



Cop Knowledge: Police Power and Cultural Narrative in Twentieth-Century America

Christopher P. Wilson

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Whether they appear in mystery novels or headline news stories, on prime-time TV or the silver screen, few figures have maintained such an extraordinary hold on the American cultural imagination as modern police officers. Why are we so fascinated with the police and their power? What relation do these pervasive media representations bear to the actual history of modern policing?

Christopher P. Wilson explores these questions by examining narratives of police power in crime news, popular fiction, and film, showing how they both reflect and influence the real strategies of law enforcement on the beat, in the squad room, and in urban politics. He takes us from Theodore Roosevelt's year of reform with the 1890s NYPD to the rise of "community policing," from the classic "police procedural" film *The Naked City* to the bestselling novels of LAPD veteran Joseph Wambaugh. Wilson concludes by demonstrating the ways in which popular storytelling about police power has been intimately tied to the course of modern liberalism, and to the rising tide of neoconservatism today.

"A thorough, brilliant blend that crosses disciplines."—*Choice*

"[S]ophisticated, highly theoretical and ambitious. . . . Connects the history of policing to cultural representations of crime, criminals and cops."—*Times Literary Supplement*

"[A] deeply satisfying approach to the crime narrative. . . . [Wilson] focuses, ultimately, on the role of police power in cultural storytelling."—*American Quarterly*

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