CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER OUTLINE

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing this chapter, the student should be able to:

1. Understand the importance of the police patrol function.
2. Explain the importance of the evolution of policing in terms of contemporary policing strategies and philosophies.
3. Describe the contributions of Sir Robert Peel to modern principles of police administration.
4. Describe the role of the police patrol officer in relation to the overall mission of the police in modern society.
5. Define “police mission.”
6. List the various roles played by the police patrol officer and describe the potential conflict among these roles.

INTRODUCTION

Police patrol is important for several reasons. First, patrol is the foundation of the police function. It is the nucleus of the police organization. The basic police responsibilities of prevention of crime, enforcement of the laws, and protection of life and property fall upon the shoulders of the uniformed patrol officer. All other police functions are designed to support the patrol function. Not surprisingly, therefore, the majority of the resources of a police department are devoted to the patrol function. The concept of policing, which extends back several centuries, actually began with patrol. All other police functions evolved later, and were designed to supplement, complement, and support the patrol function. Despite its importance, patrol does not receive the recognition it deserves.

Second, because all other police functions emanate from patrol, it is not usual that virtually all men and women who enter the police profession begin their work as patrol officers and learn their job from the ground up, so to speak. An officer’s ability to perform well as a uniformed patrol officer will invariably contribute to his or her success in later years. Police executives who eventually rise to positions of performance within their agencies are evaluated by their subordinates on the basis of the manner in which they performed “on the street.”

Third, the uniformed patrol officer is the most visible representative of the police force. The officer riding a bike, walking a beat, or responding to a “hot” call with lights flashing and siren wailing is the image that comes into the mind of the average person when they think of the police. Moreover, the uniformed patrol officer is typically the first (and often only) point of contact between the public and the police. It is the uniformed police officer who takes the stolen bike report, or who issues the traffic warning, who aids in the search for a lost child, or who arrives
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to settle a neighborhood dispute. Thus, the actions taken by the uniformed patrol officer form a lasting image in the minds of all those with whom he or she comes into contact.

THE EVOLUTION OF POLICING

It is often said that those who forget history are doomed to repeat it. This is certainly true in any study of the police mission and role. In order to fully understand and appreciate the impact of the changes that are shaping the police patrol function today, it is important to review briefly the evolution of policing. When we think of “the police,” we usually have an image of a uniformed officer driving around in a marked patrol car equipped with emergency lights and a siren. We remember the last time that we were stopped for a traffic violation, or when our neighbor’s car was stolen, or when our child was taken to the police station for violating curfew or some other minor offense. Thus, the idea of “policing” is typically associated with a uniformed force of men and women who are called upon to exercise the powers of the state in the protection of life and property, the enforcement of laws, and the maintenance of social order.

This practice of policing is of relatively recent vintage. It was not until 1829 in London, and a few years later in the United States, that the first modern police departments were established. Prior to that time, policing was a responsibility of every citizen or, in some cases, citizen delegates.

English Origins

In ancient England, shortly after the Norman Conquest, policing was carried out under a system called frankpledge, or “mutual pledge,” which provided that every male over the age of 12 join nine of his neighbors to form a tything. Tythingmen, as they were called, were sworn to apprehend and incarcerate any of their neighbors who violated the law and to deliver them to court for trial. Anyone who failed in this obligatory duty was subject himself to a very severe fine. Thus, the responsibility for upholding laws and apprehending lawbreakers rested with individual citizens.

Eventually, the frankpledge system was replaced by a system of parish constables, who were appointed to enlist the aid of local watchmen to guard the parish against lawlessness. Neither constables nor their appointed watchmen were paid, and it is unclear as to how they recovered their expenses. However, like the tythingmen before them, they were subject to fines if they refused to perform their assigned duties.

Eventually, parish constables were supervised by justices of the peace: originally wealthy and respected men who assumed the position as a matter of honor and prestige. Over the years, however, men of less dignity, respect, and financial means were appointed, and constables began to charge a fee for their services. This eventually led

to a system of corruption, since persons might be convicted of a crime only to bring profit to the justice of the peace constable. The corruption eventually extended to the constables themselves.

During the 18th century, the parish constable system further evolved to the point that a man called upon to serve as parish constable could hire someone else to take his place. The usefulness of this system, of course, depended entirely upon the ability or desire of the person who was selected to work in place of the appointed constable. As one might expect, those who volunteered to serve in this capacity were largely underpaid, unskilled, and of dubious qualification.

**Modern Antecedents**

Centuries of trial, error, and experimentation seem to have demonstrated the ineffectiveness of “citizen policing” as a legitimate or successful way of protecting the community from lawbreakers. Clearly, a more professional and well organized approach was needed. This need became even greater with the advent of the Industrial Revolution, as greater numbers of people moved from the farms and rural countryside into the cities. Crime became more prevalent, and a more organized manner of dealing with it was needed.

The problem of crime and disorder soon gained the attention of Sir Robert Peel, the British home secretary, who in 1822 observed that, while better policing might not eliminate crime, poor policing contributed to social disorder. In 1829, Peel introduced in Parliament an “Act for Improving the Police In and Near the Metropolis.” This act led to the creation of the first organized police force, which became a forerunner of the modern American police system.

Peel’s concept of policing included a number of principles which, although radical for that time, have become imbedded in the fabric and framework of modern police organizations:

1. The police should be organized along military lines.
2. Emphasis should be placed on screening and training police personnel.
3. Police officers should be hired on a probationary basis.
4. The police should be under governmental control.
5. Police officers should be deployed by time and by area.
6. Police headquarters should be centrally located.
7. Police record-keeping is essential.

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF AMERICAN POLICING

Policing in the American colonies followed the model developed in England. In most towns and villages, constables and sheriffs were responsible for enforcing laws and maintaining peace and order in the community. Many of these early law enforcement officers were elected, thus ensuring their popularity, if not their efficiency. In larger cities, such as Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, a night-watch system was established. Members of the night watch patrolled the streets and alleys of the cities, alert for trouble or criminal activity, and prepared to chase away would-be lawbreakers. This system worked reasonably well, and the night watches were later supplemented with a day-watch system.

In 1844, New York City created what is commonly regarded as being the first regular police force by consolidating the night watch and the day watch into a single organization. This example was followed in Boston a few years later. These became the models upon which other police forces were created in other cities in the early years of the new nation.

The earliest organized police forces in this country did not inspire a great deal of public confidence. They lacked much in the way of a formal organizational structure, and training of their members was almost nonexistent. Appointments to the forces were made on the basis of friendship and political patronage, with no regard to merit or qualification. It was common practice for local politicians to control appointments to the police force, for which they charged very handsome sums of money. Promotions were bought and paid for in very much the same way. As a result, many of these early police systems became mired in graft and corruption and became objects of public ridicule and criticism.

There were numerous attempts to modernize and professionalize American police forces during the latter part of the 19th century, but few were successful. In some cities, independent boards and commissions were set up to oversee the organization and management of police departments. These efforts were largely unsuccessful, since persons appointed to these boards and commissions were not schooled in police administration. In some states, the police forces of large cities were actually placed under state control as a means of insulating the police from local political influences. State-appointed boards still exercise control over the police forces in Kansas City and St. Louis.

Also, during the waning years of the 19th century, civil service systems were introduced to the police service. These systems, organized either at the state or local level, had little to do with the direct operations of the police departments, but rather controlled the appointment and promotion of persons within those systems. The theory of the civil service concept was to ensure efficient and professional police administration through merit and qualification rather than friendship and patronage. Most of these civil service systems still exist today, and for essentially the same purposes. One of the unfortunate byproducts of civil service then and now is that it tends to protect the guilty from discipline and, in many cases, promotes and protects substandard performance.
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From time to time during the 20th century, various attempts were made to focus attention on the problems of American police systems. In 1931, the Wickersham Commission examined the problems of American police forces and found that one of the most significant problems was ineffective leadership. The root of this problem, according to the commission, was that police chiefs were too dependent upon local political forces to be effective and that their limited tenure precluded continuity of operations.

If there is a beginning to what may be called the reform era of American policing, it was during the 1960s, when the police again came under scrutiny for their role in urban riots, campus demonstrations, and civil rights protests. A crisis in American policing was recognized at the national level. In 1967, the President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice issued its report, which contained one of the most comprehensive and detailed analyses of American policing ever conducted. Through its report, entitled *The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society*, the commission examined the root cause of crime and identified ways that it could be dealt with at the local, state, and national level. The commission also issued a series of reports, each dealing with a different branch of the criminal justice system, including the police, the courts, and the corrections institutions. The commission’s task force report on the police contained a very probing analysis of the problems and needs of American police systems and contained a series of recommendations for improvement.

The commission’s work was followed a few years later by the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals. This commission also issued a series of reports, each one dealing with a different part of the criminal justice system. These reports were issued in 1973 and differed from the earlier commission reports in that they contained a series of very specific recommendations for improvement in the various agencies of criminal justice. For the first time, a national agenda had been proposed for improving the police service. Moreover, the recommendations were stated in terms of easily understood and achievable goals and objectives.

Not too long thereafter, the Commission for Accreditation of Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) was created through the joint efforts of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the National Sheriffs’ Association and the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives. The goal of CALEA was to establish reasonable standards by which police agencies could be evaluated and to develop a program of national accreditation that would place police agencies on the same level as hospitals and educational institutions.

**Policing in Recent Years**

In recent years, the police mission and role has evolved significantly, as new demands are being placed upon the police and as traditional police practices are coming under greater scrutiny and criticism. During the 1970s and 1980s, police operations and management practices came under more scientific study and evaluation than ever before in the history of policing. Aided with substantial amounts of federal funding,
scientists and researchers began to examine all facets of police operations. Traditional beliefs about preventive patrol, criminal investigation and community relations began to be evaluated. New strategies for making the police more effective were developed and attempted.

During the 1970s, team policing came into vogue and was widely adopted by police agencies throughout the United States. During that era, studies were conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of random patrol, field interviews, one-person versus two-person patrol, foot patrol versus automobile patrol, the criminal investigation process and alternative ways of handling calls for service. The role of the police in dealing with domestic violence, the elderly, and victims in general was studied. As a result of this considerable research, a number of new proposals were offered to change the manner in which police operations were conducted.

For the most part, very little definitive evidence has been obtained to change the basic way in which the police perform their duties. With the obvious exception of the technology being employed (that is, computer-aided dispatch, enhanced communications systems, mobile data terminals, etc.), the police today are performing their mission very much as they did two decades ago.

This does not mean that the police have not progressed during the last two decades, for they surely have. Nonetheless, the basic role of the police is not that much different from what it was in years past, and the manner in which it is performed has not changed much, either. This is not to say that the police have not benefited by the millions of dollars that have been funneled into research, but rather that the way the police approach their mission has changed only by degree. To the casual observer, this change is quite subtle.

Law enforcement is a dynamic and evolving occupation, and one in which there must be continual research, experimentation, trial, and error in order to discover what works and what doesn’t in the provision of police services. Unfortunately, we seem to know more about what does not work than what does work, but this knowledge itself is valuable in designing new programs and evaluating existing ones. We must continually strive to find new and better ways of fulfilling our responsibilities to the public and to improve the level and quality of the services they expect.

Notwithstanding the rather slow development of the police over the years, we may be on the threshold of a major evolution in the way police do their job and in the police mission itself. Research conducted during the 1970s has yielded some rather startling information about the traditional approach to policing. We have learned, for example, that:

- Simply spending more money on the police and adding more police officers to the payroll will not solve the crime problem, nor will it make people be less fearful of crime.

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- Routine, random patrol does not have a significant deterrent effect on crime.
- Rapid response by the police to crime scenes does not ensure apprehension or conviction of offenders, nor does it necessarily ensure greater citizen satisfaction with the police.

In short, many of our fundamental views about how police operations ought to be conducted have been challenged by the research. Perhaps even more far-reaching has been the realization that the police themselves are not, nor should be, the sole arbiters of what the police do or how they do it. Since the police have been found to be relatively ineffective in solving the crime problem, they have come to the conclusion that they need to develop a closer partnership with the people in the community. Such interaction could help identify problems needing police attention, and devise ways of dealing with those problems.

As a result of these developments, in the next decade we may see a significant shift in the way the police operate. This subject is addressed in more detail in Chapter 7.

THE NATURE OF THE PATROL FUNCTION

The police are among the most visible and active providers of public service in contemporary society. They operate around the clock, 365 days a year and are called upon when no other governmental agencies are available or qualified to assist. The duties they perform often represent the difference between life and death, peace and disorder, and tranquility or tragedy. They are viewed, at one time or another, as brutal, heroic, lazy, indifferent, resourceful, crafty, dull, and brave. They are seen as public servants, law enforcers, information providers, protectors of public safety, crime preventers, skilled investigators, mediators, counselors and crime fighters.

Over the years, a great deal of lip service has been paid to the importance of the patrol function. While patrol officers are often described as being the “backbone” of the police department, they occupy the bottom rung of the organizational hierarchy. Even though they have the least formal authority in the police organization, they are expected to exercise the greatest amount of discretion in the manner in which they perform their duties. Patrol officers are expected to make split-second decisions that will later be reviewed, studied, debated, and examined by their superior officers, lawyers, judges, juries, and the general public. Even though the patrol officer is the lowest paid member of the department, has the least amount of formal authority, and is given little recognition by police executives, it is the patrol officer who makes the decisions which have the most immediate and direct impact upon the lives and welfare of the residents of the community.

The lack of recognition given to the patrol function derives from several things. First, patrol is seen as the bottom rung of the ladder to success in the police profession. Upon graduating from the police academy, police officers are routinely assigned to the patrol force. In many cases, it is several years before they may aspire to be
promoted to more seemingly “important” or challenging positions, such as investigations or drug enforcement.

Because of this, few police departments make any effort to recognize patrol as a satisfying career. Indeed, officers who remain on patrol for the entire length of their career are often seen as unambitious or lazy. They are not encouraged to spend their entire careers as patrol officers, and are often looked down upon if they choose to do so. Moreover, few police departments have formalized mechanisms for rewarding conscientious performance by patrol officers. Only those actions which are heroic or extraordinary in nature receive attention. In other words, there are few incentives to motivate patrol officers to perform their duties in an exceptional manner.

Second, there are many other police functions which are much more glamorous and seemingly more exciting than patrol. Most television series, motion pictures, books, or magazines focus on the police patrol function as being exciting. Such vehicles of entertainment have focused on the more specialized aspects of policing, such as criminal investigation. By doing so, they have failed to recognize that detective work is often dull and plodding and that the real success of any criminal investigation often relies upon the initial work done by the patrol officer at the scene. This reality rarely attracts the interest of readers and viewers.

Third, patrol officers are often confronted with the worst part of policing. They risk their lives each time they make a traffic stop or check an open door late at night; they arrest drunken drivers and issue speeding tickets to a thankless public; they work rotating shifts, which often affects their physical health; they are constantly confronted with adversity, hostility, and tragedy which they carry with them long after a particular incident has ended; and they are often criticized by an uncaring, unknowing, and unappreciative public because they do not always smile and act friendly.

The actions of the patrol officer have a direct impact on the quality of life in the community. The police officer on the beat plays a pivotal role in protecting the lives and property of the local residents and in ensuring that justice is administered fairly. It is the patrol officer on the beat to whom citizens turn for advice or assistance and by whom they expect to be protected from criminal attack.

Organizational policies and management philosophies often contribute to the lack of recognition and respect enjoyed by the patrol officer. The emphasis on specialization, for example, has taken away from the patrol officer many duties which he is capable of performing and given them over to detectives, crime-scene technicians, traffic officers and other specialists. As a result, in many police agencies, the patrol officer is seen as little more than a report taker and first responder. At a major crime scene, the patrol officer is expected to do little but protect the scene until the arrival of “trained” investigators. Even when a patrol officer has a lead about a possible burglary suspect, department policy often requires this information to be given over to a detective rather than to allow the officer to follow up.

Despite all this, the patrol force is the backbone of any police department. It is responsible for the initial response in almost all requests for police service or action. It is expected to maintain a visibility and a sense of omnipresence to deter would-be
lawbreakers and to instill a feeling of comfort and security among the members of the community.

Patrol operations in many police departments are often taken for granted. Even though we should know better by now, we still cling to the belief that the mere presence of a uniformed police officer in a marked car is sufficient to deter crime. Despite good evidence to the contrary, we still act as if there is a direct correlation between the size of the patrol force and numbers of crimes committed. If this were true, an obvious solution to an increase in crime would be to increase the size of the patrol force.

Traditionally, it has been assumed that the number of patrol officers was directly related to the volume of crime. High visibility of the patrol force was assumed to be a deterrent to crime. Times have changed, however, and it is now recognized that traditional patrol methods (that is, routine, random patrol) are no longer as effective as they were once thought to be. Clearly, there is a great need for innovative and creative ways in which to deploy and utilize the patrol force.

Over time, these traditional beliefs about the value and purpose of police patrol are being replaced by a changing awareness of the police mission. Gradually, police administrators are being forced to recognize that it is not just the number of patrol officers, but also the way that these officers are managed, that can have a direct impact on the deterrence of crime.

What is needed is not more and better equipped patrol officers, but more responsive and responsible ways to utilize them. We are just beginning to devise new and creative strategies for dealing with crime and community problems which the police have traditionally been called upon to handle. We are just beginning to recognize that highly visible police patrol and rapid response to crimes in progress, while important, are not the real answers to preventing or solving crime in the community.

We are witnessing today a historic and fascinating period in the evolution of modern policing. It may be fair to refer to this period of policing as “back to the basics.” Some could even argue that we are returning to the methods of policing that characterized the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Police patrol officers are being taken out of the police cars—the metal cocoons that have isolated them for so long—and returned to the neighborhoods of the communities they serve. We are finding more and more police agencies today experimenting with the “novel” idea of putting officers on foot-patrol beats—a concept that had been all but abandoned in many communities since the advent of the police vehicle as a standard mode of police transportation.

Not only are patrol officers returning to the neighborhoods of the community, they are beginning to establish dialogue with community groups. Storefront centers and neighborhood precincts are beginning to reappear, decades after they were eliminated in an effort to centralize police services as a means of achieving greater efficiency of operations.

Patrol officers, who for decades were relegated to the bottom rung of the police hierarchy, and who were subject to close supervision and scrutiny because they were thought incapable of making intelligent decisions or exercising good judgment, are now being allowed to identify and solve problems within their assigned areas of
responsibility. Community relations, once thought to be the province of a highly trained and specialized unit of the department, is now being accepted as the responsibility of each officer in the department, and especially the patrol officer.

In this new millennium, we are witnessing a rebirth of the patrol function in America. Change, innovation, experimentation, and adaptation are replacing tradition and conventional wisdom. Today, more than at any time during the last 50 years, the patrol function is beginning to be recognized for the contribution it makes to the police operation. Now, more than ever before, patrol officers are beginning to attain their just status in the police organization. It is truly a most interesting and challenging period in the evolution of American policing.

Of course, there will be more changes and innovations in the years and decades to come, and no one can accurately predict what the next evolution in policing will entail. It is not the purpose of this book to predict the future, but rather to explore the various alternatives, strategies, and concepts that are now possible in managing the patrol force.

**DEFINING THE POLICE MISSION**

All organizations, regardless of their type, function according to a defined mission or purpose. At first glance it would seem that the mission of the police is self-evident. It is commonly accepted that the police exist for the purpose of enforcing criminal laws and ordinances; investigating criminal offenses; identifying and apprehending law-breakers and assisting in their prosecution; protecting life and property; and providing a number of service-related activities, such as aiding in the search for missing persons, mediating domestic disputes, and assisting stranded motorists.

When examined more closely, however, it can be seen that the true mission of the police in contemporary society is not clear at all. There are several reasons for this. First, people define the mission of the police in terms of their own needs and expectations, and these often depend upon the particular situation in which they find themselves.

**Misconceptions about the Police Function**

The police function in contemporary society is highly romanticized. Newspapers, television, and motion pictures have contributed to the sensationalizing of police operations. As a result, the general public often has a very distorted view of what the police do and how they do it. Ultimately this can be damaging to good police–community relations. For example, the general public might be shocked to learn that, on the average, only about one out of five serious crimes is ever solved by the police. The rate of clearances for crimes against persons is higher, but the rate for crimes against property is lower than 20 percent.

Unfortunately, the police do not do much to dispel this myth. It would not be good public relations for a police officer or detective to admit to a homeowner that
the person who broke into his house and stole his stereo and television set would proba-
bly not be apprehended and that the property would probably not be recovered, even
though this is more than likely the case. In addition, few police officials are ready
to admit publicly that, despite their best efforts, crime does pay and that there is very
little that the police can actually do to prevent crime.

Police officers themselves also distinguish between what for them is “real”
police work and the rest of what they do. While most of what a police officer on the
beat does is routine and ordinary, “real” police work is why the officer came on
the job to begin with. As Van Maanen has described, “real” police work is

... that part of his job that comes closest to the romantic notions of police work
he possessed before attending the Police Academy. In short, “real” police work calls
for the patrolman to exercise his perceived occupational expertise to make an arrest,
save a life, quell a dispute, prevent a robbery, catch a felon, stop a suspicious person,
disarm a suspect, and so on.\(^5\)

Their vision of “real” police work is what attracts most people to police work in the
first place. They do not consider that most of what they will do on the job, at least as
a uniformed patrol officer, will be routine, monotonous and sometimes boring, and
only occasionally exciting or dramatic. They, like the general public, suffer from a
highly romanticized notion of what “real” police work is all about. Once on the job,
however, they learn that “real” police work is not exactly the way it is portrayed on
television or in movies.

Sometimes we expect too much of the police. We wonder, for example, why so
many crimes can occur despite the obvious presence of the police. While we do not
blame the police for the incidence of crime, we may question why they cannot do
more to stop crime. This view, however, does not take into consideration the realities
of crime and the limitations of the police.

The police did not create and cannot resolve the social conditions that stimulate crime.
They did not start and cannot stop the convulsive social change that is taking place
in America.\(^6\)

A false public perception about the ability of the police creates conflict when these
expectations are not met. Would it not make sense for police administrations to admit
the realities of life so that public expectations would not be so unrealistic? Would it
not be better for police executives to publicly proclaim that only certain types of

\(^5\)John Van Maanen, “Kinsmen in Repose: Occupational Perspectives of Patrolmen,” in Victor E.
Kappeler, The Police and Society: Touchstone Readings, 2d ed. (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press,

\(^6\)President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice, The Challenge of
crimes can usually be solved? Would it not be refreshing for police administrators to admit that the limited resources of the police department dictate that only those cases that appear promising will receive much attention from investigators?

**Lack of Public Consensus**

The police owe their authority to enforce the laws to the public they serve. The laws that the police are expected to enforce are enacted by legislatures which are, at least in theory, representative of society. Thus, it can be argued that the law enforcement function of the police is consistent with society’s demands and expectations. However, this is not always the case. As Banton has indicated, public consensus regarding the police role is positive in small communities with integrated values and social norms. However, society today is much less integrated than it was in the first half of the 20th century. Society is much more complex and dynamic, much less homogeneous, and there is much less consensus of social values. Thus, even though the laws which the police enforce are enacted by the representatives of the people, there is not nearly the high level of public support for those laws today as in past years. Accordingly, the police themselves do not enjoy the same level of public support.

Ironically, the police enjoy a much greater level of public support than many police officers may realize. Police officers, because they interact with the worst parts of society, and deal with society’s worst aspects, tend to develop a very pessimistic view of the world and tend to see society at its worst. As a result, they develop rather negative views and assume that their own experiences are a reflection of the entire society. In fact, however, this is not the case and the general public is often much more supportive of the police than the police themselves might expect. “National opinion polls have shown that the vast majority of citizens have favorable attitudes toward the police.”

To some, the police are expected to be primarily crime prevention specialists. Storekeepers and business owners, for example, expect the police to patrol the downtown area and check their stores regularly in order to prevent them from being robbed or broken into. The same people, on the other hand, are not often anxious to have the police enforcing parking or traffic regulations near their business because such activity may adversely affect their customers.

Parents often expect the police to aggressively patrol their neighborhood streets and the areas around neighborhood schools in order to keep their children safe from speeding vehicles, child molesters, and drug pushers. These same people, however, often become agitated when they themselves are stopped for traffic violations or when they are called by the police to come down to police headquarters to pick up a child who has been arrested for shoplifting or some other minor offense.

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Local politicians, who themselves enacted the laws and set forth the policies under which the police are expected to operate, are also ambivalent about the role of the police. They expect certain laws to be enforced more rigorously than others, or certain classes of people to be protected more vigilantly than others, simply as a result of their perceived obligations to their constituents.

The views and perceptions of each of these classes of people are certainly understandable and they are also legitimate. Nevertheless, they do compound the problem of defining the proper role and mission of the police.

Conflicting Responsibilities

In a perfect world, there would be no crime and there would be no reason for the police to exist. Our world, however, is imperfect and the police exist to protect us from those who prey upon others. The very nature of the police mission carries with it contradictory values, beliefs, expectations and objectives. To “police” is to control through political means. Thus, the police are an instrument for social control, and whenever control is exercised, there will be resistance. This is the anomaly of police work. Those who are chosen to control are at the same time expected to serve and protect. This contradiction emphasizes the complexity and the ambiguity that surrounds the role of police in a democratic society.9

The responsibilities assigned to the police are many and varied, and they are often conflicting. For example, are police officers to be law officers or peace officers? The duties of these two are quite different, and sometimes in conflict. A peace officer, for example, is one whose contacts with the public are generally nonpunitive and non-adversarial in nature. The peace officer is the one who assists stranded motorists, looks for missing persons, and does what is necessary to maintain public order. The law officer, on the other hand, uses tactics reminiscent of the days of the frontier marshal, when force and the rule of the law were the chief tools of the trade.10

In fact, the police officer is both a peace officer and a law officer. The emphasis placed on each of these roles depends upon a number of things, including community values, local administrative procedures, and political considerations. Moreover, these conflicting duties and responsibilities often require opposing attitudes and philosophical orientations on the part of the police officer. An orientation toward law enforcement and criminal investigation, for example, may be in direct contradiction to an officer’s obligation to provide care and assistance to the destitute and homeless.

A police officer may see a homeless person as a burglary or theft suspect rather than a person in need of assistance, for example. An officer who has a strong


10See Banton, *op. cit.* p. 7 for a discussion of the distinction between the “law officer” and the “peace officer.”
orientation toward traffic enforcement may have little interest in routine preventive patrol aimed at crime reduction.

In servicing the community, the police have a responsibility to ensure equity and fairness in the delivery of those services. This means, quite simply, that all persons, regardless of background, social status, ethnicity, income level, age, gender, or sexual orientation are treated as individuals rather than as representatives of a particular class. Police policy-makers need to take measures to ensure that police actions are consciously directed toward ensuring fairness and impartiality in their dealings with all persons, whether they reside in the community or not. While police officers have their own opinions, prejudices and biases, just as others do, they may not allow these to control their actions or decisions as they enforce the law, maintain order, or assist the public. It is not easy to see all people as equal and deserving of fair and equitable treatment, but this is

\[11\] Cordner and Sheehan, op. cit., p. 53.
absolutely necessary in police work, and police administrators must be conscious of the obligation to make this a basic principle of their department’s operating philosophy.

THE POLICE MISSION AND COMMUNITY VALUES

It is also true that an individual’s (or an organization's) role in society is shaped and influenced by social customs, traditions, values, and norms of behavior. The role of the police is often affected by social values and expectations, which change with increasing regularity. We live in a society characterized by changing fads and trends. Attitudes toward living, the family, religion, and government have changed radically in the last two decades, yet the police endeavor to perform their duties in much the same way that they have always done. As a result, their actions often come into conflict with societal values. This is not, however, a fault of the police, since they are simply reacting to conditions under the policies and rules that have been set for them. Nevertheless, this conflict between police actions and societal values makes the definition of the police mission even more difficult.

The police role is actually a reflection of local community values. The police are not, or should not be, an autonomous arm of local government, but rather an integral component of the local government’s “service delivery system.” Local police departments must be sensitive to and responsive to local community values and expectations. Police goals and objectives, likewise, must be developed with an appreciation for what the community wants and expects from the police.

Just as no two communities are exactly alike, no one style of policing is better than another. The operating philosophy of a police department in a large industrialized city will obviously differ from that of a small, rural community, since the problems in the two municipalities are dramatically different and the needs and expectations of the residents are not the same. The orientation of the police in any jurisdiction must be shaped by public opinion and local values.

A police department is intimately related to the community in which it is located and in which it serves . . . The men on the job are responsible to the public definitions of behavior. The nature of the community determines many of the problems that the police department must meet. The political structure of the community may have an important influence on the actions of the department and the areas of law enforcement that it emphasizes.\(^\text{12}\)

As Banton points out, police officers use their experience in society in exercising their discretionary powers.\(^\text{13}\) A police officer who lives in the community where he works has a better understanding of how people in the community think and what they expect


\(^{13}\text{Banton, op. cit., p. 143.}\)
of the police. A successful officer is one who understands the mood of the community and who behaves according to the norms and expectations of those who reside in the community. Conversely, an officer who adopts a style of official conduct that is contrary to community values provokes conflict and mistrust among the people he or she is sworn to protect.

This does not mean that police officers can only enforce laws that the public wants enforced, or that they must seek public approval for every action they take. Indeed, the police must be objective and independent in the exercise of their discretion and consider the common good when making difficult decisions. It does mean, though, that police officers must be conscious of community values and must be sensitive to public opinion in their actions. They must keep in mind that they are agents of the people, not guardians over them. They must see themselves as service providers rather than just law enforcers.

It is for this reason that it is not practical to develop universal standards by which the performance of one police agency can be measured against another unless the two communities they represent are quite similar.

SANITIZING THE POLICE MISSION

Over the years, the police role has evolved from a narrowly defined one (that is, law enforcer and peace keeper) to a proliferation of duties that no other public agency has the time, resources, or inclination to perform. Klockars has suggested that the police have inherited these responsibilities because the streets are their domain and that “whatever goes on in the streets is their business.”\(^{14}\) For the most part, the police have performed these duties ably, thus rewarding the public’s confidence in their ability.

Some authorities have argued that one solution to the problem of more accurately defining the police mission lies in narrowing the range of police responsibilities. For example, if the police were assigned only to enforce traffic laws, or only to prevent crime and search out and prosecute criminals, there would be little confusion as to their proper role in society. A number of proposals have been advanced to “sanitize” the police role by relieving them of many duties which are not directly related to the traditional tasks of law enforcement and crime prevention. The major thrust of these proposals has been to eliminate from the police role many of the service functions that occupy much of the patrol officer’s time. In this way, it is argued, the police will be free to pursue more productive and presumably important tasks.

It cannot be denied that many of the duties typically performed by the police have little in common with the traditional and historic role of the police in society. What must be recognized, however, is that these service functions are actually very important in contemporary society. Indeed, in many communities, they outweigh the importance of the more traditional police responsibilities of law enforcement and

\(^{14}\)Klockars, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 57.
criminal apprehension. Although these service functions may seem like an unnecessary bother to the individual police officer, they assume much greater importance to the local community resident.

The notion that police effectiveness may be improved by transferring these “nonpolice” duties to other governmental agencies is based upon several untested assumptions which were discussed at some length in the American Bar Association’s analysis of the urban police function. Among other things, the Association’s report questions the validity of several basic assumptions upon which the move to sanitize the police role is based.¹⁵

1. **An assumption as to what should be the primary role of the police.** For example, are the police to be primarily law enforcement officers, crime fighters, traffic regulators, preventers of disorder, or the providers of social services? This question is not answered easily, and depends upon the values, expectations, social conditions, and political expectations of the individual community.

2. **An assumption regarding the potential effectiveness of the police.** It has not been clearly demonstrated, for example, that the police can be more effective in their crime prevention and law enforcement roles if they are relieved of other duties. There is no clear evidence to support this contention, nor have there been any attempts to demonstrate the validity of this proposition.

3. **An assumption that police activities as they now exist are separable.** Is it really feasible and practical, for example, to relieve the police of the responsibility of enforcing traffic regulations, controlling the flow of traffic, and investigating traffic accidents, when a great number of crimes involve the use of automobiles? Similarly, is it practical to relieve the police of the responsibility of responding to domestic quarrels in view of the significant potential for violence posed by such events?

4. **An assumption that it is both desirable and feasible to reduce the conflict that arises by virtue of the police acting in both a helping and punitive role.** While it is certainly true that the police role often creates conflict and stress, so long as the police must deal with human problems, this conflict is inevitable. No practical means of reducing this conflict has yet been devised.

5. **An assumption that private or other governmental agencies can perform many existing police functions more effectively than the police.** It is certainly possible to transfer certain nonessential duties, such as rounding up stray animals, to other governmental agencies. However, the fact remains that the police are often the single government agency with trained and experienced personnel on duty when human emergencies arise.

The fact of the matter is that, for the most part, the police perform these duties quite well, even though they may privately complain that these are not “real” police duties. Moreover, these “nonpolice” duties actually occupy the greatest portion of the average patrol officer’s time. Even though some officers may complain that they would rather be doing “real police work,” the reality is that these same duties make the police officer’s job interesting and rewarding. The opportunity to peacefully settle a domestic dispute, to rescue a drowning child, or to aid a stranded motorist who has no one else to call for assistance can be the highlight of a police officer’s tour of duty. It is difficult to imagine how a police officer would react to being faced with the responsibility of only enforcing laws and apprehending criminals.

In truth, the police have always been expected to deal with a variety of problems, many of them totally unrelated to the commonly accepted duties of law enforcement and crime prevention. Indeed, the peace-keeping and service-oriented functions of the police are deeply embedded in the history of the police function. Since the earliest days of recorded history, the police have been charged with performing tasks not directly associated with what is commonly believed to be their primary function. Early English constables, for example, were expected to protect citizens from all manner of public dangers, including, among others, plague, fire, and commercial fraud.16

It was not until the creation of the Metropolitan Police in London in 1829—the system upon which the American police were modeled—that responsibility for prevention of crime and law enforcement was formally assigned to the police. Prior to that time, citizens were largely left to their own devices to protect themselves from criminal attack.

In this country, too, criminal apprehension and the investigation of crime were not top priorities of the police in the early development of the police system. Rather, in the early 19th century, most police forces were concerned with order maintenance activities, such as quelling disturbances, keeping the peace, and chasing drunks and vagrants out of the neighborhood, and regulating commerce by licensing peddlers and inspecting taverns and other places of commerce. For the most part, apprehending persons charged with criminal activity was the province of private police rather than public police.17

In modern times, the police continue to spend a great deal of their time performing service-oriented activities. This is particularly true in small towns and rural areas where the incidence of crime is relatively low and where there are few other agencies to provide for the needs of the citizens. While those duties may be seen by some as an unnecessary and unwarranted drain on police resources, they are nevertheless important public services. If not for the police, these needs might go unmet. This does not mean, however, that the police cannot and should not be relieved of some functions that have been given to them over the years. These are duties in which the police have no legitimate interest and that can and should be performed by other public agencies which are better equipped to perform them. Various kinds of inspection and regulatory functions, for example, could be better performed by a city’s inspections division.

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than by the police department. Animal control, as another example, could be performed much better by a private agency than by the police. Parking enforcement, which actually is more oriented toward the production of revenue rather than to parking regulation, is, in some cities, under the control of the finance department. These functions, and others, are not critical to public safety, nor are the police the most suitable agency to perform them.

Nevertheless, the attempt to “sanitize” the police role by narrowing the focus of police activities should proceed with caution for several reasons. First, it must be remembered that many of the service duties performed by the police are inextricably interwoven with the more essential aspects of the police mission. Thus, it may not be entirely possible, or desirable, to completely remove them from police responsibility.

Second, it is through the performance of many of these nonessential duties that the police have an important opportunity to interact with citizens on a positive rather than negative basis. These service functions provide an important opportunity to create and maintain favorable public support and appreciation for the police. This support and understanding is essential if the police are to carry out their other duties and responsibilities effectively. For example, we now recognize that the prevention of crime is not just a police responsibility, but a function that can only be performed effectively through widespread community support. The police need to use every means at their disposal to cultivate community support for their programs.

Finally, the self-image of the individual police officer must be considered. Too often, police officers see themselves primarily as “crime fighters” whose only responsibility is to enforce the law and put criminals in jail. In actuality, however, police officers spend relatively little time performing law enforcement functions compared to public service activities. It is likely that a totally different kind of police officer, in terms of attitude and personality, would be required if law enforcement and criminal apprehension were to become the primary mission of the police. This, in turn, could produce a negative impact on police–community relations.

All reliable evidence, combined with the experience of the past, points to the fact that the police role in contemporary society will continue to be multifaceted. Moreover, there can be no simple definition of the police mission, since the social, political, and cultural factors that influence the definition of the police mission are themselves dynamic. This fact must be recognized by the police themselves, as well as by the communities they serve.

When an agency defines its role, two broad purposes are served. First, sworn and civilian personnel are made aware of the actions and attitudes expected of them and can therefore act without hesitation in consonance with the agency’s values and policies. Second, members of the public are provided with a general standard by which they can measure the performance of the agency.\(^\text{18}\)


Defining the proper mission of the police must then take into consideration political, economic, social, and cultural factors present in the community. Thus, the police mission may be different in each community. This is already the case, even though it is not formally recognized. Policing styles vary considerably from one community to the next and are based, in large part, upon community expectations and needs. However, these factors are usually not translated into a formal mission statement. This is a weakness that needs to be addressed.

Police officials, political leaders, and community representatives must recognize that the police mission is a reflection of community values, and they should work together to develop mission statements that accurately reflect these values. The development of a police department’s mission statement should be a collaborative effort involving representatives of all ranks and assignments within the police department, as well as representatives of various community constituencies, including business, religious, and social. This was the approach taken in Aurora, Illinois, when a cross-sectional committee was formed to develop that police department’s mission statement.\(^{(19)}\)

All organizations have values, whether implied or expressed. These values range from tolerance of graft and corruption within the community, and perhaps even in the police department, to pride in professional achievement and optimum job performance. Whether a police department aggressively investigates allegations of misconduct against its members or merely pays lip service to citizen complaints is an expression of its values. Values are defined as beliefs which lead to behavior. Thus, an organization with high ethical values is one in which ethical behavior is expected and practiced. Whether a police department takes steps to hold supervisors and middle managers accountable for the actions of their subordinates or accepts mediocre job performance as a way of life is an expression of its values.

One can see these values expressed through the actions of the organization—the things that are taken seriously and the things that are rejected as irrelevant, inappropriate, or dangerous. Jokes, solemn understandings, and internal explanations for actions also express values.\(^{(20)}\)

Unfortunately, there is sometimes a disparity between the expressed values of the organization and how those values are translated and executed by the members of that organization. This often occurs in those organizations when the rank and file members have had little voice in developing the values of their organization and see them only as words on paper, rather than as having real meaning and purpose. The execution of a mission statement that accurately reflects the values of the organization, and which reflects the attitudes, aspirations and beliefs of its members, is absolutely essential.


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The mission statement should be flexible enough to meet new and changing conditions, but should be drafted in clear and unambiguous language so as to leave no doubt in anyone’s mind as to the purpose and function of the police in the individual community. This mission statement will serve to provide police officers with a clear sense of purpose and direction so that they may clearly understand their role in the community.

CONCLUSION

It is the intent of this book to put the role and the importance of police patrol into a perspective different than in the past. The remaining chapters of this book are intended to challenge the reader to begin thinking differently about the patrol force and to recognize that it is, in fact, the nucleus of the police department and that the success of the police mission depends directly upon the success of the patrol effort. In the past, public attitudes, as well as the attitudes of the police themselves, frequently failed to recognize the true importance of the patrol force.

Patrol work is too often seen as routine, dull, boring and suitable only for people who have no aspirations for more challenging work. As a result, the patrol officer is seen as occupying the bottom rung of the occupational ladder in the police organization, even though the decisions the patrol officer makes have greater potential impact on the community than those of the leadership of the department.

The focus now being placed on community-oriented policing and problem-oriented policing has turned attention once again to the “basics” of policing, in which the patrol officer plays a central role. Like team policing, directed deterrent patrol, and other innovations in policing, community-oriented policing and problem-oriented policing may only be temporary programs and may eventually give way to new ideas and policing strategies. This is healthy, since change is necessary to respond to new and different problems which the police face.

The ability to recognize the importance of police patrol and to reject conventional wisdom and tradition in favor of innovation and imaginative concepts is the underlying theme of this book. The following chapters are intended to reinforce this message and to motivate the reader to discover still other methods by which the patrol effort can be redesigned and energized. If a single new idea about police patrol—its purpose, its use, and its methods—results from reading this book, then it will have accomplished its goal.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Explain briefly why the police mission is difficult to define.
2. Is it a good idea to “sanitize” the police mission? Why or why not?
3. What things should be taken into consideration in defining the mission of the police?
4. Why is it just as important to know what does not work as it is to know what does work in policing?
5. What were some of the more significant findings that emerged from research on policing during the 1970s?
6. What are some of the reasons for the lack of recognition given to the patrol officer?
7. In what ways are we witnessing a rebirth of the patrol function in America?
8. In what ways might the various roles played by the police patrol officer sometimes conflict with each other?
9. Explain how the police mission is shaped by community values.
10. How does the lack of public consensus affect the police mission?

**REVIEW EXERCISES**

The following exercises are designed to reinforce or amplify comprehension of the material contained in this chapter.

1. Conduct library research on Sir Robert Peel and prepare a short paper (no more than 1,500 words) describing the significance of Peel’s reforms on modern policing.
2. In small group sessions, or as a general class discussion, explore the various roles played by the police in modern society and potential points of conflict.
3. In small group sessions, assign teams to debate the merits of, as well as the practical obstacles to, “sanitizing” the role of the police in society.
4. Discuss how and why various aspects of the police role may differ from one community to the next.

**REFERENCES**

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