

Second Edition

Crime and Policing in Rural and Small-Town America

Ralph A. Weisheit
David N. Falcone
L. Edward Wells

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Ralph A. Weisheit

David N. Falcone

L. Edward Wells

Illinois State University



Prospect Heights, Illinois

For information about this book, write or call:

Waveland Press, Inc.

P.O. Box 400

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Preface to the Second Edition

FROM THE DAY WE SENT THE MANUSCRIPT FOR THE FIRST EDITION of *Crime and Policing in Rural and Small-Town America* to the editor, we have continued to find new data, new analyses, and new areas of research related to rural crime and rural policing. This second edition comes only about three years after the first, but the amount of new material available since the first edition was so substantial that a new edition was deemed necessary. This edition updates many of the official figures presented in the first edition, adds new information to existing sections, and includes several areas not touched upon in the first edition. New sections to this edition include a discussion of "white trash and red-necks," crimes related to the environment, the use of deadly force by rural police, the training needs of rural police, rural prosecutors, and probation in rural areas.

This edition also includes substantially expanded discussions of guns and crime, rural poverty, gangs, violence, arson, small-town municipal police, rural jails, and prisons. Appendix A includes a more thorough discussion of the question "What is rural?", an issue we consider essential to any study of rural crime. Those who wish to use the book as a resource will find the references have been substantially expanded.

The population of America continues to grow and expand outward into the hinterlands, which may have some role in accounting for the continued interest in rural places and rural crime. This second edition reflects a maturing of our understanding of rural crime and justice issues. The subject continues to fascinate us, perhaps because we are only beginning to appreciate its complexity. It remains a puzzle that is never quite solved, an intellectual challenge that continues to reveal things about crime and American society that are quite unexpected. Although we believe this second edition is a substantial improvement

and extension of our work in the first edition, our research on rural crime and justice will continue to be “work in progress” for many years. We continue to feel fortunate to be working in such an interesting subject area.

Preface

RARELY DO RESEARCHERS HAVE THE GOOD FORTUNE TO examine an issue in which there is a continuing series of surprises and unexpected results and in which conducting the research is, for want of a better word, fun! Such has been the case with this study of rural crime and rural justice. The study formally began with a response to a request for proposals from the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) to study rural policing. The roots of this project, however, go back much further. Each of us has some connection to rural America. Dr. Weisheit grew up outside of a southern Indiana community of just over 7,000, the largest community in the county. Dr. Wells grew up on a small town in Oregon, a community of 2,500 people far from any large urban centers. Dr. Falcone grew up in suburban Chicago but lived for several years in a remote rural section of southeastern Missouri. While we each had our connections to rural environments, for much of our academic careers we set those personal experiences aside in our professional work.

Prior to this study, Dr. Weisheit was funded by NIJ to conduct a study of commercial marijuana growers. Most large-scale growers in his study were rural dwellers, as were most of the police who apprehended them. Traveling to rural areas to interview growers and police raised a variety of issues about rural crime and justice which were beyond the scope of the earlier study.

The present study was possible only because of the collaboration among Drs. Weisheit, Wells, and Falcone. From his earlier work, Dr. Weisheit had already gathered a variety of materials about rural crime and rural culture and had published an article on conducting research in rural areas. Dr. Wells contributed the insights of a methodologist, a necessity in a multi-method study such as this one. Dr. Wells also had the expertise to manage, merge, and analyze large data sets, allowing part of our research to include secondary analyses of existing data. Dr.

Falcone's expertise is in policing, something about which Drs. Weisheit and Wells are less well informed. His practical experience, combined with his scholarly understanding of the issue, proved invaluable. Dr. Falcone was also responsible for conducting all of the focus groups and most of the interviews for the study.

At first, the challenge was to find something to say about rural crime and rural justice. This changed as a general framework for understanding rural crime emerged, a framework in which the focus was on the role of relatively close social networks within the context of relatively greater physical isolation. What had appeared to be a variety of narrowly focused studies covering a broad range of disciplines began to take shape as parts of a coherent whole. As we continued to dig through the literature and the data, and as information from focus groups and interviews came in, the challenge shifted to one of deciding how to *stop* writing. Additions of new materials were made even as the book was being prepared for typesetting, and we have already begun collecting materials for a third edition. The study of rural issues has caused each of us to rethink many of our assumptions about crime and police work. We hope this book has the same impact on others.

While we assembled and wrote the information presented in this book, it would have not been possible without the assistance of many people. Marilyn Moses, our grant manager at NIJ, was tremendously supportive throughout. It was Ms. Moses who first recommended we work with the National Sheriffs' Association (NSA). The National Sheriffs' Association was a delight to work with, providing technical assistance and feedback from the very beginning. We were also pleased to have been invited to present our results at three annual meetings of the NSA. We are particularly grateful to our contact person at NSA, Ms. Theresa Mathews, who went out of her way to assist us. And, for their comments on earlier drafts of this document, we would like to thank Sheriff G. C. "Buck" Buchanan of Yavapai County, Arizona; Carl R. Harbaugh, former sheriff of Frederick County, Maryland; and Sheriff J. C. Bittick of Monroe County, Georgia. The manuscript has benefitted enormously from the comments of Dr. Joseph Donnermeyer, one of the leading researchers on rural crime issues. Dr. Mark Hamm's comments on the hate crimes section made it far more clear and readable, and Mr. Larry Heisner's experiences as a rural police chaplain prodded our thinking in a variety of areas. We also had the good fortune to interview and receive comments from David A. Armstrong of McNeese State University, who was generously willing to share his prior experiences in rural policing. His keen insights helped clarify our thinking on a variety of issues. We are also indebted to the support and feedback we received from Sheriff Steve Brien of McLean County, Illinois. He is responsible

for both rural and urban areas within McLean County and has had a long-standing interest in the issue of rural policing. His advice and observations were most helpful.

We are also indebted to the National Center for State and Local Law Enforcement at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC), which has used material from the project to develop a training program on rural drug enforcement. In the course of developing this program, Dr. Weisheit was invited to participate and to conduct a portion of the training for the pilot program. His involvement put him into contact with a variety of people whose comments were of great help. These include, but are not limited to: Special Agent Danny Ray of the Georgia Peace Officer Standards & Training Council; Lt. Tom Hargrave of the Cleburne, Texas, Police Department; and Thomas C. Durrett, Chief of Police of the Clarksburg, West Virginia, Police Department. From the National Center for State and Local Law Enforcement Training, we wish to thank Charlene Alentado, Senior Program Specialist; Steven T. Kernes, Chief of Program Management; and Hobart M. Henson, Director. While these have been our main contact people at FLETC, everyone there with whom we worked was extremely helpful and supportive. Our work has also benefited greatly from the comments and observations of Dr. Carl Hawkins, a captain with the Hillsborough County Florida's Sheriff's Office. His insights into community policing have been particularly helpful.

The authors also wish to thank the project staff. Mr. Michael Chitty provided assistance in locating and organizing much of the hard-to-find literature and undertook an interview study of conservation police. We wish to give particular thanks to Ms. Nancy Becker, who arranged interviews, transcribed tapes, and took care of a dozen other details to make this project possible.

We are also indebted to the staff at Waveland Press. Neil Rowe gave us encouragement and support throughout the project. We are also grateful to Jeni Ogilvie and Steve Dungan, who were instrumental in production of the book.

Finally, each of us would like to give a personal thanks to those near us who provided important emotional support throughout. Dr. Weisheit would like to thank his wife Carol for her continued support, and his son Ryan, who can always make him laugh. They both help keep everything in perspective. Dr. Wells wants to thank his wife Anna, along with Rachel and Loren, for their forbearance during the project, especially the busy times before meetings and deadlines. Dr. Falcone would like to thank his wife Joan for her support and understanding given his many absences from home while conducting field interviews.

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Introduction



THE IMAGE OF AMERICA AS A "MELTING POT" IS AN IMAGE OF homogeneity with a single common culture arising from many different sources. This image is fostered by the "massification" of our society. Fast food restaurants and department store chains look pretty much the same everywhere in the United States. National television networks and even a national newspaper assure that major events in one part of the country will soon be known in all parts. Americans have more automobiles per capita than any country in the world, an extensive network of over two-and-one-quarter million miles of paved highways, and over 12,000 airports, making America a highly mobile society. Modern telecommunications have facilitated a continuous exchange of information among people across the country.

While America began as an agrarian society with a predominantly rural population, few people would characterize it as either agrarian or rural today. For many, the very idea of rural life seems like an historical concept with little relevance for a modern urban society. In short, contemporary American culture is considered not only homogenous, but an urban culture. Since most people have a television and a telephone, and most have access to some form of transportation, it is assumed that urban culture has permeated all parts of America, even those areas where the population is relatively sparse.

The focus on America as an urban society with a common set of problems seems particularly true in most current thinking about crime. In the minds of many, the crime problem is, by definition, an urban problem. It is assumed that rural crime is rare or nonexistent—that when it does occur, it is only a "small" version of the urban crime problem. The urban setting is seen as the true laboratory for studying crime problems that are universal to American society. Viewed in this way, it is easy to see how the study of rural crime might be viewed as esoteric and therefore less interesting and less informative. Also, given this general perspective, it is not surprising that the strategies suggested for dealing with rural crime are often those developed and implemented in urban areas. It is assumed that urban models can be used to teach rural citizens how best to deal with crime. Conversely, it is assumed that what goes on in rural areas is irrelevant and unimportant to those dealing

with urban crime problems. Our findings directly challenge the assumption that crime and culture are identical in urban and rural areas. Rural crime and rural justice are not simply scaled-down versions of urban crime and justice. Rural crime and justice take place in a context that colors the process by which crime arises and by which justice is carried out.

This book will examine what is known about crime and policing in rural areas and small towns and how rural crime and justice are shaped by the rural environment. To place this discussion in a larger context, it is useful to discuss why a study of crime and the administration of justice in rural areas and small towns is important. Among the practical reasons are: (1) rural crime is a problem in itself, and some forms of rural crime may be increasing; (2) rural areas may have special crime problems, such as organized theft of livestock, equipment, and grain, for which urban police are poorly prepared, yet they are enormously costly to both the victim and to society. In addition to these issues, which are of direct concern to rural citizens, there are also ways in which rural crime and urban crime are interrelated: (3) rural areas are often used to produce drugs, such as marijuana and methamphetamines, for consumption in rural areas as well as for urban consumers; (4) rural areas are used as transshipment points for such illegal goods as drugs, stolen auto parts, and illegal cash; and (5) some have argued that urban crime networks, such as street gangs, are setting up “franchises” or “satellite operations” in rural areas. In addition to the practical benefits of studying rural crime and justice, there is the potential for advancing our understanding of the criminal justice system in society. If crime and justice are vastly different in rural and urban areas, an understanding of those differences might improve our understanding of crime and the administration of justice more generally.

This text, which resulted from a study undertaken with support from the National Institute of Justice, is designed to provide a better understanding of the rural crime problem and of issues facing rural and small-town police. The study was done by gathering and synthesizing information from a variety of sources (see Appendix B for details), including existing published literature, interviews with rural justice officials, focus groups, and a survey of rural and small-town police regarding their concerns. The nature of our study gives substantial attention to the police perspective. We recognize that by using this approach we have chosen to ignore other and perhaps very different views about rural crime and rural justice. However, we view this study as a first look at rural crime issues—not as the final word. A police perspective is not the only perspective, but it seems a reasonable starting point. In an area in which so little is known it is simply impossible to study more than a

fraction of the issues and perspectives that are available. It is our hope that the findings reported here will encourage others to conduct more detailed examinations of particular issues and to do so from other perspectives.

One of the most difficult challenges in undertaking this study was defining the concept *rural*. While the term is very familiar, there are no definitions which are simultaneously precise, measurable, and widely agreed upon. Moreover, the meaning of rural has shifted somewhat over the past several decades (see Appendix A). Like such broad concepts as justice, truth, and beauty, the idea of “rural” is one that most people feel they readily understand but few can objectively measure. Among the studies we examined, a wide variety of definitions of rural were used, although the most common approach was to simply use the term without defining it. The interested reader will find a more elaborate discussion of the definition of the term rural in Appendix A. Throughout the discussion we will show some degree of flexibility in our definition of the term, often to make our discussion or data comparable to the work of others. Ultimately, the reader will observe that the elements of rurality that are most important for understanding rural crime and rural justice have less to do with population density and other objective measures than with networks of interpersonal relationships. This point will be emphasized in chapter 1, which discusses the rural setting of crime and justice. It is a theme, however, that runs throughout the book.

Our work began with an extensive review of the relevant literature, which gave clues to guide the content areas of our interviews and focus groups. The volume of literature on rural crime and rural policing is scant, particularly when compared to the amount of published work based on urban environments. To complicate matters, what literature is available is scattered across a variety of disciplines. Although there are many references to rural crime and justice, they are often only fragments of information or brief asides in discussions of other issues. The reader will forgive us if there are areas in which the discussion seems incomplete. Such is the state of knowledge about rural issues. Rural crime is worthy of further study, but for that study to be useful it must tie together these scattered pieces of information. The synthesis that follows begins to do just that, starting with what is known about the environment in which rural crime and rural justice take place.

Chapter 1

The Rural Setting of Crime and Justice

