

Describe law and
order in the late
nineteenth century
essay sample



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In the late nineteenth century there was an increase in major crimes like murders and there were a lot more street crimes like theft, this became a growing problem for the newly formed Metropolitan Police Force. In 1840 the amount of crime offences had risen from 5000 to 20 000 in just 40 years. This was a problem that the police needed to tackle. There were more investigations launched towards the end of the 19th century and in the early 20th century. Investigations became more thorough and the CID was set up, this was short for the criminal intelligence department.

Police work was improved a great deal during the late 19th century and which brought the crime rate down. The jobs of officers also changed throughout this period as police were not just there to deter crime and prevent it but they were there to solve crime. Police weren't liked very much in the 19th century and they had a bad reputation for handling incidents like protests. Through out this period as well punishments for crimes changed dramatically as capital punishment was abolished for most crimes, although it still stood for murder and treason, other means of punishments were introduced.

Over all the police underwent very large changes in the way that they handled crime, the way that they punished people for crimes and the jobs of the police. Prisons also underwent large reforms; the conditions were foul and very inhumane. In 1829 the ' Metropolitan Police Force' was set up, the police officers were given blue uniforms as the older red ones reminded the public of the army and the general public felt intimidated by this. The uniform was designed so that it would look more civilian than it was military.

The reason that the colour blue was chosen for the uniform was because it was the colour of the navy's uniform, the navy were very much liked and respected. The police uniform was slightly altered in 1870 with a distinctive police helmet. There were two popular names that the police were called those were 'Peelers' and 'Bobbies'. These names were made up after the Home Secretary Sir Robert Peel. The Metropolitan Police Force was divided into seventeen divisions; each one had a superintendent, 4 inspectors and 144 constables.

Every officer had to be in good health, aged 35 and under, at least 5'5 tall and able to read and write. It took a long time for the general public to get used to the new police force and their reputation went up and down until about the early 1900's. People were not very keen on the government interfering as their policy for a long time had been 'laissez faire'. Nothing at all was done for the reputation of the police force when in 1833 there was a baton charge in Cold Bath Field in London, there was many injured and one police officer called PC Cully was killed.

Many people did not like the brutal way that the police force handled many situations, it was said to be too violent and aggressive. The job of a London 'bobby' was to keep the streets of London orderly, they were there to rid prostitutes (vagrants), drunks and thieves. Their job was strictly to stop crime and not to solve it. There were many officers dismissed in the earlier days of the police force because they turned up to work drunken and disorderly. One officer was dismissed after only 4 hours of work. This was not unusual.

In 1842 the first detectives were introduced to the Metropolitan Police Force. This caused a lot of trouble and many problems, many people were not happy with the plain clothes that they wore. People were worried that they could not tell a detective from a normal civilian. There was also the worry that the plain clothed detectives were mixing with criminals very closely and the chances of corruption would rise. In 1878 the detectives department was know as the CID (Criminal Intelligence Department). Detective work began in the 1860's when the first murder was investigated.

In 1862 the first photos were taken of a crime scene and criminals began to be photographed. It was believed that you could tell a criminal by the shape of their head. The Rogues Gallery was formed with the photos at Scotland Yard. Then the CID was set up, this didn't go well and in 1877 there were 3 out of four officers discovered guilty of corruption. Instructions for dealing with murder cases were introduced in 1879, they were that the body was not to be moved, nothing in the room must be interfered with and the public must be kept away.

In 1884 a man called John Toms was convicted of murder because the paper that was found in the wound of the victim was the same as the wadding in the gun found on him. Later in 1892 parts of bodies were measured to help convict criminals of crimes as it was believed that there were no two people the same. This was called the Alphonse Bertillon method of identification. Fingerprinting was introduced in 1901 and it was in 1902 when there was the first person was convicted of murder by using fingerprinting.

In 1901 the first police photographer was appointed. This was the beginning of the use of forensic evidence in murder cases. Police in the late nineteenth century received very little training. Most of the time before they went out on the beat was spent practicing drills. Most of the skills were learnt on the job where police officers spent up to 14 hour a day. The one big thing expected of the police was a squeaky clean public appearance, you were not to be seen rendezvousing with women and you had to be seen attending church every Sunday.

Their public image was very important because up until 1868 there had been no major disturbances that the police had to deal with. It was in the mid 1880's that the police's reputation began to go down hill when they charged on an unemployment demonstration in 1886. It was thought that they acted much too harshly. The worst case was in 1887 on 13th November when the police charged a demonstration by the Metropolitan Radical Federation and it was done using two squadrons of foot guards, the police force and also two squadrons of Life Guards.

The reputation of the police was not helped when it was seen that they were favoring the upper class and the working class were being treated unfairly. This attitude was only developed in the 1880's because there were very little incidents in the 60's and 70's so the reputation on the police was kept high and there were no incidents to damage this reputation. The corruption between the forces didn't help the publics trust, the average walking per day for a police officer was seven and a half miles and during the night two miles, and for 14 hours constant this made many officers uptight and touchy.