

# PREFACE

This preface is the only part of the forthcoming book that I will write in the first person. I do this because I want the opportunity from the outset to connect with my readers in ways that the traditional academic conventions of third person make difficult. The preface allows me to explain myself, to provide some backstory to this project that will not be found in the substantive chapters. For me, backstory is important because it offers insights into my rationale for writing a book like this in the first place. It might be considered ironic, but as a police scholar who has spent a career conducting original research and publishing the results of that work in peer-reviewed journals, I never considered writing a textbook. It seemed that writing such a book would require me to deep-dive into many policing topics that were typically outside my usual areas of inquiry, and I was not convinced that I could add anything new to the textbook literature. But after the summer of 2020, my outlook on textbook writing changed. I could see that policing was entering a dark period. Despite the legitimate criticisms of policing made by the media and social commentators, as well as the calls to defund the police, I felt I needed to contribute something to the public dialogue that might offer some hope as to how policing might move forward. I continue to believe in policing as a crucial public institution, but it is an institution in drastic need of change. Not just reform, but actual, structural change. I wanted to create a forum to speak to as many future police officers as possible. I hope this book becomes that forum.



The first thing a reader should know about me is that I am a geek for the police. I always have been. Since that warm California summer day in 1971 when my mother snapped a photo of then-four-year-old me and my one-year-old sister perched beside my dad's marked patrol car, I have been hooked on the police. In that particular photo, my dad was a new officer

sitting in the driver's seat, window down and almost totally obscured by my sister, who was sitting on the door frame of the open window. My dad's arm is visible, as he wrapped it around my sister's legs for support. The door of the patrol car is emblazoned with the city's seal that had been created as part of a city planning campaign in the 1960s. It read: "City of Santa Rosa, California: *The City designed for living!*" The car was green and had a painted white top on which was mounted a red "gumball" emergency light. Even then, at that age, I remember being a little disappointed because in my mind, police cars were supposed to be black and white, like they were in the television series, *Adam-12*. Still, at the moment that photograph was taken, I felt that my dad was just about the most important person in town.

I grew up wanting to be a police officer. I was enamored with the gear that police officers wore on their utility belts, the heft of the police cars, the Unity spotlight that could be controlled from the driver's seat, the Motorola radio mounted just under the dashboard, and the switches that controlled the lights and siren. To me, the patrol cars, and everything contained within them, embodied the very essence of scientific policing and professional crime fighting. For most of my early and teen years, I was largely oblivious to the heavy-handed policing—much of it racially charged—that was, and had been, taking place in the more urbanized jurisdictions just down the road from our small town in places like Berkeley, Oakland, Richmond, San Francisco, South San Francisco, East Palo Alto, and San Jose. To my mind, police officers did not enforce the color line or bring their night sticks to bear on college students and others who demonstrated against police brutality or structural racism in housing, education, and employment. The police were there to do good, and it did not occur to me during those years that different groups of people would have vastly different interpretations of the police.

Even in college as a criminal justice major, my impressions of the police remained untested and unchanged. Perhaps I wasn't paying attention in class (I wasn't the best student), or perhaps I wasn't exposed to the research and writings that were critical of the police, but throughout most of my undergraduate years, I did not question. I accepted that the police were there to do good, especially in the areas of crime fighting, gang interdiction, and crime prevention. Until one night in Sacramento when I was on a ride-along with officers from the Sacramento Police Department. An interaction between three downtown officers and two suspected drug dealers challenged for the first time my impressions of who the police were, and it made me question my intention to join the police department after graduation. Readers can listen to a full account of that night in the first podcast episode (linked in Chapter 1), "One Night in Sacramento." In the meantime, I will note that the officers during that interaction on a downtown Sacramento street corner treated two Black men as if they were nothing more than a violation of the criminal code. The officers had every chance to do good by those men, but they instead defaulted to the use of coercion, seemingly for the sake of coercion itself. And that moment changed me.

Fast-forward to graduate school at Temple University when I began working with (the now late) James J. Fyfe, perhaps the most celebrated scholar of police authority accountability in the country at that time. Fyfe was the real deal because, in a previous career, he had worked his way up the ranks to become a lieutenant in the New York City Police Department before earning his PhD in criminal justice from SUNY Albany. He retired from police work shortly thereafter and joined the faculty in the Department of Criminal Justice at Temple. Fyfe had an insider's view on policing even when criticizing the police, which allowed him to critique police practices while not vilifying the police institution. His perspective was important to me, because I needed to see firsthand that as policing scholars we could study things like police violence, police corruption, and other troubling aspects of street-level policing, all with an eye toward helping improve the police institution. I have spent my professional career as a scholar and social scientist trying to balance many of the inequities I see in policing against the good I know the institution is capable of achieving.

As readers will come to learn, the origins of this book reside in Carl Klockars's 1985 book, *The Idea of Police*. In that relatively brief volume (160 pages total), Klockars deciphered the highly theoretical writings of the classic sociologist Egon Bittner for a mostly undergraduate readership in ways that not only made Bittner accessible, but also revolutionized the way many readers thought about the police at such a formative moment in our academic development. I was one of those readers, having first read *The Idea of Police* in my undergraduate policing class in 1987. From that point forward, Klockars became an intellectual hero to me.

Just after I graduated with my PhD in 2001, Jim Fyfe introduced me to Carl Klockars for the first time at the American Society of Criminology meetings. During our conversation, Carl told me of the many kind emails and letters he'd received over the years from readers of *The Idea of Police*, many of whom had read it in college and gone on to become police officers. To that end, Klockars believed his book had made a real impact on the most important audience of all: the next generation of cops. Not shy, he also told me that *The Idea of Police* was the all-time best-selling book that his publisher had ever published. I have been unable to confirm his assertion, though not for a lack of trying. When I asked why he had never published an updated edition, he said it was because most undergraduate readers no longer knew *Hill Street Blues*, the television show—and specifically, several of its primary police characters—on which he relied to illustrate several personality types of police officers in his book. The fact that fewer and fewer undergraduate students knew anything about *Hill Street Blues*, he argued, made his appeal to the show and its characters dated. He also said there had never been another police drama produced on television since *Hill Street Blues* with the authenticity and diversity of characters needed to successfully update *The Idea of Police*.

My appeal to *Hill Street Blues* in Chapter 1 of this book is partly an homage to the now-late Carl Klockars (he died in 2003), and also a chance

to demonstrate the transition that has occurred in the U.S. police mentality since *Hill Street Blues* was on the air. Although I have never seen a rigorous historical analysis of how policing has changed over time with respect to the increased use of coercion to solve the problems that police officers and departments face on a daily basis, I can say that I have noticed the police institution ramp up its coercive capacities since *Hill Street Blues* concluded in 1987. That is also the year that crack cocaine began ravaging U.S. cities, resulting in the War on Drugs that dominated policing for at least two generations.

It wasn't until policing scholar Peter Kraska published his 1997 study detailing the rise of police paramilitarism that our academic field learned just how much U.S. policing was beginning to resemble the U.S. military, in terms of both hardware and deployments. Police officers in cities were increasingly carrying automatic weapons, dressing in battle dress uniforms (BDUs), and deploying in platoon-sized groups as police paramilitary units (PPUs). When the Ferguson protests occurred in the wake of the shooting death of Michael Brown by a Ferguson, Missouri, police officer, the world beyond our discipline saw firsthand what had been happening in U.S. policing, largely under the nose of the public: We saw the Ferguson and St. Louis County Police Departments quickly deploy armored personnel carriers, mine-resistant ambush protected vehicles (MRAPs), rifles based on the military M4 Carbine, tear gas, and long-range acoustic devices (LRADs) designed to not just disperse crowds (which generally enjoy First Amendment protections to assemble) but also to inflict severe pain through their 149-decibel sound emissions.<sup>1</sup> It was while watching the protests, and particularly the police responses to them, that I realized policing in America had gone off the rails. It was also during those fall months of 2014 that I began to formulate the idea for this book. I continued to believe that policing could become a crucial public institution, but to get there was going to require a mental reset to reduce the harm that officers and departments were bringing into American—mostly *African American*—communities.

Admittedly, my research and work as an academic department head caused my progress on the original iteration of this book to stall, but after watching Derek Chauvin kill George Floyd using a neck restraint while at least three other officers stood by and let it happen, I became once again invigorated to write a book about the dangers and consequences of what I viewed was a coercion-for-the-sake-of-coercion policing paradigm. Instead of speaking primarily to scholars (as most academic and university press books do), I decided I could achieve a greater impact by writing for an audience I understood well: college students who hoped to someday become police officers. I was once one of those very college students, and I continue to owe Carl Klockars a debt of gratitude for writing *The Idea of Police* just as I

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<sup>1</sup> Taub, "What Was THAT? A Guide to the Military Gear Being Used Against Civilians in Ferguson."

was entering university. I believe it is now time for an updated idea of police, or what I refer to in this book as a new idea of police—one that advocates moving beyond coercion as the primary means and ends of policing to a protection of life mandate that might ultimately reduce harm in the most vulnerable communities while also increasing the life chances of those who live there.

In his memoir, *Chief: My Life in the LAPD*, Daryl Gates (LAPD chief 1978–1992) wrote about a time when he was asked his opinion on the (then) nascent community policing movement. Responding to the question of whether he valued the concept and practice of community policing, Gates said something to the effect that the police can't be all things to all people, meaning that community policing was beyond the mission of police and not something he was keen to implement in the LAPD. As this book will argue, though, the police do not have to be all things to all people. They just need to be cool and reasonable: cool in the coercion they bring into the communities they police and reasonable with the intrusions they make into the lives of the people they encounter. Cool and reasonable is nothing more than a mentality—much the same as the protection of life mandate proposed in this book—that has the capacity to translate into practices that can produce enormous good from a police institution that is in desperate need of producing something good.

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