

**CRJ 110: Introduction to Criminal Justice**

**Final Assignment**

**An interview with law enforcement: [REDACTED] (henceforth referred to as Ms X) of  
the FBI**

**(with a Follow-up - the Duty Agent in Action)**

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*Mrs. Tarantino: Are you the police?*

*Elwood: No, ma'am. We're musicians.*

The Blues Brothers (1980)

This is perhaps most people's perception of the FBI. I went into the interview with Ms X (Parole officer attached to the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force) with this in mind hoping, at least partially to dispel the myth of the agency as a cold, impersonal, crime-processing machine. What I discovered was that, for the most part, this perception is correct.

I was limited to forty minutes with Ms X - her estimated commute from the local agency office in the Stapleton area to her residence at an undisclosed location. For security reasons phones are not allowed in the room where she spends much of her time - a secure area known as a Special Compartmentalized Information Facility - and she did not speak highly of cell phone reception in other parts of the building.

The total time of the interview was approximately thirty minutes. During that time, we touched on three aspects of law enforcement: stereotypes in the media (already alluded to in the opening paragraph), the procedures involved in a report to the agency becoming an investigation and women in law enforcement.

We started the conversation speaking about law enforcement and gender. I selected this topic out of serendipity; given that both the Course Instructor and our Secret Service guest were male the opportunity to discuss gender issues with a female in law enforcement was too good to pass up.

In my research for the interview, I discovered that more than fifty percent of office staff at the FBI are female and approximately a fifth of field agents (Barrett, 2018). While this appears low (and that is the suggestion of the referenced article), it is actually quite progressive. Ms X attributed this to a general "cultural push" to hire females, noting that the agency specifically holds diversity recruiting events. When asked why law enforcement was traditionally dominated by men Ms X reaffirmed that it was historical in that most law enforcement agencies had their roots in the military (as noted in class) which were traditionally male dominated.

The other gender disparity in law enforcement that is glaring in the text is between the number of crimes committed by men and the numbers of men incarcerated in both the State and Federal prison systems. Her answer surprised me - I was expecting the claim that women have fewer criminal tendencies but instead she stated that she felt it was because juries and judges don't like to see "wives and mothers" incarcerated. With regard to the death penalty, she agreed that "because of a woman's reproductive ability" the law generally considers female lives to be more valuable which helps to explain the virtually non-existent female execution rate of only 1.13% (Bohm & Haley, 2018).

The history of the FBI and J. Edgar Hoover is easily obtained from a variety of sources, notably Bryan Burrough's biographical history *Public Enemies* (2005) which details the birth of the agency during the crime wave of the Depression Era. While a fascinating topic, I was looking for more of an inside view of how the agency gets involved. Thus, at this point in the interview I shifted the conversation to the other two points of interest: Hollywood stereotypes and FBI procedures. Specifically, asking the question about how the FBI receives information regarding alleged criminal activity and how that information is acted upon.

The popular television show *White Collar* (2009-2014) depicts the local FBI office as having an open glass door, presumably in a high-rise somewhere in downtown Manhattan, where anyone can walk in and report a crime. While the Denver branch of the agency is more than just a single office (a more detailed description appears in the *Follow-Up*, below), Ms X informed me that people do, indeed, walk up to the office to report crimes. In addition, the FBI has a tip line as well as an online form where people can submit tips. How many of these tips are taken seriously, I asked?

"They're all taken seriously." Ms X responded.

How many of these are actually credible?

"Perhaps 20% are credible."

This estimate is primarily based on the Joint Terrorism Task Force and, as such, with terrorism being such a hot topic over the last twenty years, is probably low compared to reports of crime in other areas.

Ms X further went on to describe the process. When a tip is received, the Duty Agent - a random agent particularly assigned to this detail on a rotating schedule - prepares a report and enters the information into a computer system. This information is then passed to the relevant department, at which point it is assigned to an investigator. That person's first task is to determine whether the information is credible and whether or not the alleged crime warrants investigation. While much of the information in an FBI investigation is confidential, Ms X informed me that, in the event that a report is acted upon (i.e., an investigation ensues) that the agency does provide updates to people reasonable involved in the investigation.

I did get the opportunity to touch of the subject in which I was most interested: how the FBI handles corruption. Much to my surprise Ms X volunteered the information outright that Colorado has a big problem with public corruption, specifically, bribery of prison officials. As many of those involved are incarcerated on charges of terrorism this sometimes crosses over

into the domain of the JTTF. As with Mr Joyce, I was again astounded at the candor of law enforcement in admitting how little power they have under certain circumstances.

Follow-Up - The Duty Agent in action:

Towards the end of my interview with Ms X I mentioned a concern of my own having to do with a particular instance of suspected judicial corruption which, I discovered during this course, is an area of law enforcement that is under the jurisdiction of the FBI. Her suggestion was to report the incident to the Duty Agent.

The following day I took her advice and reported to the Denver FBI Field Office at 8000 East 36<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Unlike *White Collar*, the entire building is the FBI office, and it is surrounded by an eight-foot spiked iron fence. There is a visitor's parking lot outside and a small guard house in which two security guards sit behind inch thick bullet proof glass.

The visitor's section consists only of two chairs, an x-ray machine into which I was required to put all of my possessions before being allowed to speak with the Duty Agent, and a metal detector which I was, likewise, was required to step through.

The Duty Agent affirmed Ms X's assertion - today was his day for Duty Agent detail. When I asked for a name he responded only with "John" - I'm not even sure if this was his real name and, when I commented on the anonymity he responded by stating that, as Ms X suggested, at this time he was simply a records taker and, as such his identity was inconsequential.

He was dressed in a suit with functional shoes and was unwaveringly businesslike. He took my statement, asking questions about specifics - mainly names of persons involved - as well as jotting down my testimony.

He told me that he would write it up and pass it on (in accordance with the procedure described by Ms X) but was honest in informing me that the case may not be of interest due to its staleness (my term, not his) - the events of which I spoke happened over four years ago and the subject in question has retired. It would probably not, he suggested, be dealt with as urgently as a complaint against a sitting judge.

Unfortunately, this course will have concluded by the time I can come to any reasonable conclusion of whether or not my complaint will be dealt with. "John" highlighted that the FBI, like all government agencies, is limited in its resources and the agency is required to pick and choose those investigations which are considered most detrimental.

## References:

Burrough, B. (2005). *Public Enemies: America's Greatest Crime Wave and the Birth of the FBI, 1933-34*. New York: Penguin Books.

Bohm, R., & Haley, K. (2018). *Introduction to criminal justice*. New York: McGraw-Hill Education

Barrett, D. (2018). Women underrepresented in key jobs at FBI, DEA, ATF and Marshals Service. Retrieved 9 December 2019, from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/women-underrepresented-in-key-jobs-at-fbi-dea-atf-and-marshals-service/2018/06/26/ec12e41e-794a-11e8-ae4e-4d04c8ac6158\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/women-underrepresented-in-key-jobs-at-fbi-dea-atf-and-marshals-service/2018/06/26/ec12e41e-794a-11e8-ae4e-4d04c8ac6158_story.html)

## Filmography:

The Blues Brothers (John Landis, 1980). IMDb: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0080455>

White Collar (2009-2014). IMDb: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1358522>