The History of Criminal Investigation
Objectives

After reading this chapter you will be able to:

- Discuss the Lindbergh baby kidnapping investigation, identify the critical evidence in the case, and explain how the perpetrator was eventually identified.
- Evaluate the role of informers, thief-takers, and thief-makers in England in the 1700s and 1800s.
- Explain how the designers of the detective position accounted for the problems associated with informers, thief-takers, and thief-makers.
- Define the tactics of the “third degree” and the dragnet.
- Discuss the creation and development of the FBI and its role in advancing the methods of investigation.
- Identify the investigative strategies that are consistent with community policing.
- Compare the limitations of photography and Bertillonage as methods of identification, and the strengths of fingerprints.

From the CASE FILE

The Lindbergh Baby Kidnapping

The date was March 1, 1932. The place was Hopewell, New Jersey, and the home of Charles Lindbergh, the famed aviator and the first man to fly over the Atlantic Ocean alone in a single-engine plane. Lindbergh was an American hero, a colonel in the U.S. Army Air Corps (the forerunner of the U.S. Air Force) and a wealthy aviation consultant. But on that day in March, he was the father of a missing baby. The baby was taken from his crib between 8 p.m., when his nursemaid, Betty Gow, last checked on him and 10 p.m., when she went to check on him again and discovered him missing. The baby’s name was Charles A. Lindbergh Jr., and he was almost a year and a half old.

The Hopewell Police and the New Jersey State Police were immediately notified. Lindbergh reported to investigators that he and his wife were in the house between 8 p.m. and 10 p.m., but the only thing they heard was a “banging” noise at about 9 p.m., and it seemed to come from the kitchen area. They thought something fell off a countertop or chair. At the time, it seemed of little significance. On checking the scene, footprints were discovered in the mud below the second-story window of the baby’s bedroom, but the police did not bother to measure, photograph, or take plaster casts of them. In the same area were two deep impressions in the ground, and next to these impressions lay a carpenter’s chisel. Approximately 100 yards from the residence the police found a wooden ladder that was in three separate sections. It was believed that the deep impressions came from the legs of the ladder and that the ladder was used to gain entry into the second-story bedroom. On searching the baby’s bedroom, an envelope was discovered on the window sill. Inside the envelope was a handwritten note that read:

Have 50000$ redy with 25000$ in 20$ bills
15000$ in 10$ bills and 10000$ in 5$ bills. After 2–4 days we will inform you were to deliver the Mony. We warn you for making anyding public or for notify the polise the child is in gute care. Indication for all letters are signature and 3 holes.

On the bottom corner of the letter there was a design that consisted of two interconnected circles and three small holes.

One week after the kidnapping, an individual by the name of John F. Condon placed a letter to the kidnapper in the Bronx Home News newspaper. The letter stated that he would be willing to serve as the go-between for the kidnapper and Lindbergh. The kidnapper agreed and so did Lindbergh. As instructed by the kidnapper, Condon then placed an ad in the New York American to notify the kidnapper that the
mone was ready to be delivered. “Mony is redy” was the message. On March 12, Condon received written instructions delivered by a cab driver to meet the kidnapper in a particular cemetery to hand over the money. Condon followed the directions and met with the supposed kidnapper at the cemetery. Condon told the man that he could not give him the money until he saw the baby. No baby, no money. Condon later told the police that the man told him that his name was “John” and that he spoke with a German accent. On March 14, 1932, a second ransom letter was received that increased the ransom by $20,000. Subsequent to the new ransom demand, the baby’s pajamas were received by Condon in the mail. On April 2, 1932, “John” and Condon met again at another cemetery to exchange the money for the child. Under the direction of federal treasury agents, the serial numbers of the ransom bills had been recorded. At the meeting, Condon gave the money to “John” and Condon was given directions to a boat where they could find the baby. The boat was located but there was no baby.

On May 12, 1932, the body of an infant was found four miles from the Lindbergh home. It was believed to be the Lindbergh baby. The body was in an advanced state of decomposition. The autopsy revealed that the baby died as a result of a blow to the head and that death had occurred at about the time the baby was reported missing. Investigators suspected that the baby may have been dropped by the kidnapper as he was being carried down the ladder (which might have also explained the noise heard by the Lindberghs the evening of the crime). Meanwhile, the ladder was the focal point of interest and was analyzed by several experts. These experts were able to determine the kind of wood used to construct the ladder and the possible sources of the wood, but this information did not lead to any suspects.

Investigators theorized that an employee at the house might have been responsible for the kidnapping because of the timing of the crime: the Lindberghs normally would not have been at the house during the week that the baby was taken, but they decided to stay an extra day because the baby was not feeling well. With no other good leads, investigators focused their attention on Violet Sharpe, who was a maid at the residence. She did not have a solid alibi for the evening the baby disappeared and, according to the police, she appeared anxious when she was interviewed by them. With police pressure on her mounting, Sharpe committed suicide by drinking silver polish. The police later determined that she had been deceptive in answering their questions because on the night of the kidnapping she was on a date with another man, even though she was engaged to be married to the butler who worked at the Lindbergh estate. Condon was also considered a possible suspect, but after intense scrutiny he was determined not to be responsible either. The police began to be criticized for their handling of the investigation and their lack of progress in solving the most serious crime of the century. At this time, the FBI got involved as a result of Congress passing the so-called Lindbergh Law, which made kidnapping a federal offense and an FBI enforcement responsibility.

In mid-1934, ransom bills with the recorded serial numbers began to appear at various businesses in the New York and New Jersey area. The police recorded the locations in which the bills were being used, but this strategy proved to be of little help. The
The investigation was still going nowhere. On September 15, 1934, the police got the break they were hoping for. An individual, described as speaking with a German accent, drove into a gasoline service station and proceeded to pay for his $0.98 worth of gas with a $10 bill. The gas station manager thought this was rather strange and alertly wrote on the $10 bill the license plate number of the vehicle driven by the man. He then contacted the police. The police determined that the $10 bill was one of the ransom bills. Investigators checked the license plate number and found that it was for a blue, four-door, 1930 Dodge that was registered to Richard Hauptmann, a thirty-five-year-old German-born carpenter. The police staked out his apartment. When the police stopped and searched him, another ransom bill was discovered in his wallet. In his garage, the police found $14,000 of ransom money. On searching his home, police discovered a wooden rafter missing from the attic. The rafters were determined to be made from the same type of wood as the ladder, and the missing rafter appeared to be part of the ladder. With this evidence, Richard Hauptmann was arrested and charged with the kidnapping and murder of Charles A. Lindbergh Jr.

During the trial, which was referred to at the time as the “trial of the century,” the prosecution built their case on five critical pieces of evidence: (1) the money found in Hauptmann’s garage was, as determined by the recorded serial numbers, part of the ransom money paid by Lindbergh; (2) the wood missing from the attic matched the ladder; (3) the handwriting on the ransom notes matched Hauptmann’s handwriting; (4) witnesses reported seeing Hauptmann near the Lindbergh estate prior to March 1, 1932, the night of the kidnapping; and (5) Condon identified Hauptmann as “John,” the person he met in the cemeteries. The fact that Hauptmann quit his job within days of when the ransom money was paid and that Condon’s phone number was found written on a closet wall in Hauptmann’s kitchen were also introduced at the trial.

The defense tried to counter several of these evidentiary items. They claimed the money found in Hauptmann’s garage was given to him by a business...
associate before he left for Germany in 1933 (this man died before the discovery of the money by the police). It was claimed that because this individual owed Hauptmann money, Hauptmann decided to spend some of it. In addition, the defense questioned the handwriting match and the eyewitness identification. It was argued that the wood missing from Hauptmann’s attic and used in the ladder was planted by the police.

After twenty-nine court sessions, testimony from 162 witnesses, and the introduction of 381 exhibits, the case was given to the jury for deliberation. After twelve hours, the jury returned a verdict of guilty. Richard Hauptmann was sentenced to death and was executed April 3, 1936, in New Jersey’s electric chair (Fisher 1994; Waller 1961).

Case Considerations and Points for Discussion

- What was the most important evidence in the case that led to the identification of Richard Hauptmann as the perpetrator of the kidnapping? What was the source of this information?
- What do you think was the biggest mistake made by Hauptmann in committing the kidnapping? Why? What do you think was the most important action of investigators that led to this crime being solved?
- What do you think were the biggest lessons learned by the police as a result of this investigation?

Also:

- See “In Search of the Lindbergh Kidnapping” on YouTube for additional details on the investigation and prosecution of Richard Hauptmann.

The Importance of History in Understanding the Present and the Future

An understanding of history, and of the history of criminal investigations in particular, is important for at least four reasons. First, an understanding of history allows for an appreciation of how much or how little things have changed over time. Second, the present is a product of the past. To understand why things are the way they are today, we have to understand the past. Third, as the adage goes, those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it. To move forward, one must understand from where one has come. Accordingly, an understanding of history may provide insight into previous attempts and new methods of solving persistent problems. And finally, if history is cyclical, if it repeats itself, then we may be able to predict the future by knowing the past. It is with these understandings that attention is turned to the history of criminal investigations.

The Evolution of the Investigative Task: English Developments

Formal police departments were formed in the early 1800s in England. Soon after, the modern police detective was created. As discussed below, in designing the job of the detective, and to overcome public resistance to the idea of detectives, the problems associated with the predecessors to the police detective had to be addressed (Klockars 1985). The designers of the detective position took into account these issues in structuring the job.

INFORMERS AND PARLIAMENTARY REWARD

Parliamentary reward operated during the 1700s and early 1800 in England. With this system, a reward was offered by the government to anyone who brought criminals to justice or provided information that led to the apprehension of criminals; the more serious the crime, the larger the reward. Although this system may sound like a historical equivalent of a
modern-day tip line, there were major differences, one of which was the laws at the time. During the time of parliamentary reward, more than 200 offenses were punishable by death. These offenses included theft, vagrancy, forgery, and even cutting down a tree without permission. The methods of execution included hanging, burning, and drawing and quartering. Many referred to the laws of the time as the bloody code. Most people, however, did not support the legal system nor did they believe the legal code was just. As a result, victims were often unlikely to pursue charges, witnesses often refused to testify, and juries were often not willing to convict. There was public sympathy for petty criminals who faced the possibility of execution (Klockars 1985). The problem was that by benefiting from providing information that would lead to the apprehension of petty criminals, informers were viewed with the same contempt as the legal system. Informers were not the answer, they were part of the problem.

THIEF-TAKERS
Thief-takers appeared in the early 1800s. A thief-taker was a private citizen who was hired by a victim to recover stolen property or to apprehend the thief. The fee that the thief-taker charged was most often based on the value of the property recovered, and the thief-taker only received compensation if and when the property was returned. As such, thief-takers were not likely to spend much time on crimes for which the property was not likely to be recovered or on thefts that involved small amounts of property (Klockars 1985). In essence, the thief-takers most often worked on behalf of the rich, not the poor. In addition to this problem, there was an even more serious problem with thief-takers; they often worked in cooperation with thieves. Some thief-takers even employed thieves (Klockars 1985). The thief would steal from the victim, the victim would hire a thief-taker, the thief would sell the property to the thief-taker, and the thief-taker would then “sell” the property back to the victim. Everyone prospered at the victim’s expense. Thus the thief-taker arrangement was sometimes a corrupt one.

AGENT PROVOCATEUR AND THIEF-MAKERS
Along with thief-takers there were thief-makers. A thief-maker was an individual who tricked another person into committing a crime and then would turn that person in for the parliamentary reward. Thief-makers were often thief-takers who resorted to deception, seduction, trickery, and entrapment to apprehend criminals and receive the monetary rewards (Klockars 1985). These people essentially created criminals for their personal benefit. Not surprisingly, the methods used by these individuals were frequently viewed by citizens as outrageous and unacceptable.

LONDON METROPOLITAN POLICE DEPARTMENT
With the 1800s came the Industrial Revolution and the dramatic and rapid increase in the populations of cities, where people lived in order to be in close proximity to where they worked. Factory production was the basis of the new economy. With the Industrial Revolution also came an increase in wealth among some people and poverty among others. “Urban” problems were born—sanitation and health issues, ethnic conflict, and crime. With all the changes came political pressure on the government to institute a more formal, more sophisticated, and more effective system of property protection. In 1829 the London Metropolitan Police Department was established.

Introduced early in the London Metropolitan Police Department was the concept of the plain-clothes police officer—a detective to some, a police spy to others. In designing the job of detective, tremendous public resistance had to be overcome. The resistance was caused, in large part, because of the problems associated with earlier investigative arrangements—parliamentary reward, thief-takers, and thief-makers. To overcome these obstacles, and to allow detectives to be accepted by the public, certain features were incorporated into the design of the detective position (Klockars 1985).
First, to address the problems of parliamentary reward (when petty criminals faced unjust punishment because of the actions of informers), detectives were—in image, at least—linked to the crime of murder. There was no public sympathy for murderers. The architects of the detective position capitalized on stories of murder and offered detectives as a way to combat this horrible crime. In addition, detectives were to play a dual role. Not only were they to help bring punishment to the worst of criminals, they were also supposed to save the innocent from the worst of punishments (Klockars 1985). One can see very clearly the direct association between detectives and murder in early detective fiction (e.g., Edgar Allan Poe’s *Murder in the Rue Morgue*, Arthur Conan Doyle’s *A Study in Scarlet*), and this likely helped sell the idea of the police detective to a skeptical public.

Second, to address the problems associated with the thief-taker arrangement, the most significant of which was that thief-takers only worked on the behalf of the rich, detectives were to be given a salary (Klockars 1985). If detectives were given a salary, it was argued, they could work on behalf of the rich and the poor alike. Ideally, they could investigate crimes for which the property loss was small. In addition, given the profitability of working on crimes for a fee in a private arrangement, detectives were to be paid more than uniformed police officers.

Third, to address the problems associated with thief-makers, particularly the practice of thief-makers tricking people into committing crimes for the thief-maker’s benefit, detectives were made reactive and were assigned cases (Klockars 1985). Only after crimes occurred were detectives given the responsibility for investigating them. As a result, there was limited opportunity for thief-maker trickery. Detectives were to be evaluated in terms of their

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**MYTHS & MISCONCEPTIONS 2.1**

**The Original CSI**

As noted in Chapter 1, *CSI* is a tremendously popular television show that influences (and distorts) our views about how crimes are investigated and solved. Curiously, history has a way of repeating itself. In the late 1800s, Sherlock Holmes was the historical equivalent of *CSI*. Sherlock Holmes was a fictional detective created by author Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. He was featured in four books and fifty-six short stories. The first book, *A Study in Scarlet*, was published in 1887. Sherlock Holmes was legendary for solving the most difficult and complex murders. His most important crime-solving tools were his brilliant use of logic, his magnifying glass, and his uncanny ability to interpret clues from shoeprints, fingerprints, bullets, and handwriting. Sound familiar?

**PHOTO 2.3:** Sherlock Holmes was the historical (and fictional) equivalent of today’s crime scene investigator. He solved complicated murders mostly by using his masterful grasp of logic and clues from physical evidence such as bullets and fingerprints.

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success in solving crimes. As a result, detectives were given more control over how they were to spend their working time and more discretion in determining how to investigate the cases they were assigned. These features—being responsible for the most serious of crimes, receiving a salary, and being reactive—eventually neutralized public resentment toward detectives and paved the way for their incorporation into police operations.

The Evolution of the Investigative Task: American Developments

At the time of the ratification of the U.S. Constitution, there were few federal laws and, accordingly, the policing function was almost exclusively a responsibility of local government. Policing was quite informal and consisted most often of volunteers assigned to the watch that guarded the village or town. Local control of the police function was a desirable feature of American policing because, ideally, it allowed residents (and politicians) to influence more easily how policing was conducted in their community. The desire for local control also helped explain why the creators of the Constitution were resistant to the idea of an all-powerful national police force.

THE FIRST AMERICAN POLICE DEPARTMENTS AND DETECTIVES

It was not until the mid-1800s that formal municipal police departments were created in the United States. The first police departments were located in the large and rapidly growing cities of the eastern United States, such as Boston, Philadelphia, and New York City. The Industrial Revolution created similar problems in America as in England. Of particular significance were the violent labor protests and the rioting that stemmed from clashes between immigrants and native-born Americans (Conti 1977). The mid-1800s to the early 1900s has been characterized as the political era of policing (Kelling and Moore 1988). Politicians, particularly mayors and ward politicians, controlled virtually every aspect of policing, including who got hired, what work officers performed, and who got fired. Besides political connections, there were few selection standards. Tremendous opportunities for corruption existed. Police supervisors were few, and their influence over beat officers was minimal because there was no way to provide for supervision. There was little ability for citizens to summon the police when needed because there was no means of communication. Officers patrolled on foot. The police made few arrests. According to Lane (1967), more than half of all arrests made at this time were for public drunkenness. This was an offense that beat cops could easily discover, and no investigation was necessary. The police simply did not have the capability to respond to and investigate crimes. When an arrest was made, it was usually as a last resort. Making an arrest in the late 1800s usually involved a lot of work; officers would literally have to “run ’em in.”

PHOTO 2.4: Police officers in the United States during the 1800s patrolled on foot and made few arrests for offenses other than public drunkenness.
to the police station. “Curbside justice” with a baton was often seen as an easier and more effective alternative by officers.

The political era of policing did not provide a large role for police detectives. Like the beat cops, detectives had limited capabilities in investigating crimes. During the late 1800s, Boston’s politicians actually disbanded the police department’s detective bureau because its contributions were so minimal (Lane 1967). Although important qualities for beat cops were size and fighting ability, the most important quality for detectives was a familiarity with criminals and their tactics. Many detectives were selected from the ranks of prison guards, and some were reformed criminals (Lane 1967). Due to their specialized knowledge, detectives received more pay than beat cops. Detectives also received extra compensation through witness fees, which were compensation for providing testimony in court. Detective work was often a clandestine activity. Detectives were sometimes considered to be members of a secret service (Kuykendall 1986). They depended heavily on criminals for information to solve crimes and often worked in an undercover capacity to collect this information. Detectives never wore uniforms. Rather, they often wore disguises, even in court, to protect their identities. Sometimes detectives submitted their court testimony in writing so as not to reveal their identity (Kuykendall 1986).

It was at about this time that identification systems began to be developed and applied to criminal investigations. The first technology that was used for this was photography. By 1858, the New York City Police Department had on file photographs of known criminals—a so-called rogues gallery (Dilworth 1977). Although photographs were commonly used in wanted posters and sometimes assisted in the apprehension of criminals, they were extremely limited in their usefulness because criminals could alter their appearance either deliberately or simply over time. Of course, to be useful, authorities first needed to have a photograph of the wanted person.

The most famous identification system of the time was the one developed by Alphonse Bertillon, a French criminologist who lived from 1853 to 1914. His system was known as Bertillonage, and it was considered a major improvement over the use of photographs. The premise of the system was that the bone structure of an adult did not change over the course of a lifetime. Bertillon identified eleven measurements (e.g., length and width of the head, length of the left foot, the length of the left middle and little fingers), and these measurements, it was suggested, could be used to identify people and to differentiate one person from another (Muller 1889). Bertillon estimated that the probability of two persons having the same eleven measurements was more than four million to one (Rhodes 1968). Instruments and instructions were developed by Bertillon to make the measurement process as precise as possible. In addition, an elaborate filing system was developed to classify individuals from whom measurements were taken. Because it was difficult for the police to take measurements of criminals on the street, Bertillon also developed a scaled-down version of
his system. Although the technique enjoyed initial success in confirming the identity of suspected and known criminals and was used by police departments in many countries, by the early 1900s the deficiencies of the system were obvious. It was simply too cumbersome, prone to error, and limited in its applicability to be a viable identification strategy.

Along with the use of these identification methods, detectives at the time also used various investigative tactics to deal with crime and criminals. One common strategy was the dragnet roundup of suspects. When informed of a crime, the police would find and arrest all suspicious persons and would keep these people in custody until it could be determined that they did not commit the crime. In essence, the police would often resort to “rounding up the usual suspects.”

Another commonly used investigative tactic at the time was the so-called third degree (Lavine 1930). The origin of the expression “the third degree” is not clear, although some have speculated that the first degree was the arrest, the second degree was being transported to the police station, and the third degree was the interrogation (Kuykendall 1986; Skolnick and Fyfe 1993). Common methods of administering the third degree included beatings with a rubber hose (Haller 1976), placing a suspect in a sweat box for hours or days under constant questioning (Kuykendall 1986), drilling teeth, burning with lit cigars or cigarettes, and beating with blackjacks or batons (Lavine 1930). Many accounts suggest that the use of the third degree to obtain confessions was commonplace into the 1930s and beyond (Kuykendall 1986). In 1936, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in Brown v. Mississippi that prolonged beatings used to extract confessions were no longer a legally acceptable police practice.

SHERIFFS, STATE POLICE, U.S. MARSHALS, AND THE BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

While police departments were being developed in the major cities in the eastern portion of the country, other areas were most likely to be served by sheriffs and marshals. In the western portion of the country, U.S. marshals were often the sole police power (Ball 1978). Marshals often employed deputies who also served as sheriffs, deputy sheriffs, or constables.

With the appearance of automobiles, and due to corrupt and ineffective municipal police agencies and sheriffs’ departments, state police agencies were created to assist. In 1905, Pennsylvania created the first state police agency. It was designed to provide a police presence throughout the state, to assist the local police, and to provide police services in less populated, rural areas of the state (Conti 1977).
Also of significance at this time was the development of the Bureau of Investigation, later known as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). In a highly controversial move, in 1908 President Theodore Roosevelt created a Bureau of Investigation by executive order. Twenty permanent and eighteen temporary investigators were hired (Murray 1955). During the first years of its operation, the bureau was entrenched in scandal. However, at the same time, it was slowly becoming accepted as a law enforcement agency and was assigned law enforcement responsibilities. For example, in 1910 Congress passed the Mann Act, which prohibited the transportation of women across state lines for immoral purposes. Responsibility for the enforcement of the law was given to the Bureau of Investigation. Other statutes followed that prohibited the transportation of stolen goods, vehicles, and obscene materials (Murray 1955).

In 1916, with war raging in Europe, the 300-agent bureau was given power to conduct counterintelligence and antiradical investigations. In 1919, the country experienced a series of bombings, with the targets ranging from police departments to banks. These actions were believed to be the responsibility of communists and others who were “un-American.” In response to the bombings, Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer established the General Intelligence Division (GID) within the Justice Department to increase significantly the ability to store information on radicals and those suspected of being sympathetic to radicals. John Edgar Hoover was named the head of GID.

PRIVATE DETECTIVES

In the mid-1800s and early 1900s, private detectives played an important role in criminal investigations. In addition, many corporations, such as railroads and iron and coal mines, hired their own police forces for the primary purpose of dealing with their labor strikes (Conti 1977). The most prominent private detective agency was Pinkerton’s agency. In 1850, Allen Pinkerton quit his job in the Chicago Police Department and established his own private detective agency. At first, most of the work of the agency involved protecting several Midwestern railroads and railroad bridges from being sabotaged by the Confederates, as well as striking laborers. Pinkerton and his associates’ preferred method of operation was to mingle with known rebels and criminals in taverns, hotels, and brothels to learn of their plans. Pinkerton was also hired to spy on the Confederacy, to collect information on their strengths and weaknesses, and to apprehend enemy spies. Also at this time, the Justice Department, having no investigators of its own, used agents from the Pinkerton agency. Pinkerton was able to operate without concern for cumbersome political jurisdictional lines. This capability made Pinkerton ideal for pursuing mobile criminals such as train robbers. Pinkerton also had a well-developed system of internal communication, records, and files on criminals. Police departments often relied on this information to learn what criminals were in their area. By the turn of the century, the agency had a system in place to share information with the investigative services of foreign nations (Conti 1977).

THE REFORM ERA

With the problems of the political era policing system well noted, efforts were made to reform the police—namely, to get the police out from under the control of politicians. To do so required a new way of thinking about policing. This effort took the form of police professionalism. This new way of thinking about policing was in direct reaction to the politics of before. According to Kelling and Moore (1988), policing from the early 1900s to the 1960s was known as the reform era.

The reform era was all about police professionalism and antipolitics. The police presented themselves as experts who had the specialized knowledge and capabilities to control crime. It was argued that if the police were able to distance themselves from citizens and politicians (i.e., have professional autonomy), they would be more efficient and effective. Crime control and criminal apprehension were viewed as the primary functions of the police. The
new technology of the time contributed to and supported the ideals of the new way of thinking about policing. Examples of this technology included patrol cars, two-way radios, and telephones (see Walker and Katz 2007).

During the reform era, detectives became an important tool in police departments’ efforts to enhance their professionalism and deal with crime. Detectives were the ultimate professionals. They were well paid and highly trained. The media at the time portrayed detectives as efficient and effective crime solvers. Similar to the police style in general, detectives often went about their work in a professional, aloof manner. Dragnet, a popular television show during the 1960s, captured this style well. The show was about two Los Angeles Police Department detectives and the investigations they conducted. They cut through the emotion of their work and became famous for their line, “Just the facts, ma’am.”

MYTHS & MISCONCEPTIONS 2.2

The Mythology of the Federal Bureau of Investigation

The FBI has become the epitome of the scientific law enforcement agency. The agency has the highest prestige among many citizens, law enforcement officials, and even criminals. This is at least partially the result of the reverent media portrayal of the agency, even during its early years. For example, starting in 1935, a series of “G-Men” (“government men”) movies was produced. Censorship laws only allowed gangsters in the movies if they were being captured or killed by agents of the FBI (Gentry 1991).

The FBI has done much to advance the methods of criminal investigation. It took the early lead in the development of fingerprints as a method of identification. It instituted stringent hiring standards for its agents. Today it operates the largest and most scientifically advanced crime laboratory in the world. The FBI operates the prestigious FBI National Academy. Over the years, the FBI has taken the lead in the most high-profile criminal investigations, from the Lindbergh baby kidnapping to the terrorist attacks in 2001 to the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013.

However, justified or not, the FBI has also been criticized for its handling of several other high-profile investigations, including the catastrophic burning of the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas, in 1993; the investigation into the 1996 bombing at Olympic Park in Atlanta; the investigation into the anthrax letters in 2001; the Foot Hood shootings in 2009; and the lack of information-sharing that might have prevented the September 2001 terrorist hijackings and the 2013 Boston Marathon bombings. The FBI crime laboratory has also been subject to criticism for its work in several cases (Kelly and Wearne 1998). Although the FBI continues to be an admired and well-respected law enforcement agency and is generally portrayed well in the media, it is not immune from criticism and error.

As a continuing attempt to provide control over officers and detectives, detective work became much more removed from interactions with criminals. With scientific advances, more emphasis was placed on getting information from science (and from victims and witnesses) as opposed to criminals. The rise of science was led in large part by the FBI. Through the 1920s and 1930s, several initiatives were embarked on by the bureau, each of which helped solidify its reputation as the top law enforcement agency in the country. Namely, it took the lead in the development of fingerprints as a method of criminal identification, it developed a scientific crime laboratory, and it established the National Police Academy (to be known later as the FBI National Academy) to train select local police officers in investigative and management methods. Selection for, and graduation from, the National Academy was, and continues to be, a prestigious law enforcement accomplishment. In the 1940s and 1950s, the FBI experienced dramatic growth. With the passage of federal laws, the FBI became responsible for domestic security investigations.
THE COMMUNITY PROBLEM-SOLVING ERA

The 1960s were a troubling time for many Americans and the police. In the 1960s, America was in the grip of the Vietnam War. There were war protests across the country. It was the time of the civil rights movement and its related demonstrations, marches, and riots. The police became viewed by many as an “occupying army” in the low-income, minority ghettos of urban cities. The police were “pigs.” During this decade, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated, as were senator and presidential candidate (and former attorney general of the United States) Robert Kennedy and civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. American society was in turmoil. Fear of crime was increasing dramatically. Actual crime was also increasing; the crime rate doubled from 1960 to 1970. The police were experiencing a crisis, yet they were supposed to have the knowledge and capabilities to control crime successfully. If the situation was not bad enough for the police, the U.S. Supreme Court rendered several landmark decisions (e.g., Mapp v. Ohio, Miranda v. Arizona) that were seen as “handcuffing” the police. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, several major research studies were conducted to examine the effectiveness of police operations. The Kansas City Preventive Patrol Experiment (Kelling et al. 1974) concluded that random motorized patrols did not deter crime. The RAND study on detectives (Greenwood et al. 1977) concluded that detectives contributed little to solving crimes and that many detectives could be replaced with clerical personnel.

In the face of this multifaceted crisis, the police realized that the old ideas of professionalism no longer worked. They needed to get closer to the community to enlist citizens’ support and assistance in fighting crime. This new realization instigated the community problem-solving era of policing (Kelling and Moore 1988). The reform era emphasized police-citizen separation; the community era emphasizes police-citizen cooperation.

The idea of police-citizen cooperation and community policing seems to be quite congruent with the task of criminal investigation. The basic task of the police in a criminal investigation is to collect information that will lead to the identification, apprehension, and conviction of the perpetrator of that crime. Much of the research on the investigative function highlights the role of the public as suppliers of information to the police. Simply stated, the police are dependent on the public, and the community problem-solving era makes this dependence explicit.

Strategies that provide an opportunity for community residents to share information with the police in order to solve crimes are particularly relevant in the era of community policing. For example, tip lines are quite common in criminal investigations today. Along the same line, school liaison officers are located in a setting where they are available not only to assist students with questions or problems that they may have, but also to obtain information about crimes from them. Similarly, police involvement with community watch groups provides a public service and also makes it easier for residents to contact and provide information to the police that may assist in investigations. These strategies make police dependence on the public explicit and are congruent with the ideals of community policing.

Along with a dependence on community residents for information, other developments in criminal investigation have occurred during the community problem-solving era of policing. Chief among these is DNA analysis as a method of identification. DNA analysis represents an extraordinary advance in science and in identification methods as applied to criminal investigations. The science of DNA, along with the introduction of computer technology to store, record, and match DNA prints across individuals, has the potential to revolutionize criminal investigative methods. In addition, other technology in the form of computer networks and databanks are also changing criminal investigations in dramatic ways. COMSTAT, an operational approach to policing which is based on “gathering accurate and timely intelligence, designing effective strategies and tactics, the rapid deployment of personnel and resources, and relentless follow-up and assessment” (Dabney 2010, p. 34) also has the potential to affect how criminal investigations are managed and performed. In addition, empirical research continues to be conducted on the criminal investigation
process, the contribution of detectives in solving crimes, and the impact of forensic evidence on crime solving (e.g., Eck 1983; Brandl and Frank 1994; Baskin and Sommers 2010).

As in the past, the FBI is often considered to be at the forefront of technological changes in the criminal investigation process. Today, the FBI crime laboratory is the most scientifically advanced and well funded in the world. The FBI also operates the National Crime Information Center (NCIC)—a computerized network and storage system of crime information. The FBI continues to operate the National Academy and provides many other types of operational assistance to federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies, including psychological profiling.

During the course of history, police institutions and organizations have responded to a variety of external forces that have caused changes in their structure and function. From these changes has emerged the present criminal investigation function and investigative methods. Most people would argue that much progress has been made in criminal investigations. Ultimately, that is for the future to decide.

**MAIN POINTS**

1. With parliamentary reward, an investigative arrangement of the 1700s in England, a reward was offered by the government to anyone who brought criminals to justice or provided information that led to the apprehension of criminals; the more serious the crime, the larger the reward.

2. In the early 1800s, a thief-taker was a private citizen who was hired by a victim to recover stolen property or to apprehend the thief.

3. Also in the early 1800s, a thief-maker was an individual who tricked another person into committing a crime and then would turn that person in for the parliamentary reward.

4. The people who designed the detective position considered the problems that resulted from parliamentary reward, thief-takers, and thief-makers. To address the problems associated with parliamentary reward, detectives were associated—in image, at least—with the investigation of murder. To address the problems associated with thief-takers, detectives were to receive a salary and not be paid by victims. To address the problems associated with thief-makers, detectives were made reactive and assigned cases.

5. Detectives played a small and largely ineffective role during the political era. They relied on the technology of photography and Bertillonage and the tactics of the third degree and the dragnet.

6. During the reform era, detectives became an important tool in police departments’ efforts to enhance their professionalism and deal with crime. Detectives began to incorporate science into criminal investigations.

7. In the community problem-solving era, citizens are important in criminal investigations as they can supply necessary and important information. With the development of computer technology and advances in science, investigations rely more on science than ever before.

8. Photography had many limitations as a criminal identification tool. To be even minimally useful, investigators needed photographs of criminals; however, criminals could easily alter their appearance.

9. Bertillonage provided a methodology for criminal identification, but the system was cumbersome to use and, at best, it was limited to verification of an individual’s identity.

10. The FBI has a long history and has done much to advance the methods of criminal investigation. Some people say that there is a mythology to the FBI, given its role in high-profile investigations and favorable treatment in the media.
IMPORTANT TERMS

Bertillonage
Bureau of Investigation
Community problem-solving era of policing
Dragnet
Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)
Informers
London Metropolitan Police Department
Parliamentary Reward
Photography
Pinkerton Detective Agency
Political era of policing
Reform era of policing
Rogues gallery
Thief-makers
Thief-takers
Third degree

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND REVIEW

1. Who were informers, thief-takers, and thief-makers in England in the 1700s and 1800s? What problems did citizens have with these people?

2. How does the position of detective today reflect the problems associated with informers, thief-takers, and thief-makers?

3. How did the role of the detective differ in the political, reform, and community problem-solving eras of policing?

4. What were the limitations of photography and Bertillonage as methods of identification, and what are the strengths of fingerprints in comparison?

5. What were the third degree and the dragnet?

6. What role did the FBI play in advancing the methods of criminal investigation?

7. What investigative strategies are most congruent with the ideas of the community problem-solving era of policing?

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