

1958

## How Much Do People Write Alike--A Study of Signatures

John J. Harris

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/jclc>

 Part of the [Criminal Law Commons](#), [Criminology Commons](#), and the [Criminology and Criminal Justice Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

John J. Harris, How Much Do People Write Alike--A Study of Signatures, 48 J. Crim. L. Criminology & Police Sci. 647 (1957-1958)

This Criminology is brought to you for free and open access by Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology by an authorized editor of Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons.

without the supervision or regulation of any other department of the state. . . ."

Upon further analysis the opinion found that the disabilities and limitations of organizations of public employees—including police—included: (1) lack of power to strike, on the basis not of statutory law or judicial opinion but of "the overwhelming consensus of legal and socio-economic opinion"; (2) lack of power to negotiate a collective bargaining agreement, the relationship between a municipality and its employees being non-contractual; (3) lack of power to obtain a closed shop agreement; appointments and promotions being based on merit and fitness, not on membership in a labor organization; and (4) lack of right to enter into a check-off arrangement; whereby union dues are deducted by the employer, inasmuch as a municipality cannot be used as an instrument for the collection of private debt.

On the basis of these considerations the opinion concluded that: "In the case of public employees the right (to organize) is a qualified one dependent upon the legislative and administrative policy of the governmental agency," and upheld accordingly the power of Chicago local government agencies "in their legislative and administrative discretion" to prohibit police officers from joining a labor union. Other cities whose legal counsel have upheld limitations or prohibitions of police unions in well considered opinions, include Chattanooga, Tenn. (1945), St. Louis, Mo. (1945), and Wichita, Kans. (1946).

The great majority of labor disputes in our community, we are happy to report, are conducted in a peaceful manner. However, we have had our share of inexcusable violence and destruction of property by picketing strikers.

We believe strongly in the right to strike, and of peaceful picketing. The trouble with many strikers is that they demand the protection of the law, but they refuse to obey the law. They insist that the law gives them the right to strike and the right to picket. The law does give these rights, but you simply cannot interpret the conduct of pickets as peaceful picketing where they resort to swinging baseball bats, throwing bricks, littering the street to the plant gates with nails and physically preventing non-strikers from entering a plant. At this point, a unionized police officer has to make his choice between his sworn duty and his allegiance to the union.

The mob action resorted to in many labor disputes is due mainly to the failure or unwillingness

of the union leaders to maintain discipline among their strikers; and when the police take proper action to enforce the law and arrest such violators, they are accused by the union of being strike breakers, and showing partiality to industry. The role of a police officer in a strike situation is ticklish and unpleasant. If they try to avoid a physical clash with picketing strikers, they are criticized by proponents of management; and if they keep the plant gates open, and quell violence on the picket line, they are called strike breakers.

In twenty-four years as a police officer, the writer does not recall a union organizer agreeing that a police detail was necessary at the scene of a strike, regardless of the amount of violence. Likewise, management complains that the police details are not sufficient to protect their plant. How can a police department possibly remain neutral and tolerate a union in its ranks, and resolve this question?

Many union leaders in my community with whom I have discussed the unionization of police departments have, in private, expressed their opposition to organizing police departments. They will not, however, admit this publicly.

Let's explore the possibilities of a police officer belonging to a union when faced with the boycott of a business establishment, when all unions in the area are called upon to actively participate in the boycott. Does it seem compatible for him to patrol such establishment for eight hours as a police officer and at the end of his tour, picket such location with a sign urging the citizens to refrain from making purchases?

The ultimate goal of every union is to achieve a closed shop. What is your position as Chief of Police, are you in accord with such demands?

The Jackson, Mississippi, action has attracted wide interest. The supreme court of Mississippi on January 14, 1946, in *City of Jackson v. McLeod* (24 S. 2d, 319) upheld the dismissal of 34 policemen in Jackson on grounds of (1) insubordination, and (2) acts tending to injure the public service. The policemen had joined a local of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees and had refused to resign their membership. Their dismissal by the mayor in June, 1944, was upheld by the Civil Service Commission, but a trial by jury in circuit court in May, 1945, found against the City of Jackson which then appealed to the Supreme Court. This court pointed out that police must perform their duties without favoritism and should be "free from obligation of any other

allegiance whatsoever." The court had reference to the pledge which each member of the local union was required to take. "I . . . pledge my honor to observe faithfully the constitution and laws of this local . . . not to make public any of the private proceedings of this local . . . support the products and services of organized labor . . . and at all times to bear true and faithful allegiance . . . to the labor movement in general."

What is meant "to bear true and faithful allegiance to the labor movement in general"? It would mean that in instances of strikes in small industries, that particular union could call upon a union police officer to do picket duty at their plant, and if the police officer follows the regulations of his department, he at all times is armed. The question then arises . . . are you going to tolerate armed pickets?

The primary obligation of a police department in any labor dispute necessitating the presence of a police detail, is to remain impartial. It is impossible for a police officer to remain free of favoritism or bias, when he is required at all times to bear true and faithful allegiance to the labor movement.

In 1944 and 1945 the A.F.L. claimed to have organized local unions composed entirely of policemen in 45 cities of more than 10,000 population except one city (Centralia, Washington). Questionnaires were directed to these cities by the Louisville Department in the month of July, 1957. Forty-four of the 45 cities replied with the following results.

Within twelve years 28 unions, or 64% of the total replying, are no longer in existence, 16 cities, or 36% still have a union, 4 of this number are small in membership and considered inactive, and one is associated with a police benefit and protective association. This leaves only 11 police departments of the 44 having unions at this time. If the ratio of failures in these unions continue at the same rate as they have during the past twelve years, all of this group will be non-existent by 1963.

The I.A.C.P. in September, 1944 published a special study "Police Unions and Other Police Organizations". This study came to the conclusion, "That for the most part departmental rules, legal opinions, or defined policies exist which permit the proper officials to ban a labor union for employees of the police department; that some few cities have permitted such unions to function, some of which have died through lack of interest on the part of the members, but most of which have not been given the sanction of city administrators; and the appeal of labor union membership is not very great to law enforcement officials on the whole."

The conclusion reached by the I.A.C.P. Committee in 1944 was realistic and valid, the intervening years have only served to strengthen this opinion that the best interests of a police department would not be served by affiliation with a police labor union.

# HOW MUCH DO PEOPLE WRITE ALIKE

## A Study of Signatures

JOHN J. HARRIS

The author is an examiner of questioned documents and a partner in the firm of Harris and Harris, Los Angeles, California. In addition to his work in the questioned document field Mr. Harris serves as an Instructor of Questioned Documents at the University of Southern California and has previously contributed to this Journal. This paper is based upon a presentation of his at the annual meeting of the American Society of Questioned Document Examiners, an organization in which Mr. Harris has been active for a number of years.—EDITOR.

*(It is suggested that the reader first inspects the illustrations before reading the article).*

No two persons write exactly alike, but document examiners occasionally find persons who write with amazing similarity. From such incidents the experienced examiner develops a healthy respect for "handwriting doubles".

Nearly everyone can write and we are usually able to read what the other fellow puts down, meaning there must be a lot of handwriting similarities somewhere.

Would it not be interesting if every adult submitted a sample of handwriting using the same size paper, type of writing instrument, and text. We could count the Greek "e's", printed "S's", and other characteristics and come up with rough statistical data on *how much people write alike*. But no such records exist so it is necessary to rely on other sources and one's own experience to answer this question.

The five illustrations show that some people write quite a bit alike (although never exactly the same, given sufficient handwriting to compare). The illustrations also graphically point out why precautions are necessary in rendering opinions based on small amounts of writing.

### THE SMITH PHOTOGRAPH

The question in the Smith photograph (figure 1): Is the "Smith" outlined in black written by any of the Smiths below? Or are they all written by the same person? Is the left column by one person and the right column by another? These signatures were signed over a period of approximately ten years and under varying conditions, sometimes standing and other times sitting.

Now that you have been completely misled, here are the facts. Each of the twenty-one Smiths is by a different writer. The signatures were photographed at the Los Angeles County Registrar of Voters. They represent samples from less than one-fifteenth of the Smiths on file. Most of these people are named "John Smith".

Each signature was individually photographed, holding the camera, and using available light, which will explain why a few of the specimens are fuzzy.

That "S" is not so identifying after all. Couldn't Mr. Smith, right column, third from top, forge the Smith immediately below with a minimum of effort; in fact the less he tried, the better. He would just be doing what comes naturally.

At the Voters Registration an overwhelming number of "Smiths" sign their name using the conventional script "S". So many of these signatures lacked individuality and looked alike that they were not worth photographing.

### SHAW SERIES, ET AL.

The Shaw series (figure 2) is also from the Registrar of Voters. Each signature is by a different person.

Three types of Shaw signatures are shown. Systemic or conventional specimens are in the top column while the lower left column is made up of specimens each with a disconnected "S" and a high beginning on the "h". And the lower right column has the flying "w".

In Figure 3 the top "Harris" is a part of the writer's signature, and the others are fellow voters.

The "Dybdahl" series (figure 4) is unusually similar, considering there are only a few people with this name. Notice the capital "D", a short

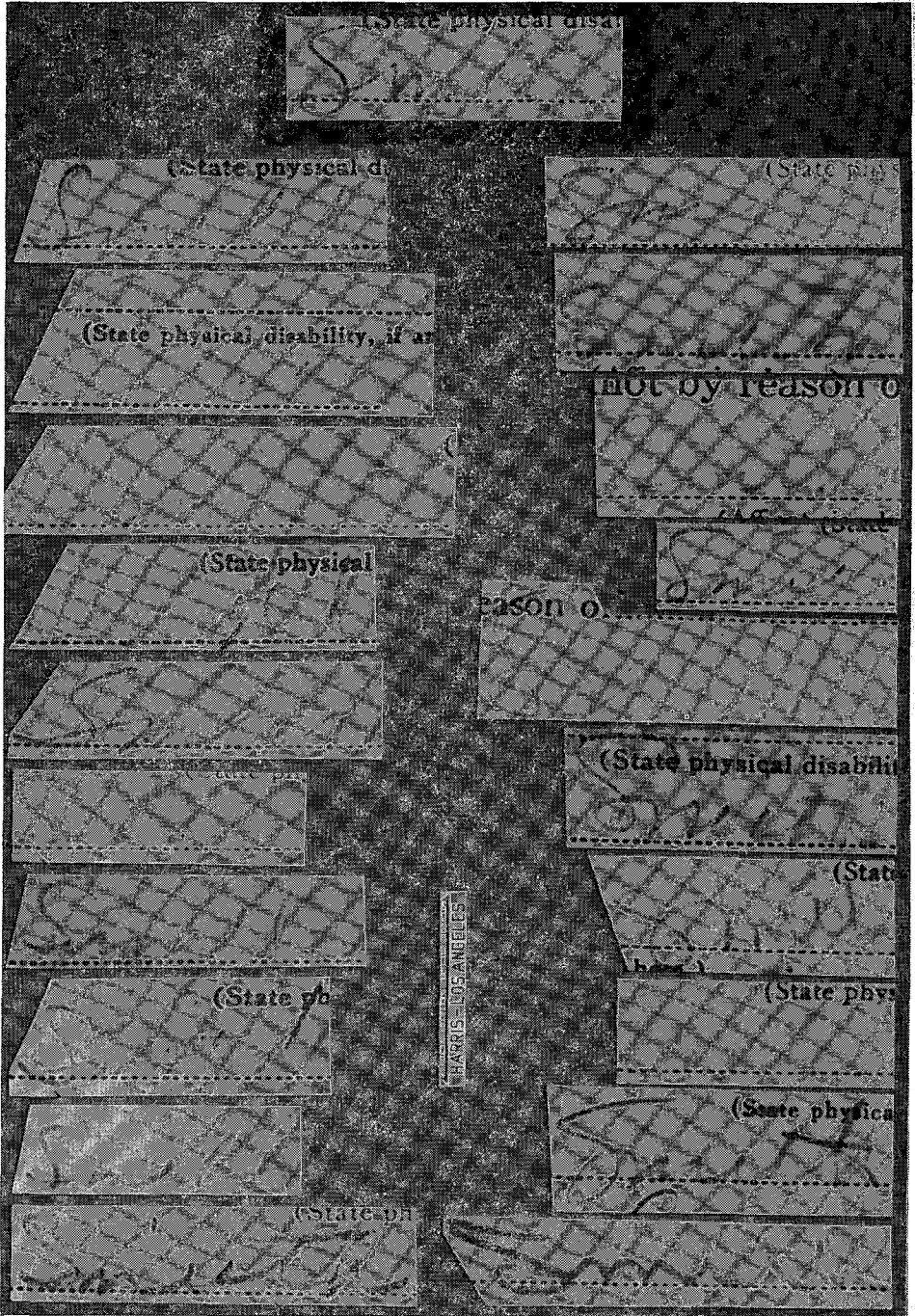


Figure 1

Twenty-One Smith Signatures

Was the Smith outlined in black written by any other Smith below? (For answer, read article.)

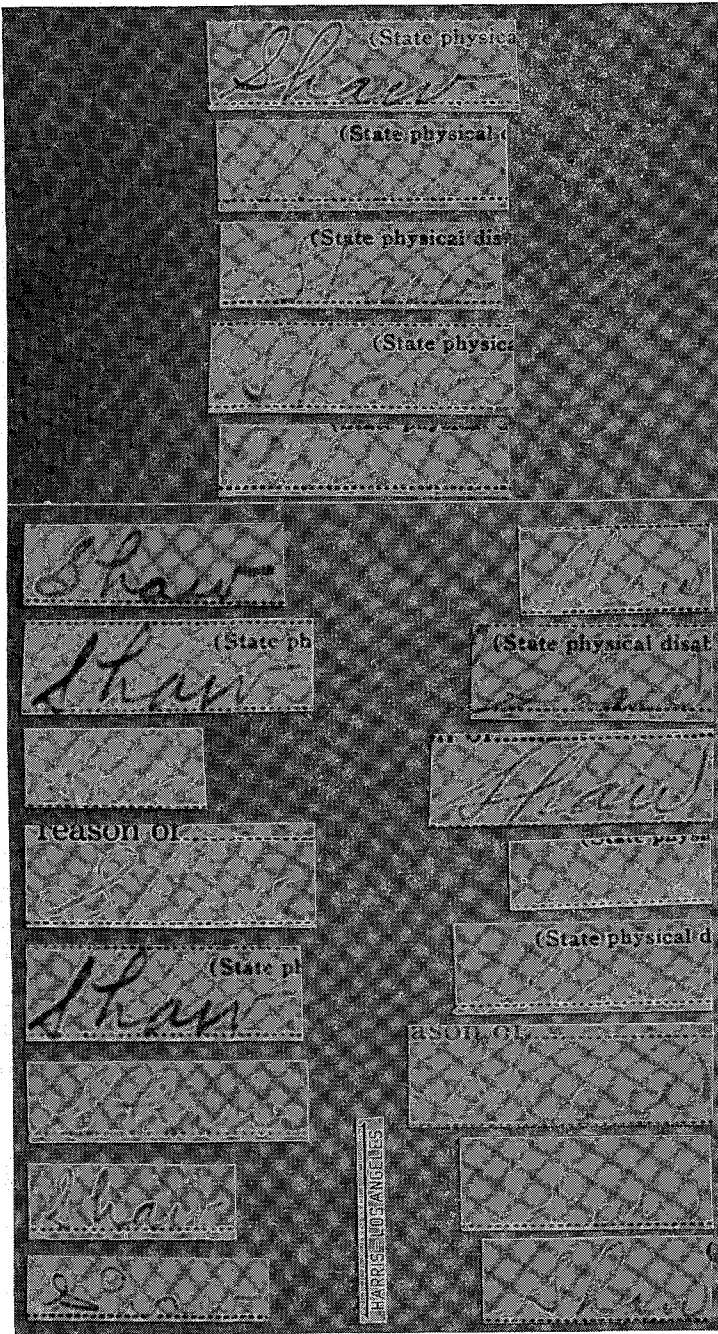


Figure 2

The Shaw Series

How many different persons wrote these signatures? (For answer, read article.)