

1922

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Recommended Citation

Horatio M. Pollock, Criminal Records and Statistics, 12 J. Am. Inst. Crim. L. & Criminology 514 (May 1921 to February 1922)

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CRIMINAL RECORDS AND STATISTICS¹

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Last year your Committee submitted a plan for the preparation of uniform statistics in institutions for criminals and juvenile delinquents. This year the Committee has devoted its attention to ways and means to put into effect the proposed plan and to the development of a scheme for securing better judicial criminal records and statistics. The Secretary of the Institute has submitted a copy of the plan outlined last year to the heads of prison departments throughout the country, but the response has not been gratifying. So far as known, the plan has been adopted only by the state institutions for criminals and delinquents in Illinois and by two institutions in the State of New York. Much more missionary work will have to be done if the system is ever to come into general use.

The situation with respect to judicial criminal statistics is even more difficult. The personnel of county and city courts changes frequently and many court officials look upon anything connected with statistics as more or less of a nuisance. They have little knowledge of the methods that should be used or of the results to be attained, and there is a deplorable lack of interest in matters pertaining to the advance of criminology. It is apparent, therefore, that we cannot hope for great improvement through voluntary effort.

Our aims might be accomplished in two different ways: First, the United States Census Bureau might establish a division of criminal records and statistics and require the necessary reports from courts and institutions throughout the whole country. This method would involve great expense and might be objected to as being an encroachment upon the powers of the several states. Second, adequate state bureaus of criminal records and statistics might be established, each of which would compile and publish annual data relative to crime and criminals within its own jurisdiction. The data thus gathered would not be of the largest service unless all of the state bureaus were working in accordance with the same general plan, and unless provision were made for bringing together the data compiled in the several states.

¹Read at the thirteenth annual meeting of the Institute, in Cincinnati, Ohio, November 18, 1921.

²Statistician to the N. Y. Hospital Commission, Albany, N. Y.

So far as we have been able to ascertain, no state bureau is collecting all the data it should concerning crime and criminals and there is very little co-operation between bureaus in different states. An examination of recent reports of state bureaus and departments dealing with crime and criminals reveals the fact that nearly all the reports issued are woefully inadequate. The report of the Bureau of Prisons of the State of Massachusetts is a noteworthy exception. This report presents in excellent form some very valuable statistical data. If other states were doing as well and were working along uniform lines, we would be able to learn much more concerning crime in the United States than we could possibly learn from existing data. Strange to say, many state bureaus are now doing enough work to secure good results provided the work was properly organized and directed. What is needed more than anything else is a clear comprehension of what should be done and a knowledge of how to do it.

Your Committee, therefore, begs leave to submit an outline of the steps necessary to secure satisfactory data concerning crime and criminals throughout the country.

1. Every state should have *one* central bureau of criminal records and statistics to which all penal institutions, criminal courts, police departments, and parole, probation and prosecuting officers should report on prescribed forms. In one state five separate bureaus are compiling criminal statistics and each bureau is practically ignoring the work of the others. Work of this kind must be centralized to be effective.

2. A branch bureau under the general supervision of the state bureau should be maintained by every large city. Large cities need for purposes of administration and crime prevention a considerable amount of local data that would be of little interest to other localities. These data would be compiled by the branch bureau in addition to its work for the state bureau.

3. The state bureau should establish a system of forms, records and reports to be used by branch offices and by all recording and reporting officers throughout the state.

4. The state bureau should provide a statistical manual explaining the system and should employ experts to instruct and assist recording and reporting officers, so that uniform standards might be maintained throughout the state.

5. Reasonable specific compensation should be given to all officers reporting to the state bureau.

6. Penalties should be prescribed by statute for failure to keep the required records or to report at the specified time.

7. A competent statistician should be placed at the head of every state bureau. The importance of the work and the difficulties involved demand expert direction.

8. There should be the fullest co-operation between state bureaus throughout the country and so far as possible all bureaus should use the same system. This is essential if we are ever to get good national statistics of crime and criminals.

9. Every state bureau should publish an annual report containing a series of standard statistical tables.

10. Every state bureau should report to the Federal Census Bureau as soon after the close of each year as possible, such reports to be uniform and to be based on data collected according to a standardized plan.

11. The Federal Census Bureau should issue a yearly bulletin of criminal statistics which should be available to the public within a year from the close of the period to which it relates. Such bulletin would of course include only the states that were compiling and reporting satisfactory data.

12. Statistics of crime collected by state bureaus should give complete classified data of crimes reported to police officials and prosecuting officers showing for each principal group of crimes the arrests made, the trials held and the convictions resulting therefrom. These data should be given for the state as a whole and for each county and important city.

13. Statistics of criminals in general would necessarily be limited, but more adequate data could be secured concerning convicts sentenced to state institutions. The plan proposed last year would serve as a basis for institution statistics.

14. Criminals convicted for the first time should be separated in statistics from recidivists and each class should be carefully studied.

15. Every state bureau should maintain an identification file of Bertillon measurements and finger prints and there should be active co-operation between bureaus in exchanging records and in identifying prisoners.

16. Every state bureau should be a bureau of information concerning all matters pertaining to crime and criminals and should lend assistance to courts and police officers.

17. The federal government should co-operate in this movement for better statistics of crime and criminals by establishing in the census office at Washington a bureau that would compile adequate data of crime and criminals under federal jurisdiction and that would receive and consolidate reports from state bureaus, as above outlined.

Your Committee recommends that a model law relating to the establishment of state bureaus of criminal records and statistics be prepared by the Institute and that an effort be made to secure its adoption by the several states.