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Police in urban America, 1860–1920

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Police in urban America
1860 – 1920

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More information

Contents

List of tables and figures *page* xi
Preface xiii

Introduction 1
The police in the context of urban history 1
Issues in studying crime and the police in the past 13

1 The historical development of the police 30
The urban locus of policing 30
English origins 31
The American adoption of the London model 41
The spread of uniformed police forces across the United States 49

2 Arrest trends, 1860–1920 65
Previous studies of arrest and crime trends 65
New data from old sources 69
Trends in urban arrest rates 71

3 Tramps and children: the decline of police welfare 86
Overnight lodging in police stations 86
The police care of lost children 109

4 A narrowing of function 129
Police and crime 129
Old world, new world 133
Two city types 136
A slice in time 138
Bureaucrats 143
Summary 147

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052153125X - Police in Urban America 1860-1920
Eric H. Monkkonen
Frontmatter
More information

Conclusion 148
Two periods of urban change 148
Police forces and urban order 150
Crime control and intercity relationships 156

Appendixes
A Police uniform adoption dates 162
B Arrest data sources 169
C Multiple regression tables and correlation matrices 170
D Lost children, rank order correlations, individual city data, and a comparison of New York police/NYSPCC data 176
E Synopsis of crime rates from previous studies 180
F Lagged police correlated with criminal arrests, by city 182

Notes 183
Index 215

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Cambridge University Press
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Eric H. Monkkonen
Frontmatter
More information

Tables and figures

Tables

1	The obligation of victims of injustice to comply with criminal laws	*page* 28
2	Annual rates of tramps per 1,000 city population	95
3	Lodging influence on police arrest behavior	105
4	Percentage of lost children who were black compared to percentage of total population that was black, New York, 1864–1900	113
5	Ethnicity of lost children, New York, 1864	114
6	Percentage of native-born (all races) lost children compared to percentage of native-born population, Pittsburgh, 1890–9	115
7	Percentage of persons picking up lost children at police station, Pittsburgh, 1890–9	116
8	Lost children regression for 1880	125
9	Cross-sectional regressions on arrests and lodgers, United States, 1880, 1890, 1903	140
A.1	Police uniform adoption dates	164
B.1	Arrest data sources	169
C.1	Total arrests as dependent variable (based on first differences)	170
C.2	Initiative arrests as dependent variable (based on first differences)	171
C.3	"Crime" arrests as dependent variable (based on first differences)	171
C.4	Lodgers as dependent variable (based on first differences)	172
C.5	Correlation matrices (based on first differences)	172
C.6	Regressions with additional variable of unskilled real urban wages (first differences on all variables)	175
D.1	Slopes and annual rates of lost children by city	176
D.2	Annual rates of lost children per 1,000 city population (for earliest fifteen years of data series)	177

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Eric H. Monkkonen
Frontmatter
More information

D.3 Rank order correlations of lost children by region, 1880 179
D.4 Annual number of lost children returned to parents by the NYSPCC compared to those returned by the New York police 179
E.1 Synopsis of crime rates from previous studies 180
F.1 Lagged police correlated with criminal arrests, by city 182

Figures

Police headquarters – lost children waiting for parents *frontispiece*
1 Cumulative number of cities adopting uniformed police, 1850–1900 *page* 54
2 Rank order of cities adopting uniforms, 1850–1900 57
3 Total arrests per 1,000 city population; initiative arrests per 1,000 city population; "crime" arrests per 1,000 city population 73
4 Homicide arrests per 100,000 city population 77
5 Civil War arrest rate peaks and lows 79
6 Station house lodgers per 1,000 city population 93
7 Lost children return rates for three cities 117
8 Seasonal variation in lost children, Brooklyn, 1874 118
9 Hypothetical curve of annual rates of lost children returned by police 121
10 Total police personnel per 1,000 city population 144
11 Percentage of police force on patrol 145

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Eric H. Monkkonen
Frontmatter
More information

Preface

This is a social history of policing. It examines the function and social effects of modern uniformed police in American cities. It explores social history by examining the behavior of a governmental agency and by tracing changes in this behavior over time. It then uses this behavior to construct an analysis of the social role of the police agency. Those concerned with the role of police, with trends in crime, with social welfare services to the indigent, and with the lives of urban children will find new information and topics of interest to them in the following pages. In dealing with these subjects, the book touches upon many problems of importance to social historians, but my hope is that it synthesizes these problems and thereby creates new sets of problems.

For the nonhistorian, this book explains the development of a now-ubiquitous urban institution, and in so doing has policy implications. Perhaps the most important policy implication is that, although we have in the police a municipal agency capable of both social service and disservice, the best and most positive role that they can play is not clear. In the nineteenth century, the police took care of the homeless and even had soup kitchens, but we cannot easily return to that century's welfare-oriented policing. If we did, this study shows that we would have to be prepared to accept the consequences of even greater class and racial bias than we now have. On the other hand, if we choose to continue with the current model of policing, which emerged between 1890 and World War I with an emphasis on crime prevention, we must accept the increasing separation of the police from the policed, a division that opened dramatically with the decline of the welfare-oriented police after 1890. Although a middle route between the two models of policing that this book delineates may be possible, we should realize it is a less consistent approach to crime, social disorder, and poverty than that of the previous two models.

Many individuals and institutions have lent me their assistance in researching and writing this book, and I wish to thank them. I am not able to individually thank the approximately 200 librarians and archivists who responded to my queries concerning police uni-

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forms and arrest records, and lost children. Many were unable to locate any information for me, but their efforts and the efforts of those who did find information reaffirmed my faith in the quality and dedication of librarians across the country, who seem to work as well as ever in spite of shrinking budgets.

Several organizations have provided me with monetary assistance, and it is pleasing to be able to acknowledge this, although the conclusions of this study are my responsibility. The University of North Carolina at Charlotte supported this study with a summer research grant. The University of Minnesota Computing Facility and the University of California, Los Angeles, Academic Computing Service both supported this project with computer time. UCLA also supported this work more directly with Academic Senate Research Grants and two Regents' Fellowships. At a critical early stage, the American Philosophical Society awarded me a research grant that supported my first data-gathering foray. And the Social Science Research Council's award of a Research Training Fellowship gave me the opportunity to study criminology at the Institute of Criminology, Cambridge University.

Several people assisted my research at various stages, particularly Noel Diaz, Bradley Johnson, Judith Monkkonen, Beth Williamson, and David Waterhouse, whose work was invaluable.

Many colleagues and scholars have shared their ideas, data, and critical comments with me. I have tried to answer their criticisms and follow their suggestions, and am grateful for the time they shared with me. These people include: Donald Black, Jon Butler, Edwin R. Coover, Gestur B. Davidson, Lance Davis, Ellen Dwyer, George D. Green, Mark Haller, Barbara Hanawalt, Michael Hindus, Michael Katz, Roger Lane, Colin Loftin, John Modell, Paul Murphy, Gary Nash, Forest Nelson, Harold Pepinsky, Michael Polen, John Schneider, Charles Tilly, Maris Vinovskis, Nigel Walker, Eugene Watts, and M. Norton Wise. Terence McDonald gave the manuscript an extremely close and useful reading at a final stage, for which I wish specially to thank him.

I have also benefited from seminar discussions of portions of this book at the Center for Research on Social Organization, University of Michigan, at the Newberry Library Community and Family History seminar, and at the Social Science seminar at the California Institute of Technology. Parts of Chapter 2 were presented as a paper at the annual meeting of the Organization of American Historians in St. Louis in 1976; parts of Chapter 3 were read at the International Economic History Congress in Edinburgh

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in 1978; and parts of the Conclusion were read at the Social Science History Association's annual meeting in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in 1977.

The original data series on which this study is based is available through the Criminal Justice Archive and Information Network, University of Michigan, P.O. Box 1248, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106.

Los Angeles
October 1980

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