

Reviews

Mark Findlay, *Introducing Policing*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 2004, ISBN: 0195516214

Few professions in Australia have changed as significantly over the past generation as has policing. The changes have been dramatic, and varied. The *multilateralisation* of policing has seen the traditional monopoly of public police agencies challenged, with the authorization and delivery of security now shared with private and hybrid auspices. The *politicisation* of policing has seen governments exercising greater control over organisations that previously enjoyed almost a quasi-judicial independence. Media depictions of policing, whether factual, fictional, or in combination, are pervasive. Women, previously marginalised in the police profession, now serve in the highest executive positions.

The advent of community policing, in an era of managerialism, has seen the development of a service ethos and the emergence of what is conventionally termed a 'customer focus'. That the police have succeeded spectacularly in marketing themselves is reflected in the consistently high levels of satisfaction with police services that are measured by public opinion surveys; the outcry that inevitably accompanies any proposal to close a police station; and the fact that police have more business than they can handle (reports of ordinary break and enter no longer elicit an automatic police presence in some places).

However, support for police and satisfaction with police service is not uniform across society. Findlay reminds us that the young, the foreign, and the marginalised may not share the views espoused by the majority of Australians. He observes that there is an ambivalence and a tension in contemporary policing. Police are both a service, and an instrument of coercion.

A chapter devoted to issues of accountability contains a particularly thoughtful discussion of the elements of accountability, and calls for pluralistic approaches. Here the challenge will be evaluating the relative merits of oversight from various sources, which will inevitably be endowed with varying degrees of wisdom and virtue.

The chapter on alternative policing deals with multilateralisation, including the growth of private security. Traditional policing, both public and private, existed to secure capital and to regulate labor. But is contemporary private security inevitably exclusionary? It has certainly been criticised, implicitly and explicitly, for protecting the 'haves' from the 'have-nots'. One can envisage, however, some circumstances in which private security can free the public police to deliver services where they are most needed. Institutions of private security may also play a role in protecting innocent have-nots from their predatory brethren. I for one am not troubled about private security screening for weapons in places of public accommodation.

Findlay's discussion of the traditional insularity of police culture, and ways of overcoming this, are challenging. There is a need for more openness and media involvement. This of course assumes a modicum of responsibility on the part of the media, who tend to deal poorly with ambiguity and who are fond of depicting police as participants in a morality play.

At the end of the day, one might evaluate the police according to the degree to which they enhance the dominion of the citizenry. Overall, are we a freer society because of the police? Certainly. Can continued improvements in policing enhance this freedom even more? Certainly.

This stimulating and very useful book presents key issues in contemporary Australian policing in a readable form. Its pitch is general, rather than parochial, so it will resonate with readers in any Australian jurisdiction. The book will be a great teaching resource, with interesting points for discussion to be found on almost every page. It also contains a good reading list.

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