MILITARIZING MAYBERRY AND BEYOND: MAKING SENSE OF AMERICAN PARAMILITARY POLICING

PETER B. KRASKA
LOUIS J. CUBELLIS

MILITARIZING MAYBERRY AND BEYOND: MAKING SENSE OF AMERICAN PARAMILITARY POLICING*

PETER B. KRASKA
LOUIS J. CUBELLIS
Eastern Kentucky University

National-level data, derived from a survey of all police agencies serving 25,000 to 50,000 people, document a previously unrecognized phenomenon: the growth in the number, an expansion of the activities, and the movement toward the normalization of small-locality police paramilitary units (PPU). Beside examining the implications of these findings for small-locality policing, we situate this phenomenon within broader paramilitary changes in the police. To begin the process of making theoretical sense of PPUs, we refute the commonsense notion that their rise is a response to changes in crime. We then contextualize the phenomenon by discussing the lingering influence of the military model, the recent popularity of paramilitary subculture, changing police tactics in the war on drugs, police reform efforts, and the quest to modernize the criminal justice apparatus. Noting similar developments in corrections, we conclude that this phenomenon should not be seen merely as a peculiar manifestation of get-tough policies. Instead it corresponds closely to attempts by the state, in times of high modernity, to further refine its administration of violence.

Crime and justice studies have a fundamental interest in society's formal reaction to the breaking of laws (Sutherland, Cressey, and Luckenbill 1992). Consequently criminologists have examined and debated the changing nature of the criminal justice enterprise. Some penological scholars argue, for instance, that correctional ideology and practice are aligning themselves more closely with the features of a postmodern or high-modern society (Christie 1994; Feeley and Simon 1992; Garland 1990, 1995). Policing scholars, on the other hand, focus predominantly on the "quiet revolution" occurring within the modern police institution, namely community and problem-oriented policing reforms (Kelling 1988).

Despite the democratic rhetoric connected with this "revolution," the discourse associated with military activity and war remains a core feature of crime-control ideology (e.g., the war on drugs, crime fighters). Indeed the military model, the armed forces, and a fear of martial control have all been influential in the development of police (Bailey 1995; Bittner 1970; Enloe 1980; Fogelson 1977; Manning 1977). Early police scholarship examined in depth the military model's theoretical and practical importance for civilian law enforcement (Bittner 1970; Fogelson 1977; Manning 1977). Contemporary discussions, however, rarely include the military model as a central influence on the police institution.

An important exception is Skolnick and Fyfe's (1993) recent discussion, similar to Bittner's in 1970, of the continued harmful influence of the military paradigm in contemporary policing. They argue that despite the recent rhetorical turn toward democratic reforms, the military model still lingers as a central feature of police culture and operation. One important manifestation of this paradigm which Skolnick and Fyfe overlooked is the adoption of the military special operations model,[1] embodied in what the international literature calls police paramilitary units (PPUs) (Brewer et al. 1988; Enloe 1980; Jefferson 1990; Reiner 1992). These units are known most commonly in the United States as SWAT or special response teams.

At first glance, the police paramilitary unit imagery exhibited at Waco and Ruby Ridge hardly appear to support the notion that a component of policing is moving toward a military approach. These events were sensational and alarming, but could be regarded as unique events that portended little about trends in law enforcement overall. Kraska and Kappeler (1997), however, in a national study of PPUs in medium-sized to large police departments, found that these units have not only grown in numbers but have become increasingly proactive.

The research presented here stems from a separate national survey of small-locality police agencies. Descriptive and longitudinal data on small-locality PPUs are presented, followed by the implications of these findings. In an effort to begin making theoretical sense of these data, we then situate the small-locality findings with the larger PPU phenomenon. We present additional analyses and discuss how the rise and normalization of PPUs correspond closely to macro-level changes in formal social control.

---

[1] For a more thorough discussion of the war/military paradigm and its connection to paramilitary policing, see Kraska (1996).

THE MILITARY MODEL AND PARMILITARY UNITS

In this study we shed light on two neglected areas of scholarship in criminology. First, Weisheit (1993:217) charges crime and justice studies with urban ethnocentrism when reviewing the scant literature on rural crime and justice issues. Although the literature includes some case studies of small police departments (Decker 1979; Gibbons 1972; Marenin and Copus 1991), few systematic examinations of these agencies exist (Weisheit, Falcone, and Wells 1996). The existing literature characterizes small-locality police as oriented toward crime prevention and social service.

Second, until recently no scholarly research on PPUs existed except in the international literature (Jefferson 1990; Reiner 1992).[2] Few police scholars have acknowledged that the military and the police have an inherent political connection: both possess a monopoly on and the prerogative to exercise the state-legitimized use of force (Bittner 1970; Enloe 1980; Kraska 1994; Turk 1982). Even internationally, police rarely organize and administer force along any other lines than the military-bureaucratic model, although the degree of militarization varies widely (Brewer et al. 1988; Chevigny 1995; Enloe 1980).

Police academics, however, have criticized the military model as playing a central role in numerous problems that plague policing (Angell 1971; Bittner 1970; Fogelson 1977; Fry and Berkes 1983; Klockars 1985; Skolnick and Fyfe 1993). The military-bureaucratic model, epitomized in the professional model of policing, acts as a barrier to police-community ties by fostering a "we/they" attitude. Military ideology and organization are also antithetical to more democratic approaches, both internal and external to a police agency. Finally, the military model encourages overemphasis on the crime-fighting function of police work and promotes a warlike approach to crime and drug problems.

In the "era" of community- and problem-oriented policing, it may seem inappropriate to examine trends toward rather than away from the military paradigm, particularly in smaller police jurisdictions. Yet today, the military model's influence on the police may be no less significant (Chevigny 1995; Kraska 1994; Skolnick and Fyfe 1993).

---

[2] *The Iron Fist and the Velvet Glove* (Crime and Social Justice Associates 1983) was the first work to identify and critique the SWAT phenomenon. Chambliss (1994) conducted field research on the Washington, DC rapid deployment unit (RDU) and discussed its "repressive" tendencies. Stevens and MacKenna (1988) conducted survey research on PPUs in 1986, which yielded only a 40 percent response rate. Their research focussed on administrative issues.

Cop-on-the-Beat Police versus Police Paramilitary Units

It is important to distinguish traditional police from policing with PPUs. In the images constructed by the media, PPUs are highly trained and disciplined teams of police officers housed in the largest agencies, which respond to the rare hostage, sniper, barricaded person, or terrorist. Police paramilitary units can be distinguished from what Enloe (1980) calls "cop-on-the beat policing" most simply by their appearance, their heavy weaponry, and their operations.

For a more exact identification, we must clarify the term *paramilitary unit*. We must distinguish between indications that are *necessary* in applying the PPU label and those which would only *contribute* to labeling these units and their activities as paramilitaristic.

First among the necessary factors, the unit must train and function as a military special operations team with a strict military command structure and discipline (or the pretense thereof). Examples include the U.S. Navy Seals teams and foreign police paramilitary squads such as the British Special Patrol Groups. This status as a unique team within a larger organization perpetuates the belief that these units and their members are "elite," a sentiment supported by their administrators (Kraska and Paulsen 1997).[3]

Second, the unit must have at the forefront of their function to threaten or use force collectively, and not always as an option of last resort (e.g., in conducting a no-knock drug raid).[4] Operationally, PPUs are deployed to deal with situations that require a team of police officers specifically trained to be use-of-force specialists. Historically they have operated as *reactive* units, handling only strictly defined, high-risk situations already in progress.

Finally, the unit must operate under legitimate state authority, and its activities must be sanctioned by the state and coordinated by a government agency. This criterion would exclude common thuggery, militia organizations, and guerilla groups.

Contributing indicators include the hardware they employ and their garb. These teams generally outfit themselves with black or urban camouflage BDUs (battle dress uniforms), lace-up combat

---

[3] Ninety-six percent ($n = 45$) of the police chiefs responding to this survey agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "Being part of a tactical unit is a prestigious position in the department."

[4] One department of 75 officers sent us professionally made trading cards depicting its 15-man unit. One of the cards was a photograph of the SRT posed around an armored personnel carrier. Members were dressed in full tactical gear; nylon-mesh masks covered their faces. The back of the card read, "When citizens need help they call the police. When the police need help they call SRT." The SRT's self-image as the cops' cops illuminates members' self-perception as specialists in the use of force.

boots, full-body armor, Kevlar helmets, and ninji-style hoods. PPUs' weapons and hardware include submachine guns, tactical shotguns, sniper rifles, percussion grenades, CS and OC gas (tear and pepper gas), surveillance equipment, and fortified personnel carriers.

It would seem improbable, given the crime prevention and service orientation attributed to small-locality police agencies, that they would want, need, or be willing to fund these expensive units.[5] Ethnographic research, however, uncovered a flourishing PPU movement in small-town police departments in the north central United States (Kraska 1996); this work overcame our doubts about using resources and time to conduct a national survey of these agencies.

METHODOLOGY

We designed and administered a 40-item (100-variable) survey to collect data on the formation, prevalence, and activities of PPUs in small localities. We developed a sampling frame of all U.S. police agencies (excluding federal agencies), serving jurisdictions between 25,000 and 50,000 citizens.[6] This list yielded a population of 770 law enforcement agencies. In March 1996 we made an initial mailing of the survey to this population of police agencies; the mailing included a letter of introduction and a copy of the survey instrument. Because police agencies are secretive and suspicious (Manning 1978; Skolnick 1966; Westley 1956), and because of the difficulty in researching sensitive topics in policing, the letter was written on a recognized sponsor's letterhead. It was signed by both the principal researcher (the first author) and the director of the professional organization that was sponsoring the research. It also noted the researchers' university affiliation. The language used in the survey encouraged respondents to recognize the study as administratively oriented. It is likely that this orientation, coupled with the authors' familiarity with PPU rhetoric and the promise of confidentiality and anonymity, aided our response rate.

Within five weeks, the first mailing yielded 433 completed surveys, a 56 percent response rate. After approximately six weeks, we mailed a second wave of surveys to the remaining 337

---

[5] In phone interviews with two departments that had just established PPUs, the informants estimated that start-up and first-year costs of a 15-member unit would be $200,000 to $250,000. This figure includes all "tactical gear" and first-year training costs.

[6] The demographic literature makes the break between smaller and larger cities at 50,000 (McGregor-Matlock and Woodhouse 1987; Shannon and Ross 1977). In labeling this study "small-locality," as opposed to "small-town," we included 37 county agencies that serve 25,000 to 50,000 people and employ 100 or fewer officers.

nonrespondents. In the second mailing we emphasized the high level of participation by other police agencies and urged cooperation from departments without a PPU. After six additional weeks, this follow-up mailing yielded an additional 119 surveys for a total response rate of 72 percent ($n = 552$).

Of the 552 returned surveys, we excluded 79 departments that employed more than 100 sworn officers, and thus obtained a more accurate representation of policing in small localities ($N = 473$).[7] The resulting sample of departments contained an average of 62 officers and a median of 60.

Of the 473 agencies, we selected 40 to provide identification and telephone information for semistructured follow-up phone interviews. We sought information on missing data and inquired into some of the more sensitive PPU activities, such as proactive patrol work. Interviews lasted five minutes to one hour; most lasted about 30 minutes.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Demographic and Descriptive Characteristics

Over 65 percent ($n = 311$) of the departments responded that they had a SWAT team. Of the remaining agencies (those without a PPU), 28 percent ($n = 46$) responded that they planned to develop a team within the next few years. The highest proportion of these agencies (24 percent) used the traditional acronym SWAT. Other departments employed an array of labels for the reorganized or more recently formed PPUs, including SRT (special response team, 21 percent) and ERU (emergency response unit, 15 percent).

Most of the units we surveyed were equipped with the latest "tactical gear." Over 80 percent of the departments had MP5 submachine guns, tactical semiautomatic shotguns, night vision equipment, sniper rifles, flash-bang grenades, tactical shields, battledress uniforms, and specialized "dynamic entry tools." Over 50 percent had electronic surveillance equipment, tactical helmets, tactical communication headsets, and a mobile command center (i.e., a SWAT van). Seven percent had armored personnel carriers.

Most of the officers responding to the survey were police supervisors. Thirty-eight percent ($n = 119$) could be categorized as high-level administrators (chief, sheriff, deputy chief, major, or captain); 50 percent were either sergeants or lieutenants ($n = 154$); the remainder were patrol officers or deputy sheriffs.

---

[7] Although the N is reduced by truncating the population subset at the 100-officer level, analysis of the larger data set revealed no appreciable differences in our findings.

Because the departments were relatively small, it was important to understand how PPUs fit into these agencies' organizational structures. Seven percent ($n = 22$) of the PPUs were maintained full-time; 93 percent, were classified as a part-time arrangement ($n = 288$). Almost 74 percent ($n = 230$) of the PPUs served only one department, while 18 percent ($n = 58$) were multijurisdictional. Follow-up phone interviews revealed that many extremely small departments offset the high costs of forming and operating a paramilitary unit by participating in regional units. Some of these multijurisdictional operations involved 50 to 60 smaller agencies.[8]

There were 17.7 paramilitary officers for every 100 sworn persons. We realize that this finding is due mainly to departmental size. As we discuss later, the proximity of paramilitary police officers to regular patrol officers (in fact, most officers in small-town PPUs function as both) is important in assessing the potential cultural and operational effects of these units on the larger organization.

PPU Activities over Time

Analysis of the longitudinal data revealed important trends in the periods during which PPUs were formed (see Figure 1). Only 20 percent ($n = 63$) of today's PPUs existed at the beginning of 1980. By the end of 1984, the number had risen to 121, a 92 percent increase. This increase foreshadowed the developments in the second half of the 1980s. The number of PPUs formed between 1985 and 1990 increased sharply: 130 new units came into existence during this period, bringing the total to 251 and representing an increase of 107 percent. Between 1985 and 1995, the number of paramilitary units in agencies serving small jurisdictions increased by 157 percent. This growth is likely to continue. If we consider that 46 of the departments surveyed responded that they would establish a unit within the next few years, three-fourths of departments employing 100 or fewer officers and serving 25,000 to 50,000 persons will have a PPU by the turn of the century.

The formation of numerous but relatively inactive units, however, would lessen the significance of these data. Therefore we collected baseline data on the number of call-outs performed by each department beginning in 1980; we requested longitudinal data from

---

[8] Some police administrators in small towns and rural counties are developing multijurisdictional PPUs by using existing arrangements designed to assist small communities in natural disasters. A paper agency is formed when departments participating in the disaster relief arrangement also donate one to three officers and associated funds to be a part of a fully operational 40- to 60-member PPU. Several interviewees claimed that their multijurisdictional PPUs gradually developed an independence from political and community oversight; this left them free to collaborate with state police agencies, with little political or community scrutiny.
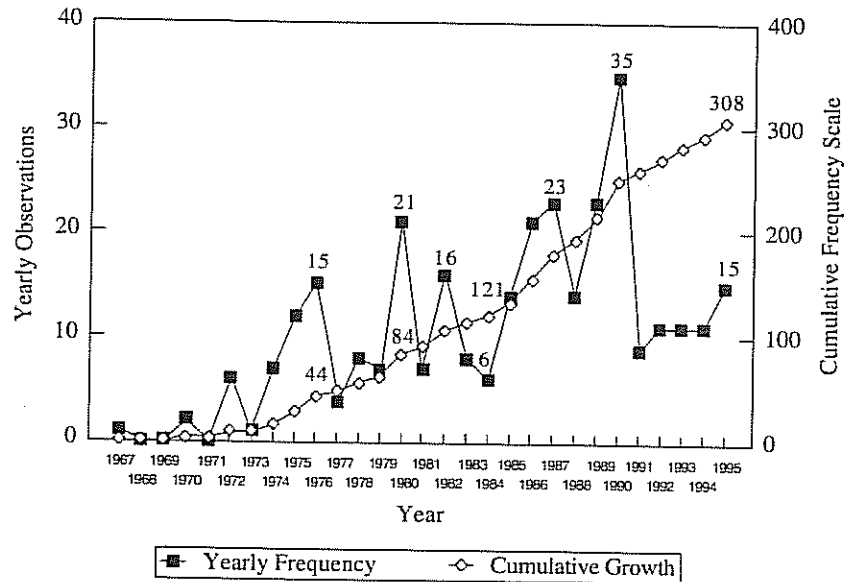
Figure 1.   Cumulative Growth of PPUs, Showing Number of New PPUs Formed Each Year.

1980 to the end of 1995. "Call-outs" included any activity requiring deployment of the unit, such as barricaded persons, hostages, terrorists, civil disturbances, and the serving of high-risk search and arrest warrants. These data do not include activities related to proactive patrol work by PPUs.

The number of call-outs from 1980 to 1984 remained relatively stable at an average of 3.6 to 3.8 per year (see Table 1). Beginning in 1985, the mean number increased steadily from 4.5 in 1985 to slightly over 12 by the end of 1995. The median rose from 4 in 1985 to 9 in 1995. Between 1980 and 1995 the mean number of call-outs increased by 238 percent.

The total number of call-outs, because of the increase in the number of PPUs in the last 10 years, illustrates more clearly the aggragate rise in police paramilitary activities (see Table 1). In 1980 the total was 220. By 1985 the number had more than doubled to 481, by 1988 it had quadrupled to 960, and by the end of 1995 it had reached 3,715, a total increase of 1,589 percent.

For 1995, traditional reactive functions associated with SWAT units accounted for a surprisingly small proportion of call-outs. Hostage situations ($n = 193$; 5 percent), civil disturbances ($n = 52$; 1 percent), and terrorist incidents ($n = 5$; .1 percent) were quite rare. Barricaded persons accounted for a higher proportion ($n = 874$; 24

Table 1.   Selected Characteristics of Call-Out Data

Year	Mean	Median	Number of Call-Outs	Percentage Increase[a]
1980	3.7	3.0	220	N/A
1981	3.7	3.0	244	10.9
1982	3.6	3.0	274	24.6
1983	3.7	3.0	322	46.4
1984	3.8	3.0	350	59.1
1985	4.5	4.0	481	118.6
1986	5.5	4.0	685	211.4
1987	6.7	4.5	960	336.4
1988	7.1	4.0	1,151	423.2
1989	8.9	5.0	1,633	642.3
1990	10.3	5.0	2,311	950.5
1991	11.1	6.0	2,610	1,086.4
1992	12.1	7.0	3,052	1,287.3
1993	12.0	8.0	3,255	1,379.6
1994	12.2	8.0	3,452	1,469.1
1995	12.5	9.0	3,715	1,588.6

[a] Within the percentage increase column, 1980 is the base year for all calculations.

percent). By far the most common use of these units was for executing search and arrest warrants: 66 percent ($n = 466$) of the units' call-outs belonged to this category.[9]

Figure 2 displays the number of departments each year that began using their paramilitary units to execute warrants. The total number of departments using PPUs for this purpose has increased steadily over the last 20 years, and increased exponentially (342 percent) between 1985 and 1995. Even though the overall number of units has increased, the percentage of units engaged in warrant work has grown significantly as well. For instance, as shown in Table 2, only 40 percent of PPUs were used in this capacity in 1980. This number had risen to 49 percent by 1985, to 81 percent by the end of 1990, and to 94 percent by the end of 1995. These data indicate a dramatic shift in PPUs' activity.

Serving warrants should not be interpreted as a "reactive" deployment of the unit when a felony arrest warrant is served on a high-risk suspect after a thorough investigation. Phone interviews revealed that warrant work consisted almost exclusively of proactive, no-knock "raids" for the purpose of investigating a residence and collecting evidence such as drugs, guns, and money. About 10 percent of the small-locality departments served 20 to 120 investigatory search warrants a year.

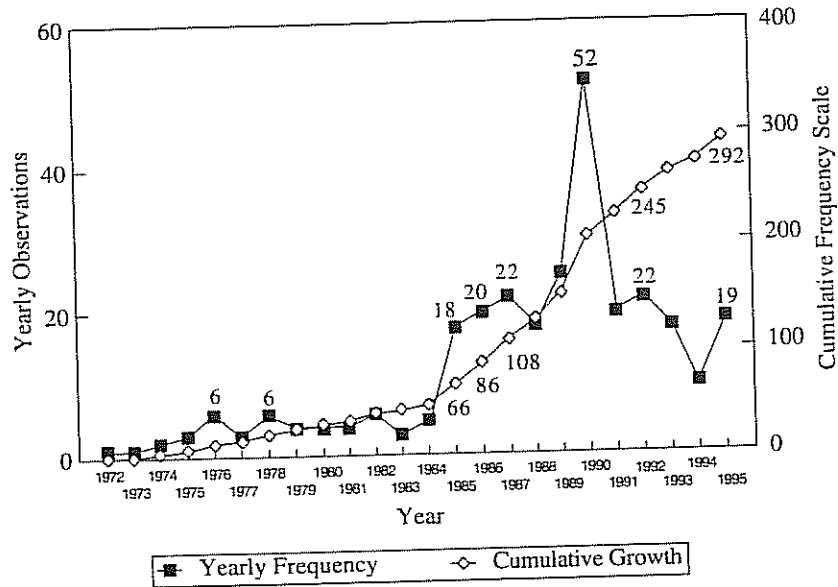[9] Three percent ($n = 125$) of call-outs were categorized as "other."

Figure 2. Years in Which PPUs Began Warrant/Drug Raids

Possibly an even more controversial use of PPUs was their deployment as a patrol force. Seventeen percent of the departments with a paramilitary unit ($n = 55$) used the unit as a proactive patrol

Table 2. Proportion of PPUs Conducting Warrant Work for Selected Years

	Number of Units in Existence	Number of Units Used for Warrants	Percentage Engaged in Warrant Work
1984	121	48	39.67
1985	135	66	48.89
1990	251	203	80.88
1995	311	292	93.89

force in "high-crime" areas within their jurisdiction. Although a few PPUs performed this function before 1989 ($n = 6$), most of the increase has occurred since then ($n = 49$, a 717 percent increase; see Figure 3). Phone interviewees described a variety of approaches used to deploy these units as patrol teams. Some PPUs patrolled in BDUs and carried MP5 submachine guns. These units responded only to the most serious call for service; they spent most of their

time conducting "terry-stops."[10] Other departments used similar
tactics but dressed less like a military unit (in jeans and jackets
identifying their unit) and carried only 9mm service revolvers and
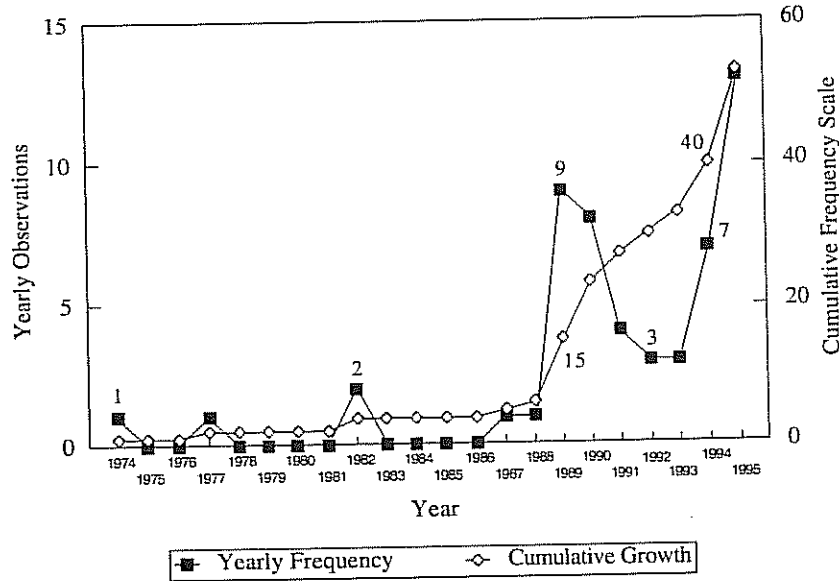semiautomatic shotguns.

Figure 3.   Years in Which PPUs Began Proactive Patrol

Finally, the PPUs' training deserves mention. Training holds a
central place in the police paramilitary subculture (Kraska 1996;
Kraska and Paulsen forthcoming). As with military special opera-
tions teams such as the Navy Seals and the Army Rangers, these
units' elite status is based in part on their reputation for receiving
extensive training in "tactical or special operations."

In medium-sized to large police organizations, each officer in a
paramilitary unit receives an average of 225 hours of formal train-
ing per year (Kraska and Kappeler 1997). Most PPU commanders
agreed that if a department is moderately active in conducting call-
outs (two per month), a tactical officer needs at least 220 hours of
training a year. If the unit conducts relatively few call-outs (three a
year), it should provide at least an additional 50 hours of formal

----

[10] Interviews revealed that when paramilitary units conducted proactive pa-
trols, they were not required to answer routine calls for service. These units instead
were deployed into "high-crime" neighborhoods to conduct street interrogations of
"suspicious" pedestrians, occupants of automobiles, and even persons in "drug
houses." Three departments said that it was not unusual for their units to conduct
"warrantless dynamic entries" into private residences if they saw suspected drug
dealers entering a residence to elude police interrogation.

training per year. The PPUs housed in the small-locality depart-
ments studied here conducted a yearly average of only 106 hours of
formal training per officer. Almost 53 percent of these departments
conducted 100 or fewer hours of training per year; 20 percent pro-
vided their tactical officers with 50 or fewer hours.

Police paramilitary teams often draw their expertise and train-
ing from actual military special operations teams such as the Navy
Seals and the Army Rangers (Kraska and Kappeler 1997). Surpris-
ingly, even in these smaller jurisdictions, 32 percent ($n = 101$) of the
respondents answered "yes" when asked whether they trained with
active-duty military experts in special operations. Thirty-one per-
cent ($n = 96$) responded that they were influenced by "police officers
with special operations experience in the military." The two most
popular sources of PPU training and/or expertise were the FBI and
for-profit, tactical training schools. Forty-one percent ($n = 129$) of
the PPUs worked with the FBI; 63 percent ($n = 196$) used private
tactical schools.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SMALL LOCALITIES: THE
DANGERS OF MILITARIZING MAYBERRY

The data demonstrate a significant growth in the number of
PPUs and a precipitous rise in PPU activity in small jurisdictions.
Because small-locality PPUs engage in proactive patrolling and
serve investigatory search warrants, these findings also document
the normalization of the PPU approach into small-town police work.
Most likely we captured these trends in the midst of their
development.[11]

Previous research assessing macro-level shifts in police prac-
tices focused mainly on "big-city policy" (Fogelson 1977). Our re-
search adds a new dimension to the underresearched area of small-
locality policing by raising questions about the assumption that
these agencies are exclusively service-oriented. Paramilitary units
in small towns are even more significant than in big cities because
urban police officials and politicians can justify, at least partially, a
paramilitary approach to crime and drugs in the media-constructed
image of a hostile, crime-ridden, urban environment. How do we
reconcile this same type of paramilitary policing imagery and activ-
ity in "Mayberry"?

It would be tempting to marginalize this paramilitary phenom-
enon as an interesting appendage of the multidimensional nature of

---

[11] Evidence for this assertion includes the large number of police departments
planning to establish a PPU in the future, the recent steep growth in PPUs doing
warrant and patrol work, and the fact that much of these data comes from newly
formed units.

modern police. Not only do the findings on the normalization of small-locality PPUs into routine police work neutralize this argument, it is also critical to recall that there are almost 18 police paramilitary officers for every 100 regular patrol officer in these small localities. Most of these PPU officers serve in the organization as regular patrol officers during their normal duties. In addition, police administrators view these officers as the "elite" or the "cops' cops" (see footnote 3). These factors add credence to the possibility that the paramilitary team model today represents a significant cultural and operational influence on small-locality police organizations as a whole (and possibly will do so more strongly in the future).

The small number of training hours in these PPUs raises another important issue: the degree to which these teams approximate the ideal of highly trained, proficient squads of use-of-force specialists. In keeping with the decentralized nature of American policing, departments form these squads in an ad hoc fashion, with no regulatory body or set of standards. Expertise in "tactical operations" often is gained from reading books, watching videotapes, and possibly visiting a 3- to 5-day for-profit, paramilitary training camp.

In view of these conditions, strict military discipline, a rigid command structure, and tight administrative oversight may not be the norm in Mayberry. PPU members in this study claimed autonomy from direct administrative supervision. As one team commander stated, "We're left alone. The brass knows that we know what we're doing more than they do. One of the reasons we're so effective is we have the freedom to handle situations and problems as we see best." Bock (1995) documents how the autonomy enjoyed by these PPUs, even at the federal level, carries high potential for abuse, particularly in serving no-knock search warrants.

Another development that must be tracked closely are departments' tendency to expand paramilitary units' range of applications, especially if we consider their high cost (see footnote 5) and the extreme concern about officers' safety in the police subculture (Skolnick 1966; Van Maanen 1978). PPUs are not only creeping into proactive functions; their existence in small localities also might be contributing to a broader definition of reactive situations requiring a paramilitary response. One small-locality SWAT commander gave the following justification for an inordinately large number of PPU deployments for barricaded suspects in relation to a departmental policy that requires patrol officers to ask "barricades" only once to surrender:

If the subject refuses once, the SWAT unit is called in, and we almost always either gas 'em or toss in a flash-bang grenade. We're not gonna hang around for hours and beg, and we're sure not going to get killed because we're indecisive.[12]

BEYOND MAYBERRY: EXPLAINING PARAMILITARY UNIT POLICING

Theoretical and Causal Analysis

To understand the PPU phenomenon more clearly, we must situate small-locality PPUs within broader changes in the police institution and in formal social control in general. We attempt here to make theoretical sense of the rise and normalization of paramilitary policing.

Trends in small-locality policing lag, by roughly three years, nearly identical shifts in larger departments (see Kraska and Kappeler 1997). Small-locality paramilitary policing thus follows an even more significant movement in medium-sized to large police agencies. If we combine the data from larger departments with those cited in this study, we see that the paramilitary unit approach is becoming an integral part of contemporary policing in all departments serving localities with 25,000 or more people. In 1995 over 77 percent of police departments had paramilitary units, an increase of almost 48 percent since 1985. The returned surveys alone documented 29,962 paramilitary deployments in 1995, a 939 percent increase over the 2,884 call-outs of 1980. Over 20 percent of all departments with PPUs use the units for proactive patrol work, a 257 percent increase since the beginning of 1989.

Our assertion that these data represent a shift in the police institution should not be interpreted as the announcement of a mutually exclusive shift — that is, the only shift. The police institution has probably shifted as well toward the rhetoric and activities associated with community policing. National-level longitudinal data documenting the degree to which the police institution has

---

12   One of the anonymous reviewers of this paper claimed that similar changes are taking place in hostage/barricade situations:

Instead of following the tried and true 25-year-old practice of negotiating for a bloodless resolution no matter how long it takes, some departments seem to have adopted the practice of turning scenes over to SWAT after a relatively short time. . . . SWAT then attempts to implement a "tactical resolution" which usually ends in one or more dead bodies. Indeed, members of one SWAT team even told me that their department has given up on negotiating for a bloodless resolution no matter how long it takes. Instead, they have adopted the "LA procedure" which consists of negotiating with hostage takers or barricaded persons for the purpose of putting them in position for a "tactical resolution": an "instantly catastrophic" shot by a sniper to the cerebral cortex.

structurally transformed and engaged in activities associated with community policing over time, however, have yet to surface (see Maguire forthcoming).[13] As we argue below, it is likely that the two approaches are increasing simultaneously.

As with any macro-social shift, an explanation for the rise of PPUs will likely involve a multitude of intersecting and overlapping factors forming a complex theoretical mix of social, political, economic, and cultural influences. Because of the shortage of relevant longitudinal, national-level data, valid theory testing and model building will be difficult.

Nonetheless we attempted to determine what factors accounted for variance in the dependent variables, paramilitary unit formation and paramilitary unit call-outs ($n = 846$). We collected 73 national-level independent variables that measured economic trends and trends in crime rates, drug use, fear of crime, and criminal justice activity. Using varimax factor analysis and multiple regression, as well as "differencing" to control for the influence of time (Lafree and Drass 1996), we found that no single variable or construct accounted for a significant amount of variance in our depedent variables.[14]

The inability to account for variance by using these indepedent variables may be important in itself. We were especially interested in additional testing of the commonsense notion that the rise of PPUs represents a rational reaction by police to changes in crime. Therefore we tested, agency by agency, whether PPU activity corresponds to the occurrence of violent crime. We compared call-out rates from 1980 to 1995, for each jurisdiction, to a UCR violent-crime composite for each of those jurisdictions. We derived the UCR composite by summing the homicide, rape, and robbery rates for each of the responding locations for each year from 1980 through 1995. We excluded aggravated assault rates on the basis of recommendations in the literature (Gove, Hughes and Geerken 1985; Lafree and Drass 1996).

Because the data revealed time-based dependence, we differenced the call-out and crime measures at the first level to make them stationary (i.e., to remove the effects of time). A canonical analysis, using the 15 call-out variables and the 15 crime variables for each jurisdiction, revealed that the canonical correlation value

---

[13] On the basis of data from 1987–1993, Maguire (forthcoming) finds no significant differences in the extent of structural change between agencies that identify themselves as community policing departments and agencies that do not.

[14] Currently we are collecting data relevant to social threat theory for each of the 846 jurisdictions for 1995. The objective is to determine which (if any) social threat variables account for the variance in paramilitary deployments across jurisdictions.

of .59 differed significantly from zero at the .000 level. The Stewart-Love index of redundancy, which is directly analogous to the R^2 statistic in multiple regression and is interpreted similarly (Hair et al. 1995), allowed us to determine that only 6.63 percent of the variance in the call-out data was explained by the violent crime composites. Thus we could reasonably exclude changes in violent crime as an important factor explaining the activities of PPUs.

Beyond the Numbers: A Theoretical Exposition

To make sense of this phenomenon beyond the commonsense notion that it reflects a rational response to crime, we must first recognize that the specter of the military model still haunts the real world of contemporary policing, despite the recent rhetoric of democratic reforms. In learning that a component of the police institution is reorganizing itself and conducting operations that could be characterized as militaristic, we find strong support for the thesis that the military model is still a powerful force guiding the ideology and activities of American police. This should not be surprising considering the war/military paradigm remains an authoritative framework for crime-control thinking and action by politicians, bureaucrats, the media, and much of the public (Sherry 1995).

To understand the revival of militarism in policing, we must point out the close identification between the police paramilitary subculture associated with PPUs and the recent growth of a larger paramilitary culture in the United States during the Reagan-Bush era, and especially since the end of the cold war (Gibson 1994; Hamm 1993; Kraska 1996). Gibson (1994) believes that a ubiquitous culture of paramilitarism has arisen in the last 15 years. Indications include the popularity of paramilitary themes in films, movies, politics, and the news media during the 1980s; the rise of PPUs at the federal and local levels; the popularity of military special operations teams such as the Navy Seals, the Army Rangers, and the Delta Force; the rise of informal militia/paramilitary groups; and the paramilitarism found in some urban gangs (Gibson 1994).

Within this larger culture, the police paramilitary subculture contains a status hierarchy with military special operations squads such as the Navy Seals at the top, followed by FBI, and BATF police paramilitary teams, large metropolitan paramilitary units, and, finally, PPUs in smaller jurisdictions (Kraska 1996). In the past decade an enormous police paramilitary community has developed, which includes a 10,000-member professional organization, numerous periodicals, and even its own artwork.

A complex of for-profit training, weapons, and equipment suppliers heavily promotes the culture at police shows, in police magazine advertisements, and in police paramilitary training programs sponsored by gun manufacturers such as Heckler and Koch and Smith and Wesson. As evidenced by data in this study, the U.S. armed forces also participate, particularly since the end of the cold war (Kraska 1996). The allure of police paramilitary subculture stems from the enjoyment, excitement, high status, and male camaraderie that accompany the heavy weaponry, new technologies, dangerous assignments, and heightened anticipation of using force in most PPU work (Kraska 1996; Kraska and Paulsen 1997).

Ideologically the government's latest war on drugs, with its rhetoric and actions associated with doing battle (drug war boot camps, drugs as a threat to national security, and the use of the U.S. armed forces), dovetails nicely with Gibson's thesis on the growth of paramilitary culture. The drug war — beginning in the early 1980s, peaking in the late 1980s, and continuing through the 1990s — has profoundly affected all aspects of the criminal justice system (Irwin and Austin 1997; Miller 1996). It is no coincidence that the police cracked down on drugs in economically deprived areas concurrently with the great increase in investigatory, no-knock drug raids, conducted mostly by PPUs. Indeed, most of the increases in paramilitary deployments began in 1988, at the apex of drug war activity and hysteria. Nearly all police officials ($n = 126$) in small and large agencies explained in phone interviews that their agency either formed its PPU or dramatically increased the activities of its PPU to conduct raids on private residences in search of drugs, guns, and "drug money."

The escalation of the drug war and the increase in PPUs coincide as well with reformers' calls for the police to alter their operational focus. Reformers advocate a change from *reacting* to individual calls for service with one or two officers to adopting a *proactive* model, which establishes "teams" of officers that work collectively to "maintain order" or solve "community problems" (Goldstein 1990; Kelling 1988; Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux 1990). As we found in this research, and according to data from larger departments (Kraska and Kappeler 1997), police paramilitary teams are used as proactive patrol forces to "suppress" highly politicized problems such as guns, drugs, gangs, and community disorder in economically deprived areas. In fact, 63 percent of police agencies serving 25,000 people or more agreed or strongly agreed that PPUs "play an important role in community policing strategies." One PPU commander clarified the rationale behind this belief:

> We conduct a lot of saturation patrol. We do "terry stops" and "aggressive" field interviews. These tactics are successful as long as the pressure stays on relentlessly. The key to our success is that we're an elite crime-fighting team that's not bogged down in the regular bureaucracy. We focus on *"quality of life"* issues like illegal parking, loud music, bums, neighbor troubles. We have the freedom to stay in a hot area and clean it up — particularly gangs. Our tactical enforcement team works nicely with our department's emphasis on community policing (emphasis added).

At first glance one might assume that a trend toward militarization must be in opposition to the community policing "revolution." In the real world of policing, however, some police officials are interpreting the reformers' call to adopt a proactive stance, and to "actively create a climate of order" (Bayley 1996), as requiring a more aggressive, indeed militaristic approach to enforcing law and order among the "dangerous classes." At least in their minds, PPUs do not supplant a CP or POP approach; they operate in harmony. This reasoning is exemplified most clearly in the recent crackdown on crime and drugs by New York city politicians and police officials.[15]

The rise and the normalization of PPUs, then, correspond to changes in popular culture, drug control operations, and police reform efforts. It should be apparent that a complex combination of factors plays a role in this phenomenon. To explain the final and perhaps most compelling way in which the rise of PPUs corresponds to larger shifts in formal social control, we must revisit the essence of paramilitary unit functioning: PPUs are deployed to deal with situations that police agencies perceive as requiring a team of officers with a strong focus on the threatened or actual use of violence. Street-level policing has always been individually based, discretionary, and unregulated (Bittner 1970; Skolnick 1966). Does this shift in policing, away from individual, situational uses of violence and toward the collective use of violence by "well-managed" teams of officers, coincide with larger trends in formal social control?

A comparable development in scope, form, and function is occurring in corrections. It cross-validates the notion that paramilitary units may indicate *modernizing* changes in the handling of

---

[15] NYPD officials, with support from the Harvard School of Government, are quite vocal in claiming that their unique brand of proactive, aggressive policing has reduced crime dramatically. In April 1996, NYPD launched a "3,000"-officer offensive to "crush drug trafficking and the drug business," employing the same tactics as discussed in this research (Kraus 1996:1). NYPD is also aggressively marketing its "success strategy" to other police agencies via national conferences.

violence by social control agents in the larger criminal justice apparatus (Christie 1994; Feeley and Simon 1992; Garland 1990). Correctional administrators have adopted the paramilitary unit model in attempting to *rationalize* (in the Weberian sense) correctional officers' use of violence through the establishment of "special operations" or "emergency response" teams. As has occurred in policing, "many departments of corrections created their own emergency response teams modeling them after Police SWAT Teams and military commando units such as the Army Green Beret Special Forces and the Navy Seal Teams" (Bryan 1995:2). These units, originally designed to react to only the most serious inmate disturbances, have expanded their range of functions in the last few years to include cell searches, lesser inmate disturbances, "extractions" of inmates from cells, and the forced administration of medicines (Beard 1994; Bryan 1995).

Why is this paramilitary model so appealing to both corrections and policing? As note above, part of the answer lies generally in the seductive powers of paramilitary unit subculture as promoted by for-profit industry. The techno-warrior garb, heavy weaponry, sophisticated technology, hypermasculinity, and "real-work" functions are nothing less than intoxicating for paramilitary unit participants and those who aspire to work in such units (Kraska 1996; Kraska and Paulsen 1997).

An additional source of allure is the hope that bureaucracies, by creating "violence specialists," can finally control, manage, and make more efficient the state-administered force which is their prerogative. This faith in professionalizing violence by adopting the military model has a long history in both corrections and policing. Thus, to much of the practicing criminal justice community, the recent implementation of the military special operations model represents not a regression in the administration of justice but a step toward further modernizing and refining state violence.

In sum, militarizing state force does not only signal a falling back on a culture of militarism and crude state power in the war on crime and drugs. It also corresponds closely to developments documented by Christie (1994), Cohen (1985), Ericson (1994), Feely and Simon (1992, 1994), Garland (1990, 1995), Manning (1992, 1993), and of course Foucault (1977). All of these scholars have theorized on what they view as an unpromising, fundamental shift in formal social control: an acceleration of criminal law agencies' uncritical implementation of practices consistent with the tenets of "high-modernity" — accentuated standardization, routinization, technical efficiency, scientificazation, risk minimization, technologicalization, actuarial thinking, the "what works" fetish, moral indifference, and

a focus on aggregate populations — in a quest to more efficiently manage those who threaten state order. The rise and the normalization of PPUs represents, therefore, an adaptation to conditions of high-modernity in the crime war.

POLICY SCIENCE AND GENERAL SCHWARTZKOPF

We cannot assume, however, that this quest for rationality will lead to rational outcomes. Ritzer (1993:121) draws from Weber in asserting that "rational systems inevitably spawn a series of irrationalities that serve to limit, ultimately compromise, and perhaps even undermine, their rationality." The central policy issue related to PPUs is the degree to which this phenomenon constrains police violence, as intended, or escalates it. Except for individual departments, no systematic data have been compiled on the extent to which these units use force. The first author interviewed officials from large and small police departments who claimed that their units had never discharged weapons during a deployment; others stated that they often discharged their weapons on call-outs; some admitted shooting innocent people; and some described casualties to officers caused by "friendly fire."

The paramilitary community is adamant about PPUs' life-saving potential. Few could argue against using well-trained specialists to respond to serious terrorist or hostage situations. Even within these narrow reactive functions, however, we need only recall Waco and Ruby Ridge to appreciate what the adaptation of the paramilitary model implies for civilian law enforcement. Valid systemwide data on PPUs' use of force is needed but will be difficult to obtain.

To determine the rationality of this approach, however, we must consider issues broader than whether these units "save lives" and how often weapons are discharged. Researchers also must track and assess PPUs' "mission creep" into mainstream policing functions. As evidenced by the broad definition of "barricades" in some small-locality agencies, the normalization of the PPU approach carries high potential for expanding the use-of-force options available to the police and the circumstances in which they are utilized in a type of police violence net widening. "Less-lethal technologies," for instance, are becoming extremely popular among PPUs (Kraska 1996).

These data also demonstrate the expansion of police power in conducting contraband raids. PPUs provide the police institution with a new tool for conducting a crude form of investigation into drug and gun law violations inside private residences. This new

approach to drug and gun law enforcement is not necessarily a reaction to a dangerous existing condition (such as a hostage situation). Rather, it is a police-initiated *proactive* approach, which itself manufactures dangerous situations.

Policy research as it applies to police militarization, however, can provide only limited guidance. The debate on paramilitary policing in the British literature illustrates clearly that normative concerns play a central role in assessing its desirability (Jefferson 1990; Reiner 1992). This issue involves heartfelt beliefs, values, and morals. To many people, even among academics, the military model represents constraint, discipline, honor, control, competence, and even a type of patriotism. To others it stands for tyranny, state violence, human rights abuses, war, and an ideology which stresses that problems are best handled by technologized state force. Some will see the rise and normalization of PPUs as a necessary and rational approach to today's crime, gang, and drug problems; others will view it as bureaucracy building and as evidence of a government in crisis moving toward a police state.

Crime and justice academicians nevertheless must be careful not to succumb to what Ericson calls "General Schwartzkopf criminology": an uncritical policy science approach that emphasizes "how military-type bureaucracy, discipline, technology, deployment and coercion fight criminal sources of insecurity" (Ericson and Carriere 1994:100). The ideological trappings of the General Schwartzkopf approach lie in its close association with military professionalism, scientific rationality, advanced technology, and expedient, value-neutral problem solving through the use or threat of force. Scholars must remain skeptical about applying these tenets of high-modern militarism to the criminal justice apparatus, and must watch closely for the irrationalities it is likely to spawn.

REFERENCES

Angell, J.E. 1971. "Toward an Alternative to the Classic Police Organizational Arrangements: A Democratic Model." *Criminology* 9:195-206.

Bailey, W.G. 1995. *The Encyclopedia of Police Science*, 2nd ed. New York: Garland.

Bayley, D.H. 1994. *Police for the Future*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Beard, J.A. 1994. "Using Special Management Units to Control Inmate Violence." *Corrections Today* (August):88-91.

Bittner, E. 1970. *The Functions of Police in Modern Society*. Chevy Chase: National Clearinghouse for Mental Health.

Bock, A.W. 1995. *Ambush at Ruby Ridge: How Governmental Agents Set Randy Weaver Up and Took His Family Down*. Irvine, CA: Dickens.

Brewer, J.D., A. Guelke, I. Hume, E. Moxon-Browne, and R. Wolford. 1988. *The Police, Public Order and the State*. New York: St. Martin's.

Bryan, D. 1995. "Emergency Response Teams: A Prison's First Line of Defense." *Corrections Compendium* 20(7):1-13.

Chambliss, W.J. 1994. "Policing the Ghetto Underclass: The Politics of Law and Law Enforcement." *Social Problems* 41:177–94.

Chevigny, P. 1995. *Edge of the Knife: Police Violence in the Americas*. New York: Free Press.

Christie, N. 1994. *Crime Control as Industry: Toward GULAGS, Western Style*. New York: Routledge.

Cohen, S. 1985. *Visions of Social Control: Crime, Punishment and Classification*. Cambridge: Polity.

Crime and Social Justice Associates. 1983. *The Iron Fist and the Velvet Glove: An Analysis of the U.S. Police*. 3d ed. San Francisco: Garret.

Decker, S. 1979. "The Rural County Sheriff: An Issue in Social Control." *Criminal Justice Review* 4:97–111.

Enloe, C. 1980. "Police, Military, and Ethnicity: Foundations of State Power." New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.

Ericson, R. 1994. "The Division of Expert Knowledge in Policing and Security." *British Journal of Sociology* 45:149–70.

Ericson, R. and K. Carriere. 1994. "The Fragmentation of Criminology." Pp. 89–109 in *The Futures of Criminology* edited by D. Nelken. Beverly Hills: Sage.

Feeley, M. and J. Simon. 1992. "The New Penology." *Criminology* 39:449–74.

———. 1994. "Actuarial Justice: The Emerging New Criminal Law." Pp. 173–201 in *The Futures of Criminology*, edited by D. Nelken. Beverly Hills: Sage.

Fogelson, R.M. 1977. *Big-City Police*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Foucault, M. 1977. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage.

Fry, L.W. and L.J. Berkes. 1983. "The Paramilitary Police Model: An Organizational Misfit." *Human Organization* 42:225–34.

Garland, D. 1990. *Punishment and Modern Society: A Study in Social Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

———. 1995. "Penal Modernism and Postmodernism." Pp. 181–210 in *Punishment and Social Control: Essays in Honor of Sheldon L. Messinger*, edited by T.G. Blomber and S. Cohen. New York: Aldine.

Gibons, D.C. 1972. "Crime in the Hinterland." *Criminology* 10:177–91.

Gibson, J.W. 1994. *Warrior Dreams: Manhood in Post-Vietnam America*. New York: Hill and Wang.

Goldstein, H. 1990. *Problem-Oriented Policing*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Gove, W.R., M. Hughes, and M. Geerken. 1985. "Are Uniform Crime Reports a Valid Indicator of the Index Crimes? An Affirmative Answers with Minor Qualifications." *Criminology* 23:111–20.

Hair, J.F., Jr., R.e. Anderson, R.L. Tatham, and W.C. Black. 1995. *Multivariate Data Analysis with Readings*. 4th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Hamm, M.S. 1993. *American Skinheads: The Criminology and Control of Hate Crime*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Irwin, J. and J. Austin. 1997. *It's About Time: America's Imprisonment Binge*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Jefferson, T. 1990. *The Case against Paramilitary Policing*. Bristol, PA: Open University Press.

Kelling, G.L. 1988. *Police and Communities: The Quiet Revolution*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice.

Klockars, C.B. 1985. *The Idea of Police*. Beverly Hills: Sage.

Kraska, P.B. 1994. "The Police and the Military in the Post-Cold War Era: Streamlining the State's Use of Force Entities in the Drug War." *Police Forum* 4:1–8.

———. 1996. "Enjoying Militarism: Political/Personal Dilemmas in Studying U.S. Police Paramilitary Units." *Justice Quarterly* 13:405–29.

Kraska, P.B. and V.E. Kappeler. 1997. "Militarizing American Police: The Rise and Normalization of Paramilitary Units." *Social Problems* 44:1–18.

Kraska, P.B. and D.J. Paulsen. 1997. "Grounded Research into U.S. Paramilitary Policing: Forging the Iron Fist inside the Velvet Glove." *Policing and Society* 7:253-70.

Kraus, C. 1996. "NYC Police to Start Big Drug Offensive Using New Approach." Posted on World Wide Web, April 4. *New York Times* Company.

LaFree, G. and K.A. Drass. 1996. "The Effects of Changes in Intraracial Income Inequality and Educational Attainment on Changes in Arrest Rates for African Americans and Whites, 1957 to 1990." *American Sociological Review* 61:614–34.

Maguire, E.R. Forthcoming. "Structural Changes in Large Municipal Police Organizations during the Community Policing Era." *Justice Quarterly*.

Manning, P.K. 1977. *Police Work: The Social Organization of Policing*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

———. 1978. "The Police: Mandate, Strategies and Appearances." Pp. 53–70 in *Policing: A View from the Street*, edited by P.K. Manning and J. Van Maanen. Chicago: Goodyear.

———. 1992. "Economic Rhetoric and Policing Reform." *Criminal Justice Research Bulletin* 7:1–8.

———. 1993. "The Preventive Conceit: The Black Box in Market Context." *American Behavioral Scientist* 36:639–50.

Marenin, O. and G. Copus. 1991. "Policing Rural Alaska: The Village Public Safety Officer (VPSO) Program." *American Journal of Police* 10:1–26.

McGregor-Matlock, L. and L. Woodhouse. 1987. "The State of the Small City: A Survey of the Nation's Cities and Towns under 50,000." Washington, DC: National League of Cities.

Miller, J.G. 1996. *Search and Destroy: African-American Males in the Criminal Justice System*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Reiner, R. 1992. *The Politics of the Police*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Ritzer, G. 1993. *The McDonaldization of Society: An Investigation into the Changing Character of Contemporary Social Life*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge.

Shannon, J. and J. Ross. 1977. "Cities: Their Increasing Dependence on State and Federal Aid." Pp. 211–29 in *Small Cities in Transition: The Dynamics of Growth and Decline*, edited by J. Herrington. Cambridge, MA: Ballinger.

Sherry, M.S. 1995. *In the Shadow of War: The United States since the 1930s*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Skolnick, J.H. 1966. *Justice without Trial: Law Enforcement in a Democratic Society*. New York: Wiley.

Skolnick, J.H. and J.J. Fyfe. 1993. *Above the Law: Police and the Excessive Use of Force*. New York: Free Press.

Stevens, J.W. and D.W. MacKenna. 1988. "Police Capabilities for Responding to Violent Criminal Activity and Terrorism." *Police Studies* 11:116–23.

Sutherland, E.H., D.R. Cressey, D.F. Luckenbill. 1992. *Principles of Criminology*. Dix Hills, NY: General Hall Inc.

Trojanowicz, R. and B. Bucqueroux. 1990. *Community Policing: A Contemporary Perspective*. Cincinnati: Anderson.

Turk, A. 1982. *Political Criminality: The Defiance and Defense of Authority*. Beverly Hills: Sage.

Van Maanen, J. 1978. "Kinsmen in Repose: Occupational Perspectives of Patrolmen." Pp. 28–39 in *Police and Policing: A View from the Street*, edited by P.K. Manning and J. Van Maanen. Chicago: Goodyear.

Weisheit, R.A. 1993. "Studying Drugs in Rural Areas: Notes from the Field." *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 30:213–32.

Weisheit, R.A., D.N. Falcone, and L.E. Wells. 1996. *Crime and Policing in Rural and Small-Town America*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland.

Westley, W.A. 1956. "Secrecy and the Police." *Social Forces* 34:254–57.