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## Police Science Technical Abstracts and Notes

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## THE PRESENT STATUS OF POLICE LITERATURE

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Between 1945 and the present date, well over five thousand nationally circulated books, pamphlets, and articles have been written in America concerning the police.<sup>1</sup> Of these, some are lay articles, some are aimed at the officer in the field, and a small number are intended for the use of specialists and students of police administration.

Since a body of literature is one of the items generally required before professionalization can be said to have taken place, it is well to examine the content and the subject matter of this material.

In working with the *American Police Bibliography*, the present authors discovered that the literature can be organized into eighty-two major subjects, with many of these groups breaking into sub-categories for easy handling.

Were the literature evenly distributed over the eighty-two different subject groups, each group would contain roughly sixty items. Unfortunately, almost half of the five thousand entries are monopolized by eight subjects—traffic, training, criminalistics, juvenile, personnel, communications, foreign police groups, and police relations (community, press, human, and race relations), in that order. Traffic, alone, accounts for some five hundred and seventy-five items, while training adds another four hundred and forty entries.

Greater interest in certain areas of police work is to be expected, but such definite monopoly by a limited number of subjects would indicate that police literature is suffering from a dearth of writing and reporting skills in many important areas.

Apparently it is one thing to speak of professionalization, while it is quite another thing to

make even a brief contribution to the literature of the field—a contribution which would further the common goal of professional law enforcement.

Fewer than two hundred items are to be found in the field of general police administration. Less than twenty items appear on the subject of crime control. Only thirty authors made contributions on the subject of homicide. The same is true for subject after subject.

A few interesting articles or books may be found in almost any area, but the material is so limited that a comprehensive view of the area can seldom be gained by reading. If material is not available, interested persons must rely upon experience and upon training for information; a "profession" which offers the beginner so little material can hardly expect to see its young men progress at a satisfactory rate.

When one stops to consider the amount of time a single individual requires to learn a given technique, and when one multiplies this by the number of officers whose work would be improved by also learning this technique, one begins to comprehend the seriousness of a lack of interdepartmental communication such as is possible by the use of the written word. Granted, only a limited number of techniques might be learned through reading, but even that small number would increase police efficiency by an astounding ratio if officers all over the nation read of them and thus learned them.

The depth of police literature should also be considered. The great number of "surface" items which appear in the field is astounding, while the number of serious items which see print is unfortunately small. However, once the items are sorted by category, it becomes possible to read many "surface" items and to thus glean information from the aggregate amount of data offered. At the

<sup>1</sup> JOHN P. KENNEY AND E. CAROLINE GABARD, assisted by Charles Gabard, *AMERICAN POLICE BIBLIOGRAPHY*. (In press, Charles C Thomas).

same time, this fact should not excuse authors who merely wish to see their names in print, or editors who are faced with the necessity of filling blank pages in their publications.

On the brighter side, police literature is in the enviable position of offering something for everyone, something aimed at the comprehension level of almost any individual. In addition, almost all areas offer at least a few items to potential readers of all intellects.

Unlike the medical profession, law enforcement is not now made up of college graduates, thus "serious" literature is not, in itself, an answer to the requirements of the field. The depth of publications in the various areas must be adjusted to the educational accomplishments of the men who are expected to find the items of interest.

Thus, a general tightening of the intellectual belt would serve a negative goal—fewer articles would be read. At the same time, more material must be made available to serious students of law enforcement. A delicate balance between "the man in the field" and "the man behind the library table" must be established and maintained.

We speak glibly of "police literature," yet has anyone really stopped to consider whether or not such a body of literature actually exists?

Five thousand entries over a period of twelve years (1945–1957) give an average of four hundred and sixteen entries per calendar year. The 1950 Census lists 194,313 persons as policemen and detectives (this number does not include other branches of law enforcement, thus the following statistics are low). This means that one article or book per year is submitted and published for every four hundred and sixty-seven law enforcement officers.

Let us compare this figure with that of a branch of the medical profession. The Society of American Bacteriologists is made up of some six thousand

members.<sup>2</sup> Yearly, the *Journal of Bacteriology* publishes from two hundred to two hundred and fifty articles, for a rough average of two hundred and twenty articles per year. One must remember that this figure is that of one journal, and is only a small portion of the items written in the field of bacteriology, yet this figure means that one article is submitted to the Journal for every twenty-seven members of the Society.

Compared on a per capita basis, the field of bacteriology produces 17.3 authors for each author produced by law enforcement! Were one to consider other branches of law enforcement and other literature from the field of bacteriology, the ratio would be even higher in favor of the bacteriologists.

From these statistics, it would be a simple matter to deduce that, in comparison, police literature does not even exist. At the same time, a bibliography of five thousand entries cannot be set aside.

Law enforcement, as a profession, is in its infancy, and its literature is in much the same position. Entries are too few, subject matter is too limited, and the depth of the literature leaves much to be desired.

However, a kernel of literature does exist, material on most subjects is available, at least in limited quantities, and the depth of works in the field does take into consideration the needs of the individual members of the profession. While police literature may not be sufficiently developed to be referred to as a body of literature, it at least exists, and it appears to be moving in the right direction.

Police literature finds itself in a position which requires much soul-searching, and it is in need of persons who are willing to contribute of their time and effort in an attempt to professionalize law enforcement.

<sup>2</sup> DIRECTORY AND CONSTITUTION: SOCIETY OF AMERICAN BACTERIOLOGISTS n.p., 1957.