POLICE INSTITUTE AT RUTGERS-NEWARK HAS BECOME MUCH MORE



George Kelling (left) and Michael Wagers (far right)

• A few months after 9/11, George Kelling, the founder and faculty chair of the Police Institute at Rutgers-Newark, invited police from northeastern cities along the I-95 corridor to an informal meeting in Newark to brainstorm ways to thwart terrorism. The reason, says Michael Wagers, Kelling's colleague and institute director, was that local

police officials were made to feel like the SOO-pound elephant in the room after the attacks brought about massive changes in federal law enforcement policies. "The 20 people at that first meeting included men and women who are now police chiefs in Los Angeles, Boston, and Miami," says Wagers. "At first, terrorism was the primary focus, but the agenda

has expanded to include drugs, guns, gang violence, and other problems that local departments face. We also have grown to include state criminal justice and homeland security directors."

The meetings have become so popular that they are now conferences. The most recent, cohosted by the institute in May in Miami, included 125 participants who explored topics such as policing interstate highways, strategizing to fight crime with nontraditional partners, and improving communication between local departments and federal agencies. Kelling, a professor in the School of Criminal Justice, helped set the agenda and moderated several panels.

Partially funded by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Assistance, the conference was the group's eighth gathering. Each time the participants meet, they forge stronger relationships, says Wagers. Miami and Philadelphia police brought separate videotapes to one meeting that they had seized from individuals videotaping bridges and oil refineries in those cities. Wagers says that "the two tapes turned out not to be connected, but that's the kind of sharing that can make a huge difference someday."