

Sunday Los Angeles Times

\$1.50 DESIGNATED AREAS HIGHER © 2008 694 PAGES DECEMBER 7, 2008 latimes.com

JOEL RUBIN

William J. Bratton stepped into a drab, cramped room at Los Angeles Police Department headquarters on a recent Tuesday morning.

The 61-year-old chief took his seat, slipped on a pair of reading glasses and waited for his bosses — the five civilian commissioners who oversee the LAPD — to begin their weekly meeting. As they do each week, the commissioners soon turned their attention to Bratton, who ticked off the department's latest crime numbers.

"Homicides down 8.9%, rapes down 14.2%, robberies down 3.4%, aggravated assault down 6.4%," Bratton read on at a quick monotone clip: Burglary, grand theft auto, gang crimes, shooting victims — all down. The whole thing took about a minute. A commissioner thanked Bratton and the meeting moved on.

It seemed a perfunctory moment, a dry exchange of numbers the city has come to expect after six years of falling crime under Bratton.

But for Bratton, the most influential cop in America today, the numbers are everything.

They are the hard evidence he has spent a career trying to amass: proof that he has the blueprint for fighting crime in [See **Bratton**, Page A21]

AN AMERICAN MOMENT: On the road to the inauguration

Snapshots of a changing nation

On the eve of Obama's presidency, excitement mingles with hard times.

PETER H. KING

On a Saturday morning in late November, a baker's dozen of bicyclists pedaled from downtown Los Angeles to Leimert Park on what was billed as a "victory Barackcycle." The riders wore Obama T-shirts and hooked campaign placards to their bikes.

They rolled along Hope Street and Martin Luther King Boulevard, eliciting a few cheers and many smiles from the sidewalks.

"In a tiny way, it is empowering," said Elson Trinidad, 37, a grant analyst who organized this ride and several others during the campaign. "In whatever small way, maybe it helped. Maybe someone saw us on one of our rides and began to think about Obama. Anyway, it was fun."

This modest event in the aftermath of a historic presidential campaign wasn't exactly an Inauguration Day march along Pennsylvania Avenue, but it seemed as good a starting point as any for a journey that will take us there.

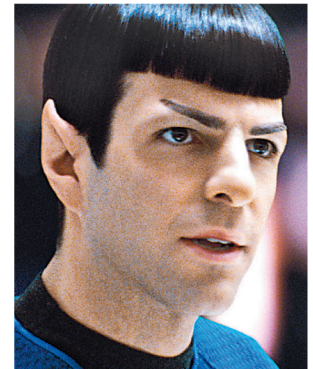
Between now and Jan. 20, Times photographer Kirk McCoy and I will be joining the migration to Washington, wending our way east by car, plane, maybe train, bouncing around the country to take some snapshots, if you will, of a nation at a time of war, economic peril and political change.

Back in 1980, I was dispatched on a similar journey by the San Fran- [See **Moment**, Page A24]



KIRK MCKOY Los Angeles Times

STARTING POINT: "Barackcyclists" in Los Angeles organized promotional rides during the campaign.



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