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The King of the Rat Squad For two decades, Campisi was in charge of the NYPD's 'cheese-eating rats'—the cops whose mission was to bust fellow officers gone rogue.

Edward Kosner reviews "Blue on Blue" by Charles Campisi.





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By Edward Kosner Feb. 8, 2017 6:40 pm ET

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If the TV impresario Dick Wolf ever wants to spin off yet another hit show, all he has to do is

bust their fellow officers gone rogue.

couple of dozen episodes of "Law and Order: Internal Affairs," each with a satisfying resolution. Now retired, Mr. Campisi was from 1996 to 2014 the leader of the New York Police Department's Internal Affairs Bureau and its "cheese-eating rats"—hundreds of detectives,

option Charles Campisi's lively memoir, "Blue on Blue." There are enough plot lines for a

undercover operatives (called "uncles"), lieutenants and captains whose mission was to

Corruption has been a scourge of police departments since the first real coppers began

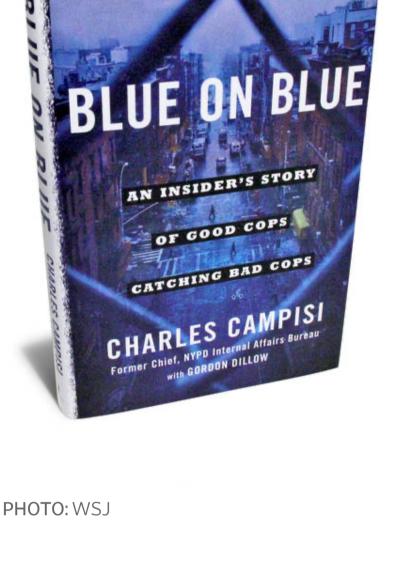
walking their beats in the mid-19th century. The petty stuff—free lunches, free car washes and the rest—isn't really the problem. It's called "white socks" chiseling in NYPD argot and is the target of "shoo-fly" squads from individual precincts. What kept the "rat squad" busy was cops running guns, ripping off drug dealers, brutalizing suspects, stealing from crime victims or people with medical emergencies, and ferrying heroin and cocaine shipments. Mr. Campisi, a Brooklyn kid who had one of the longest careers in the NYPD's history, has

seen it all, and he tells his cop stories with verve, intriguing detail and a generous heart. He

is a master of cop talk, the tangy slang of the precincts: "mutts," "mopes" and "skells"

(criminals), "hairbags" (lazy veteran cops), "collars for dollars" (overtime), "mongo men" (metal scavengers), "the hook" (influence in the department), "grass-eaters" (cops who take only minor graft) and "meat-eaters" (cops always after a big score). Time and again, he vouches for the character and conduct of all but a tiny fraction of the NYPD's more than 50,000 employees. He even has compassion for some of the evil, venal and stupefyingly dumb cops caught by his unit.

Installed at the new IAB by Commissioner Ray Kelly in the midst of police scandals in 1993, Mr. Campisi became its chief three years later. From



BLUE ON BLUE

Scribner, 348 pages, \$28

By Charles Campisi

the start, he was dogged by the reputation of the old Internal Affairs Division. Cops, he writes, felt that other cops would only go into the IAD if "they're cowards or shirkers . . . rats who got jammed up by their own corruption or misconduct and agreed to . . . rat out other cops to save their own skins or . . . zealots who simply get a sick and twisted pleasure out of persecuting cops." Changing that perception and making the rat squad more effective became Mr. Campisi's crusade. His book details some of the biggest outrages in the NYPD's modern history: the 41 shots fired at Amadou Diallo, a harmless African immigrant

killed on his stoop in 1999 by jittery anti-crime cops; the sodomizing with a broken broomstick of a Haitian immigrant, Abner Louima, in 1997 by a sadistic NYPD officer; the fusillade that gunned down Sean Bell and two pals in Queens in 2006. In each case, Mr. Campisi painstakingly describes the IAB investigation that brought the cop perps to justice—or, at least, forced them out of the department. Still, the best stories in the book are the unheralded ones that show the inventive ways in which IAB sleuths stalked, wire-tapped, tricked and ultimately bagged crooked cops and, occasionally, city workers who assist the police.

created an elaborate scenario in which he was directed to an "uncle" playing a dealer with \$1,100 in marked money in his back pocket. The sergeant didn't notice the IAB's "ghosts" disguised backup officers—or cars nearby with hidden cameras. He was taped shoving some of the "perp's" money into his own pocket, and it was still there hours later when he was arrested heading home to Westchester for the weekend.

Investigating complaints of money disappearing after paramedics respond to deaths in

homes, the IAB fingers a mortuary worker whose job was to transfer the dead to the

corpse, so a giant duffel bag of cow bones and offal was placed in an apartment with

medical examiner's office. A clever sting was staged: It was plainly impossible to use a

There is the tale of the Bronx sergeant suspected of ripping off drug dealers. The IAB

hundreds of dollars in cash left on a dresser. When "the body" was sufficiently rank, the cops, EMTs and the morgue driver were sent to the apartment. The driver was directed to take the "remains" to the ME's office to see whether they might be human. IAB cameras caught her removing the bones—and the bills—and she was busted. Still, most of the IAB's success, Mr. Campisi writes, involved more diligent drudgery than high comedy or drama. Special secure phone lines had to be set up so that cops and civilians could call in tips without fear of exposure. Because the bureau's informants were

often criminals whose testimony about past crimes by cops wouldn't be worth much in

court, suspect officers had to be freshly caught in the act. The cops' self-protective "blue wall of silence" could be cracked but never really demolished. And there were the inevitable ironic disappointments: A deputy inspector controversially booted out of the department in a drug case scored a \$1 million Lotto jackpot a few years later. Mr. Campisi has a degree in criminal justice and did postgraduate work at Columbia and the Kennedy School at Harvard, but he is no bleeding heart. He lavishes praise on former New York Mayors Rudy Giuliani and Michael Bloomberg and their top cops, Bill Bratton and Ray Kelly, for the historic drop in crime—and police corruption—over the past two decades.

being "anti-police and soft on crime." No matter how effective the rat squad, police corruption can never be eradicated. Major scandals tend to erupt every 20 years or so, Mr. Campisi observes. Sure enough, right on schedule last year, two top NYPD commanders pleaded not guilty to charges that they took gifts and vacations—including a private-jet flight with a prostitute aboard—in exchange for favors for two businessmen enmeshed in a federal investigation of campaign fund-

And he is contemptuous of the "disastrous" current mayor, Bill de Blasio, accusing him of

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Mr. Kosner is the former editor of Newsweek, New York, Esquire and the New York Daily

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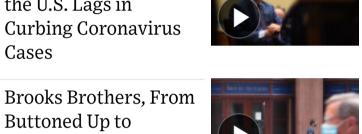


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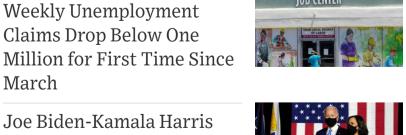
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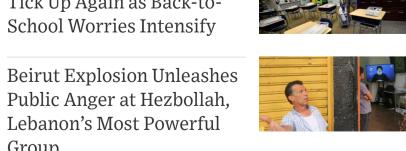
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