Police organizations and administration criminology essay

There is an old adage that states, " Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Sadly, many people in the law enforcement community seem to think that the history of police work began the day they first put on their badge and gun belt. Because of this reason, each form of progress in law enforcement tends to be viewed as something completely innovative, without any historical background. This is truly the case in today's society in regards to community policing.

In order to grasp a better understanding of the debate over community policing in our present time, officials within law enforcement should be knowledgeable of its history. History proves wrong to all of the outlandish claims made by some of the supporters of community policing and also warns against forgetting the important lessons of the past. It shows us that the idea to change policing strategies have been a continuous theme since the beginning of municipal policing. Most importantly, it reminds us that are problems in today's society, while very serious, are nothing new to the world of policing.

Modern law enforcement history began about 181 years ago with the creation of the London Metropolitan Police District in 1829. By forming a new police force, the British Parliament tried to deal with the rise in crime rates in and around the nation's capitol, attributed at the time to the fast urban growth, unconstrained immigration, alcoholism, high poverty, radical political groups, unsupervised juveniles very poor infrastructures, and merciful judges. The philosophy taken on by Sir Robert Peel, the first chief of the London Metropolitan Police, has become the traditional model for all British and American police organizations. These principles include the use of crime

rates to determine the effectiveness of the police, the importance of a centrally located publicly accessible police headquarters, and the value of proper recruitment, selection, and training (Patterson, 1995).

Possibly the most lasting and significant advancement was the establishment of regular patrol areas, known as " beats." Before the creation of the London Metropolitan Police in 1829, the police, whether it was either civilian or military, only responded to a crime after it had been reported. Areas were not patrolled frequently; any crime prevention or arresting of criminals in the act of committing a crime took place coincidently.

As part of Sir Robert Peel's strategy, he would place his officers in specific geographic zones and held them responsible for preventing and stopping crime within these zones. He based this strategy on his belief that the officer would: 1) become known to the public, and citizens with information about criminal activity would be more likely to tell a familiar figure than a stranger, 2) become familiar with people and places and thus better able to recognize suspicious persons or criminal activity, and 3) be highly visible on their posts, tending to deter criminals from committing crimes in the immediate vicinity (Patterson, 1995). In order for Peel to put into action his " beat" model, he instituted a paramilitary command structure. Though Peel truly believed in civilian control, he also understood that only military discipline would ensure that his constables, to us known as officers, would actually walk their beats and enforce the law on London's streets.

Early American policing came about roughly similar to that of the London police. By the time of the Civil War, most of the populous U. S. cities had

established municipal police departments. These police departments, just like the London police, had adopted a paramilitary structure. Police officers were required to wear distinguishing blue uniforms and foot patrol their assigned beats. However, there was a difference between American and London police officers. The American officers were allowed to carry a gun on their belt. They were also under the control of a politically appointed local precinct captain, unlike the London officers.

By the turn of the century, the progressive movement began to promote professionalism in law enforcement as one of the basic components of rehabilitating municipal politics (Patterson, 1995). There was a true concern about corruption and violence in local police agencies that ultimately resulted in States taking over of some of the city departments. Eventually, that led to the formation of new State police agencies that would be free from corrupting influences of local area politics. Reformers fervently tried to protect the police from political obstruction and simultaneously preserve local government control. Founded in 1893, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) implemented a civil service personnel system and the centralization of power in powerful executive positions which would be able to control the politically united precinct captains. Reformers also wanted to change the responsibilities of police officers in American society. During the 19th century, police officers were doing more social work than law enforcement. American police officers were busy enforcing health and building codes, securing housing for the homeless, building and supervising playgrounds for children, and even finding jobs for ex-convicts (Patterson, 1995). Reformers felt that the social work being done by American police

officers provided too many chances for political preferential treatment and was a waste of resources. They felt the American police officer's time should be allotted to fighting and preventing crime.

Technological and scientific advancement played a pivotal role in American policing. The forensic sciences introduced ballistics, chemistry (e. g. DNA), and fingerprinting. The technological advancement came in the form of the automobile, telephone, and the radio. These advancements took policing to an unprecedented level. Radios were installed in patrol cars which allowed for police officers to respond to emergency calls received by the police switchboard. The use of automobiles during the beat also had a great impact. It allowed for police officers to observe the area that they were patrolling from a distance while also allowing them to respond to any incident that might have occurred in another area in a timely manner.

As time went on, professionalism within local police agencies encountered several problems. Many police agencies became divided between the older generation of officers and the newer college-educated officers. Advanced education contributed to greater levels of disappointment with the more everyday aspects of policing. With higher demands put on policing, such as being more efficient and objective, it caused officers to become detached from the community and go against any route that any elected political leader might have. Many people also questioned whether professionalism within local police departments was really taking place. Many departments implemented a civil service merit system to deal with hiring and promotion. A code of ethics was also implemented. Many of these departments supported their practices through knowledge based on experience

(Patterson, 1995). None of the departments conducted any true scientific research, nor did they require any form of higher learning (college degree) to be able to work in the field. It became evident in the past 40 years that professionalism was failing. With all the assassinations, urban riots, and gang violence that was taking place, the citizenry lost their trust in the police's ability to protect and serve them.

The first organized resistance using the basic concept of community policing can be found in Skolnick's case study of the San Francisco, California, Police Department's Community Relations Unit. In 1962, the San Francisco Police Department formed a specialized unit based on the notion that " police would give help to reduce crime by reducing despair; by acting as a social service agency to ameliorate some of the difficulties encountered by minority group persons" (Patterson. 1995). The members of the unit were uneasy of the mission put forth on them due to the fact that they were not sure on what methods they would be applying in order to serve any of the minority population. Another problem that this specialized unit faced was " how to maintain its identity as a police organization and at the same time to win the confidence of the minority group population...ordinarily considered a police problem" (Patterson, 1995). Subsequently, the relationship of trust between the community and the unit resulted in complaints of misconduct against other police officers. The program was inefficient and quickly disbanded.

A new strategy came about in the 1970s called team policing. Advocates of team policing recognized that: " In recent years, due in part to changes in the social climate and in part to changes in police patrol techniques (more

patrol cars, less foot patrol), many police agencies have become increasingly isolated from the community. This isolation makes crime control more difficult." (Patterson, 1995). Much like Sir Robert Peel's strategy of placing an officer responsible for patrolling a specific beat, team policing assigned a team of police officers to a specific geographic area in order for them to learn about the neighborhood, its people, and its problems. Since team policing involves a team of people and not an individual, the chances of corruption are reduced. The concept of team policing appealed to many major American cities; cities tried employing different forms of it within the community. The different forms of team policing attempted in American cities failed. One of the main reasons why team policing failed was because it placed more effort on long-term problem solving than on quick response to incidents. Other reasons were that it violated the chain of command and also interfered with detectives and other specialized units in the police departments.

The term community policing is basically made up of police philosophies, strategies, and tactics known as problem-oriented policing, neighborhood-oriented policing, or community-oriented policing. Just like team policing, the goal of community policing is that the officer(s) that is assigned to a specific beat will create a bond between himself and the community. Community policing encourages police officers to pursue higher education and conduct research on proposed methods of policing. Community policing officers dedicate a substantial amount of time performing social work. However, they also work independently and creatively to find solutions to the problems they encounter on their beats instead of merely responding to emergency calls

and arresting criminals. (Patterson, 1995). By doing this, community police officers are able to make many personal contacts in the community. All of the standards of community policing coincide with the values of police culture: crime fighting, standard operating procedures, and a paramilitary chain of command.

Community policing consists of three key components. The first is community partnerships which are defined as collaborative partnerships between the law enforcement agency and the individuals and organizations they serve to develop solutions to problems and increase trust in police (Wikipedia, 2010). The second component is organizational transformation which is the alignment of a law enforcement agencies organizational management practices, structure, personnel, and information systems to support community partnerships and proactive problem solving (Wikipedia, 2010). The final component is problem solving which is the process of engaging in the proactive and systematic examination of identified problems to develop and rigorously evaluate effective responses (Wikipedia, 2010).

Community policing has received favorable reviews from politicians, academic scholars, public administrators, the media, and, most importantly, the general public. Despite the positive support that community policing has received, it has gone through some upheavals at the operational level in almost every place that it has been implemented. When comparing modern community policing against the first forms of community policing in America, there are a number of significant errors that are noticeable. Even though community policing was accepted by many people that were in and out of the public eye, the reality was that the program was only put into place

when there was grant funds available. If there were funds, then the next issue would be which neighborhood groups would the specialized unit need to operate in. The priority was placed on funding and which neighborhood to appease than actually coming up with a strategic management plan. Another problem was that many of the officers that were involved in community policing appeared unsure of who to serve and how to serve them. They used different techniques that ranged from enthusiastic social work to forceful street crime policing.

Many of the cities that tried to implement community policing did so by using small, specialized units in well-defined neighborhoods. This caused a negative reaction within other communities because other residents felt ignored by the police. It also caused a rift between police officers because there was a perception that community police officers play by different rules and do not have to respond to the same possible violent calls that other officers have to take.

Personnel evaluations and lack of efficiency are two other issues within community policing (Friedmann, 1996). In regards to personnel evaluations, many cities have been slow to change their forms of evaluating officers. They are still using traditional indicators, such as calls handled and arrests made, to evaluate performance instead of evaluating officers on their efforts to solve problems. Lack of efficiency is a major issue because community policing is truly labor intensive. Foot patrols, a key component in community policing, was discarded by prior generations because it was not a cost effective way to deliver police services (Patterson, 1995). Due to the

shrinking tax base in cities and public demands for leaner government, there are few opportunities to make community policing effective.

Decentralization and permanent assignments are considered to be two focal elements of community policing. Unfortunately, these two elements conflict with the professional model (Friedmann, 1996). One of the first changes made by the IACP was the implementation of a more centralized authority and also a mandatory rotation of assignments for officers. An unplanned consequence of community policing was that in order for officers to get to know their " beat", they would have to be able to spend a significant amount of time in the community building relationships with the residents. The relationships formed between officers and citizens lead to an increased in corruption and biased behavior by officers.

Crime is a natural condition of society. Police administrators, police officers, political leaders, and the public need to accept the inevitability of crime in order to avoid being deluded into unrealistic expectations by new programs (Patterson, 1995). It is important to realize that top to bottom organizational changes in policing are inevitable. These changes, however, do not represent a novelty in policing. The changes that are occurring in policing today are a consequence of a long history of problems encountered since the beginning of policing. It is pivotal that police administrators learn the history of policing and the lessons that have been learned from the past. If they do, they will be better prepared for the uncertain and challenging future.