

## MODULE 3 - HOW DID WE GET HERE?

### LECTURE 7 – PRIVATE DETECTIVES

#### THE “PINKS” – THE ORIGINAL PRIVATE EYE

We’re going to diverge from the public police and forensics and such now – it’s getting too touchy with all this security vs. privacy stuff, and I need a break. So let’s take a look what was going on in the **private sector** in the 1800s and the 1900s. That **should be fun!** **Pinkerton and Burns** are two names that stand out in this area.

The **Pinkerton** Agency is quite a story.<sup>78</sup> Allen Pinkerton was a Scottish immigrant to the US who was appointed as the first detective in the Chicago Police Department. He became known as the “**original private eye**” when he created a private company, called the Pinkerton National Detective Agency, in 1850, to protect the properties of large businesses like railroad and mining companies. This was during a period when local police agencies had their hands full just responding to the communities that employed them, and the state and federal governments had not yet developed organizations to support many of the security needs of large corporations. The agency specialized in putting down labor unrest, providing guards for transporting valuable properties and conducting criminal investigations for employers.

The “**Pinks**,” as they became known, established a **code** of conduct for their detectives. Some of the key points were – no bribes, no reward money, no compromise with crooks, but partner with local agencies and keep clients up-to-date on what was going on. **Kinda** like the Peelian principles, maybe. Their detectives were well-paid and well-armed, and by the 1890s, they employed over 2,000 personnel country-wide, with more than 30,000 in reserve. Their company symbol was a picture of an “unblinking eye,” (all-seeing), and their motto was “**We never sleep.**” To this day, whenever I see that symbol, I still get **chills** up and down my spine. Among the many exploits for which they became famous were the hiring of the first female private detective, aborting an assassination attempt on President Lincoln, providing intelligence services to the Union Army during the Civil War (that was a forerunner of the US Secret Service (USSS), developing one of the first criminal identification files, arresting the first known serial killer, and run-ins with Jesse James, Butch Cassidy and other famous gangs. Eventually, however, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the public distaste for the Pinks’ labor union strikebreaking activities, and the development of public criminal investigation agencies (FBI, etc.), made private criminal investigations less profitable, and the Pinks turned more to providing security and protective services.

Ah yes, the **wild and wooly** days of stagecoach and train robberies, shoot-'em-ups, posses, cowboy hats, long coats, **pufferbelly** steam engines, and the like. What a time to be alive! **Lip-smackin'** good! And I saw it all on TV, **you betcha!**

### **BURNS – THE AMERICAN SHERLOCK HOLMES**

The William J. **Burns** National Detective Agency is another good story.<sup>79</sup> In the late 1800s, Burns was initially a private detective, and then became a Secret Service agent. He established the Burns agency in 1909, and soon had over 1,100 employees engaged in providing protective and investigations services mainly to banks and hotels. Prior to World War I, he gained a reputation as the **“American Sherlock Holmes”** by solving several high-visibility murder and bombing cases (yep, had bombings even back then), and by using innovative covert Government Spy techniques (bugs, wiretaps) (**heh-heh**) for big businesses against growing labor union unrest activities.

In 1920, President Harding appointed Burns as the director of the BOI (you **remember**, the forerunner to the FBI, right?); however the involvement of his agency in various political corruption scandals (including the subsequent Teapot Dome scandal – Google it~) led to his downfall. The public perception of him grew as an anti-union, anti-communist **Agent Provocateur**, whose methods **violated civil liberties**, and in 1924, he was forced to resign from the BOI. He was succeeded by a gentleman named J. Edgar Hoover, who remained as the leader of the BOI/FBI until his death in 1972. There's some irony in that appointment, but I'm getting ahead of the story. In his retirement, Burns went on to write crime novels and “true detective” stories that he modestly claimed were based on many of his past exploits. Talk about career changes! And modesty!

These **two real-life private detective agencies** were the largest of their time, and they were portrayed frequently in numerous media outlets (short stories, novels, crime magazines, newspapers, movies, etc.). But even as private organizations, they never gained the popularity or stature of the fictional Classical Detective (except maybe in Burns's novels that were written by Burns and starred Burns). While they may have shared some of the attributes associated with Classical Detectives (such as no bribes/rewards, dedication, truth-seekers, anti-crime), in many ways their activities were usually closer in kind to the real-world Government Spy, the Secretive Rogue and the fictional hard-boiled detective, only driven by a more business-oriented profit motive. Their **GOAL** was to collect and use info to prevent, detect and solve crime (**CUIPDSC**), and their **STYLE** included both **overt and covert** measures. The **ends** seemed to justify the means, and the **FOCUS** was on **offenders** in **all five phases** of a crime.

Needless to say, both companies were **hugely successful** because they filled a big business need for security that local agencies were too weak to provide, and that the federal government wasn't capable of dealing with at the time. Like local agency Inquisitor Detectives, they relied heavily on threats and intimidation and, like local agencies, that was their downfall. As federal government agencies were invented and developed, both Pinkerton and Burns moved their business away from the anti-labor and investigations flashpoint activities and toward the more mundane protective services (guards, etc.) where they were subjected to much less flack and disapproval from the public.<sup>78, 79</sup>

Essentially, they followed the same path as local agencies from the Secretive Rogue and Inquisitor Detective to the Bureaucrat Detective (who we will cover shortly).

Ah, the good old days – what a time it must have been, **eh?** I wonder if the next lecture can top this one~~~