CHAPTER III

"THE SYSTEM IS A FARCE"

Efforts to improve the occupational status of the police department coincided with the drive toward civil service reform as civil service advocates sought to make the operation of the police and other municipal departments an orderly and efficient process.¹ To eliminate the instability endemic in police departments operating under the spoils system, reformers sought to substitute a rational procedure for making appointments and rating the performance of police officers. They first met with success in New York City in 1884, when the police department was placed under civil service regulations. Chicago followed New York’s example in 1885.² By the second decade of the twentieth century, civil service regulations were active in police departments in a majority of the nation’s cities with populations of 100,000 or more.³

Reform, which began in Houston in 1889 with improvements in the city’s financial management, was expanded in 1897 to include administrative as well as fiscal improvements, and culminated in 1905 with a new city charter providing for a commission form of government.⁴ The reform movement combined a concern for the moral rejuvenation of the community with the need to adopt a systematic means of dealing with the increasingly bureaucratic structure of the city’s departments. Mayoral campaigns of the period indicate the moral issue involved in the reform effort. Incensed by administrative incompetence and charges of corruption, voters turned to candidates promising efficient and honest government. In 1902 Oran T. Holt’s reform ticket handily defeated the incumbents with the promise to return responsible government to Houston.⁵

The initial step toward municipal civil service reform in Houston was taken in the revised city charter of 1897. Only the police, fire, and health departments were included in the 1897 charter provision because of their vital concern to the public welfare of the city and their vulnerability to political manipulation. Authority to regulate the police department was vested in a Police, Fire, and Health Board (or civil service board, as it was frequently termed), composed of the mayor (ex officio) and four aldermen. Although the board was empowered to formulate whatever regulations it deemed necessary for the three departments, none was suggested for consideration during the board’s six year existence. In 1903 a revised charter amendment empowered the city council to create a civil ser-
vice commission to enforce any regulations enacted by the council. No changes were brought about, however. The board’s most important duty was to act as a review agency to which employees from the police, fire, and health departments could appeal suspensions or dismissals.

As appeal agencies, both the board and the commission failed. The nineteenth-century precedent of direct interference in the operation of the police department by the mayor and council, and the wide latitude allowed the chief of police in his own actions, created a hostile environment for a civil service board. Moreover, the board, composed entirely of elected officials, became an arena for conflicting interests, with members dividing their loyalty between their responsibilities as aldermen and their duties as board members. Rather than removing politics from the police department, the civil service commission made the police the focal point of factional feuds.

In 1901 and 1902 a conflict arose over the prerogative of the chief of police to discipline members of the department. Supported by the mayor, the chief resisted efforts of the civil service board to make him subordinate to the board’s authority. Although few cases were actually appealed to the board, the legal right to appeal provided police officers with a vehicle to present their grievances, the ramifications of which will be examined later.

So serious was the dispute in 1901 and 1902 that the normal business of the council could not be carried out. Mayor Woolford and two members of the board refused to attend the proceedings, which involved an investigation of several policemen accused of misconduct. With the mayor and chief of police ignoring or reversing the directives of the city council, hope of conciliation seemed remote. The impasse led the chairman of the civil service board to offer a resolution proposing that the mayor, aldermen, and heads of all departments—especially the police department—resign and a general election be held to elect new members who would be able to cooperate in governing the city. The resolution was rejected, and the issue was resolved in the courts in favor of the civil service board.

During the reform administration of Mayor Ben Campbell (1913-1917), an effort was made to correct the shortcomings of the 1897 and 1903 civil service amendments. The voters approved a revised charter amendment authorizing the creation of a new civil service commission in October 1913. An ordinance enacted in April 1914 provided for its operational structure. The newly created commission, consisting of three members and a secretary or chief examiner, had the power to examine and classify all positions included under civil service, to set requirements for applicants, to eliminate partisan politics in the operation of the municipal government, and to serve as an appeal agency.

To perform its duties the commission needed an authority independent of the mayor and city council. Instead it became subservient to
both. Although in several other cities the terms of the commissioners overlapped, the Houston plan allowed the mayor to appoint all three commissioners for the duration of his own two-year term. Moreover, the charter allowed the mayor to remove holdover commissioners at his discretion, so that the commission suffered from the same lack of stability and experience it was expected to eliminate in the police department. The mayor in effect controlled the commission through the power of appointment. The mayor's power to manipulate the commissioners became at times a potent political weapon, as in 1933, when newly elected Mayor Holcombe used his authority to dismiss two commissioners from the previous administration in order to deprive a discharged police officer of his right to a civil service commission hearing.

The integrity of the commission was further compromised by the right of the city council to veto or amend the rules proposed by the commission. In addition, the city council, through its authority to enact ordinances, could make whatever changes in the civil structure it desired—or which political expediency demanded. Consequently, civil service over the years became less a coherent system than an accumulation of ordinances and resolutions enacted for political reasons rather than for administrative efficiency. Operating under such unstable conditions, the police department fell prey to municipal political intrigue.

Rules and regulations governing the operation of the department were enacted soon after the creation of the commission. Standards for selecting police officers conformed to those already in use in other cities. In addition to the existing requirements outlined in the general ordinance creating a police department, the 1914 regulations established specific qualifications involving general knowledge, educational background, physical fitness, and experience. In 1920 a revised examination acknowledged the inadequate educational level of most applicants. The examination was on an elementary school level and emphasized areas of general knowledge, with a few questions dealing with hypothetical police situations. No minimum educational attainment level was set.

The introduction of civil service regulations prompted the commission to report in its Year Book for 1922 that the police department was entering a new era of efficiency and dedication. "The roughneck, old time pistol 'toter' of a decade ago," the statement continued, "is being supplanted now by the lithe young fellow who considers the public first." Such optimism was not borne out by the realities of the operation of the department.

As administered, civil service became a façade, shielding political machinations behind the respectability of the law. Applicants, for instance, were selected without regard to the minimal requirements of civil service regulations. Instructions were usually relayed to the chief of police that a
man was being employed on the personal recommendation of either the civil service examiner or the mayor. Two applicants sent to Chief of Police Searcy Baker in April 1920 had not passed the examination, but a commissioner asserted that they could “qualify on this later.” With regard to one of the applicants, the commissioner assured Baker that the secretary had “coached him along the duties of a police officer.” In another case Chief of Police Tom C. Goodson received notification from the mayor’s office that Holcombe had assigned an applicant to the position of special detective. At other times executive orders were issued authorizing the assignment of a particular person to the force. In January 1929 Chief Goodson was notified that “upon an executive order from Mayor Holcombe we are forwarding to you . . . [a] placement as mounted police . . . This applicant has this day been sworn in by Mayor Holcombe as a regular police officer and is now ready to report for duty.”

Political favoritism continued beyond the initial selection of police officers. Promotions were likewise decided on a partisan basis rather than according to ability, seniority, or examinations. Most promotions above the rank of sergeant were tied to a change in the city administration and usually followed oral interviews with the commission. In principle, the oral interview, as a supplement to written examination, was a useful approach to selecting qualified candidates for promotions. As implemented, however, it became a convenient means of manipulating the promotional process. The degree of difficulty of the questions depended not on any requirements for the position sought but rather on how favorably disposed the administration felt toward a candidate. If the candidate was not favored for the promotion, he was asked questions that were usually impossible for him to answer at his level of experience. The scores of the oral interviews were adjusted either to the advantage or disadvantage of the applicant, depending on his political qualifications. Under such conditions it was not unusual for a patrolman who ranked twelfth among the eligible to receive a promotion to sergeant over the others. Acting Director of Civil Service Knox Dale Womack, in a public disclosure at the time of his resignation in December 1947, charged that “the verbal examinations were a cover-up to allow the city administration to hire supporters of the administration.” The mayor’s executive assistant, Sam Johnson, Womack asserted, screened and authorized the hiring of all city employees even before examinations were given. Womack labeled the city’s civil service system a “farce.”

The failure of civil service was most conspicuous during election campaigns. Although the earliest civil service regulations attempted to mitigate the effects of politics on the operation of the department, police officers were frequently found campaigning at the voting polls. On occasion, as in 1901, they were accused of intimidating voters while acting under the cloak of their office. The conditions brought a denunciation from the Police, Fire,
Political campaigning by police officers, specifically prohibited by the civil service regulations enacted in 1914, was overlooked if the effort was made in behalf of the administration in office. Campaigning was not only permitted but actively encouraged by mayors, with pressure exerted on the patrolmen through the chief of police. Political pressure tended to reduce police chiefs to campaign managers during close mayoral elections. During the 1924 mayoral campaign, for example, Holcombe noted in a letter to Chief of Police Thomas C. Goodson that the police department had “certainly done some excellent work [securing pledge cards] with the hotels and numerous other people,” but, the mayor continued, “I am particularly anxious to get in as many pledge cards as I can between now and the 15th of the month. Do all that you can and get as many of your men to work as possible. I know that we have a number of our friends who should be doing some work along this line but, up to now, I cannot see any results of their work. Can’t you straighten them out?”

Apparent Goodson, having been appointed only the previous year, had not shown the proper eagerness in campaigning for the mayor, but it was a deficiency he soon rectified. During the 1926 contest, Goodson notified the President of the Houston Community Chest that he was forced to submit his resignation as a member of its Board since the organization’s annual fund drive coincided with Holcombe’s campaign. Goodson explained that he was “wholeheartedly interested in the re-election of . . . Holcombe . . . and honor bound to devote . . . [his] undivided efforts towards that accomplishment.”

Instilling political loyalty within the department was as important a duty of the police chief as campaigning outside the department. In all mayoral campaigns the loyalty of the department to the administration was tested by the opposition. During the 1928 campaign, Judge Walter E. Monteith’s supporters were particularly active in seeking the support of the department, leading Goodson to warn his ranking officers that he would not allow Holcombe’s opponents on the force to divide the department or disrupt its operation. “I am not going to hold it against any man for voting against Mayor Holcombe and I am not going to fire him for it. Personally, I am supporting him, first, last and all. I am interested from a business standpoint and that I want to be Chief of Police of this City . . . We owe it to the public as a whole to keep this organization together, and I want your men to bear in mind that I do not want you to allow anything [disruptive] to happen in the department.” At other times pressure was exerted directly by the mayor. In January 1931 Mayor Monteith in an open letter to the police department reproached its members for reportedly supporting his opponent. He felt “that it . . . [was] not too much to expect employees of the city to
be loyal to the administration.”26

Punitive measures were usually swift for police officers who supported the opposition or were loyal to the losing administration. Ranking officers were demoted or asked to resign, while uncertainty was the fate of patrolmen. Following Monteith’s victory in 1928, more than twenty detectives were reduced in rank, while patrolmen were asked to resign or "demoted 'to the sticks.'"27 As many as twenty-five patrolmen were dismissed regardless of their service records.28 At such times nearly all efforts at law enforcement ceased. The difficulty of maintaining discipline during election upheavals was noted by Chief of Police Lawrence C. Brown in 1941, who complained to newly elected Mayor C. "Neal" A. Pickett that his announcement of a reorganization in the department created insecurity among the men. As a consequence, Brown asserted, the department had become disorganized and undisciplined.29

Municipal politics became more important to a policeman than professional ability, for it was only through correct political alignment that an officer could expect advancement or even retain his job. The case of Roy Edward Floyd, the director of Houston’s Civil Service Commission in 1947, exemplifies the relationship between political fortune and occupational advancement. Floyd began his career in 1935 as a chauffeur for Holcombe during the latter’s second term as mayor. In 1936 Floyd was assigned as a detective on the police force while continuing to serve as the mayor’s chauffeur. With the election of R.H. Fonville in 1937, Floyd was demoted to patrolman. Floyd enjoyed an abrupt change of fortune upon the re-election of Holcombe in 1939, at which time he was promoted to inspector of police, followed in 1940 by a promotion to assistant chief of police. In 1941, one month after the election of Neal Pickett, Floyd was demoted again to patrolman. Upon Holcombe’s return to the mayor’s office in 1947, Floyd was appointed director of civil service, replacing acting director Womack, who had clashed with the administration over the operation of the civil service system.30

In another case an officer was promoted and demoted ten times during an eleven-year period. One officer, who joined the department in 1919 as a patrolman, served at every level of command during the next eighteen years—including acting chief of police—but found himself demoted to patrolman in 1937 following a change in the city administration.31 Police personnel records are replete with similar examples of political favoritism.

Political patronage had a detrimental effect on discipline within the department. In March 1920 the commission adopted a merit system similar to the one used by the New York Police Department.32 Under this system a specified number of demerits were given for infractions of department regulations ranging from excessive conversation while on patrol to drunkenness. Receipt of seventy demerits in a one-month period required
an appearance before the civil service commission. A repetition of the same rating meant suspension or dismissal. Merits were awarded for outstanding service, and it was envisioned that they would serve as the basis for promotion.\textsuperscript{33}

The introduction of the merit system as part of civil service was viewed as a rational means to instill discipline within the department in the hope that this would enhance the image of the police. Improved discipline became critical in an increasingly sophisticated urban environment in which police officers were in daily contact with all elements of the population. In actual practice, however, the merit system, like other components of municipal civil service, fell victim to political patronage.

Efforts to instill discipline accelerated following the implementation of civil service and particularly the merit system. In the period 1923-1929, for example, several hundred disciplinary actions were taken. The offenses ranged from minor infractions of the rules such as smoking on duty to such serious actions as beating prisoners. In February 1923, for instance, a police officer was suspended and reduced from corporal to patrolman for striking a black suspect; in August 1924 two patrolmen were dismissed for beating a suspect; in March 1925 an officer was suspended for abusing a prisoner; in July 1925 an officer was suspended three days for “slouchiness and inattention to duty.”\textsuperscript{34} A study conducted in 1939-1940 revealed that 233 active members of the department had records of disciplinary action having been taken for nearly 500 violations.\textsuperscript{35}

Such disciplinary action was common, and on paper the degree of discipline was impressive. In reality, though, separations from the department were not necessarily permanent. One officer, suspended five days in March 1926 for threatening a person, had previously been discharged for drunkenness, but was rehired because of the intercession of Mayor Holcombe. His subsequent career was erratic. Following his suspension, he was promoted to sergeant, was again suspended, and then demoted for intoxication. But by 1940 he was promoted to lieutenant only to be indefinitely suspended in 1942. His attempt to rejoin the department in 1947 was rejected.\textsuperscript{36} Over a nine-year period another officer was disciplined eight times for neglect of duty and intoxication. Although one offense resulted in a permanent suspension, the officer was back on duty after a short while. Another officer with an eight-year record with the department was charged with eleven offenses, one of which resulted in his dismissal. As in other cases, however, he was reinstated with the department through political influence.\textsuperscript{37} In addition to the inconvenience and potential threat to the public by unruly officers, ineffectual discipline also created morale problems within the department. While civil service and the merit system encouraged ranking officers to instill discipline, their efforts were minimized by the successful appeals of errant officers to influential politicians and by the pre-
occupation of ranking officers with preserving their own positions within the unstable departmental administration.

Civil service failed as a means of fostering responsible law enforcement in Houston. Indeed, civil service became itself a victim of political patronage. From its inception in 1897 through its subsequent modifications, municipal civil service was dominated and controlled by the mayor and the city council. In order to execute its rules impartially, civil service required a relative degree of autonomy for independent decision making. Neither the Police, Fire, and Health Board established in 1897 nor the Civil Service Commission created in 1914 enjoyed such autonomy. Conscientious enforcement of civil service rules depended on the good faith of city officials. The temptation to secure political advantage, however, frequently proved stronger than the desire for an administratively effective and responsible police force.

NOTES

1. The nature of the reform movement is the subject of studies by Samuel Hays and Robert H. Wiebe. According to Hays in his article, "The Politics of Reform in Municipal Government in the Progressive Era," Pacific Northwest Quarterly 55 (October, 1964): 157-169, the reformers, all members of the professional and business classes, sought to apply the same techniques used in business to municipal government. An expansion of Hays's study is found in Wiebe's The Search for Order, 1877-1920 (New York, 1967), in which a general interpretation of the whole reform movement is presented. Wiebe emphasizes the role of a new middle class, confident and anxious to bring order into a chaotic urban society through the application of systematization and rationalization acquired in the business and professional world.


To gain insight into the civil service reform movement, one must refer to the primary literature of the National Civil Service Reform League. A series of addresses of the League was published during the period 1883-1892: "Address to the Reverend Clergy of all Denominations in the United States" (New York, 1883); "An Act to Regulate and Improve Civil Service of the United States" (Washington, D.C., 1883); George William Curtis, "The Reason and the Result of Civil Service Reform" (New York, 1888); George William Curtis, "Party and Patronage" (New York, 1892).

While numerous books and monographs have been written on the subject of urban reform and the national civil service, secondary literature dealing with municipal or state civil service is sparse. One of the most useful studies of the civil service reform movement is Ari A. Hoogenboom's Outlawing the Spots: A History of the Civil Service Reform Movement, 1865-1883 (Urbana, Illinois, 1961). For a study of the interaction between state and city in formulating civil
service programs, see George Charles Sumner Benson, The Administration of the Civil Service in Massachusetts with Special Reference to State Control of City Civil Service (Cambridge, 1935). Lawrence V. Howard's Civil Service Development in Louisiana (New Orleans, 1956) provides an excellent study of the conflict between politics and civil service reform. With the exception of a University of Texas Bulletin by Benjamin Fletcher Wright, Jr., The Merit System in American States with Special Reference to Texas (Austin, 1923), no local studies of civil service reform in Texas exist. Although outdated, Fosdick's discussion of civil service reform and the police in American Police Systems is useful for the first two decades of the twentieth century. A brief but inadequate discussion of civil service reform and its direct relation to the police is found in James F. Richardson, The New York Police: Colonial Times to 1901 (New York, 1970). The most thorough general survey of municipal civil service reform is found in Frank Mann Steward's A Half-Century of Municipal Reform: The History of the National Municipal League (Berkeley, 1950).

4. See Revised Code of Ordinances of the City of Houston of 1914, pp. 7-76.
6. Charter (and Revised Code of Ordinances) of the City of Houston (Houston, 1897), pp. 19 and 20. Charter of the City of Houston, Harris County, Texas, as Passed by the Twenty-Eighth Legislature (Houston, 1903), p. 22.
7. Miscellaneous Correspondence, Packet dated November 11, 1901, Report of the police committee, November 11, 1901, HCAC; ibid., Packet dated December 3, 1901, Letter from Board Chairman to the Mayor and City Council, November 6, 1901, HCAC; Houston Daily Post, November 1, 6, and 7, 1901.
8. Adoption of the amendment distinguished Houston as the first city in Texas to establish a civil service commission. El Paso was the second city to do so when its voters adopted a similar amendment in 1917. The Houston civil service law included all city employees, while the El Paso commission concerned itself only with police and firemen. Wright, The Merit System in American States, p. 92.
9. A civil service ordinance was first approved in June 1913 but was repealed in February 1914 and replaced by the April ordinance. The organization created by the June 1913 ordinance was similar to the system established by the Charter of 1897 in that the agency of authority was a board of fire and police commissioners, which, if retained, would have again extended civil service to only two or three select job positions. Such a narrow conception of civil service violated the provisions of the new charter amendment, which created a Civil Service Commission to "provide for the classification of all employees eligible to civil service, except day laborers, and of all officers and appointees, including peace officers and firemen, except the heads of departments." Ordinance Book 3 (June 2, 1913), pp. 368-369; The Revised Code of Ordinances of the City of Houston of 1914, p. 53.
10. Ordinance Book, vol. 4 (January 10, 1914-June 3, 1914), pp. 362-364; HCAC. Other ordinances, subsequently enacted, further detailed or clarified the workings of the commission. An ordinance approved in May 1914, for example, established the "Civil Service Rules." See Civil Service Commission Rules (Houston, 1914), passim.
12. Brief for Appellant in the Court of Civil Appeals for the First Supreme Judicial District of Texas at Galveston, No. 10104, W.R. (Bobby) Ellis v. Oscar F. Holcombe et al., HCCR.
14. By 1905 most major cities had instituted some form of competitive examination for police officers. Most examinations consisted of two parts, one to test physical fitness and the
second to determine the mental capabilities of the applicant. Examinations varied significantly from one city to another in the degree of sophistication, because of the uneven development of the merit system. Serious defects existed in many of the examinations, but in a few instances the system worked surprisingly well: considering that competitive examinations were still experimental. In New York City and Oakland, California, for example, formulation of the examination was based on as much collaborating information as possible. Examiners drew on the experience of officers both in the department and outside to determine precisely what qualities would be useful. An exchange of information with other departments was arranged, and in New York City a special Municipal Reference Library was established to assist the examiners. Varying degrees of emphasis were attached to the different categories. The more advanced commissions (such as Boston's) rated the previous experience of the applicant as well as his performance on the examination. Other commissions supplemented the written examinations with oral interviews. F.W. Coker, "Progress in Municipal Civil Service: A Review of Reports of the Past Year," National Municipal Review 5 (October, 1916): 575-577; Coker, "Progress in Municipal Civil Service: A Review of Reports of the Past Year," ibid. 6 (November, 1917): 694-696; Arch Mandel, "Getting and Keeping Good Policemen," ibid. 12 (June, 1923): 299-301; H.W. March, "Civil Service and the Police," ibid. 10 (May, 1921): 286-291; "Notes," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 24 (July-December, 1904): 151-162.

15. Civil Service Commission (Rules and Regulations) (Houston, 1914), p. 35; see also ibid. (Houston, 1929), passim; Civil Service Rules for the City of Houston (Houston, 1944), passim.

16. Houston Police Department, "Civil Service Examinations," 1920, Reel 1, PFHPD; see also Memo from the Civil Service Examiner to Chief of Police Gordon Murphy, February 16, 1920, D-20, Reel 1, PFHPD.

17. "Short History of the Police Department Prepared for the Civil Service Year Book," January 17, 1922, Reel 1, PFHPD.

18. Letters from Civil Service Commissioner to Chief of Police Searcy Baker, April 14 and 30, 1920, Reel 1, PFHPD; Memo from Mayor's Office to Chief of Police Tom C. Goodson (month not given) 21, 1926, D-163, Reel 1, ibid.; Letter from Civil Service Commissioner to Chief of Police Tom C. Goodson, January 8, 1929, D-1284, Reel 19, ibid.

The interview with former Assistant Chief of Police George Seber on December 13, 1973, was particularly useful for providing information regarding the operation of the department under civil service regulations during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Mr. Seber served with the Houston Police Department from 1927-1969. Valuable information concerning the operation of the department under civil service was also obtained in the August 9, 1972, interview with former Chief Carl L. Shuptrine, who served with the department from 1930-1963.

19. See Civil Service Commission (Rules and Regulations) (Houston, 1913), p. 65; Civil Service Commission of the City of Houston (Houston, 1929), p. 75; Civil Service Rules for City of Houston (Houston, 1944), p. 18.


21. Miscellaneous Papers 1900-1903, Packet dated February 4, 1901, Motion by Chairman of the Police, Fire, and Health Board, February 4, 1901, HCAC.

22. Pledge cards indicated that the person whose name appeared on the card intended to vote for the candidate distributing the cards. It was hoped that having voters sign pledge cards would obligate them to vote for a particular candidate. By counting the pledge cards a candidate could better determine his areas of strength and weakness prior to an election. Police officers were burdened with dispensing pledge cards because of their familiarity with local neighborhoods. All department heads were expected to collect cards. The number of pledge cards collected did not always give a true indication of how persons actually intended to vote—as in
the mayoral election of 1928 when Holcombe lost to Judge Walter E. Monteith despite favorable projections based on the pledge cards. As a consequence, the collection of pledge cards was discontinued.

23. Letter from Mayor Oscar F. Holcombe to Chief of Police Thomas C. Goodson, October 8, 1924, Reel 2, D-163, PFHPD.

24. Letter from Chief of Police Thomas C. Goodson to the President, Board of Directors, Houston Community Chest, October 8, 1926, Reel 2, D-163, PFHPD.

25. Memo of Message Delivered by Chief of Police Thomas C. Goodson to his ranking officers, September 27, 1928, Reel 2, D-163, PFHPD.

26. Letter from Mayor Walter E. Monteith to members of the Houston Police Department, January 20, 1931, Reel 3, PFHPD.

27. Houston Chronicle, April 11, 1929.


29. Letter from Chief of Police Lawrence C. Brown to Mayor C.A. Pickett, February 8, 1941, Reel 9, D-692, PFHPD. The plight of ranking officers is candidly expressed in a letter from Chief of Police Lawrence C. Brown to J. Edgar Hoover, Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, November 9, 1940, Reel 11, D-758, ibid. See also Letter from Chief of Police Ray Ashworth to William A. Bernrieder, Director of Civil Service, February 12, 1941, Reel 11, D-758, ibid.


30. Houston Post, December 4 and 5, 1947; Inactive Police Personnel Files, Reel 11, D-758, PFHPD.


32. The New York system, devised through the cooperative efforts of the Municipal Civil Service Commission and the Bureau of Municipal Research, relied on efficiency records. The records were maintained on each officer, who was evaluated in several areas—service performance, conduct, work management, and personality. Each category was divided into sub-units to allow as precise a grading as possible. The method of grading each category was based on points or merits. Demerits were given for substandard performance or as a penalty for infractions of the rules. A minimum amount of points was required at the end of each month for a satisfactory rating. The accumulation of efficiency reports over the years formed a continuous record of performance from which promotional lists could be drawn. Henry Moskowitz, "Old and New Problems of Civil Service," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 64 (March, 1916): 156-162; Coker, "Progress in Municipal Civil Service: A Review of Recent Reports," pp. 579-580; Elmer D. Graper, American Police Administration: A Handbook on Police Organization in American Cities (1920; reprint ed., Montclair, 1969), pp. 81-88.

33. Regulations of Civil Service, System of Merit and Demerit, March 24, 1920, Reel 1, PFHPD. See also Correspondence Files, 1920, Police Department Folder, Police Department General Order No. 95, December 29, 1921, HCAC.

The merit system was altered slightly on December 29, 1921, by substituting points for demerits. Basically the general structure of the system remained unchanged. Letter from Chief of Police to Department Captains, General Order No. 95, December 29, 1921, Correspondence Files, 1920, Police Department Folder, HCAC.

34. The extent of discipline during the period 1923-1929 was gleaned from a review of the 700 personnel records composing Reels 1-7 of the inactive files of the Houston Police Department.


36. Personnel record, Reel 11, D-776, PFHPD.
Maintaining discipline was complicated by the reluctance of officers to report the illegal activities of their colleagues. The concern that violations of police regulations were not properly reported and investigated was expressed in a memo from Chief of Police Percy Heard to Inspector C.L. Shuptrine concerning an incident involving an officer’s abusive behavior against a prisoner. “The reports and confessions in the.... case reveal a statement... that... [the officer] repeatedly slapped a prisoner. I was wondering whether or not this incident was reported to you. I am not interested from the point of view of disciplining... [him], because he has been discharged, but I want all such incidents reported and thoroughly investigated.” Memo from Chief of Police Percy Heard to Inspector C.L. Shuptrine, dated June 22, 1943, Reel 13, D-879, PFHPD.

The problem was succinctly stated in a memo by Shuptrine regarding his futile attempt to investigate a complaint of the mistreatment of a prisoner. The inspector noted that “in most of these cases, it is difficult to get other officers to make a statement to the detriment of an officer or to get a citizen who is a witness to make an open statement whereby you can take positive action against officers for their conduct, which perhaps accounts for an officer being with the Department as long as he [the accused officer] has.” Memo from Inspector of Police Carl L. Shuptrine to Chief of Police Percy Heard, dated September 11, 1944, Reel 19, D-1264, PFHPD.