

# History of the Police

It is important to examine the history of policing in the United States in order to understand how it has progressed and changed over time. Alterations to the purpose, duties, and structure of American police agencies have allowed this profession to evolve from ineffective watch groups to police agencies that incorporate advanced technology and problem-solving strategies into their daily operations. This section provides an overview of the history of American policing, beginning with a discussion of the English influence of Sir Robert Peel and the London Metropolitan Police. Next, early law enforcement efforts in Colonial America are discussed using a description of social and political issues relevant to the police at that time. And finally, this section concludes with a look at early police reform efforts and the tension this created between the police and citizens in their communities. This section is organized in a chronological manner, identifying some of the most important historical events and people who contributed to the development of American policing.

# Sir Robert Peel and the London Metropolitan Police

- In 1829, **Sir Robert Peel** (Home Secretary of England) introduced the Bill for Improving the Police in and Near the Metropolis (Metropolitan Police Act) to Parliament with the goal of creating a police force to manage the social conflict resulting from rapid urbanization and industrialization taking place in the city of London. Peel's efforts resulted in the creation of the London Metropolitan Police on September 29, 1829. Historians and scholars alike identify the **London Metropolitan Police** as the first modern police department. Sir Robert Peel is often referred to as the father of modern policing, as he played an integral role in the creation of this department, as well as several basic principles that would later guide the formation of police departments in the United States. Past and current police officers working in the London Metropolitan Police Department are often referred to as *bobbies* or *peelers* as a way to honor the efforts of Sir Robert Peel.

# Sir Robert Peel and the London Metropolitan Police

- Peel believed that the function of the London Metropolitan Police should focus primarily on crime prevention—that is, preventing crime from occurring instead of detecting it after it had occurred. To do this, the police would have to work in a coordinated and centralized manner, provide coverage across large designated *beat areas*, and also be available to the public both night and day. It was also during this time that preventive patrol first emerged as a way to potentially deter criminal activity. The idea was that citizens would think twice about committing crimes if they noticed a strong police presence in their community. This approach to policing would be vastly different from the early watch groups that patrolled the streets in an unorganized and erratic manner. Watch groups prior to the creation of the London Metropolitan Police were not viewed as an effective or legitimate source of protection by the public.

# Sir Robert Peel and the London Metropolitan Police

- It was important to Sir Robert Peel that the newly created London Metropolitan Police Department be viewed as a legitimate organization in the eyes of the public, unlike the earlier watch groups. To facilitate this legitimation, Peel identified several principles that he believed would lead to credibility with citizens including that the police must be under government control, have a military-like organizational structure, and have a central headquarters that was located in an area that was easily accessible to the public. He also thought that the quality of men that were chosen to be police officers would further contribute to the organization's legitimacy. For example, he believed that men who were even tempered and reserved and that could employ the appropriate type of discipline to citizens would make the best police officers. It was also important to Peel that his men wear appropriate uniforms, display numbers (badge numbers) so that citizens could easily identify them, not carry firearms, and receive appropriate training in order to be effective at their work. Many of these ideologies were also adopted by American police agencies during this time period and remain in place in some contemporary police agencies across the United States. It is important to note that recently, there has been some debate about whether Peel really espoused the previously mentioned ideologies or principles or if they are the result of various interpretations (or misinterpretations) of the history of English policing

# Sir Robert Peel's Policing Principles

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1. To prevent crime and disorder, as an alternative to their repression by military force and severity of legal punishment.
  2. To recognize always that the power of the police to fulfill their functions and duties is dependent on public approval of their existence, actions and behavior, and on their ability to secure and maintain public respect.
  3. To recognize always that to secure and maintain the respect and approval of the public means also the securing of the willing cooperation of the public in the task of securing observance of laws.
  4. To recognize always that the extent to which the cooperation of the public can be secured diminishes proportionately the necessity of the use of physical force and compulsion for achieving police objectives.
  5. To seek and preserve public favor, not by pandering to public opinion, but by constantly demonstrating absolute impartial service to law, in complete independence of policy, and without regard to the justice or injustice of the substance of individual laws, by ready offering of individual service and friendship to all members of the public without regard to their wealth or social standing, by ready exercise of courtesy and friendly good humor, and by ready offering of individual sacrifice in protecting and preserving life.
  6. To use physical force only when the exercise of persuasion, advice and warning is found to be insufficient to obtain public cooperation to an extent necessary to secure observance of law or to restore order, and to use only the minimum degree of physical force which is necessary on any particular occasion for achieving a police objective.
  7. To maintain at all times a relationship with the public that gives reality to the historic tradition that the police are the public and that the public are the police, the police being only members of the public who are paid to give full-time attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the interests of community welfare and existence.
  8. To recognize always the need for strict adherence to police-executive functions, and to refrain from even seeming to usurp the powers of the judiciary of avenging individuals or the State, and of authoritatively judging guilt and punishing the guilty.
  9. To recognize always that the test of police efficiency is the absence of crime and disorder, and not the visible evidence of police action in dealing with them.
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# The History of Police in Creating Social Order in the U.S.

The institution of policing is very much connected to the enactment of violence against strikers and union-breaking. So eventually, someone comes into this picture whose name is August Vollmer.

- CHANG: And who is he?
- KUMANYIKA: So August Vollmer is kind of, like, a really important figure in the history of policing, right? He starts out as Berkeley's police chief in California in 1905. Then he sort of travels all around the country and really revolutionizes policing. When you hear people say, well, policing is just about protecting the public and it really doesn't have anything to do with race, August Vollmer, who's considered in many ways the father of modern policing - he would disagree with that.
- CHANG: Really? How? How does he see race playing a role?
- KUMANYIKA: Well, one of the things that Vollmer observes is that very aggressive interrogation techniques - things he called third-degree techniques - are tolerated when they're applied against minorities, the poor and recent immigrants but rarely tolerated when they are applied against the middle and upper classes. You know, he notices this thing which really kind of implicates race and class, but he doesn't really necessarily care about human rights. He observed that it's an obstacle to people building trust in the police department, and it actually hurts their ability to get convictions. And so he recommends all kinds of modernizing measures. Some of those are administrative things. Like, he wants to give police chiefs and police executives more power. And then he's a big advocate of technology.