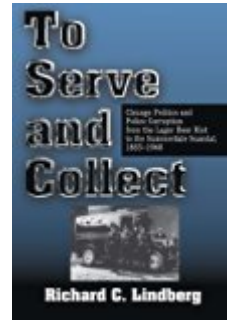


**Richard C. Lindberg.** *To Serve and Collect: Chicago Politics and Police Corruption from the Lager Beer Riot to the Summerdale Scandal, 1855-1960.* Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998. xxii + 366 pp. \$19.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8093-2223-7.



**Reviewed by** David Wolcott

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The Chicago police have enjoyed an almost mythical reputation as one of the nation's most corrupt and undisciplined departments. From the middle of the nineteenth century until the very recent past, they were profoundly influenced by ward-level patronage politics and often operated hand-in-hand with the city's notorious gamblers, bootleggers, and organized crime families. Richard Lindberg's *To Serve and Collect* is the first book to chronicle their history. The result is a reasonably successful local history, but it will prove frustrating for scholars or readers in search of a serious interpretation.

Lindberg's story is a narrative, highly descriptive account of scandals that shaped the Chicago Police Department. Although the book is published by an academic press, its approach suggests that it is aimed at a general audience primarily interested in Chicago history. This edition is actually a paperback reprint of a study first published in 1991 with a new introduction by the author, an independent scholar with a master's degree from Northeastern Illinois University and nine books to

his credit, including histories of the Chicago underworld and the Chicago White Sox.

His account of the Chicago police is based on extensive research in newspapers, investigations of police corruption and vice, and published accounts by former officers. The sheer amount of information collected is impressive, particularly because, as Lindberg points out, the Chicago police discourage historical investigation by shredding many of their papers every seven years and denying researchers access to their surviving materials. Nonetheless, Lindberg could give the reader a better sense of where he found his information. The book includes endnotes for every chapter, but they tend to be discursive and do not sufficiently explain the sources.

The book's greatest strength is an encyclopedic discussion of the political evolution of the Chicago Police Department from the 1850s to the 1960s. It offers amazingly detailed, almost overwhelming, descriptions of scandals, corrupt police officers, and infighting between the police leadership, politicians, and organized crime. Throughout the book, Lindberg brings individual figures

to life very effectively by mixing short biographical sketches with accounts of the events for which they became known.

The scale of the book makes the narrative impossible to encapsulate, but certain themes recur. First, Lindberg emphasizes the key role of gambling and vice in shaping the operations of the Chicago police. He shows that, as early as the 1870s, gambler Mike McDonald exercised deep influence over police appointments and discouraged the police from regulating vice, setting a precedent that persisted throughout the twentieth century. In addition, the police department's Prohibition-era dependence on graft from bootlegging represented a major stumbling block that prevented those few police reformers who wanted to fight organized crime from succeeding. Outlining the corruption of law enforcement by criminal interests represents the most important contribution of the book.

Second, Lindberg also emphasizes the police department's continuing lack of an internal review procedure to root out corruption. No police leader could muster the courage or political power needed to fundamentally change the status quo. Instead, the reform that did occur resulted from short-term reactions to particular scandals or criticisms. Even the creation of a Civil Service Commission in 1895 ultimately perpetuated the existing spoils system.

Third, Lindberg concentrates on the relative inability of the police to investigate and solve crimes. Crime fighting, he suggests, was not a high police priority and often failed due to poor coordination and a lack of resources. For example, the police failed to solve a series of murders of teenagers in the 1950s because they refused to cooperate with the county sheriff and the city park police, which shared jurisdiction in the cases.

One problem with the book, though, is that it rarely pursues any one subject at any great length. All of the themes and individual figures are intertwined, as they surely were in life. In an

historical narrative, however, the result is sometimes choppy and confusing. Moreover, the narrative regularly begins to suggest a line of argument only to drop it. For example, one provocative chapter describes a case in which Dr. Patrick Cronin, a leader in the Irish radical group Clan Na Gael was killed in 1889 by other Clan Na Gael members, including policemen. Lindberg uses the incident to illustrate the extent of Irish radicalism in the police department, but he does not extend his argument beyond the particular scandal and show what the divided loyalties of rank-and-file officers actually meant for police operations.

In addition, Lindberg occasionally assumes that the reader shares his understanding of a subject and, hence, does not explain it sufficiently. For example, his account is not always clear about the operations of some of the criminal rackets so central to the story. It is difficult to the uninitiated to figure out just what sort of rackets "handbooks" and "clairvoyance" were.

This book's lack of context will represent a more fundamental problem for scholars. In spite of the book's substantial length, Lindberg devotes extremely limited attention to the social and national arenas in which the Chicago police operated. There are no comparisons with police elsewhere or with national trends in policing to indicate whether the corruption and inefficiency endemic to the Chicago police were typical of police in general or just a regional peculiarity.

Lindberg also offers little information on what the Chicago police actually did when they were not collecting graft. A series of short "close-ups" between chapters provide some impressions of police duties, but otherwise, the functions that rank-and-file officers performed are rarely discussed. In particular, Lindberg describes crime rates from time to time, but uses them as an explanation for administrative changes in the police—if crime rates were down, the police were doing a good job, but if they were up, a reorganization was in order. He does not suggest what crime

rates themselves might indicate about larger social trends or police practices, or acknowledge that police discretion whether to make arrests may have influenced reported rates of crime.

Finally, the book suffers from a puzzling lack of attention to police brutality. Lindberg mentions that the Chicago police occasionally used the "third degree" (brutalizing prisoners in custody) to extort confessions, but he does not give it any sustained discussion or analysis. Instead, the book treats the "third degree" as just something that police did, not as a practice whose use has changed over time. It also fails to mention the 1931 report of the National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement, which singled out the Chicago police department for its use of force, suggesting that "it was an exception when a suspect was not subjected to personal violence."<sup>[1]</sup> The book also concludes by characterizing the administration of police reformer O.W. Wilson between 1960 and 1967 as the beginning of a "period of modernity" (p. 314). However, while properly emphasizing improvements made under Wilson's leadership, it glosses over repeated charges of police brutality that civil rights leaders made against him.<sup>[2]</sup> Furthermore, it ignores the police department's assault on anti-war demonstrators at the Democratic National Convention in 1968. These omissions do not undermine the book's larger treatment of police corruption, but they detract from a fuller understanding of the failings of the Chicago police.

In sum, this book offers a solid history of the Chicago police department, primarily concerning police leadership and corruption. Lindberg is to be commended for his thoroughness in assembling and conveying his material. It also provides an outstanding resource for anyone interested in learning more about a particular incident or individual in the history of the Chicago police. The book would have benefited, however, from more thorough consideration of the larger context and more consistent development of its own themes.

Neither its narrative nor its arguments are always clear and, too often, the relationships between its many anecdotes are not apparent. As a result, the book fails to offer a substantial analysis of police corruption.

#### Notes

[1]. Wickersham Commission [National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement], *Report No. 11, Lawlessness in Law Enforcement* (1931; reprint, Montclair, N.J.: Patterson Smith, 1968), 125.

[2]. Samuel Walker, *Popular Justice: A History of American Criminal Justice*, 2nd ed. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 172-73.

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