

The History and Evolution of Police Training in America

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**Abstract**

As law enforcement leaders, it is essential to recognize that as a profession, we must continually be prepared for the changing climate and the direction we need to go to have the best practices in mind to create the best possible outcome. From early times, law enforcement had little to no training and very few standards. As a result, officers could easily fall into corruption. Due to this, the need for standards was realized. The first training academy was established at the turn of the nineteenth century. Resistance to change caused law enforcement to suffer failures during critical incidents, which led to the development of specialized teams and units to address civil unrest and critical incidents. Due to tragedies, law enforcement leaders sought to make deep changes in training and tactics. As efforts increased to change law enforcement for the better, training has been a focus to improve organizational goals and vision. Currently, with the growth and utilization of technology, law enforcement is better equipped to face the challenges of today's climate and more prepared to combat the ever-evolving times and struggles we face in our communities.

## **Introduction**

The origins of policing in America can be traced back to colonial times; however, there was no formal training program for law enforcement officers until the 1900s. “The first U.S. police training academy was the August Vollmer’s Berkeley Police School, which opened in 1908” (Jarvis & Schafer, n.d.). In 1935, what is now known as the FBI National Academy was established. The training academy “was created in response to a 1930 study by the Wickersham Commission that recommended the standardization and professionalization of law enforcement departments across the U.S. through centralized training. With strong support from the International Association of Chiefs of Police and with the authority of Congress and the Department of Justice, the “FBI Police Training School” was born. Courses at that time included scientific aids in crime detection, preparation of reports, criminal investigation techniques, and administration and organization. With the advent of World War II, courses were added in espionage and sabotage” (Federal Bureau of Investigations, n.d.). Following the implementation of centralized training in 1959, California became the first state in the country to create Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST), a trend other states followed until the final three states created POST requirements in 1987.

## **Purpose**

Through researching the history of law enforcement in America, we find deep change in our operational and training methods only occurs as a reaction to significant failures and other incidents that shock the public’s conscience. This capstone research paper highlights how law enforcement training has evolved and brings attention to modern technology available to minimize risk and enhance officers’ abilities. By keeping an eye on the horizon for the best

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equipment and methods to train and develop law enforcement officers, leaders can take a proactive approach to train and develop officers for the future.

### **Field Training and Evaluation Program**

While the Milwaukee (Wisconsin) Police Department fashioned the nation's first field training program, the San Jose Police Department in California created the first formal and standardized Field Training Officer program in 1972. The San Jose model is still the standard by which other field training programs are designed and judged; however, it took two critical incidents for the program to come to fruition.

In 1969, the San Jose Police Department hired an officer that lacked the skills and abilities required to be a police officer; however, the agency did not have proper documentation to support terminating the officer. The following spring, the young officer was traveling at high speed, ran a red light, and crashed into another vehicle, resulting in the death of a passenger in the other car. According to the San Jose Police Department (n.d.), "Lieutenant Robert L. Allen, who served in the military and had been a staff member of the California Military Academy, developed a proposal for training and evaluating recruit officers. His proposal was shelved by a deputy chief before it reached the Chief of Police" (San Jose Police Department, n.d.). Unfortunately, the deputy chief lacked the vision and foresight to implement a needed change in the training culture of the department. In 1971, a San Jose Police Officer was involved in a shooting during a traffic stop, and training was called into question again. Following this incident, the Chief of Police was made aware of the proposal made by Lieutenant Allen and ordered him to work with Dr. Michael Roberts, Ph.D., to fine-tune the field training program.

### **Tactical Teams**

Incidents such as the Texas Tower Shooting of 1966 brought about the need for specialized teams such as Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) and other technical teams to respond to threats of this nature. SWAT has become more than just special weapons and tactics. There is now a greater emphasis on officer safety and well-planned operations. Leaders in SWAT must continue to learn and care for their operators. There are always new and innovative tools typically designed and implemented by SWAT operators from various organizations. Today, SWAT is very different from the early years and utilizes robots, unmanned aerial vehicles, and specialized ballistic vehicles. Less-lethal options have been born out of SWAT operations and critical incidents. Unfortunately, there is no data to determine the number of lives saved by SWAT teams using less-lethal options. In recent years progressive leaders have begun to expand SWAT-type tactics and training to patrol officers. Many Agencies, for example, train patrol level officers on less-lethal weapons, breaching tools, and tactical first aid. Many agencies carry less-lethal and breaching tools on routine daily patrols. “Over the past several decades, the National Tactical Officers Association (NTOA) has worked diligently to create and support the implementation of best practice policies into SWAT operations across the U.S. Performance standards have been developed, as well as guidelines for minimum training, model policies, and learning validation, measuring officer comprehension and retention of policy details” (The International Association of Chiefs of Police (ICAP), n.d.).

### **Active Shooter Training**

School shootings began to gain national attention with events such as Pearl Mississippi (1997) and Columbine High School Littleton, Colorado (1999). As these incidents started to occur more frequently, there was a need for change in law enforcement response, and still, 42

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years later, it is not fully implemented nationwide. “Texas State University, in partnership between San Marcos, Texas Police Department, and Hays County Texas Sheriff’s Officer, created ALERRT in 2002 to address the need for active shooter response training for first responders” (ALERRT Center at Texas State University, 2022). In 2013, the FBI named ALERRT at Texas State University as the National Standard in Active Shooter Response Training.

### **Community Policing**

Sir Robert Peel’s Nine Principles of Policing states, “Police, at all times, should maintain a relationship with the public that gives reality to the historic tradition that the police are the public and the public are the police; the police being only members of the public who are paid to give full-time attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the interests of community welfare and existence” (Nagle, 2014). In contrast to traditional methods of policing, law enforcement agencies across America have moved to a more modern standard of policing involving community-oriented policing. This style of policing focuses on the community’s involvement with law enforcement’s efforts to prevent crime. The shift to this policing method is because law enforcement officers were primarily seen as being detached from the communities they served. To provide a better service, police officers must act as stakeholders in the community and engage the communities they serve to curtail criminal activity. “These reasons are rooted in the history of policing and police research during the last quarter of a century, in the changing nature of communities, and in the shifting characteristics of crime and violence that affect these communities” (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 1994).

Community-oriented policing enhances public trust in law enforcement, and several types of community policing strategies focus on engaging different members of the communities.

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“However, according to COPS, Community Oriented Policing Services, community policing comprises three essential elements; community partnerships, organizational transformation, and problem-solving” (Community-Oriented Policing Services, 2014). Within each of these elements are several strategies that law enforcement members utilize to assist them in carrying out the mission of community policing.

First, by educating our citizens through citizen police academies, establishing neighborhood watch programs, engaging private businesses, and a variety of other techniques, we can create partnerships to detect and deter crime instead of relying solely on police patrol officers. These strategies have shown to be practical tools in advancing community relations and have allowed officers to become more involved with the community. These community partnerships can also lead to neighboring law enforcement agencies building better working relationships to share information. Community policing can be difficult in some areas where community members have repeatedly experienced negative interactions with law enforcement. Still, repairing these relationships forged by community partnerships is even more critical. It shows that law enforcement officers can provide better and more adequate service to their communities by bringing all stakeholders to the table.

The second key element of community policing is organizational transformation. In this element of community policing, you will find categories such as the climate and culture of the organization, leadership, agency decision-making, policies, personnel, despecialization of training, recruitment and retention, information, and technology. Moreover, COPS classifies organizational transformation as aligning organizational management, structure, personnel, and information systems to support community partnerships and proactive problem-solving. This element focuses on a broader approach to police training, which looks at the effective use of

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practical and authentic leadership strategies to improve police training. Those strategies include decentralized decision-making, allowing front-line officers to have more say in how they police. In addition, when front-line officers are involved in the decision-making process, it allows for more accountability and places a greater responsibility on the officers involved.

The final element of community based policing is problem-solving skills. Within this technique, police officers deploy the acronym SARA, which stands for scanning, analysis, response, and assessment. In the scanning stage of community policing, officers identify and prioritize problems. For example – by utilizing the SARA method, the St. Charles Parish Sheriff's Office was able to identify several juveniles from the New Orleans area that were committing vehicle burglaries within our jurisdiction. This training strategy was effective in those subjects' apprehension and subsequent prosecution. The second stage involves analysis, where officers receive all known intelligence about the problem and begin formulating leads. The third stage is the response, which requires law enforcement officers to develop an operational plan to respond to the situation appropriately. The final step is the assessment, where officers conduct an after-action briefing and report, whether good or bad, by determining the mission's success and preparing a plan for future incidents.

After a close look at community policing, we can infer that members of this theory or policing strategy were operating from the point of servant leadership. Further research also confirms that servant leaders inspire others to go beyond the call of duty to be not only proactive law enforcement officers but also proactive community members. Therefore, being a servant leader and looking at the state of policing in America, there is a direct need for more advanced police training applications.

### **Crisis Intervention Teams**

Due to the lack of mental health resources in America, law enforcement officers across the United States have unfortunately been tasked with becoming first responders to people with mental illness. In response to this problem, law enforcement leaders have teamed up with leaders from mental health providers, emergency services, and family members of the mentally to form CIT (Crisis Intervention Teams). This training program was derived from the Memphis Police Department and spearheaded by Major Sam Cochran with the assistance of Doctor Randolph Dupont and members from the Universities of Memphis and Tennessee, respectively. “In September of 1987, Memphis police responded to a call for service involving a young black man with a history of mental illness who was cutting himself with a knife and threatening suicide. The officers had trained at the time of the encounter that their lives were in danger, which caused them to shoot and kill the mentally ill patient” (Tinney, Rosenbaum, Magnusson, & Cox, n.d.). These actions resulted in national and public outcry from citizens. In response, Memphis police partnered with the Memphis Chapter of the National Alliance for Mentally Ill (NAMI), members from the local mental health community, and members from the Universities of Memphis and Tennessee. They were tasked with organizing, training, and implementing this specialized unit’s procedural and practical applications. The unit’s goal was to create a specialized approach in law enforcement training on properly dealing with people suffering from mental illness.

As a result, and according to NAMI, in over 2,700 communities nationwide, “CIT programs bring community leaders together; they can also help keep people with mental illness out of jail and in treatment on the road to recovery” (Behavioral Health Network, Inc., 2022). Furthermore, according to GOCIT, “the Memphis CIT program has achieved remarkable success

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primarily because it has remained a true community partnership. Today, the so-called “Memphis Model” has been widely adopted by more than 2,000 communities in more than 40 states and is being implemented statewide in several states, including Maine, Connecticut, Ohio, Georgia, Florida” (Tinney, Rosenbaum, Magnusson, & Cox, n.d.), Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana. Moreover, the statistics of all enforcement personnel certified in CIT at our respective agencies are as follows: 65 percent for St. Charles Parish Sheriff’s Office, 10 percent for St. James Parish Sheriff’s Office, 20 percent for Foley Police Department, and 1.75 percent for Pascagoula Police Department. However, all agencies listed believe in the fundamental principles of CIT and have a shared vision of making all personnel CIT certified soon.

CIT has been an invaluable tool in the law enforcement toolbox. But, more importantly, since law enforcement has been tasked with this insurmountable problem and with no help for the foreseeable future, it would be incumbent upon leaders of respective agencies to adopt some CIT training within their agency.

The CIT certification program comprises at least 40 hours of instructional learning from mental health, law enforcement, and psychology members. Typically, at least 8 hours or more are set aside for actual field visits to mentally ill treatment centers where officers get first-hand experience speaking with someone being treated for mental illness.

Lastly, gone are the days of old where we, as law enforcement leaders, could push these issues off with claims such as lack of funding. As an ever-changing profession, we can either adapt our leadership principles to fit the needs of our community or become the next social media video or news story that will sell for propaganda. Leaders must rise to the challenge to face adversity head-on with training such as CIT and other technological advances in our profession. The need to do more is ever apparent in our law enforcement profession. Many

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agencies have also created wellness programs and have begun training officers in topics such as mental health first aid to help themselves and their coworkers identify mental health issues earlier.

### **Technology and Training**

In recent years, there has been an extensive nationwide push for transparency in law enforcement. While the public has demanded officers have body cameras, law enforcement leaders have also requested money to purchase these cameras to protect their good officers, weed out the bad, and provide remedial training to those displaying deficiencies. Even though some officers were hesitant initially, many have embraced the concept of body cameras and even utilize the technology as a training tool to critique themselves.

With body cameras, an agency can create community transparency on use-of-force incidents while increasing officer accountability. While keeping with the integrity of an investigation, departments can release aspects of an incident to give an officer's perspective of an incident. They can reduce the public scrutiny of an officer by showing the totality of an incident instead a singular version. Many occasions where body cameras were absent created an environment where the public's understanding of the incident is believed to be accurate, and public trust is lost. Body cameras also increase officer accountability, and departments can benefit from reviewing videos. Officers can no longer give their version of events to sway the leaders of an organization. Still, they are now held to a higher standard, knowing that every incident is recorded. From the use of body-worn cameras, we can use past incidents and improve for the future. Hindsight is known to be 20-20, and organizations should use every tool and asset available to better their training tactics, organizational standards, and community relations.

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The National Institute of Justice states, “According to the BJS report, the main reasons (about 80% each) that local police and sheriffs’ offices had acquired body-worn cameras were to improve officer safety, increase evidence quality, reduce civilian complaints, and reduce agency liability” (National Institute of Justice. 2022. para. 3). Although studies do not definitively indicate a reduction of complaints or liability, through the use of body-worn cameras, we believe it creates a climate for better policing.

### **Virtual Reality Simulators**

Technological advancements have assisted law enforcement vendors in creating training systems that can simulate a real-life encounter with suspects and people in crisis. While costly, these virtual reality simulators can provide invaluable training in a safe atmosphere in the use of force incidents, de-escalation tactics, and officer safety techniques. “For example, trainers can’t hold a safe training event on the side of the highway as traffic rushes by, but a virtual reality scenario can deliver the audio and visual stimulus and other stressors that an officer must navigate during a high-risk traffic stop on the shoulder of a crowded freeway” (Friese, 2022). While virtual reality simulators are still a new concept in police training, several systems are currently on the market. Law enforcement officers can interact in many environments, such as roadside traffic stops, residential settings, grocery stores, offices, and warehouses within the system. In addition, officers can train on a wide range of calls for service, including domestic violence calls, intoxicated subjects, and dealing with people in crisis and mentally ill subjects.

For example, when an officer needs improvement on a particular skill set, such as de-escalation, a scenario can be loaded for the officer to calm the subject by simply speaking to them. The officer is not interacting with a computer but is communicating with the instructor overseeing the training. Therefore, if the officer’s tone escalates, the instructor can respond

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verbally and select the appropriate physical and emotional inputs to agitate the subject inside the simulator. Moreover, suppose the officer is using proper techniques. In that case, the instructor can speak calmly and select options to change the subject's body language to display a calm demeanor and peacefully conclude the scenario. One system even allows the officer to swap roles and experience the incident from the perspective of the person in crisis.

### **Media Impacts on Law enforcement**

Through technological advances, law enforcement has been subject to increased publicity and scrutiny. Instead of an incident making it to television later in the evening or days after an event, it is publicly available and often unfolds as a live event. An event unfolding in real-time can put law enforcement at a severe disadvantage. News is no longer spread on the household television but in the palm of your hand. With the ability of social media platforms to stream events, an incident can reach a community faster, creating a quick response from the public and an unprepared effort from law enforcement. Captain Gwendolyn Waters states, "Social networks generate momentum, and law enforcement agencies provide a stimulus for that energy. Departments must take responsibility for protection from this threat before they become blindsided by a sudden viral attack on their officers" (Waters, 2012. para. 26). In recent history, events such as George Floyd, Michael Brown, and Duante Wright which have become a national news story in a matter of minutes rather than overnight. The momentum gained led to civil unrest that resulted in numerous deaths, large-scale property damage, and unprepared police response.

With a forward-thinking mentality, we can better prepare officers with the newest tactics to battle the culture of changing times and police perception. Stemming from the incidents, law

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enforcement organizations have developed new and improved training, such as de-escalation tactics, limitations on neck restraints, and changing the mindset of law enforcement officers.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, police training has evolved in response to outside influences such as active shooter incidents and civil unrest. In addition, law enforcement leaders must be able to focus on the needs of the communities while at the same time focusing on the needs and well-being of the officers they lead. If utilized effectively, servant leadership could transcend law enforcement leaders, allowing them to practice what is commonly referred to as advanced empathy.

According to Anderson (2017), “Advanced empathy is the capacity to be aware of, to have an understanding of and be sensitive to another’s deeper feelings and the internal problems or issues that are connected to those feelings.” Leadership at all levels of law enforcement needs to be open to change and understand how to manage change effectively. Dr. Long stated, “Deep change is riskier, receives more resistance, and requires new ways of thinking and behaving (Long, 2017).” Deep change is a learning process requiring enormous energy and optimism to overcome the fear and resistance associated with change.

Increasingly, now more than ever, leaders must look ahead and forecast the potential needs in training and community involvement to best prepare their officers for success. We need leaders who have a futuristic mindset and operate in the capacity of forward-thinkers. Legacy leadership terms this as “Making time to think about the future, getting others involved, and gather their input on what needs to happen, is what we are doing sustainable, and how can we improve?” (Blankenship, 2017). Leaders can only accomplish this by empowering their people to make decisions to help them see into the future of law enforcement. Overall, as new technology develops and criminals become more sophisticated, law enforcement agencies must

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continue to evolve to combat them and their wicked use of technology. Furthermore, new technology, such as virtual reality training, provides endless opportunities for officers to train in real-world scenarios while remaining in a safe environment. Moreover, law enforcement leadership must ensure budgets match their department's vision and have a shared vision that ensures officers receive quality and up-to-date technological training.

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