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PERSPECTIVES ON POLICING IN NINETEENTH CENTURY AMERICA

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April 1978

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CRSO Working Paper #176

Copies Available Through:

The Center for Research on  
Social Organization  
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Review essay, forthcoming in Social Science History, vol. 2, no. 3.



Perspectives on Policing in Nineteenth Century America

Policing in America has long been the object of heated debate. Much of the conflict concerned the issues of professionalization and the extension of public authority over policing. As a result of these processes, the nineteenth century witnessed substantial experimentation among diverse forms of policing.

This essay addresses changes in the character of American policing during the century bounded loosely by the 1820s and 1920s. Our examination of the historical literature on policing reveals three main perspectives on the rise and reform of urban police: social disorganization, political process, and class conflict. We select sets of studies which we think are representative of these perspectives--including appropriate works on English police--and evaluate their utility in explaining changes in policing.

Conceptual limitations within all three perspectives prompt us to suggest a respecification of the research problem. We present a broadened definition of policing which encompasses activities of private as well as public agents, and of non-professional as well as professional agents. We then attempt to elaborate a description of changes in the proportions of policing activities undertaken by the various classes of policing agents throughout the century.

The historical study of policing grew out of a renewed interest in the character of urban life in America. Early studies, notably Roger Lane's Policing the City: Boston, 1822-1885 and James Richardson's The New York Police: Colonial Times to 1901, employ an implicit model of

urban growth in tracing changes in the character of municipal policing, especially the emergence of centralized city police.<sup>1</sup> The model, which we shall call the "social disorganization" perspective, is a familiar one: as towns expanded into cities, urban anonymity provided cover for criminals, and the increasing heterogeneity resulting from immigration intensified inter-group tensions. Hence, rising crime and collective disorders were natural concomitants of urban growth. The mechanisms of social control appropriate to small-scale, homogeneous communities became increasingly inadequate. New developments in policing simply reflected an equally natural, if not inevitable, adjustment to changed social circumstances.

In Boston and New York during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, municipal policing was largely informal and decentralized; policing involved a variety of actors organized in citizen and professional forces under military and civilian control with overlapping jurisdictions among sheriffs, watchmen, and constables. The use of entrepreneurial policing under the fee system, in which constables provided services to owners of stolen property who paid extra-legal fees for the return of their goods, was quite common.

Both Lane and Richardson suggest that increases in the scale and complexity of urban life in the nineteenth century overwhelmed informal policing arrangements. Lane suggests that before growth, Boston was comparatively easy to police, but "as the city developed, problems arose which the community was unable to meet in traditional fashion."<sup>2</sup> The creation of a professional, preventive police resulted from the inability of citizens to deal with the problems of riot, criminality, and disorderly behavior, of which drunkenness was the most important symbol. Richardson writes

that in New York, "the old patterns of deference to one's betters and social control by informal mechanisms such as gossip no longer prevailed."<sup>3</sup> He notes the significance of the successful model provided by London's Metropolitan Police, and offers the clearest statement of the social disorganization perspective:

New York City established an organized police only when provided with a successful model and when fears of social disintegration were stronger than distaste for a quasi-standing army.

.....  
The 1830's and 1840's were decades of rapid population growth with sharp increases in immigration, heightened distinctions between class, ethnic, and religious groups with consequent social strain, and a dizzying economic cycle of boom and bust. These changes greatly complicated the city's police problem.<sup>4</sup>

Richardson extends this explanation to other large northern cities in a subsequent book:

New York, Boston, and Philadelphia underwent rapid social and economic change during these years [by the 1830s], change that so intensified group conflict that new instruments for maintaining order seemed imperative.<sup>5</sup>

The social disorganization explanation of the transition to bureaucratic, urban police rests on an argument concerning community responses to increases in public disorder for which scant supporting data have been presented. Presumably, its proponents have in mind some threshold of disorder which sparks police reform. Lane tells us that in the 1830s, "the problem of mob violence . . . compelled the municipality . . . to create a new class of permanent professional officers, with new standards of perfor-

mance."<sup>6</sup> Certainly Boston experienced serious disturbances in the 1830s: the burning of the Charlestown Convent (1834), the attack on W. L. Garrison (1835), and a bloody battle between volunteer firemen and an Irish funeral procession (1837) could well have been the central precipitants of Boston's police reform of 1838. But Lane's account rests on a retrospective reading of history that never directly attempts to answer the question, "How much disorder was too much?" Only the emergence of professional police provides evidence that there was "too much" disorder. Similarly, it is not clear for how long or to what extent crime had to be rising in order to elicit a reorganization of policing forces.

The sequence of rapid social change, the breakdown of traditional mechanisms of control resulting in disorder, and the institutionalization of new modes of control characterizes the social disorganization perspective on American policing. Adherents to this view attempt to specify the social conditions which preceded centralization, but generally ignore the politics of changes in policing. They rarely examine the groups calling for change, the political circumstances accompanying the changes, and the forms of organization which resulted.

Allan Levett develops some of these criticisms of the social disorganization approach in his study of the centralization of police in the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> Reinterpreting the conditions preceding the move for centralization, Levett criticizes the social disorganization perspective for its failure to distinguish among types of crime and collective violence. He writes, "If it did, scholars would need to consider the specific purposes behind policing, whose interests are served and what elements in a population the police are most directed to move against or control. It is in this way that policing is political."<sup>8</sup> Calling for an understanding of

policing within the politics of the nineteenth century, Levett proposes an alternative model which he labels the "political process" perspective.

The political process approach interprets the politics of policing as the competition among contending groups for control over policing activities in their interest. Groups within the community mobilize to influence the character of policing. The resulting forms of police organization reflect the outcomes of this competition.

Levett argues that police practice after unification lends support to the political process model because there was an increase in arrests for public order offenses, especially drunkenness, disorderly conduct, and vagrancy. Drawing on labelling theories of deviance, Levett contends that public order offenses involve conflicting definitions of what constitutes proper behavior. Therefore, arrests for public order offenses have a characteristically political flavor. Disputes about the definitions of acceptable behavior ensured that control over policing was one of the chief issues in nineteenth century municipal elections.<sup>9</sup>

Examining conditions before and after centralization in nine large cities, Levett focuses first on the factors which produce changes in the degree of police centralization and second on the consequences of centralization for social control. He suggests that centralization was facilitated by three conditions: the increasing financial strength of the well-to-do, the expansion of the poor and the trend toward downward mobility among native-American craftsmen, and the large influx of foreign immigrants. The move for centralization was led by the new middle classes, especially in the older cities of the Eastern seaboard where the extension of suffrage provided them with the opportunity to build a coalition with native-American workingmen. The coalition effected centralization and mobilized police power against immigrants,

lower class natives, and the unemployed. However, in the absence of systematic measures of changes in the ethnic and occupational composition of public order arrests, Levett's hypothesis remains to be tested thoroughly.

Samuel Walker's Critical History of Police Reform offers a variant of the political process perspective which concentrates on the politics of police professionalization in American cities from the mid-nineteenth century through the nineteen-thirties.<sup>10</sup> Walker suggests that early urban police represented the very "antithesis of professionalism": policemen received little or no training before being sent to march their beats; they lacked a career orientation to their jobs; they were generally held in low esteem by the public they were entrusted to protect; they too often relied upon force and violence to obtain compliance from citizens; and, perhaps most importantly, they enforced laws selectively, to advance the partisan interests of local politicians. Professionalization of police work became the rallying cry for those dissatisfied with a system in which the police officer "was less a public servant than an agent for a given political faction."<sup>11</sup> Though dissatisfied, reformers were not disinterested. Walker writes, "the attempt to remove the influence of politics was essentially an effort to supplant one political element with another."<sup>12</sup>

In contrast to the attention paid by the social disorganization perspective to changes in the scale and complexity of urban life, the political process perspective emphasizes the political processes which mediate between large scale social changes and changes in the character of municipal police. It examines the political contention surrounding unification and reform by analyzing the mobilization of groups for control over policing. It emphasizes the relationship between coalitions which control policing and the targets of police practice. However, its adherents fail to explain the rela-

tion between large scale changes and changes in the interests of the groups which combine or compete for control over policing.

A third perspective on policing links major changes in police organization to the changing class relations attendant upon the rise of industrial capitalism. The "class control" model seeks to link the emergence and subsequent functions of professional police to the growing intolerance of disorderly public behavior by an increasingly powerful class of industrialists who hoped to use the police to impose new social norms.

The employment of professional police to discipline a growing working class figures prominently in several class analyses of police in the nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup> Sidney Harring states the strongest version in his critical review of police histories:

the preeminent force behind the creation of the police institution in the United States was the need of large-scale entrepreneurs to ensure the orderly control of workers during the era of capitalist industrialization.<sup>14</sup>

In Buffalo, for example, businessmen used their control over municipal offices to mobilize local police against strikers and to encourage selective enforcement of public order laws to the disadvantage of workers and recent immigrants.<sup>15</sup>

Allan Silver's seminal treatment of police and riots in mid-nineteenth century England conveys an important difference between the class control and social disorganization models: instead of an increasing need for order in the community, there was a concrete demand for order, which included "a specific demand for the bureaucratization of police functions."<sup>16</sup> The new organization of police initiated the "penetration and continual presence of central political authority throughout daily life."<sup>17</sup> It was accompanied by

an "unprecedentedly extensive form of moral consensus" which enabled the police to exercise coercive control under the mantle of constitutional authority.<sup>18</sup> This consensus served to legitimate the political rule of new economic classes. Silver suggests how this arrangement worked:

at a time when the agrarian rich often sought to multiply and reconstruct the traditional means of self-defense against violent uprising and attack, those who sprang from the newer sources of wealth turned toward a bureaucratic police system that insulated them from popular violence, drew attack and animosity upon itself, and seemed to separate the assertion of 'constitutional' authority from that of social and economic dominance.<sup>19</sup>

In his view, the moral consensus mirrored the ideology of the new manufacturing class. But just how and how extensively this consensus was achieved remains problematic in his essay.

In an analysis of England's northern industrial areas, Robert Storch provides lucid descriptions of how new police forces were employed as agents of moral reform: drinking, gambling, and sports came under the purview of police.<sup>20</sup> Regulating these activities represented an attempt to impose a middle class conception of public order on a reluctant--and frequently resistant--working class. The police, argues Storch, were intended to do more than prevent serious crime and contain popular disorder. The daily surveillance of working class neighborhoods, including streets, pubs, and popular celebrations, marked a new departure in policing activities, which must be viewed as a direct complement to the attempts of urban middle-class elites--by means of sabbath, educational, temperance, and recreational reform--to mold a laboring class amenable to new disciplines of both work and leisure. The other side of

the coin of middle-class voluntaristic moral and social reform (even when sheathed) was the policeman's truncheon.<sup>21</sup>

Authorities were particularly zealous in their attempts to suppress traditional collective actions such as stang-riding and Guy Fawkes celebrations, which represented forms of popular justice and sometimes provided occasions for social protest.

In contrast to the social disorganization view, adherents to the class control perspective attempt to relate the emergence of professional police departments to the rise of industrial capitalism. Relative to the political process model, class control arguments posit a less pluralist image of American politics by emphasizing the role of a single set of actors--industrialists--who essentially determined that the creation of professional police forces would further their interests.

However, most of these approaches employ retrospective reasoning: they err in explaining the origins of municipal police by referring to their subsequent social control functions, rather than by providing evidence about the intentions of groups which influenced police reform. Some studies posit an automatic change in police organization and practice in response to industrialization.<sup>22</sup> These accounts ignore the political struggles accompanying industrialization which occasionally produced police support for striking laborers.

In fact, Bruce Johnson has reversed the standard class control picture by arguing that local public police functioned predominantly to defend working class interests.<sup>23</sup> He writes:

If criminal justice and police work in the United States constitute a system, it is not a unitary one. It is rather an apparatus whose multiple parts serve different masters. The . . .

claim that American law serves capitalist elites makes sense for courts, extra-local public police and private police (though even here, significant variability exists). These agencies, so to speak, have taken care of business. However, local public police (the most important single component of our criminal justice system) have taken care of labor. Today and over time, local public police have been accessible to the viewpoints and preoccupations of the American working class; many of their activities have served and do serve to defend or extend the (modest) social privileges of this class. This recognition is the key which unlocks American police work, past and present.<sup>24</sup>

More than their English counterparts, American municipal police were closely tied--by residence requirements, often by ethnicity, and, after the Civil War, by participation in Democratic political machines--to the working class and poor communities they patrolled. Efforts to reform municipal police by putting them under the control of largely Republican state legislatures in the last half of the century were part of an attack upon the close relationship between police and workers which characterized machine politics.

Police support for labor during strikes was most evident in medium-sized industrial cities of the East and Midwest. Drawing on Herbert Gutman's studies of a number of these cities,<sup>25</sup> Johnson argues that strong local ties often bound small businessmen, city officials, and police forces with striking workers against industrialists and scabs from outside the community. In such situations, industrialists learned to rely less upon local public police. They turned instead toward private police like Pinkerton's, and later, toward state police and federal agencies when they required coercive forces to handle disaffected laborers.<sup>26</sup>

Johnson's interpretation of the relationship between local police and the working class challenges not only the conclusions of most proponents of class control models of policing, but also most police historians working within the other perspectives.<sup>27</sup> The challenge should spur more research on the role of local police in repressing strikes. If Johnson's notions are correct, such research will have to consider the roles of private police, state police, militias, and federal agents as well.

Setting local public police within the context of other policing agencies, Johnson makes an important conceptual advance over much of the policing literature we have reviewed. Whether or not his conclusions about local police hold up under further empirical investigation, his approach suggests to us that future research should consider the activities of a wider set of coercive control agents. All three of the perspectives we discussed tend to impose too narrow a definition of policing by identifying policing with the activities carried out by formally organized agents of local government. The definition overstates the link between policing and governments and does injustice to the wide range of types--private and public, military and civilian, formal and informal--which characterize the history of policing in America. Focusing on the emergence of centralized local police tends to obscure the extent to which centralized policing was merely one of a number of options available to groups calling for changes in policing.

Our review of the literature on policing suggests the need for a re-specification of the research problem. We begin by offering a redefinition of policing. Previous work spoke of police, not policing. Taking organizations as its starting point, it focused on the activities of formal policing agencies like municipal departments or the earlier citizen watch.<sup>28</sup> We begin

from a different position, taking activities as the starting point and looking at the distribution of policing actions in different places and at different points in time.

By policing actions, we mean encounters in which collective actors or their representatives apply coercive sanctions under the claim of maintaining public order. The collective actors include a wide range of groups such as federal, state, or local police, citizen watch, private police, and private citizens acting as vigilantes. The common ground is the coercive character of their actions and the claimed legitimate right to maintain public order.

This perspective allows us to frame policing as a topic in the sociology of politics. Competition among groups and actors carrying out policing actions becomes the center of attention. The shift in the distribution of policing actions during the century becomes a measure of changes in the extent of control over policing exercised by these groups.

We use the term "forms of policing" to refer to the classes of groups and actors that carried out policing actions in the nineteenth century. We depart from previous approaches which try to explain the appearance of various types of policing. The broadened definition proposed here suggests instead a concentration on changes in policing actions among the forms of policing of which the various types are examples. When we approach policing by focusing on the types of organizations, the emergence of organizations is a key fact to be explained. When we look at policing as a set of activities initiated by a variety of groups and actors within a population, we shift the focus to an explanation of changes in the distribution of policing actions. The extent of organization differentiates the various groups involved in policing. The effect of organization on the distribution of policing actions becomes a problem to be explained. For example, we translate the concern



with the emergence of centralized municipal departments into a research hypothesis about the effects of the change on the distribution of policing actions among the forms. In place of explanations of new types of policing, we emphasize the impact of change on the distribution of activities among all the forms of policing. Table 1 arranges the chief forms of policing according to two dimensions: the extent of professionalization among the groups carrying out policing actions and the relationship between policing agents and the state. By indicating the most salient analytical characteristics for the nineteenth century, the cells define four groupings among the types of policing we have discussed.

Table 1  
here

The rows distinguish between the activities of professional and non-professional policing agents. We identify professional policing with the activities of agents for whom policing is their chief employment. Professional agents are generally formally organized. In contrast, we identify non-professional policing with the activities of actors who take part in policing actions but do not make policing their chief employment.

Describing the relationship between policing agents and the state, the columns distinguish between the activities of public and private forces. Public forces have been much discussed in the literature, while policing by private agencies or vigilantes has received less attention.

The diversity of forms is a key fact to be explained. The variety of forms can be understood as the outcome of particular features of American politics which continue to characterize policing. The structure of public policing reflects the distribution of power among American governments. Public policing was parcelled out among the various levels of government--federal, state, county, and local. Overlapping jurisdictions complicated the assignment of responsibilities among these agencies. Although federal agencies

TABLE 1  
Forms of Policing

	Agents of the State (Public)	Not Agents of the State (Private)
Professional	Municipal police County police State police Federal police	Private police
Non-professional	Citizen watch Militia/National Guard Posse, deputies	Vigilantes

did policing work, policing by the central state was relatively weak and decentralized policing was the rule. Lower level police forces, such as local and county police, were usually held accountable to the electorate. Decentralized authority, overlapping jurisdictions, and electoral accountability framed the structure of policing in America and invited political contention among the forms of policing.

But public policing covers only part of the policing work in the nineteenth century. The police mandate was interpreted broadly by governments which chartered large numbers of private agencies during the century. Best known for their work on behalf of business and industry, private police trailed criminals who crossed jurisdictional boundaries, policed offenses which fell outside the purview of public agencies, and, most importantly, bolstered the manpower available from public agencies for the protection of property. Private policing flourished in circumstances where public policing was absent, the responsibility of public agents unclear, or their commitment of resources unsure. The enormous growth of private policing in America was unparalleled by the experience of European nations where police powers were heavily concentrated in the central state.

The tradition of policing by private citizens is deeply inscribed in American history. Following English custom, private citizens organized under the hue and cry system had major responsibility for policing urban areas. After the formation of centralized departments, the tradition persisted when private citizens were deputized and posses were formed. A good deal of policing, however, involved unchartered groups of citizens.

Vigilantism is an enduring part of the American police tradition. In the West, there were large expanses of "unpoliced" space where formal police forces did not exist until the late nineteenth century. In areas where set-

tlement preceded government, vigilance committees often administered justice. As these settlements grew and were incorporated by governments, public policing challenged the practice of vigilantism. However, some communities found vigilantism a cheaper solution to the demand for order and postponed the establishment of public policing. Where law enforcement agencies took hold, vigilantes supplemented or usurped public policing when influential segments of the community were unsatisfied with official justice. Vigilantes enforced laws for which they found police response lax and pronounced summary justice on those whose activities they found threatening. Although vigilantism had precedents in European history, there were no parallels to the strength of the vigilante tradition in the United States.<sup>29</sup>

Under the conditions of a weak central state, the limited geographical and legal extent of public policing, electoral accountability, and a broad interpretation of the police mandate which included public and private actors, policing in the nineteenth century involved diverse forms contending for control over policing actions. We try to clarify the diversity of types of policing in the nineteenth century by emphasizing the two significant dimensions which distinguish among classes of policing actors. These factors enable us to trace changes in the distribution of policing actions among the various forms of policing. The first was the gradual replacement of citizen policing by professional policing. The second involved the imposition of public authority over policing.

The table suggests an accounting scheme which might be used to examine variations over time in the distribution of policing actions among the forms within a given population--a nation, state, region, or locality. We will use the scheme to sketch the broad trends in the distribution of policing actions at the national level. Drawing on our review of the historical

accounts, we offer a hypothetical scenario of the long-run changes in the character of policing in nineteenth century America which we hope will be confirmed, corrected or refuted by future studies in the field.

Our account concerns changes in the proportion of policing actions among the forms. To be sure, the absolute number of policing actions increased enormously during the century as a result of population growth, urbanization, and changes in the character of policing. Our interest in the forms of policing suggests that redistribution is a more important concern than increase in the overall number of policing actions. If we wanted to carefully measure changes in the distribution of policing actions across a sample of places, we would have to introduce statistical controls for changes in the size and settlement of populations during the century. Our discussion minimizes these demographic effects and concentrates on the impact of professionalization and the expansion of public authority over policing on the distribution of policing actions.

Professionalization refers to a net shift in the proportion of policing actions initiated by non-professionals to those initiated by professionals. We relate the process to the growth of professional policing agencies which involved increases in their control over resources such as money, manpower, and strategy. Our historical account focuses on the impact of changes in organization on the proportion of policing actions undertaken by various forms. Two cases will be discussed: the centralization of municipal police and changes in the organization of private policing.

As we know from the historical literature, the debate over centralization focused on the organization of policing in cities. By centralization, most authors refer to a shift from entrepreneurial to professional policing which brought increases in the funding, size, and sophistication of municipal

police. Few studies, however, examine the relationship between the increasing resources of professional agencies and the distribution of policing actions under their control. We hypothesize that increased manpower, guaranteed regular employment and decent wages combined with greater visibility and sophistication to raise the capacity of municipal departments to maintain public order. As the growing capacity of municipal police increased the overall number of policing actions, the proportion of policing actions under their control also expanded.

The effects of changes in strategy support our argument. At the beginning of the century, public agencies practiced reactive policing. Entrepreneurial police were principally engaged in the detection of crime and the apprehension of criminals. With centralization, strengthened professional agencies developed proactive strategies, most importantly the practice of surveillance and continuous police presence in the community. Allan Silver relates professionalization to the creation of a "policed society" which would not have been possible given the limited size, financial resources, and organization of entrepreneurial policing.<sup>30</sup>

Professionalization also brought increases in capacity among private agencies. Private organizations such as the Pinkertons replaced the "hired gun" in the West and their money, manpower, and sophistication increased steadily during the late nineteenth century. In fact, private agencies pioneered many of the innovations which were later adopted by public police. Bruce Johnson notes that Pinkerton's was the first agency "to fully develop the detective as an occupational role, and the first to use fingerprints as a tool for identification."<sup>31</sup> Increases in their capacity probably had the dual effect of increasing the overall number of policing actions and increasing the proportion of policing actions under their control, but to a lesser

extent than in the case of municipal police.

The extension of public authority over policing refers to a net shift in the proportion of policing actions which favored public over private actors. The process involved an expansion in the range and responsibility of public police. Our account focuses on the impact of changes in the extent of public authority over policing on the distribution of policing actions among the forms.

The extension of public authority over policing had several facets. First of all, the increase in the number of state and local governments brought more people under the control of public policing. We note the broadened geographical range of public policing, where government followed settlement. The beginnings of municipal policing in these urbanizing areas increased the proportion of policing actions under government control. Second, new laws and interpretations of laws gave public police responsibility for offenses which had previously been policed by private agencies or vigilantes. For example, the New England Association Against Counterfeiting, a private agency, was the chief instrument of Massachusetts bankers in the fight against counterfeiting until the United State Secret Service took charge after the Civil War.<sup>32</sup>

All in all, the expansion of public authority over policing increased the proportion of policing actions undertaken by agents of government. If our predictions about the effects of professionalization and the extension of public authority over policing are correct, we should expect that the redistribution of policing actions favored professional over non-professional forces and public over private forces. The majority of policing actions shifted into the first cell of Table 1. The shift was accomplished at the

expense of non-professional public policing, and, to a lesser extent, at the expense of non-professional private policing. Concurrently, the activities of private professional policing were increasing, but not as extensively as the number of policing actions undertaken by professional public policing.

Within the first cell, the centralization of authority at higher levels produced important changes. While local police continued to account for the bulk of public professional policing actions, we note a moderate shift toward higher levels of authority which reflected the increasing role of state and federal agencies. In the late nineteenth century and especially the early twentieth century, state and federal agencies stepped into areas where public responsibility was ambiguous and policing by local governments was absent or ineffective.

Our account of the redistribution of policing actions suggests the importance of the politics of policing. We have argued that groups contending for political power sought to gain control over policing. Control over policing allowed these groups to advance or consolidate their control over important resources.

The relationship between policing and the economy is illustrative. To the extent that policing actions facilitate certain economic activities and constrain others, policing serves particular economic interests. For example, in a society which guarantees the rights of property, policing inevitably serves the interests of the propertied more than the propertyless. Groups carrying out policing actions on behalf of particular economic interests claim legitimacy by identifying the protection of property with the maintenance of public order. Whether we consider labor conflict, licensing, or vice, these claims reflect concerns of production, distribution, and consumption.

The political circumstances which gave rise to a variety of forms of policing also provided various loci of authority which were the targets of powerful groups seeking control over policing. In the case of public policing, the electoral accountability of municipal forces made local policing the object of contention among competing political parties. When electoral defeats robbed them of their power over local policing, party leaders frequently turned their efforts to state legislatures. Raymond Fosdick notes that a dozen major cities underwent state control over policing between 1857 and 1915.<sup>33</sup> Most of these takeovers of municipal forces involved the efforts of rural Republican legislatures to disarm Democratic party machines. Pitched battles among political partisans sometimes followed. In 1857, members of the state-appointed Metropolitan police and local police chartered by the city council staged a major riot over the right to police New York City.<sup>34</sup> Takeovers often benefitted business interests as in the case of Boston where the state-appointed commissioners "had the police assume the locally unpopular function of protecting property during strikes."<sup>35</sup>

Similarly, the formation of state police forces satisfied a long-standing demand for the protection of industrial property by industrialists who found local police and the state militia unreliable. The creation of the Pennsylvania State Constabulary followed the 1902 anthracite coal strike which represented a strong challenge to the power of capital. Removed from political influence, the constabulary was a mobile force organized along military lines which recruited its members throughout the state in order to prevent sympathy between the police and local citizens.<sup>36</sup>

When governments were unwilling to commit forces on their behalf, powerful interests used other strategies to gain control over policing. They frequently called on governments to charter policing agencies. In Pennsylvania,

state law allowed private corporations to form their own police forces. Under the 1867 Coal and Iron Police Act, industrialists were allowed to have their private forces deputized by the county sheriff. Removed from public accountability, the Coal and Iron police were more reliable than municipal police or the state militia in the campaign to suppress the labor movement.<sup>37</sup>

When governments failed to act on their behalf, powerful interests resorted to private violence under the claim of maintaining public order. In 1855, the San Francisco Vigilance Committee, organized by leading merchants and supported by over 6,000 citizens, challenged local police under the control of the predominately Irish-Catholic Democratic party. Charging the municipal police with corruption and inefficiency, the Committee tried and hung some of the town's most infamous residents and deported twenty-eight people from the city. The Committee took charge of local policing until 1856 when a favorable slate of candidates was elected.<sup>38</sup> When powerful groups found public police wanting, vigilantism was an available alternative.

Changes in the dominant forms of policing involved struggles between powerful groups. Conflicting programs advanced by competing interests gave rise to experimentation among various forms of policing. The outcomes testify to the strength of certain powerful actors which marked the process of state-making in the United States.

#### Conclusion

We began with a review of the major perspectives which characterize the literature on policing. Our evaluation focused on the limitations of previous approaches. Our chief effort centered on a reformulation of the research problem based on a broader definition of policing which takes into account the particularities of American politics. Finally, we examined the

redistribution of policing actions among various forms of policing and described some of the political conflicts which accompanied changes in forms.

We have not proposed a new model of policing, having chosen instead to offer a new version of the problem to be explained. By shifting the focus to changes in the proportion of policing actions carried out by various forms of policing, we lay the groundwork for new questions about the history of policing. We have limited our account to a description of the processes involved in the redistribution of policing actions. We have not tried to confirm or refute any of the three perspectives which we have reviewed.

The respecification of the research problem should facilitate the task of confirmation. We have tried to elaborate a framework for studying changes in policing which is theoretically meaningful, empirically verifiable, and suggestive of strategies for research. First, it provides a theoretical rationale for considering the variety of forms which characterized policing in the nineteenth century. Second, it goes beyond the scope of questions about the emergence of new forms to provide a scheme which takes into account the continuous character of changes in the proportion of policing actions. Finally, it offers strong support for comparative research and suggests criteria for selecting units of observation and analysis.<sup>39</sup>

The prospects of our respecification of the research problem await new research on the relationship between large-scale transformations such as the emergence of industrial capitalism and the centralization of political power and changes in the distribution of policing actions among the forms. We have discussed one of several possible approaches for research on the forms of policing. Our account of the redistribution of policing actions shifted the focus from the emergence of types of policing to a more global analysis of the effects of organization on policing actions among all the forms of

policing. Studying changes in the number and character of actors engaged in policing would allow us to measure changes in the strength, class and ethnic composition, and the types and extent of political influence among the forms in different periods and places. This approach would provide important findings on shifts in resources, personnel, and sources of political influence for theories about the relationship between the state and private interests seeking control over policing.

A third approach might look at specific types of policing actions in order to account for changes in the control over these types exercised by different forms of policing. The protection of industrial property during strikes is a case in point. We have cited several examples of change in the locus of responsibility for policing strikes which followed the political mobilization of industrialists. Looking at the transfer of control over these actions between various private agencies and various types of public policing will provide evidence for theories about the relationship between powerful economic actors and the state during the expansion of industrial capitalism.

Research on policing will benefit from a broadened definition of policing which takes into account the particular political circumstances of the nineteenth century. The respecification of the research problem proposed here suggests guidelines for new interpretations. We hope that it will encourage future students of policing to do justice to a crucial and complex issue.

## NOTES

- 1 Roger Lane, Policing the City: Boston, 1822-1885 (Cambridge, Mass., 1967); James F. Richardson, The New York Police: Colonial Times to 1901 (New York, 1970).
- 2 Roger Lane, Policing the City, 221.
- 3 James F. Richardson, The New York Police, 25.
- 4 Ibid., 22, 24-25.
- 5 James F. Richardson, Urban Police in the United States (Port Washington, New York, 1974), 19.
- 6 Roger Lane, Policing the City, 26.
- 7 Allan E. Levett, "Centralization of City Police in the Nineteenth Century United States" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Sociology, University of Michigan, 1975).
- 8 Ibid., 18.
- 9 See, for example, Alan Dawley, Class and Community (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), chapter four.
- 10 Samuel Walker, A Critical History of Police Reform: The Emergence of Professionalism (Lexington, Mass., 1977). Big-City Police (Cambridge, Mass., 1977) by Robert M. Fogelson covers much the same ground, although it pursues the theme of police reform into the 1970s.
- 11 Samuel Walker, A Critical History, 3.
- 12 Ibid., 31.
- 13 See Center for Research on Social Justice, The Iron Fist and the Velvet Glove: An Analysis of the U.S. Police (Berkeley, 1975); Sidney L. Haring and Lorraine M. McMullin, "The Buffalo Police 1872-1900: Labor Unrest, Political Power and the Creation of the Police Institution," Crime

- and Social Justice, 4 (Fall-Winter 1975), 5-14; Sidney Haring, "The Development of the Police Institution in the United States," Crime and Social Justice, 5 (Spring-Summer 1976), 54-59; Dawley, Class and Community, chapter four.
- 14 Sidney Haring, "The Development of the Police Institution," 54.
  - 15 Sidney Haring and Lorraine McMullin, "The Buffalo Police."
  - 16 Allan Silver, "The Demand for Order in Civil Society: A Review of Some Themes in the History of Urban Crime, Police, and Riot," in David J. Bordua, ed., The Police: Six Sociological Essays, (New York, 1967), 10.
  - 17 Ibid., 13.
  - 18 Ibid., 15.
  - 19 Ibid., 11-12.
  - 20 Robert D. Storch, "The Plague of the Blue Locusts: Police Reform and Popular Resistance in Northern England, 1840-57," International Review of Social History, 20 (Part 1 1975), 61-90; Robert D. Storch, "The Policeman as Domestic Missionary: Urban Discipline and Popular Culture in Northern England, 1850-1880," Journal of Social History, 9 (Summer 1976), 481-509.
  - 21 Robert D. Storch, "The Policeman as Domestic Missionary," 481.
  - 22 For example, Sidney Haring and Lorraine McMullin, "The Buffalo Police."
  - 23 Bruce C. Johnson, "Taking Care of Labor: The Police in American Politics," Theory and Society, 3 (Spring 1976), 89-117.
  - 24 Ibid., 91.
  - 25 Herbert G. Gutman, "The Worker's Search for Power," in H. Wayne Morgan, ed., The Gilded Age: A Reappraisal, (Syracuse, New York, 1963),

38-68; Herbert G. Gutman, "Class, Status and Community Power in Nineteenth Century American Industrial Cities: Paterson, New Jersey: A Case Study," In Herbert G. Gutman, ed., Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America, (New York, 1976), 234-260.

26 Bruce C. Johnson, "Taking Care of Labor," 94-96.

27 For example, Richardson concludes that the New York police "did not identify with the problems and aspirations of labor; nor did labor have any respect for the police" (The New York Police, 201). Only Walker seems impressed by instances in which local police were seen by industrialists as being unreliable during strikes (A Critical History, 76).

28 Under Anglo-Saxon law, citizens were collectively responsible for maintaining public order within their communities. In most American cities, public policing before centralization comprised several roles: nightwatch, constable, day and night police are examples. We use the term "citizen watch" to refer to policing roles that citizens were obliged to perform. Even by the early nineteenth century, the extent of professionalization among the citizen watch varied greatly from place to place.

29 See Richard M. Brown, "The American Vigilante Tradition," in Hugh Davis Graham and Ted Robert Gurr, eds., Violence in America, (New York, 1969), 144-218); Richard M. Brown, Strain of Violence: Historical Studies of American Violence and Vigilantism, (New York, 1975).

30 Allan Silver, "The Demand for Order," 8.

31 Bruce C. Johnson, "Taking Care of Labor," 75.

32 Roger Lane, Policing the City, 55-56.

33 Raymond B. Fosdick, American Police Systems, (New York, 1920), 97.

34 James F. Richardson, The New York Police, 104-105; Samuel Walker,

A Critical History, 27-28.

35 Bruce C. Johnson, "Taking Care of Labor," 93.

36 Samuel Walker, A Critical History, 76.

37 Ibid., 29; see also J.P. Shalloo, Private Police: With Special Reference to Pennsylvania, (Philadelphia, 1933), 58-134.

38 Samuel Walker, A Critical History, 30-31; Richard M. Brown, Strain of Violence, 134-143.

39 Our account of the political background argues for a national analysis based on a sample of states and localities. Any account should consider regional variations in explanatory variables such as the extent of industrialization and the degree of central political control. We are working on an explanatory perspective and developing strategies for research.