Cops and Kids
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Upon his appointment as chief of the Los Angeles Police Department for the second time in 1933, James E. Davis proclaimed three objectives. First, under his leadership, the LAPD sought to “eliminate all gangsters”; second, they would “decrease burglaries...[and] robberies to the lowest point in the history of the city”; and third, he intended to “utilize every member of the department to the utmost in actual police duty.”

One year later, in 1934, Davis claimed success. In spite of strains placed on his department by “economic stress” and “gangster terrorism,” the LAPD had prevented gang murders for the previous ten months, helped solve a widely publicized kidnapping, and barred known criminals from entering the city. In addition, the LAPD also claimed credit for a 15 percent decrease in burglary, a 16 percent drop in robbery, and a 23 percent decline in auto theft in the previous year.

In short, according to Davis, the LAPD was waging and winning a war against crime. Although Davis’s rhetoric may have been exaggerated to appeal to a public concerned about law and order in the face of Prohibition and Depression Era fears of crime, he also pointed out a very real shift in police priorities. Rather than focus on maintaining public order, as urban police departments had done in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, police departments came to prioritize fighting crime in the 1920s and 1930s. Rather than see their primary functions as providing general services and
arresting ne’er-do-wells for disorderly conduct, police came to define their purpose more narrowly as investigating and preventing crimes against persons and property, and apprehending and punishing criminals. If August Vollmer represented a leader who could help professionalize policing and make officers more like social workers, then James Davis represented an ideal leader in a war on crime. Born in northern Texas in 1889, Davis had arrived in Los Angeles in 1911 after being discharged from the U.S. Army with little education and $150 to his name. He soon found a job as a patrolman for the LAPD and worked his way up through the ranks. In contrast to leaders such as James Couzens in Detroit who made careers in other fields and entered policing laterally as chiefs, Davis began his career as a rank-and-file patrolman and shared the values of many officers on the beat. Davis came to prominence working in the LAPD’s vice squad, where he developed political connections with Mayor George Cryer and political boss Kent Kane Parrot in the 1920s, and rapidly ascended into the LAPD’s leadership. Davis found himself appointed chief in 1926 (at the youthful age of thirty-seven), was forced to accept a demotion in 1929 in a political scandal, and was reappointed chief in 1933. In all, Davis served nine years as chief, the longest tenure for any LAPD leader until then. During that time, Davis constructed a public image of himself as a fearless crime fighter. He made bold declarations against criminals and gangsters, arranged frequent demonstrations of his prowess as a marksman and of the renowned skill of the LAPD pistol team, and displayed the power of the police through their daily approach to crime control.

Davis encouraged his officers to fight crime using repression and violence. Under Davis, according to historian Gerald Woods, the LAPD “reached the lowest depths of its dreary history.” During his first term, Davis developed the highly visible tactic of the dragnet, in which officers commandeered major street intersections, stopped and searched all passing vehicles, and interrogated anyone deemed suspicious. Citizens complained, but Davis countered that only criminals had anything to worry about. In addition, Davis condoned brutality among his men, brushing aside protests about police violence. Davis also encouraged officers to utilize their heavily promoted skills with firearms to apprehend serious criminals, stating that he would just as soon see them brought in dead as alive. And in 1933, Davis fulfilled his promise to fight gangsterism by convincing the city to implement a “criminal registration ordinance” that required persons convicted of felonies within the past ten years to register with the LAPD within forty-eight hours of their arrival in Los Angeles. These men and women would be the usual suspects apprehended first when persons unknown committed major crimes. Davis did not believe that constitutional niceties should interfere with effective policing.
And yet in the 1920s and 1930s, the LAPD also participated vigorously in juvenile crime prevention programs as extensive as those in any city in the country. It worked closely with community-coordinating agencies and sponsored Boy Scout troops, summer camps, and organized recreation for children at risk. How could the same agency engage both in lawless law enforcement and in child-friendly efforts intended to save potentially delinquent youth?

The LAPD’s approach to policing youth in these years encapsulates a change in how U.S. law enforcement agencies handled young offenders, a change built on larger changes in American society during the Great Depression and New Deal. Between 1926 and 1940, the LAPD broke from older informal models of intervention with youth and sought more aggressively to control juvenile crime. In doing so, they engaged in and benefited from crime prevention programs that diverted many minor juvenile offenders to child welfare agencies prior to or in place of arrest. This change helped to free the LAPD to concentrate on more serious youthful offenses. As a result, by the end of the 1930s, the LAPD arrested very different sorts of juveniles than police had in previous decades—these youths were older, more often drawn from targeted minority communities, and more often accused of felony crimes. And this resulted almost inevitably in the LAPD petitioning to juvenile court a larger percentage of serious criminal offenders. By remaking the clientele for juvenile court, the police helped remake the juvenile justice system, forcing it to address the new problem of controlling crime as much as the older goal of saving delinquent youth.

The LAPD in the 1920s and 1930s

In the first decades of twentieth century, the LAPD embodied many of the problems endemic to big-city police nationwide. Almost from its origins in 1876, the LAPD had been closely associated with both machine politics and organized crime. Municipal reformers continually demanded changes in both the police and the larger city administration, only to vote their candidates into office and see them make compromises with criminal networks inside and outside of government. As a result, like departments in many other urban centers, Los Angeles policing was marked continually by scandal and turbulence. In the 1920s and the 1930s, however, police practices changed dramatically, both nationwide and in Los Angeles, as departments gradually severed their ties to political machines and remade themselves into more professional law enforcers. The LAPD thus serves as a focal point both for viewing national
trends in law enforcement and for examining more closely how the distinctive features of Los Angeles shaped its policing, particularly of juveniles.

In the early twentieth century, the LAPD dealt with issues of growth comparable to those faced in Detroit and Chicago a few decades earlier. The population of Los Angeles more than doubled each decade for forty years, increasing from roughly 50,000 persons in 1890 to 1.24 million in 1930. Los Angeles went from being the fifty-seventh largest city in the United States in 1890 (just behind Evansville, Indiana) to the fifth largest in 1940, with a population of over 1.5 million (just shy of Detroit’s). Los Angeles achieved some of that growth by annexing surrounding municipalities—the area of the city increased from 101 square miles in 1910 to 442 square miles in 1930—but it also grew through migration. Los Angeles offered both a desirable climate and an often-forgotten but thriving industrial sector built around oil and shipping. Thus it attracted wave after wave of migrants, both members of the white Protestant middle class mainly from the U.S. Midwest, and working people of a variety of ethnicities from the entire United States and Mexico. The result, as in other places that experienced growth earlier, was a boom for the city but a complicated job for the police.8

During the 1920s and 1930s, the ideal of professionalism also established new expectations for policing. Much as other fields such as medicine and the law had used access to specialized knowledge and services as the basis for establishing a clearly delineated and independent occupational status for their practitioners, police, too, sought to craft their own professional autonomy. Advocates of police professionalization in the 1920s such as Vollmer and the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) argued that police officers had developed expert knowledge and skills in controlling and preventing crime, and therefore deserved professional status. A series of investigations by independent crime commissions—beginning in Cleveland in 1922, then in Missouri in 1926 and in Chicago in 1929, and culminating with the federal Wickersham Commission in 1931—reinforced this argument. Discovering that ties to local political parties and civic administrations undercut police effectiveness, these commissions advocated greater autonomy for municipal police. By the end of the 1920s, police departments strove for new independence from political interference, more centralized administrative authority, and higher standards of education and training for police personnel. In some cases, departments brought in outsiders to enact changes. Los Angeles, for example, convinced Vollmer to take a leave from Berkeley and serve as chief of the LAPD for one year between August 1923 and August 1924. During that time, he reorganized the department so that the chief had central command over all its branches, improved its standards
for selecting officers, established a training school, systematized record keeping, and introduced the principles of scientific crime detection.9

Technology also reshaped policing in the 1920s. The police patrol car, in the words of Samuel Walker, “had been a novelty prior to World War I [but] had become an inescapable necessity by the 1920s.” Patrol officers gradually abandoned their walking beats and adopted automobiles in order to cope with the expanding geographic sizes of cities, to respond to criminals who were already motorized, and to address complaints received via another new technology—the telephone. With the spread of telephones, citizens increasingly called the police to report problems, rather than contacting them in person. And police utilized a third new technology—the two-way radio—to dispatch officers to investigate and to maintain contact between patrolmen and supervisors. The LAPD, assigned to cover the geographic sprawl of Los Angeles, eagerly embraced the technology. In just one year, Vollmer’s administration purchased sixty-three patrol cars and sixty motorcycles. The new technology, however, changed the relationship between the police and the public. On the one hand, it increased public demands. The new technology encouraged citizens to phone in complaints and ask the police to address an increasingly wide range of disturbances. On the other hand, it also separated the police from the public under any other circumstances. Isolated in their patrol cars, officers could easier see themselves as distinct from the public they monitored.10

These changes were gradual. In Los Angeles, Vollmer failed to achieve the level of professionalism that he sought, at least in the short term. He could not penetrate the LAPD’s existing culture of corruption and its ties to the business community and organized illegal enterprises. He returned to Berkeley after one year with his most fundamental goals frustrated. Vollmer was succeeded first by one former commander of the central vice squad and then, in 1926, by another, James Davis.11

Davis’s position at the time of his appointment illustrates the difficulties faced by police administrators in the 1920s. The LAPD had begun taking steps toward more professional policing, but still lacked autonomy; Davis served a variety of interests. He owed his job to Mayor Cryer, and indirectly to the political machine that supported Cryer. That machine derived much of its income and power from organized vice, so the police had to ignore operations that had the machine’s approval. Davis also had to satisfy the vocal and influential moral reform community in Los Angeles, led by Protestant ministers such as the Reverend Robert Schuler, by demonstrating enthusiasm for fighting crime. And Davis had to satisfy the business interests that dominated Los Angeles, led by Los Angeles Times publisher Harry Chandler. These
interests wanted crime suppressed to a level where it did not interfere with business, and expected the LAPD’s help in keeping organized labor out of Los Angeles.\textsuperscript{12}

Davis balanced the competing interests exerting pressure on the LAPD by turning his police loose on criminals, transients, minorities, and vice operators not enjoying the protection of the machine. The LAPD took advantage of its centralized command, tighter organizational structure, and improved efficiency to get tough on crime and suspected criminals. Violence against suspects both during arrests and in custody was routine and tacitly permitted by administrators. In addition, the LAPD regularly stretched the boundaries of legally permissible methods of investigation. Beginning in 1922, California courts accepted evidence obtained through unauthorized searches and seizures and thereby encouraged the LAPD to raid suspected criminals. In 1931, the Wickersham Commission reported that “arresting and holding men on suspicion is considered legal by the police.” The courts allowed them to detain suspects for forty-eight hours without bringing charges against them, and the LAPD often extended this grace period to as much as a week.\textsuperscript{13}

In the 1930s, the Great Depression strained police departments’ resources, as they had to meet the threat of an apparent increase in crime with diminishing budgets and personnel numbers. They sought to address these difficulties by increasing their efficiency, conducting scientific studies of the best ways to allocate their forces and concentrating on the most visible public problems.\textsuperscript{14} The LAPD was no exception. Even as Los Angeles grew in population and area, the number of LAPD officers remained virtually constant from the middle of the 1920s until World War II. The department employed as many as 2,364 officers in the 1924–25 fiscal year, but its growth ceased thereafter; its numbers remained virtually the same through 1940. Thus, the ratio of police to the public declined steadily from a peak of 2.61 per 1,000 residents in the 1924–25 fiscal year to 1.54 in 1940. In addition, salaries remained flat. In 1926, the city council set a starting patrolman’s salary at $170 per month and, again, kept it at that level until the war years. Policing may have offered a steady paycheck during the Depression, but that paycheck did not go as far in the late 1930s as it did in the 1920s.\textsuperscript{15}

Davis met these challenges in part by shifting officers out of desk jobs or specialized duties and into patrol. In 1926–27, his first year as chief, only 66 percent of sworn LAPD officers worked as patrolmen, down from a more typical range between 70 and 78 percent in the previous decade. Davis immediately put men on the streets; 82 percent of officers served as patrolmen each year throughout the rest of the 1920s and 1930s.\textsuperscript{16}

“Efficiency” became a constant buzzword of Davis’s reports. In 1933, he
proclaimed his intention to “energize the department as a whole into a forceful, active, and efficient group of police officers” and returned to this theme again and again. As the decade progressed, his reports to the city highlighted his department’s efficiency in contrast to its limited resources. In 1936, for example, Davis advertised the LAPD’s “increasing effectiveness in the protection of life and property. . . . This was accomplished without any increase in the number of sworn police. It is evidence of the energetic performance of conscientious men and women connected with this Department and the splendid personnel direction under which they have functioned.” And in 1937, he argued that the LAPD’s successes reflected “a high standard of efficiency and morale in the Department despite the physical handicap of insufficient manpower.”

Police in the 1930s associated professionalism and efficiency with fighting serious crime. These connections derive in part from the influence of Federal Bureau of Investigation Director J. Edgar Hoover, who made a public spectacle of the FBI’s efforts to catch kidnappers, bandits, and bank robbers in the early 1930s. Furthermore, Hoover associated his “war on crime” with the latest investigative techniques such as fingerprinting and a style of cool bureaucratic detachment that proved very appealing both to the public and to police striving for professionalism. Hoover thus helped to establish crime fighting as the special area of expertise that would allow police at both the federal and local levels to achieve professional status. Just as much as Hoover did, local law enforcement officials such as Davis also engaged in a war on crime in the 1930s. Working on a local rather than a national scale, however, allowed organizations such as the LAPD to operate differently than the FBI. First, they concentrated as much on preventing crime as investigating and pursuing it. Second, confident in the support of the local powers-that-be, they could exercise repression on anyone they deemed potential criminals.

The weight of Davis’s war on crime fell disproportionately on communities lacking political power or long-term residency in Los Angeles. For example, in 1936, Davis famously established a border patrol (a “bum blockade”) to prevent transients from entering California. During the Great Depression, as millions of workers lost their jobs and hundreds of thousands of farm families on the Great Plains were forced off their land, many of the dispossessed took to the road or the rails and traveled the country looking for work. To them, California represented an attractive destination. To Californians, however, these Depression Era transients represented potential sources of crime. Davis argued that dust bowl refugees were responsible for “crimes of all types” and the LAPD claimed that an annual 20 percent winter increase in crime could be attributed to transients. In response, Davis sent LAPD officers far
outside of their jurisdiction to the borders of California to prevent transients from entering the state via major highways or railroads. They arrested transients on charges such as vagrancy or evading railroad fares, gave many “their choice of returning to the place from whence they came or appearing before the local magistrate,” and convinced the majority (of those they caught) to leave California. Hampered by negative publicity and court injunctions, the LAPD gave up the bum blockade after a few months, but applied its principles to vagrants and transients within Los Angeles, vigorously targeting for arrest anyone without visible means of support throughout the 1930s. These exercises, in the eyes of Davis and the eyes of the LAPD, divided respectable Los Angeles residents from the less respectable and protected the city from crime.19

The weight of the LAPD’s tactics also fell heavily upon the city’s Mexican American community. The largest minority group in Los Angeles in the 1930s, Latinos faced pervasive discrimination in employment, housing, and education.20 In particular, Latinos faced discrimination and ill treatment from the LAPD. Mexican American informants recalled verbal abuse from the police, arbitrary interrogations in public, sexual harassment of women, and mass arrest of Latino youths. For Mexican teenagers, according to historian Eduardo Obregon Pagan, “repeated confrontations with the LAPD simply become one of the strands woven into their adolescent experience.”21 These practices resulted not so much from the conscious policies of Davis but from the confrontational stance that the LAPD took against any group of outsiders. They saw working-class Mexican Americans as sources of disorder and treated them as such.

In short, in the 1920s and 1930s, police in general and the LAPD in particular placed an increased emphasis on controlling serious crime, in part because doing so helped increase their own professional status. Furthermore, improved management and technology allowed them to fight crime more efficiently even with limited personnel. Their methods, however, went beyond responding effectively and investigating thoroughly. They also sought to maintain order and prevent crime by targeting communities such as transients and Latinos whom they perceived to be potential criminals.

**Juvenile Crime Prevention in Los Angeles**

Leaders like James Davis did not pay much attention to juvenile delinquency except to the extent that it contributed to crime more generally. Nonetheless, the LAPD established one of the most widely publicized,
extensive crime prevention programs of the 1930s. Like police crime prevention in other cities, they justified their efforts in terms of social scientific approaches to delinquency, yet the reality of their programs paralleled older efforts to deal with young offenders. In practice, they relied mainly on cooperation with community agencies, organized recreation, and one-on-one interactions with kids. Davis, we can imagine, tolerated crime prevention programs because they allowed the LAPD to appear sophisticated and professional, and because diverting run-of-the-mill delinquents to community correctional agencies allowed the LAPD to concentrate on more serious juvenile offenses.

Los Angeles was, in the early twentieth century, a surprising source of innovative child welfare reform. Although California established juvenile courts for major cities (including Los Angeles) in 1903, it was not a leader in juvenile justice. California's main early innovations in the field lay in work with female offenders. First in 1916, the state established a separate correctional facility for female delinquents in Ventura (noted for its extensive educational programs and clinical treatment). Then in 1919, the Los Angeles County Probation Department, under the leadership of juvenile court referee Miriam Van Waters, opened its own experimental reform school for girls, El Retiro. With the close supervision of Van Waters, a pioneering leader in girls' corrections, El Retiro became a model institution by eliminating corporal punishments and prison-like elements such as uniforms and barred windows, and offering schooling, recreation, vocational training, and some self-government. The LAPD was an even less likely source of child welfare innovation. Nonetheless, the police made a number of steps toward protecting children and youth during the Progressive Era. It assigned a special officer to handle juvenile cases in 1909, hired social worker Alice Stebbins Wells as its first policewoman in 1910, and established an official Juvenile Bureau in 1913. The Juvenile Bureau also worked closely with the City Mother's Bureau, a parallel agency established in 1914 and entirely staffed by policewomen that primarily guarded girls from seduction and prostitution.

The main function of the LAPD Juvenile Bureau was investigating and adjusting delinquency cases. Between the 1910s and 1930s, when patrolmen arrested persons age seventeen or younger, they immediately transferred them to the Juvenile Bureau. There, officers were to investigate each case and design a plan intended both to benefit the child and to safeguard society from harm. They maintained children's records of arrests, recommended whether detention was appropriate, and made preliminary dispositions, seeking to adjust cases without taking children to court. When youths were first-time offenders, the police usually lectured them, released them with a "promise of
good behavior” if their parents were cooperative, and kept track of them through “voluntary” probation. Only when informal treatment turned out to be insufficient did they petition youths to juvenile court.24

The Juvenile Bureau did not, however, devote much attention to preventing delinquency for the better part of the 1910s and 1920s. Nor did it sponsor child-friendly initiatives akin to those in New York or Detroit. Even Vollmer, in his one-year stint with the LAPD, did little to bring a social work perspective to policing. Frustrated with the scale of problems in Los Angeles, Vollmer sponsored only narrowly administrative reforms such as consolidating an array of services into a single Crime Prevention Division (CPD).25

In the late 1920s, however, the CPD joined the national crime prevention bandwagon, advocating proactive work with predelinquent youth. These programs actually began when Davis was out of office in 1929, but continued and expanded after his return in 1933. During this time, CPD spokespersons adopted current psychiatric rhetoric to explain their new approach to delinquency. It was essential, they argued, to reconceptualize the juvenile delinquent not “as a criminal who must be punished” but “as a socially mal-adjusted individual who needs correction and guidance.”26 They further argued that new psychiatric diagnoses and treatments of delinquents represented better long-term solutions to crime than did detecting and apprehending criminals. “Crime prevention,” asserted the CPD, was “the salvation of this era in which crime is so prevalent.”27

What did the police bring to crime prevention that other agencies did not? According to CPD spokespersons, the police were in the unique position of being “the first agency that comes in contact with the juvenile delinquent.” They made a virtue of the LAPD’s aggressive approach to crime and disorder. In particular, the CPD claimed that it could provide around-the-clock emergency service, conduct investigations of criminal cases involving children, discover and eliminate many community-based causes of delinquency, detect children at risk for trouble, and coordinate with other agencies interested in child welfare and crime prevention.28

This last point was key. The LAPD put crime prevention into practice mainly through cooperation with the Los Angeles County Coordinating Council (LACCC). In January 1932, Los Angeles Juvenile Court Judge Samuel R. Blake and Probation Officer Kenyon Scudder brought together “representatives of case-working agencies that deal with children”—court officials, educators, social workers, and police officers—to form a Coordinating Council to oversee all “delinquency prevention” work in Los Angeles. The LACCC was explicitly modeled on the pioneering coordinating committee initiated by Vollmer in Berkeley in 1919. Like the Berkeley
committee, it gathered officials from all agencies that dealt with children in order to address both the social problems that contributed to delinquency and specific issues regarding particular juveniles. It also maintained that work with potential delinquents should extend beyond the aegis of the by-now traditional juvenile court. Judge Blake “decided that inasmuch as the Juvenile Court procedure had proved so successful after delinquency, why could not the same principles be applied in the field of prevention, before the child reached the Court?”

The context of the Great Depression and the New Deal help explain why the LACCC emerged when it did. For Judge Blake, during economic hard times, reducing the cost of juvenile court represented a major concern. Preventing delinquency was a welcome goal not only because it promised to accomplish good in society but also because it promised to reduce the number of expensive investigations, hearings, and treatments conducted by juvenile court. By the end of 1933, Judge Blake claimed that new crime prevention initiatives had already saved Los Angeles County over $500,000. And funding for the new programs came from state and federal programs, not local taxpayers. Initially maintained through volunteer work and then funded modestly by the Civil Works Administration, the LACCC soon acquired extensive financial support from the California State Emergency Relief Administration (SERA), and the federal Works Progress Administration. Through relief programs, the LACCC hired over eighty previously unemployed men and women—reportedly including teachers, lawyers, ministers, and filmmakers—to serve as local youth workers. The convergence of Depression Era concerns about juvenile delinquency, the need to reduce the costs of government, and New Deal support for experimental social programs made large-scale crime prevention possible.

The LACCC performed three major types of work. One committee sought to improve the social environment that contributed to delinquency. It addressed concerns such as juvenile access to pornography and alcohol (especially worrisome with the repeal of Prohibition in 1933). A second “character-building” committee sought to link “unattached” youths with organizations such as the Boy Scouts, the YMCA, churches, and playgrounds that would provide them with structured recreation and group activities designed to discourage delinquency.

A third committee sought to adjust delinquency cases without formal police or court action. When children “on the verge of trouble” came to the attention of any agency affiliated with the LACCC, the Adjustment Committee could intervene and refer them to social services or recreation programs. The LAPD played a key role in the referral process by directing
minor delinquents with whom they had had contact to the LACCC. These referrals allowed the police to divert many adolescents who might previously have been arrested, and to release them (“kick them loose”) to neighborhood adjustment committees that offered a variety of programs to keep them out of future trouble. This continued the earlier practice of “voluntary” probation but passed responsibility to the LACCC. Not only did this policy relieve the police of one duty; it also provided social benefits. As James Davis and LAPD Captain E. M. Slaughter wrote, the LACCC helped establish a “united front for law enforcement,” serving as “an outlet for cases of delinquency not serious enough to demand Court action,” and creating “a close and constant contact between the Police and the community.”

Cooperation with the LACCC helped the LAPD establish organized recreation programs. Police in Los Angeles maintained that “supervised recreational pastimes” would not only discourage crime and delinquency but also promote “better citizenship.” In addition to sponsoring baseball leagues and a citywide softball tournament, the CPD instituted continuing programs such as a summer camp (Camp Valyermo) ninety miles from Los Angeles for “underprivileged” children. In 1936, 1,400 boys between ages nine and sixteen and 400 girls between twelve and sixteen went to the camp (200 at a time) for six days of swimming, hiking, games, and entertainment. The LAPD also sponsored Boy Scout troops for slightly younger boys. Beginning with one troop organized by the 77th Street Division in January 1935, the program grew to eighteen troops (and one Girl Scout troop led by policewomen) that used Camp Valyermo during the school year in 1938.

In addition, police often utilized sports such as boxing to make crucial initial connections with youngsters. For example, in the mid-1930s, the LAPD and the LACCC became very concerned about boys—mostly Latino—stealing produce from the East Side Wholesale Market. Dealers claimed that the boys stole between $20,000 and $40,000 in fruit and vegetables each year, and whenever police tried to catch them, they would scatter and run away. The police and coordinating council tried a new tactic: they recruited Bert Colima, a prominent local Mexican American prizefighter, to come and talk to the boys. Colima reportedly told the boys that the police were coming to arrest them, but if they ceased committing minor crimes they could be referred to a community center and given boxing lessons. Colima’s standing within the Latino community helped create a point of entry for police and social workers to recruit troublesome boys into crime prevention programs. His approach also exemplified a characteristic crime prevention tactic of balancing the threat of arrest with the opportunity to participate in recreation.

Similarly, police recreation programs often evolved from the LAPD’s
efforts to divert youths from arrest. In one widely publicized 1934 example, police officers from the Hollenbeck Heights division sponsored a seven-mile hike and overnight camping trip for neighborhood boys as a reward for completing an organized recreation program. As a result of the outing, “the attitude of children and parents toward the Police has changed remarkably.” The LAPD asserted, “friendly cooperation [had] replaced suspicious distrust.” This effort originated not from casual encounters or parental requests, however, but from nighttime patrols that were intended to stop a flurry of vandalism and petty theft. Through “constant surveillance of streets, parks, and alleys at night,” the police apprehended over 900 boys, contacted each boy’s home, declared that subsequent encounters would result in arrests, and insisted that, as an alternative, the children be enrolled in recreation programs sponsored by the LACCC and the police.\textsuperscript{41}

The LAPD justified recreation programs by arguing that they reduced delinquency. One CPD officer claimed that these efforts slashed juvenile crime as much as 35 percent during children’s summer vacation from school. He explained this sharp drop by suggesting that, because only youth with clean records were allowed to attend the camp, juveniles tried to stay out of trouble.\textsuperscript{42} The CPD primarily sought to reduce delinquency, however, by constructing recreation programs that would attract boys (girls were an afterthought at best) and introduce them to guidance from male role models such as police officers. The summer camp, as well as activities like baseball and scouting, “create[d] a bond of friendship between the potential delinquent and the law enforcement officer which tends to forever protect the child from a life of crime.”\textsuperscript{43}

Police also sought to use individual encounters to form personal connections with boys. Los Angeles probation officer Kenyon Scudder recounted one incident in which a policeman found two boys, ages fifteen and twelve, out after midnight in an alley behind a small grocery store that they apparently planned to rob. The officer—writing up the boys for violating curfew but ignoring the intended burglary—happened to wave his flashlight at the grocery store and mused about what a “good old guy” the owner was. Shaming the boys about their planned heist without explicitly acknowledging it, the officer, according to Scudder, “supplant[ed] youthful lust for adventurous plunder with respect for a good old guy whose property it is an honor to defend.” The officer ultimately convinced the boys to participate in one of the LAPD’s night baseball programs. At least in this instance, the patrolman dealt with the boys in a manner similar to that of a Chicago Area Project street worker. Through simple exchanges like this one, crime prevention officers believed that they could teach boys to respect rather than to prey upon their communities.\textsuperscript{44}
The LAPD may have used psychiatric rhetoric occasionally to explain its crime prevention programs, but these programs were built largely on the common sense notion that boys would naturally drift into delinquency without adult male guidance. The LAPD’s methods of dealing with juveniles were very different from those of dealing with other potential offenders, but the fundamental assumptions were strikingly similar. Via early and sometimes coercive intervention, they could prevent crime. LAPD officers used the threat of arrest to push boys into crime prevention and recreation programs, hoping that they could discourage them from delinquency.

James Davis was forced to retire as chief of the LAPD in 1938 under pressure from another scandal. At least for juveniles, however, the change in administrations made little difference. Davis’s successor, Arthur H. Hohmann, urged the CPD to maintain a balanced approach to young offenders, avoiding “any tendency toward retrogression into the field of penal treatment of juvenile delinquents or a progress into the particular field of social welfare work.” Police crime prevention work persisted into the 1940s and later in large part because diverting large numbers of minor delinquents to preventive programs allowed the LAPD to devote greater attention to fighting serious juvenile crime.

### Juvenile Arrests in Los Angeles

The LAPD’s arrest patterns reflect how its approach to controlling juveniles changed and how it sought to get tough on juvenile crime. Beginning in the mid-1920s, the LAPD published extensive tabulated records of arrests of juveniles, separate from arrests of adults. As with tables published by the Detroit Police Department, these data do not allow the detailed analysis that individual arrest records would make possible. However, they do distinguish arrests by sex, age, race, charge, and initial dispositions, making it possible to reconstruct general patterns and to chart change over time.

The arrest data reveal a startling trend: controlling for population, juvenile rates of arrests increased somewhat between the middle of 1920s and the early 1930s and then dropped by roughly half between the early 1930s and 1940. Among boys between ages ten and seventeen, the arrest rate fell from a high of over 65 arrests per 1,000 in the 1931–32 fiscal year to 38 per 1,000 in 1940 (see figure 7.1). Among girls between ten and seventeen, it fell from over 19 arrests per 1,000 in 1929–30 to 9 per 1,000 in 1940 (see figure 7.2). In addition, arrests decreased for all categories of offense even though their distribution remained fairly even. Among boys, for example, between
1926 and 1940, offenses against property constituted 59 percent of all arrests; for any given year, they constituted between 57 and 62 percent; yet the rate of arrests for property crimes fell sharply from roughly 37 per 1,000 boys in 1930–31 to 22 in 1940. Likewise, throughout the period, the share of status offenses constituted 22 percent of boys’ arrests, public order offenses 11 percent, offenses against persons 6 percent, and other categories 3 percent, all with little variation from year to year; yet in each case, rates of arrests per population dropped sharply.

Do the declining arrest rates mean that juvenile crime diminished substantially during the Great Depression? Probably not, if we consider the

**Figure 7.1**

Boys’ arrest rates in Los Angeles, 1925–26 to 1940

degree of the offenses for which the LAPD arrested boys. While boys’ overall arrest rate declined throughout the 1930s, arrests for offenses labeled felonies remained fairly steady, slipping only from 22 per 1,000 in 1931–32 to 19 per 1,000 in 1940. By contrast, the arrest rate for misdemeanors fell from almost 31 per 1,000 in 1931–32 to less than 8 per 1,000 in 1940 (see figure 7.3). In other words, the police continued to arrest boys almost as often for felonies in 1940 as in 1930, but far less often for misdemeanors. Whereas in 1930–31, misdemeanors accounted for 46 percent and felonies for 35 percent of all boys’ arrests, in 1940 felonies accounted for 51 percent and misdemeanors for only 21 percent of boys’ arrests. Felonies came to constitute the bulk of boys’ arrests.

Why the change? With limited personnel and an increasing priority of fighting serious crime, the LAPD delegated some of its traditional responsibilities in curbing delinquency to the LACCC and its affiliated agencies. By 1940, the police increasingly reserved arrests, court hearings, and correctional
treatment for youths who had committed felonious offenses, not the status offenses and misdemeanors that had occupied much of their attention earlier.

Similar changes can be detected in other cities as well. In Chicago, the overall rate of complaints against juveniles investigated by PPOs decreased from approximately 40 per 1,000 in 1930 to 29 per 1,000 in 1940. And in Detroit, boys’ arrest rates remained flat between 1933 and 1940, averaging just over 40 per 1,000 boys between ages ten and sixteen, but police charged a noticeably larger share of boys with felonies than in the past. Whereas between 1898 and 1907, felonies had constituted only 1 percent of boys’ arrests, and between 1908 and 1918 they had constituted 6 percent, between 1933 and 1940, felonies constituted 21 percent of boys’ arrests. Los Angeles may encapsulate the new approach to policing youth, but its transition was not unique.

The LAPD’s new focus on serious juvenile crimes also contributed to changes in the demographic profile of kids it arrested. The ages of boys who were arrested shifted upward. Boys’ average age rose from 14.2 in 1930–31 to 14.7 in 1940. The rate of arrest for boys between fifteen and seventeen in 1940 (64 arrests per 1,000) more than tripled that of boys between ten and fourteen (20 per 1,000).

The LAPD also arrested minority youth in disproportionate and increas-
ing shares between 1930 and 1940. Latinos, the largest non-Caucasian ethnic group in the city, constituted approximately 8 percent of the total population but 17 percent of the boys arrested in 1930 (see figure 7.4). African Americans represented 3 percent of the population (and 3 percent of Los Angeles males between ages 10 and 17) but 9 percent of the boys arrested. These racial disparities grew over the course of the decade, most dramatically for Latinos. By 1940, Latinos constituted 32 percent and African Americans 12 percent of all boys arrested by the LAPD (versus 8 percent and 4 percent of the population, respectively). In comparison, the share of whites decreased from 72 percent of boys arrested in 1930–31 to 55 percent in 1940.

In contrast to boys, the LAPD arrested the vast majority of girls—85 percent between 1925–26 and 1940—for non-criminal offenses such as dependency and sexual delinquency. The decline in girls’ rate of arrest on these charges—from over 15 per 1,000 in 1929–30 to less than 9 per 1,000 in 1940—accounts for the decline in girls’ overall arrest rate in these years (see figure 7.5). Minorities were disproportionately represented, but not to the same degree as among boys. Nor did their ratios change substantially over time. Latinas, who constituted 17 percent of girls arrested in 1929–30, increased to 22 percent in 1940. Blacks remained at approximately 8 percent.
between 1930 and 1940 while whites declined from 74 to 69 percent (see figure 7.6). Girls’ average ages remained in a roughly constant range between 13.7 and 14.0.56

In essence, the LAPD continued to arrest similar types of girls for the same reasons throughout the 1930s, but it arrested fewer of them. By 1940, coordinating councils and other social welfare agencies represented new institutional actors capable of protecting girls. They could intervene before girls encountered the police or before police contacts escalated to the point where an arrest became necessary. With limited resources at their disposal, the police in turn demonstrated little interest in arresting girls on charges that did not immediately threaten public safety or order. Because girls committed few criminal offenses, they were of less concern to a Depression Era police department that was increasingly channeling its resources toward crime control.

The LAPD’s changing arrest practices also substantially impacted the juvenile court and the larger juvenile justice system. Following arrest, officers from the Crime Prevention Division investigated each case and determined whether it could be resolved informally or whether it should be petitioned to court. And, as the LAPD concentrated increasingly on serious juvenile offenders, CPD officers determined that more and more cases required for-
mal adjudication. The share of boys petitioned to court by the CPD increased from 29 percent in 1930–31 to 48 percent in 1940.\textsuperscript{57} Predictably, the felons whom the police increasingly arrested more often required court supervision than did boys who committed minor offenses, thus increasing the court’s burden. In addition, the LAPD became more likely to petition felons to court. In 1930–31, CPD officers referred 49 percent of boys arrested for felonies to court; in 1940, they referred 70 percent. As a result, felons came to account for an increasing share of the juvenile court’s workload. In 1930–31, felons represented 58 percent of boys’ cases petitioned by the LAPD; in 1940, they represented 73 percent.

When processing girls during the Depression decade, the CPD continued to rely on juvenile court, but they also became increasingly likely to send them to outside agencies. Throughout the 1930s, the share of girls’ arrests petitioned to court remained fairly flat, generally ranging between 40 and 45 percent. However, the proportion of girls sent to other law enforcement or correctional agencies—probation officers, most often—increased noticeably from 9 to 19 percent between 1930–31 and 1940. Likewise, the share of girls referred to the Los Angeles Federation of Charities rose sharply from 6 percent to a high of 18 percent in 1938. These increases resulted in a reduction

\begin{figure}
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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Figure7.6.png}
\caption{LAPD Arrests of Girls by Race, 1925–26 to 1940}
\end{figure}

Sources: LAPD, Annual Reports (1925–26 to 1940).
in the percentage of girls who were released; 33 percent of girls arrested in 1929–30 had their cases dismissed or suspended by the police, but only 18 percent were so fortunate in 1940. Girls were arrested overwhelmingly on non-criminal charges throughout this period, so these shifts cannot be attributed to changing offense patterns. Instead, they reflected a shift in police procedure. Over time the police released a smaller portion of girls and instead increasingly chose to send them to agencies inside or outside of the formal juvenile justice system that would provide some form of guidance or treatment.

In sum, the purpose of the LAPD’s juvenile arrests narrowed considerably in the 1930s to focus on crime control. At the end of the decade, officers arrested boys and girls for lesser offenses at much lower rates than they had at the beginning. The LAPD ceased to use arrest as a catchall method for handling any sort of delinquency, minor or major. Instead, it increasingly reserved arrest for mid-teenage boys who had committed felonies and who were disproportionately members of racial minorities. Juveniles arrested in Los Angeles were becoming older, darker, and more criminal. Furthermore, by 1940, the LAPD petitioned more and more juvenile offenders to juvenile court. For adolescent offenders, release after arrest was becoming a thing of the past. Instead court adjudication increasingly became the routine outcome of an arrest. Thus, the LAPD’s concentration on felony arrests not only impacted the youths apprehended and the communities targeted, but also contributed to a substantial remaking of the intake and operations of juvenile court.

**Crime Prevention to Facilitate Crime Control**

No one would accuse James E. Davis of worrying too much about juvenile offenders or of adopting a “child-friendly” approach to policing youth. Yet between his appointment as chief in 1926 and his final resignation in 1938, the LAPD contributed substantially to a transformation of juvenile justice. The LAPD under Davis’s watch prioritized crime control. Their methods—centralizing organization, utilizing automotive patrols and communications technologies, targeting seemingly disreputable elements of the community for harassment and arrest, and often ignoring suspects’ constitutional rights—may have been extreme, but they also paralleled a general trend toward more hard-boiled policing in the 1930s. Yet at the same time, the LAPD also participated vigorously in delinquency prevention programs by organizing sports
teams, conducting camping trips, and cooperating with community-based social agencies. The LAPD apparently engaged in crime prevention because doing so fit its larger institutional agenda and interests in two ways. First, if they assumed that today's delinquent naturally became tomorrow's criminal, then redirecting present-day young offenders would make future crime control more manageable. And second, diverting predelinquent and moderately delinquent youth to social service programs allowed the LAPD to focus its attention on adolescent offenders who had committed more severe crimes. Their new priority of fighting more serious juvenile crime would, in turn, also remake the juvenile court.