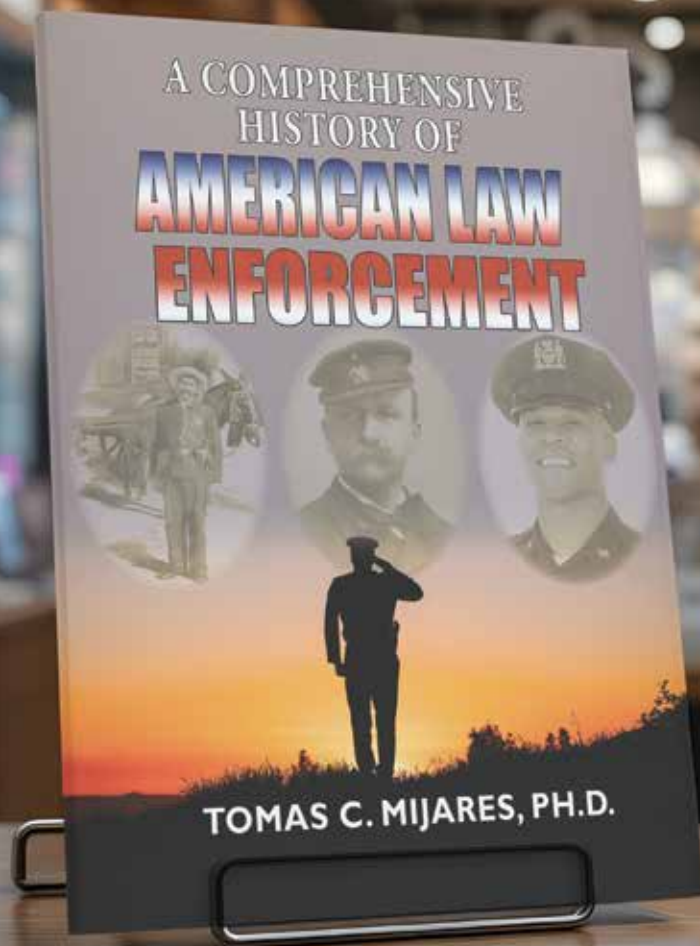




# A COMPREHENSIVE HISTORY OF AMERICAN LAW ENFORCEMENT

BY TOMAS C. MIJARES; CHARLES C. THOMAS, PUBLISHER

REVIEWED BY DR. KEVIN W. JENNINGS

Society is humanity's greatest asset. Without cooperative groups of humans living together, bound by a set of rules and norms, we could not have created the printing press, cured smallpox or taken pictures of the rings of Saturn. We would not have the Sistine Chapel, Starry Night or the Tortured Poet's Department. On the other

hand, we wouldn't have ransomware, date rape drugs, the electric chair or nuclear weapons, either.

Every society — from the first groups of hunter-gatherers on the African savannahs, through the Egyptians, Norse and Mayans, all the way to the modern interconnected world of today — has had to deal with rule violators. Mecha-



nisms exist in every society to confront, detain and punish rule breakers according to the norms of that culture. Today, we call those rule breakers “criminals” and the norms they violate are laid out in complex legal systems. The most visible part of the legal system for any society is law enforcement, but law enforcement has changed drastically in the millennia since humanity first developed agriculture.

Tomas Mijares’ new book, “A Comprehensive History of American Law Enforcement,” describes and gives context to how the policing function has evolved over time. He does a relatively thorough job guiding the reader through periods of history and showing what law enforcement was like during that time frame. The first few chapters of the book describe law enforcement processes of ancient civilizations from Persia, Rome and Egypt, and the author points out how lessons learned by these ancient civilizations are still applicable today. The book

also discusses the English common law system, and how Western European experiences informed and guided the early American colonies. This is a refreshing change of pace from the typical works on policing, which (if they have any discussion of the history of policing at all) commonly have some brief mention of Robert Peel and/or August Vollmer, then jump right into the 20th century of American policing.

After the introductory chapters, each subsequent chapter follows a similar basic form. The author chooses a rough time period (The Wild West, World War II, the 1960s,

etc.) and describes the state of policing at the time. This ranges from the status of the police/citizenry relationship, the technological developments that impacted policing and investigations, the wider historical and social implications of the period, and how the Supreme Court’s rulings impacted how the Constitution applies to police/citizen interactions. In most sections, the author explicitly connects the lessons learned, the techniques developed, and the technological advances to the modern day, discussing how these developments still affect law enforcement and continue to guide the policing function. The case histories, in particular, are a helpful way for the reader to contextualize law enforcement practices, procedures, and lessons learned in each era.

While the author attempts to provide historical context and discuss the most important issues for each section, that is impossible to do in less than an encyclopedia-sized volume, so by necessity many subjects do not get the attention they deserve. The incredibly brief mention (or lack of mention altogether) of so many important events, developments, and historical figures may frustrate readers with knowledge or expertise in the subject, but this lack of detail is understandable. These brief mentions of important aspects of law enforcement history naturally lead to simplistic summaries of complex events, and one of the drawbacks of this book is that it does not provide the reader with recommendations for suggested books that offer a much deeper understanding of each of these topics.

Overall, this book will provide an invaluable resource to law enforcement, criminal justice professors and students, as well as those seeking to learn more about this specific aspect of American history. It would not be out of place as a textbook or resource in a history, sociology or criminal justice course. It offers a broad, well-written, educational and entertaining take on law enforcement from an author who has firsthand experience with the difficulties and growth of the law enforcement profession. As long as society exists, there will be members who cannot self-regulate, and thus, policing will continue to be necessary. It is incredibly important that not only the police but also the rest of society understand the history and context of the law enforcement process, and this book is a great place to start that process.

*Reviewed by Dr. Kevin Jennings, Lincoln Memorial University*

---

IT IS INCREDIBLY IMPORTANT THAT NOT ONLY THE POLICE BUT ALSO THE REST OF SOCIETY UNDERSTAND THE HISTORY AND CONTEXT OF THE LAW ENFORCEMENT PROCESS, AND THIS BOOK IS A GREAT PLACE TO START THAT PROCESS.