

PREFACE

This book was written with the benefit of having taught and conducted research on policing for the past 32 years and as having served as a summer police officer, a large metropolitan police officer, and retiring as a military police officer. It is that combination of education and practical experience that I hope to communicate in this textbook, *Policing America: An Introduction, Fourth Edition*.

The variety of perspectives, however, made for somewhat of a challenge in trying to determine how to approach this book. Having served as a police officer, I understand that the police officer is a street-level bureaucrat and is instrumental in shaping what is American policing. This is because police officers still retain a fairly wide amount of discretion, and what happens on the street, what police officers do, has a powerful impact on the police department, and it drives the organization. Therefore, the police officer's perspective, even when it differs from either police management or research, should never be overlooked.

Research also serves a purpose in helping us to gain an insight into American policing by giving a bird's-eye view into commonalities between and among the more than 18,000 police agencies and approximately 800,000 law enforcement officers. It also, sometimes, gives us new insights into the actions of individual police officers and their departments. It cannot, however, always provide a contextual understanding of American policing because of the many limitations inherent in research methods.

Another perspective into American policing comes from police administration and management, because they are the people who run the police organizations, and what they do and how they see things is critical to understanding what police departments and police officers do. However, although their perspective is important, when they steer the police organization, it is often equated to steering a big ship with a very small rudder.

That last notion also makes an assumption that is not always true in American policing, and that is that we are dealing with large bureaucratic organizations. Most of the police departments in America are small-town and rural agencies employing fewer than 20 police officers. Still further, not all police agencies are police departments, but many are composed of offices of the sheriff, marshal, and constable. What might prove true for the large metropolitan police department might not hold true for the small-town police chief with a force of three officers, or the sheriff's office with five deputies.

Still another perspective on American policing is the fact that when we talk about these agencies, they are mostly local and municipal, yet sheriff's offices serve at the county level, and there are also state and federal agencies as well. We assume these police agencies are all the same. Sometimes those assumptions are wrong.

One other perspective that must be pointed out, one not represented in this book, is that policing in America is very different from policing in the rest of the world. Most other countries have one police department that operates geographically throughout the country but reports to a higher executive authority. American policing is far more decentralized. Therefore, this book is very American-centric out of necessity. Rather than detailing an international or comparative perspective, the book focuses on American policing in the cities, towns, and counties, as well as local, state, and federal levels.

To achieve an understanding of American policing, all of these perspectives are incorporated into the book. The focus of the book is on a contextual understanding of concepts in American policing. It is supported by academic research, balanced with the voice of the American police officer. Additionally, when addressing matters that pertain largely to police administration, the book attempts to balance the research with the voice of the administrator as well. The ultimate goal of this textbook is to provide a balanced understanding of policing from an academic perspective without losing sight of the realities of policing as performed by the men and women of law enforcement who do this job every day. It is the reader who will judge if I have achieved this goal.

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