

Describe Law and Order in the late nineteenth century

Law and Order in the late 19th century was not as it is today. Things were even worse than they are today. Even though there was a police force, they were new and poorly equipped to tackle serious crimes. This force was the Metropolitan Police Force, established in 1829. However the force was in deep controversy about several issues surrounding the role of the police in society, the severe use of force and detective work such as prevention of crime like murder, rapes etc.

The Met was set up by the Home Secretary (Sir Robert Peel) in 1829. Before The Met there were the Bow Street Runners and the Thames River Police Force. Set up in 1749 and 1798 respectively. These three forces were based in different parts of London and were very low in numbers. The main objective of the Bobbies and Peelers (named after Sir Robert Peel) was to assume the duties of Special Constables and Watchmen. These were local men placed in charge of law and order by the local citizens to keep order on the streets with their whistles and truncheons and prevent thefts and other street crimes. But the police also needed to deal with severe riots going on at that time. These riots developed from minor scuffles to mass brawls then to all out riot. Assistance from the army and the Lord Mayor's Grenadier Guards were needed to bring about order and help the outnumbered policemen. Many people did not want the image of the army on the streets; they wanted police to wear blue like the navy who were the 'defenders' of the land.

One of the main controversies was the use of force along with drunken policemen. To solve crowd control the police used the baton charge to disperse rioters. This was very dangerous and painful for anyone who got hit. In 1833 at Cold Bath Field in London, PC Cully was killed during the baton charge. The jury acquitted the killers as the homicide was deemed acceptable. The baton charge had caused severe injuries and serious riots had resulted in police and civilian fatalities. Drunken police were very unpopular and tarnished the already damaged reputation of the police. People saw the role of the police to solely deal with street crime and not solve crime. However when the Whitechapel murders occurred people were afraid and questioned the police as to why they hadn't caught the killer. Many critics thought that if the police brought him or her to justice it would be 'better for their own reputation'.

In 1842, detectives were first introduced by The Met much to the dislike of people who did not approve of detectives. These men wore plain clothes and could not be identified and the authorities were afraid that 'bent' detectives would surface due to friendliness with criminals. During the 1860s through to the 1880s detectives had been reformed. At first inspectors and sergeants were sent to investigate murders. In 1869 detectives were drafted in full-time in each station by the detective department. This was then reorganised in the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) in 1878. By 1884 they were 294 detectives who made 18,244 arrests.

Guidelines for detectives investigating murder scenes were established. But it was not until the early 20th century that fingerprinting and photography was introduced. These methods were slowly developing and therefore not as effective as they are now.

Little training was given to police and in some cases non-existent. It was up to individuals to use their own skill and intelligence to prevent crime and keep order. PCs had the worst time, they had to work long hours and walk very long distances while on beat duty this made them fatigued and therefore ineffective police work was the result.

The police force was stretched and there were simply not enough policemen to police the people. The population of London was 5,255,069 in 1855. The police force had 13,319 officers; out of this only 1,383 men could be on beat duty at any one time. For every one police officer there were 394 people to look after. This would have been impossible to look after each and every person on each and every street, road and alleyway in the city and make arrests, run after thieves and walk miles without any proper shifts.

This was the reason that law and order was bad and why people were robbed, raped and killed on the streets of London and England. Petty theft and muggings could have easily been solved if there were more men to police the streets and if the policemen weren't distracted by riots then maybe they could have prevented other simple crimes which occurred freely on the streets.