

The invention of Peel's principles: A study of policing 'textbook' history

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Abstract

Beyond noting the importance of the Act for Improving the Police in and near the Metropolis (1829) (hereafter referred to as the Metropolitan Police Act of 1829) to the origins of modern policing, law enforcement and policing textbooks commonly include a list identified as Peel's principles. In researching the origins of such lists and their principles, this study found that they are largely the invention of twentieth century textbook authors. From this understanding emerge several considerations for the future of textbook history and of Peel's principles. These include the ongoing importance of incorporating new scholarship and changing historical interpretation into texts. In such an endeavor, however, care should be taken not to impose twentieth or twenty-first century concepts on the past.

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Introduction

The study of history in the discipline of criminal justice remains largely incidental. Dedicated history courses are rare and the 'historical roots' of criminal justice are more often relegated to an introductory chapter or even paragraphs of textbooks. Partially, this lack of historical context is the product of the breadth of the discipline. The history of policing is, for instance, brief compared to say the courts or law. Where does one start a history of criminal justice? Similarly, the history of criminal justice as a discipline is relatively short compared to other disciplines with undergraduate practitioner dimensions and a long tradition of foundations courses, for example, education and social work. In this line of thought, it may be that criminal justice has not sufficiently matured to fully develop its own

historians and philosophers, although the emergence of significant new work particularly in the history of policing indicates substantial growth in this regard (see for example, Philips & Storch, 1999; Reynolds, 1998; Taylor, 1997). Much of this more modern and critical work, however, does not seem to have, as yet, been fully integrated into policing textbooks.

Still, that history is often seen as peripheral to criminal justice does not relieve the discipline from getting the history it does acknowledge, and often uses, accurate. Absent designated history courses, it is the many topical courses of criminal justice which are foundational for understanding the role of history in the discipline of criminal justice. In this regard, textbooks remain at the undergraduate level as critical learning tools about foundation. As textbook authors, in their monumental task of condensing an enormous body of material, remain current in regard to social science and legal research, so too is remaining current in historical study vital to the internal and external legitimacy of the discipline. In this task, writers are significantly

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dependent on secondary sources, but perhaps more so in history. For social science and law, the primary source is often but a few clicks away in the form of the actual study, case, or statute. One does not imagine textbook authors scouring public records offices and historical societies for new insights; it would, quite simply, be impractical. Nevertheless, critical assessment of sources, whether primary or secondary, is an ongoing process. Without it, errors may become lasting dogma.

This study examined the textbook history of Peel's principles, the set of nineteenth century precepts so often referenced as foundational to modern policing. Since even a cursory review of sources cited for such principles by textbooks identifies only secondary sources, the research question initially posed was simply 'what is the origin of Peel's principles?' While the answer may on paper seem self-evident—Sir Robert Peel himself, it is problematic. Quite simply, how is this known to be true? Although the fact that secondary sources are uniformly cited for such principles might alone stimulate interest in such a query, one of this study's authors, a historian with some research background in the time period, has never seen a reference to Peel's principles in either primary documents or secondary historical sources.

The methodology required is basic to historical research, a tracing of layers of sources. Since it is the sources cited which must be examined in order to trace the factual origins of Peel's principles, recent textbooks in multiple editions were initially selected for review. That they have reached at least a second edition indicates their usage or popularity. Such texts were examined for whether they referred to Peel's principles, and if so, what source was cited. Significantly, no one list or set of Peel's principles was identified. Some textbooks cite earlier policing texts as the source for the list of principles, others older policing histories. It was these cited sources that were then examined, proceeding further back in time in order to identify the first references to Peel's principles. Accordingly, following a discussion of the first generation of policing textbooks will be a review of early policing histories. The ultimate finding is that Peel's principles, as they are generally presented and understood today, are an invention of twentieth century policing textbooks.

That Peel's principles were invented, however, does not necessarily make them a fiction. Quite simply, much of history is constructed by scholars and media, and then reconstructed as new information is discovered. Sometimes the reconstruction is revisionist; more commonly the reconstruction is about filling-in missing information or enriching the factual context of a particular

historical point. Whether revisiting Peel's principles is about a need to better define the history of modern policing or just a trivial addition to historical dicta, is in the eyes of the beholder. Toward the former idea, the present research and its conclusions provide some direction for the future teaching of policing history. This writing will, therefore, conclude with several suggested considerations regarding textbook discussions of history and the future of Peel's principles.

Textbook history today

In the 1990s as criminal justice programs flourished, so too did policing courses and the writing of policing textbooks. In this regard, it is important to add that textbooks themselves also often become secondary sources for other texts. In the writing of textbooks, 'getting it right' is critical, since one error in a citation or reference will undoubtedly multiply. In the historical discussion of the current generation of policing textbooks, the importance of the Metropolitan Police Act of 1829 to modern policing remains central. For example, in addressing the day that the new police marched from their headquarters, one text, *Policing American Society*, stated, "The importance of this day in Britain is nearly impossible to overstate—modern public policing had been born" (LaGrange, 1993, p. 31).

Added to the discussion of the Metropolitan Police Act and the formation of the new police, this first edition text included a separate box titled "Peel's Principles of Law Enforcement" (LaGrange, 1993, p. 34). In support of the nine listed principles, the author cited a nearly century-old policing history by W. I. Melville Lee (1901). The same nine principles and Melville Lee were also referenced by David Carter and Louis Radelet (1999) in the sixth edition of the text *The Police and the Community* and again in the seventh edition by Carter (2002).

Another text, *Policing in America: Methods, Issues, Challenges* by Kenneth Peak (1993) identified twelve rather than nine principles of Peelian reform. In a more recent edition of the same text, the author (Peak, 2003) recited the same twelve principles, citing as their source a policing text by Pamela Mayhall (1985), *Police-Community Relations and the Administration of Justice*. These same twelve principles are also identified in the text, *Policing: Concepts, Strategies, and Current Issues in American Police Forces*, by Michael Palmiotto (1997), but the cited source is a well-known law enforcement text of the 1960s and 1970s by Germann, Day, and Gallati (1968). In a quite detailed overview of early British policing, Gaines, Kappeler, and Vaughn

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