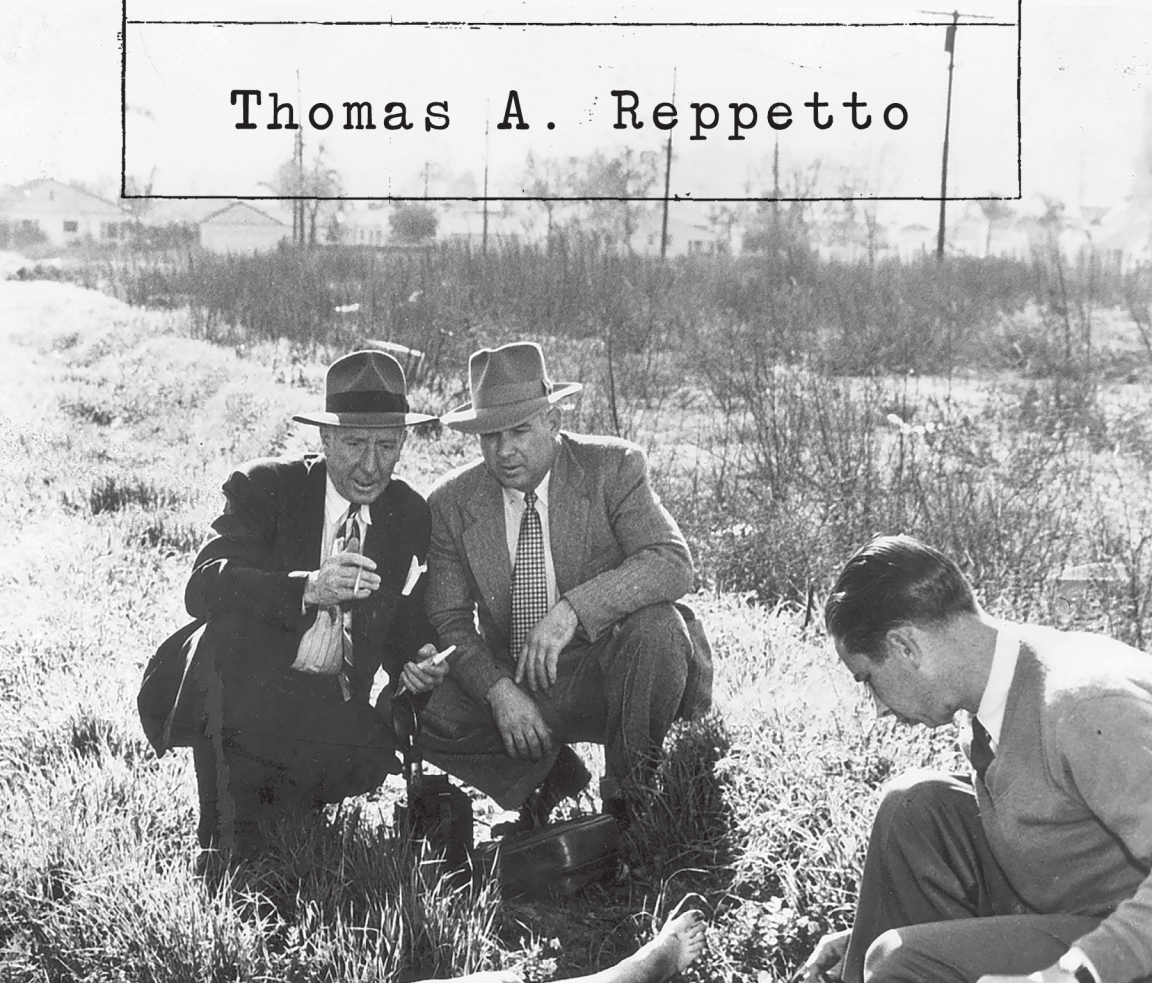
AMERICAN DETECTIVE

Behind the Scenes of Famous Criminal Investigations

Thomas A. Reppetto



AMERICAN DETECTIVE

AMERICAN DETECTIVE

Behind the Scenes of Famous Criminal Investigations

THOMAS A. REPPETTO

POTOMAC BOOKS | *An imprint of the University of Nebraska Press*

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Reppetto, Thomas A., author.
Title: American detective: behind the
scenes of famous criminal investigations
/ Thomas A. Reppetto.
Description: Lincoln: Potomac Books, an imprint
of the University of Nebraska Press. [2018] |
Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2017052153
ISBN 9781640120228 (cloth: alk. paper)
ISBN 9781640120570 (epub)
ISBN 9781640120587 (mobi)
ISBN 9781640120594 (web)
Subjects: LCSH: Criminal investigation—United
States—History—20th century. | Crime—
United States—History—20th century.
Classification: LCC HV8141 .R395 2018 |
DDC 363.250973—dc23 LC record available
at https://lccn.loc.gov/2017052153

Set in Sabon Next by E. Cuddy.
Designed by N. Putens.

To the memory of Arthur Hale Woods, 1870–1942, deputy commissioner of the NYPD in charge of detectives, 1907–9; police commissioner, 1914–17; colonel, U.S. Army, 1918–19. Awarded Distinguished Service Medal (U.S.), Order of St. Michael and St. George (UK), and Chevalier of the Legion of Honor (France). A brilliant police administrator, with an exceptional knowledge of detective work.

Contents

Illustrations

Following page 130

1. Allan Pinkerton, founder of America's most important detective agency, 1862
2. Detectives escort a Mafia killer, 1903
3. NYPD commissioner Arthur Woods, 1914
4. San Francisco police interrogate Tom Mooney for Preparedness Day bombing, 1916
5. William Flynn, director of the (federal) Bureau of Investigation, 1919
6. William Burns talks to a reporter on the day of the Wall Street bombing, 1920
7. Scene on Wall Street after the bombing that killed thirty-eight people, 1920

8. Texas ranger Capt. Manuel "Lone Wolf" Gonzaullas early in his career, 1920

9. Detectives reenact the St. Valentine's Day Massacre for the Cook County coroner, 1929

10. Top figures in the LAPD confer, 1934

11. Eliot Ness demonstrates a disarming tactic, 1936

12. The Cleveland coroner leads the search for a victim of the Mad Butcher serial killer, 1938

13. An FBI agent on stakeout in a kidnapping case, 1939

14. San Francisco police chief Charles Dullea, 1940

15. Los Angeles detectives examine the body of the Black Dahlia, 1947

16. Boston detectives interview Brink's and ADT employees at the scene of a $2.5 million robbery, 1950

17. Boston detectives examine evidence in the Brink's robbery, 1950

18. A San Francisco police detective arrests kidnappers, 1954

19. Willie Sutton, America's premier holdup man, 1950s

20. The most famous perp walk in American history, 1963

Snapshots from the Lost World of Detectives

San Francisco, October 9, 1926

TERROR IN THE STREETS

In the 1920s automobiles gave criminals a means of striking anywhere in a community and making a quick escape. One police chief who became impressed with this fact was Dan O'Brien of San Francisco. On Saturday, October 9, 1926, shortly before midnight, as O'Brien and his wife were leaving the home of friends, he heard the sound of gunshots around the corner. He sent his wife back into the house and ran to the scene with his driver, Sergeant Neely. There they found a man dying in the street. Just then a sedan raced down the street, and when O'Brien and Neely signaled it to stop, gunfire erupted from the car. The two cops returned fire as it sped past them.

O'Brien had happened into a war that his own army was already fighting. A murderous crime spree by so-called terror bandits had begun a few hours earlier when two men, using a stolen car, robbed a cab driver at gunpoint. A few minutes later another cabbie was robbed. Then the gunmen accosted a doctor as he was about to enter his home. Inspectors (detectives) with shotguns were already cruising through the streets looking for the bandits. Among the inspectors' leaders was a tough ex-marine named Charlie Dullea, who was a lieutenant in charge of the homicide squad.

The robbers were not through for the night. They encountered a man strolling with a woman, her thirteen-year-old daughter, and a female friend. After sticking up the group, the gunmen dragged the mother into the car and drove off. Looking at her under a flashlight, they decided "she ain't young enough" and threw her out of the car.

After midnight the bandits stormed into a pool room and announced a robbery. At 3:30 a.m. they robbed two more men as they entered their house. That was the last job of the night. The robbers got about $400 and assorted pieces of jewelry from the dozen stickups they committed.

At noon on Sunday police officers recovered the stolen auto. There were bloodstains on the upholstery, suggesting that one of the robbers may have been hit in the encounter with the chief. The only description witnesses could give was of two young, white males.

Two days later, at 6:00 p.m. on Monday, the bandits went on another terror spree. They hired a yellow cab driver, shot him fatally, took his cab and his uniform, and threw his body under a viaduct. They then went out with one of them posing as the cab driver. When a bandit asked a man walking on the street what time it was and he pulled out his watch, they shot him fatally. Next they robbed two pedestrians. Then they went to a restaurant where they held up patrons and shot the cook.

Still going, they walked across the street to a filling station where they killed the night watchman and wounded two other men. Next they went to Pier 36 on the waterfront and robbed and pistol whipped a man. Then they drove to a gas station, where they were assaulting and robbing a patron when a police officer drove by. The robbers sped off with the cop in pursuit. The bandits drove the cab into a curb, jumped out, and fled. Somehow they procured another car and drove past a police officer who was waiting for the morgue wagon at the scene of one of their fatal shootings. When he signaled them to stop, they began shooting and the officer returned the fire. The bandits made their getaway and quit for the night.

In just two nights, San Francisco had topped Chicago's reputation for murderous violence. Chief O'Brien ordered the mobilization of the entire police department and radio stations put out a message for all

off-duty police officers to report to their commands. There they were assigned to vehicles, some of them the officers' personal cars. Then, supplemented by fire department volunteers and issued one thousand rifles borrowed from the National Guard, a force of two thousand men began patrolling the streets.

The terrorist spree was brought to an end in the old-fashioned way. Det. Sgt. Louis DeMattei and his partner, George Wafer, broke the case after they got word from an informer. On October 18, nine days after the first shooting, detectives picked up a man named Lawrence Weeks, age twenty-two. Under questioning he confessed to twelve holdups on the Saturday night in question but denied he was involved in the Monday-night spree. Weeks named an accomplice, Clarence "Buck" Kelly, twenty-two, as ringleader of the group. Kelly was a street criminal well known to the police. When the cops went to his apartment, he attempted to escape but was hit twice by rifle fire. Though Kelly would never admit his guilt, a search of the premises where he lived turned up part of the dead cab driver's uniform and other evidence.

So outraged were the city's cab drivers over the shootings of their colleagues, they were about to go to the hospital where Kelly was being held and lynch him. To head them off a district police captain assigned twenty-five men to guard the building. Kelly was eventually hanged for murder.

During the two nights of terror it was the detectives who directed police efforts, not the much larger patrol force. The image of detectives that had already begun to form in America was that they were the ones who would lead a city's crime-fighting efforts. Over the next forty-plus years this would be the case in San Francisco under the direction of Charlie Dullea, chief of inspectors and later chief of police, and his successors.

New York City, May 7, 1931

THE GREAT SIEGE

Crime in the Prohibition era, which extended into the early 1930s, is often seen as revolving around gangsters, taking rivals "for a ride," and the introduction of the "Chicago piano" (i.e., the Thompson submachine

gun). However, there was more to crime than just mobsters. As in the musical *Chicago*, ordinary people also took up the gun and became temporary sensations under such names as the Bobbed-Haired Bandit or Two Gun Crowley. Francis Crowley of the Bronx was an eighteen-year-old punk, short and slim, who, along with his running mate, Rudolph "Fats" Duringer, carried out a spectacular crime spree in the New York area in 1931. It began in February when Crowley shot two men at an American Legion dance. The next month he wounded a New York Police Department (NYPD) detective who attempted to arrest him. In April Crowley and Duringer were riding in a car with the latter's girlfriend. When she resisted his advances, he shot and killed her.

The hunt for the two fugitives was led by Bronx borough detectives under Insp. Henry Bruckman. The NYPD had been in existence since the middle of the nineteenth century, when the Bronx was sparsely populated and much of it was patrolled by mounted policemen. For a cop in Manhattan to be transferred up to the Bronx was a form of punishment. Rookies often concealed the fact that they could ride a horse because they did not want to be sent to the boondocks. By the mid-twentieth century, though, it was an urban area just like most of the rest of the city. Its detectives were part of the NYPD Detective Bureau, which had been the model for all similar organizations in America since the 1880s.

Bruckman's lead detectives in the hunt for Crowley and Duringer were Dominic Caso and William Mara. During their investigation they learned that the fugitives were running with a girl named Billy Dove, who hung out in upper Manhattan dives. So the detectives went from joint to joint asking about Billy and her boyfriends. In those days the gold shield of a New York detective commanded respect and loosened many tongues. Based on tips from a former girlfriend of Crowley and information from cabdrivers, the detectives went to a five-story imitation French château at 303 West Ninetieth Street, where they were told the fugitives were hiding out. When they showed the building superintendent pictures of Crowley and Duringer, he identified them as Mr. White and Mr. Jones, who were living in apartment ten on the top floor. In fact, he said, the two men were in the apartment at the time.

It might have been wiser for the detectives to call the local precinct and ask that assistance be sent to the scene immediately. However, that would have brought a commanding officer from Manhattan, who would have taken over the case. So, following protocol, the detectives notified their squad lieutenant up in the Bronx, who notified his district detective captain, who informed Inspector Bruckman that the wanted men had been located. Bruckman raced to West Ninetieth Street and West End Avenue with reinforcements. He placed men on the roof of a building on West Ninety-First Street that overlooked apartment ten in the château. From there the cops could heave tear gas grenades into two windows of the apartment. Other detectives went up to the fifth-floor landing. When everything was in place, Detective Caso called out to Crowley, telling him the place was surrounded and that he should surrender. His answer was a burst of machine-gun fire through the door. The battle was on.

Eventually fifteen thousand spectators and the police commissioner himself, Ed Mulrooney, arrived at the scene and watched as officers on the adjoining roof threw gas grenades at apartment ten. They managed to get them inside the apartment twice. Crowley picked the grenades up and threw them out the window. Then the wanted men started shooting at the roof, compelling the detectives on it to take cover. Occasionally Crowley and Duringer would fire their machine gun at the door to hold off any attempt to rush the place. If the cops had followed normal procedure and broken down the door, there would almost certainly have been a few police funerals resulting from the action. The situation was at a standstill, with an army of three hundred of New York's finest held off by two punk gunmen.

Down at headquarters, the teletype in the office of the major case squad, the department's elite detective unit, flashed what was happening at West Ninetieth Street. In the squad room were some of the top detectives on the force. Johnny Cordes was the senior man. He had joined the NYPD in 1915 at the age of twenty-five and had developed a reputation as an expert at tailing criminals. Twice he was severely wounded in gun battles, coming near to death each time. Mayor Jimmy Walker offered to retire him on a full disability pension, but Cordes refused. Twice he won the

department's highest medal, a feat never accomplished before or since. Cordes was relatively small for a cop and easygoing. The powerfully built Johnny Broderick had been a city fireman before he joined the department in 1923 at age twenty-three. He had distinguished himself a number of times, including at the Tombs jail (so called because it resembled an Egyptian tomb), where he led the charge against three escaping prisoners who had murdered the warden and a guard. Two of the men committed suicide after Broderick trapped them and the third was shot to death by police. Short, slim Frank Phillips had come on the job in 1926 when he was twenty-two years of age and, after drawing notice as a patrolman, was transferred to the major case squad. In 1928 that was the equivalent of a low minor leaguer going straight to Yankee Stadium. Burly Ray Henshaw was the quiet one of the group, but his record was as good as the others'.

The captain of the main office squad granted permission to his four stars to go to the scene of the battle. Probably he thought somebody had to do something up there because nothing seemed to be working. With Broderick at the wheel, the four of them made it up to the scene through five miles of heavy Manhattan traffic in less than ten minutes. They checked in with Inspector Bruckman and asked permission to go up to the fifth-floor landing and see what they could do. Bruckman was already at his wit's end, and he agreed to let them take over. Johnny Broderick led the way, and when he yelled his name through the door, Crowley recognized it and listened. Broderick said, "I'm coming through the door with nothing in my hands" and proceeded to do just that. Both Crowley and Duringer surrendered. The following year they were executed.

Why had Crowley surrendered and why had Broderick taken such a chance? No doubt in the few words that he exchanged with Crowley, Broderick detected in the gunman's voice that he was tired, hurt, and wanted to give up. It was an instinct that a certain kind of detective has and most other people don't. By managing to conclude the battle, he spared the police department, including the commissioner, a great deal of embarrassment. The affair had been the largest siege in the history

of the department, and no one had seemed to know how to resolve it. The detective bureau had saved the day for the police department by the action of its most famous members.

Chicago, March 20, 1953

A KILLING AT THE STOCKYARDS

The Union Stockyards on Chicago's southwest side was an old-fashioned slaughterhouse dating from the nineteenth century. It covered nearly a square mile, and thousands of workers spent their time in it butchering cows, pigs, and chickens after driving spikes through their heads or cutting their throats.

The stockyards was the home of giant companies like Armour and Swift as well as lesser-known ones, and each had its own guard force. If the city police were needed in the yards, the Eighteenth District was located near the front entrance on Halsted Street. The back entrances emptied into Ashland Avenue a mile away. The Seventeenth District was only three blocks from one of the back gates. The chief problem for the police was not in the yards but the sleazy saloons on Halsted and Ashland.

At 7:45 a.m. on March 20, 1953, the day shifts in the Eighteenth and Seventeenth Districts (the latter included the writer) stood at roll call. At police headquarters, the detective bureau turned out at 8:30 a.m. with a dozen two- or three-man squads assigned to street duty citywide. Other detectives were working on cases. The detectives regarded themselves as the elite of the police force. Some of the detective cars on the street carried heavy equipment, that is, machine guns, shotguns, rifles, tear gas, and so on, and when a shootout occurred they assumed the role that a SWAT team would today. If it became a siege, they donned their bulletproof vests and moved in to deal with the shooter. The department was not big on negotiating with criminals. The usual way to end a siege was to toss in tear gas. If that didn't work, a team of detectives would storm through the front or back door. To a modern-day policeman it would look like something out of Dodge City or Tombstone, but it was standard operating procedure in most American police departments of that time. In New York City, a policeman would shout to a trapped

gunman, "This is Father Murphy, think of your immortal soul." If the shooter did not give up, the cops went in, guns blazing.

There was always a ranking officer available to supervise the detective cars patrolling the city. This day it was the best-known police officer in Chicago, Lt. Frank Pape. He had joined the force in the early thirties and quickly was appointed to the detective bureau. Pape was a good detective and he and his partner, Morris Friedman, made a strong record working out of the robbery detail. In ten years together they had never fired a shot. Then one day, while attempting to execute a robbery warrant from Cleveland, Ohio, they chased a man through downtown Chicago and the man turned around and fired, killing Friedman. After that, Pape began to acquire notches on his gun. All of those he shot were armed, professional criminals. Even though Chicago had a large minority population, none of the people Pape gunned down were nonwhite. In the 1950s Lieutenant Pape and the submachine gun he often carried were well known in Chicago, and the newspapers built him up. On first meeting him, though, people were surprised by his mild looks. Instead of being a huge brute, he was of medium height and weight and did not have the manner of a tough detective. While his name was taken to be Italian, he was actually German and Irish.

Riding in a patrol car on the west end of the Seventeenth District, along with a veteran cop, I listened to radio calls coming in to South Side police units. It was a slow morning. Over at the stockyards, two Libby, McNeill & Libby cannery officials were pushing a pay cart filled with cash. Suddenly, five men with guns surrounded them. The robbers also took three other employees hostage and kept them quiet by hitting them over the head with a lead pipe. Another worker who saw what was happening managed to race up to the next floor and inform the security chief of the company, Theodore Zukowski, of the robbery. Zukowski, though unarmed, was a fearless man and came racing down the stairs toward the pay cart. The leader of the gang was Paul Crump, who had worked at Libby, McNeill & Libby and knew that Zukowski was never armed, but he shot and killed him anyway. The robbers began running out of the building. Outside, a getaway car was parked but the driver

panicked and drove off, leaving some of the gang behind to make their way out of the huge complex on foot.

Out of the blue, the police dispatcher came on and announced, "Robbery and a man shot at Libby, McNeill & Libby" and gave the address. All of the cars from the Eighteenth District rushed to the scene. Within a few minutes a call was broadcast—"wanted for murder"—with a description of the holdup men. When the first call had come over, although the Seventeenth District cars were not dispatched, they began to head toward the Ashland exits of the facility. I drove to McDowell Street, a two-block-long road that connected the stockyards to Ashland Avenue. Crump had run down McDowell on foot shortly before my partner and I came racing up the street into the yards. By that time the area was flooded with police. However, all the robbers made their getaway.

The next message broadcast by the dispatcher ordered all detective cars on field duty to proceed to the stockyards and report to Lieutenant Pape. He was going for broke by assembling the cream of the detective bureau and sending them out hunting for the robbers in an attempt to close the case quickly. When they assembled at the scene, Pape issued orders and they began heading out to look for the robbers, including Crump, who had been recognized by one of the employees. It was a memorable sight to see the power of the police department mobilized and on the move. A more prudent supervisor would not have mobilized so many detective bureau units but would have followed standard procedures, working up from the district detectives. However, Pape was a man who acted out of instinct and was very forceful. Soon an army of detectives was combing the South Side. Over the next few days they rounded up all of the holdup men and booked them for murder. At their trials they were convicted, and Crump was sentenced to death, although he was not executed.

In the next few years Pape was at the height of his fame, and it seemed certain he would become chief of detectives. But as the 1960s dawned, the world of policing changed. The old detective bureau was dismantled, and Pape did not find favor with the new leaders of the department. He would never become chief of detectives. In the mid-1960s he was just

a patrol captain, while I was in the detective bureau and held a higher rank than he did. Even I thought that was a ludicrous situation.

I would always remember that day in March 1953 when Pape and the bureau swept into the stockyards, took over, and within a couple of days rounded up the gang. If they had not taken action, someone like Crump might have gone down south and disappeared. Seven or eight years could have passed before he would be picked up and his prints matched to those of the wanted man in Chicago.

Unbelievably, nine years after the Zukowski murder journalists made a major effort to get Crump released from prison. They claimed he had the mind of a genius. Prominent writers and civic leaders championed his case. The story they presented of what had happened at Libby, McNeill & Libby was so distorted as to be unrecognizable. They did not even mention that Crump had shot Zukowski, who was unarmed. Then a highly respected federal judge who had prosecuted Crump back in 1953 stepped forward to remind people what the true story was. Crump's sentence was not commuted, but eventually he was released from prison. He never won a Nobel or Pulitzer Prize for any later achievements.

Preface
Strangers Who Walk in an Atmosphere of Mysterious Greatness

Contrary to conventional wisdom, detectives are the key element in American policing. Undoubtedly, this statement will be disputed by many police administrators and researchers. In recent years it has become almost an article of faith that the patrol force is far more important than detectives. Those who argue otherwise are often dismissed as "buffs" who have seen too many movies and TV shows. Having spent a lifetime in and around police work, I hardly think that title would apply to me. Within police administrative circles detective bureaus are often thought to be vastly overrated and grossly overstaffed, but, because the public is fascinated by the latest front-page murder or million-dollar robbery, they are difficult to rein in.

Patrick V. Murphy, a career New York cop who from 1963 to 1973 headed the police departments of Syracuse, New York; Washington DC; Detroit; and New York City had especially hard words for detectives in his native city. He wrote, "The ambitious ones might be barhopping with reporters, politicians, or judges; shakedown artists, barhopping too, might be 'shopping'; the lazier ones could be glued to a stool ostensibly picking up 'information.'" Of course, Murphy himself never worked as

a detective. Instead he spent most of his early career as an instructor in the police academy. The petty chiseling he accused detectives of was not confined to any police unit. It was known in every bureau.

The highly regarded management consulting group known as the Rand Corporation made more fundamental criticisms in less vitriolic terms: "The single most important determinant of whether or not a case will be solved is the information the victim supplies to the immediately responding patrol officers. If the information that uniquely identifies the perpetrator is not presented at the time the crime is reported, the perpetrator by and large will not be subsequently identified. . . . The method by which police and investigators are organized (team policing, specialist versus generalist, uniform patrolman–investigators) cannot be related to variations in crime, arrests and clearance rates." The study led some administrators to argue that half the detective force in any police department could be dispensed with.

The Rand notion that only information from victims or witnesses would lead to an arrest ignored the vast amount of other information detectives received from informers and the general knowledge they acquired from their work. Just because no one witnesses a particular burglary, it does not mean that it cannot be solved. Burglary detectives can sometimes tell from the tool marks on the door what gang pulled the job. Or they can canvas their many informers. They can then start asking questions around the milieu of burglars. They might even be able to set up a trap for the gang that pulled the job. The same is true in other crimes. The murder of union leader Jimmy Hoffa has never been solved officially, but a number of people deemed responsible for it have been punished by being sent to prison on other charges.

On its face, the Rand assertion about detective organization is unsupportable. The way in which an army, business corporation, or government agency is organized is fundamental to its success or failure. After World War I, leaders of the victorious French Army assumed that in any future conflict, defense would prove the key to victory. So they sheltered their troops behind the Maginot Line. In contrast, the Germans envisioned a war of movement and developed mobile forces to carry it out. In 1940

France actually had more and better tanks than the Germans but it used them to support the infantry rather than as a massed attack force. If France had organized a mobile tank army, as a certain Col. Charles de Gaulle had urged in a prewar book, the Allies would have won the war in 1940.

Most murderers, rapists, professional robbers, and burglars are captured by detective follow-up investigations. Police investigators also apprehend less visible criminals such as con artists and members of drug rings. The detective bureau, usually composing around 10–12 percent of a police department, is the only major unit devoted solely to fighting serious crime.

The history of detective work of the present type is not a long one. The London Metropolitan Police, created in 1829, replaced a force of part-time night watchmen hired by the various parishes (local neighborhoods) of the city with a full-time uniformed force. American cities, beginning with New York in 1845, followed suit. Until the late nineteenth century detectives in London or New York were a small adjunct to the main force. Then, in 1878, the London Metropolitan Police created a criminal investigation division (known popularly as Scotland Yard), and two years later Insp. Thomas Byrnes of the New York City Police Department established the modern American detective bureau.

Even before the emergence of powerful police detective bureaus, private detectives, like the Pinkerton Agency, operated nationwide and even internationally. Occasionally a city or state or the national government would hire the Pinkertons. The agency's symbol, an open eye with the slogan "we never sleep," became well known and gave rise to the term *private eye*.

The twentieth century saw the rise in importance of American detectives. From the beginning of the century until as late as the 1970s detective bureaus dominated many American police departments, particularly major ones like New York, Chicago, and San Francisco. The era was the golden age of detectives and every ambitious cop tried to secure an investigative assignment. In some cities a detective post became more desirable than the job of sergeant or lieutenant in the patrol force.

Despite the public's fascination with detectives, most people do not understand how they operate. Contrary to the impression furnished by

TV, Hollywood, or mystery novels, the basis of detective work has not been the intuitive powers of individual investigators. Successful police detectives are individuals who are able to master the systems and methods of criminal investigation utilized by their departments: cultivation of informers, canvassing for witnesses, interrogating suspects, and keeping an eye on known criminals.

Since the 1960s, urban patrol forces have encountered significant hostility in many communities. Simple incidents, like arresting a motorist or dispersing a group of noisy young men, have sparked riots, which in some cases have resulted in a number of deaths. Some police departments have attempted to establish "community policing," where officers seek to emulate the idealized (and often historically unreal) neighborhood beat cop. In that formulation the cop knew, and was known by, everybody and, rather than using enforcement techniques, often engaged in counseling. No doubt some did, but since it took five cops to patrol one foot beat around the clock seven days a week, most beat officers did not live up to that ideal. The new-style community cops generally spend their time attending meetings and filling out reports. In many cities they constitute a sort of showpiece force that exists largely for public relations without having much impact on crime.

Detectives meet less resistance in inner-city areas because the public knows they are there to investigate serious crimes, not to regulate behavior such as loitering, public drinking, and so on. While patrol officers search for criminals in an ad hoc fashion, detectives usually work from a base of previously gathered data and are trained to elicit information without being heavy-handed. As a group, they are more experienced than the young cops who patrol environments they are unfamiliar with and interact with people they find difficult to relate to.

Detectives also benefit from the fact that the public stands in awe of them and sees them as well-above-average cops. Most citizens believe detectives are more skilled and possess higher ranks than ordinary cops. In the NYPD a low-ranking detective outranks a patrol captain at a crime scene because he is thought to be the expert and the captain is not.

Even before detectives became an important part of policing they

tended to stand out from their fellow cops. In mid-nineteenth-century London they attracted the attention of the novelist Charles Dickens. The previous image of them had been that of men not very different from criminals. The great French detective chief Eugène François Vidocq, who was in charge of the national detective force (the Sûreté) from 1811 to 1827, hired ex-criminals on the theory that "it takes a crook to catch a crook." Dickens had a different view. He wrote that London detectives "are one and all, respectable-looking men, of perfectly good deportment and unusual intelligence; with nothing lounging or slinking in their manners; with an air of keen observation and quick perceptions when addressed; and generally present faces, more or less marked of habitually leading lives of strong mental excitement."

They were in fact models of the kind of working-class heroes Dickens often wrote about: boys who, despite a deprived background, rose to modest success. In the class-demarcated society of nineteenth-century England, detectives were among the few people who had the authority to pry into the affairs of gentlemen, interrogate them, or place them under arrest. Detective work, with its challenges, offered a much larger field intellectually than walking a beat. Thus it attracted a higher class of officer. Dickens describes his principal hero, Inspector Bucket (based on an actual Scotland Yard detective), as having a "ghostly manner of appearing," and as "a sparkling stranger who walks in an atmosphere of mysterious greatness."

Beyond its importance to public safety, detective work is at the heart of urban life. It tells us what our society is really like. In the late nineteenth century the NYPD detective bureau of Insp. Thomas Byrnes was the subject of considerable attention from great journalists like Jacob Riis and Lincoln Steffens. Novelist Julian Hawthorne wrote books based on cases "from the notebook of Inspector Byrnes." Steffens and Riis understood that detectives shed light on the urban experience that was coming to dominate American culture. Hawthorne realized that in the late nineteenth century the problems of New England villagers, portrayed in his father's *House of the Seven Gables*, were less significant than those of city dwellers. In the post–World War II period popular writers

like MacKinlay Kantor and Quentin Reynolds explored big-city life by examining the work of New York detectives.

In the present time, books by former Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) detective Joseph Wambaugh have gone beyond police stories to social commentary that ranks him with such writers as Raymond Chandler, the creator of Philip Marlowe, and Dashiell Hammett, who brought to life detective Sam Spade. Wambaugh's books provide an insightful analysis of American society and the workings of power within it.

The chapters that follow look at American detectives in action from the mid-nineteenth century to the last part of the twentieth. They describe how a police backwater became the most prominent element of big-city forces. The reader will note how this work differs from most detective stories in that it looks at cases not from the perspective of individual detectives but from that of the detective bureau. This is because detectives are not a collection of individuals but products of a system.

In one instance we will analyze the murder of a top Hollywood director, possibly by a major movie star. Though the case was never solved, as late as 1950 old Hollywood-ites may have been trying to point to the killer by sending signals in an Academy Award–nominated picture of that year, *Sunset Boulevard*.

Murder is found in both the highest and lowest elements of society. In the 1920s an Episcopalian priest and his paramour were found murdered in a "lovers' lane" in New Jersey. After an investigation, the minister's blue-blooded family was put on trial for the murder, although they were not convicted. At the other end of the scale, we will explore lowlife in a journey through the skid-row and hobo jungles of Cleveland in the 1930s. Here a "mad butcher" cut off a dozen or more heads in the mid-1930s. The police force, directed by Elliott Ness, could not solve the case. In 1947 the murder and dissection of an obscure girl, labeled the "Black Dahlia," in Los Angeles (never solved) shook the police and the city establishment to their cores. We also look at a series of killings in a medium-size Texas town shortly after World War II. As in Cleveland and LA, the case was never solved.

In highlighting major property crimes we examine three cases. In 1920s Chicago a band of Texas cowboys pulled a train robbery that netted them

$3 million in cash and bonds. The investigation by the Chicago police quickly rounded up the robbers, but further inquiry determined that the crime had been masterminded by an individual above suspicion. In the 1930s an armored-car heist in Brooklyn netted $427,500, the largest cash amount on record up to that time. Though quickly traced to a Hell's Kitchen group, it took four years for the police to finally clear the case with the arrest or death of the participants. Finally we examine the 1950 Brink's holdup in Boston, which was barely solved before the six-year statute of limitation expired. The investigation was constantly hampered by feuding between the FBI and the local police force. In Britain, the secretary of state for home affairs would have quickly resolved a feud between police departments. In the American federal system there is no mechanism for doing the same thing.

In the area of organized crime, we cite the case where a New York detective was sent on a suicide mission and murdered in Sicily. A decade later, another New York detective was sent on a similar mission to Naples, where he barely escaped with his life.

In the political realm, we look at two major events: the 1920 Wall Street bombing in which thirty-eight people were killed and the 1940 New York World's Fair bombing, which killed two detectives and wounded several more and might have led to the death of hundreds of people if the bomb had not been moved outside a building. Neither case has been solved, although historians today generally agree on who set the Wall Street bomb.

Perhaps the most interesting stop we will make is in what was America's most colorful city through most of the twentieth century, San Francisco. Here we will look at bombings, riots, murders, and major heists. For years it was common for the police department to be led by a top detective. Among the detectives profiled herein are private detective chiefs Allan Pinkerton and William Burns, commanders like Thad Brown of Los Angeles, Public Safety Director Elliott Ness of Cleveland, Charles Dullea, captain of inspectors and later chief of police of San Francisco, and America's "top cop," J. Edgar Hoover of the FBI. We will also look at a number of working detectives, including Peter Merylo, who was the

lead investigator on the Cleveland butcher case and drew conclusions diametrically opposite to those of Elliott Ness; John St. John of Los Angeles, who was honored by being given detective badge number one; and New York's Frankie Phillips, whose career, including his pursuit of Willie Sutton, made him one of the best-known New York detectives in the mid-twentieth century. In New Jersey we describe West Pointer H. Norman Schwarzkopf, superintendent of the New Jersey State Police, who, although not a detective, played a major role in the Lindbergh case, and in Texas Captain "Lone Wolf" Gonzaullas of the Texas Rangers, who worked on serial killings and other major crimes in his state.

Some detectives were not admirable characters. A rural New Jerseyian, Ellis Parker, chief of detectives of Burlington County, managed to convince many people that he was one of the most brilliant sleuths who ever lived. His interference in the Lindbergh investigation brought his downfall.

By the end of the narrative I expect many people, including individuals with considerable knowledge of the field, to be surprised to have learned things they did not know about detectives. More importantly, I will point out how a restoration of detectives to their primary role might solve many of the current difficulties of American policing.

Acknowledgments

I wish to express my gratitude to the following people and their organizations, who were helpful to me in the writing of this book: Kenneth Johnson, the Library of Congress; Michael Marie Lange, the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; Christina Stopka, Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum; Sarah Yarrito, Chicago History Museum; Molly Haigh, Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA; Joan Renner, Deranged LA Crimes.com; Brian Meggitt, Cleveland Public Library; Donna L. Stewart, Michael Schwartz Library, Cleveland State University; Linda Wilkins, Federal Bureau of Investigation; Jeff Thomas, San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library; Erica Varela, *Los Angeles Times*; Aaron Schmidt, Boston Public Library; Arthur Pollock, *Boston Herald*; Critical Past LLC; Patrick Frierson, Getty Images; Larry Sullivan, librarian of the John Jay College of Criminal Justice of the City University of New York; Patterson Smith, antiquarian bookseller and publisher; Murray Weiss, CBS News; Raymond J. Kelly, former NYPD commissioner; Robert Schnell; Christa Carnegie; Tom Swanson and Natalie O'Neal, Potomac Books, University of Nebraska Press; other members of the University Nebraska Press: Rosemary Sekora,

Tish Fobben, Sabrina Stellrecht, Rachel Gould, Ann Baker, and last but not least, Joy Margheim.

There are also a number of people who are no longer alive and who, over the years, have influenced my thoughts on the subject matter of this book. There are so many that to list them would require many pages. I am also not sure that all of them would want to be identified. Indeed, some living persons have preferred not to be cited. In any event, my thanks to all of them.

AMERICAN DETECTIVE