

Space, Time, and Crime

Space, Time, and Crime

Third Edition

Kim Michelle Lersch

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA POLYTECHNIC

Timothy C. Hart

UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA LAS VEGAS

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Introduction

In the fall of 2002, residents of the Washington D.C. metropolitan area were absolutely terrified by a pair of serial snipers who had roamed the region, shooting 14 innocent people as they conducted the every-day business of their lives: shopping, pumping gas, dropping by the post office, running errands, or just going to school. There was no rhyme or reason to the selection of the victims. Men and women, old and young, and members of various racial and ethnic groups were slain at the hands of the well-trained shooter and his young stepson. In the days prior to their arrest, the gunmen had even issued a warning to parents that their children may be the next victims. No one was immune from this indiscriminate violence.

The most terrifying aspect of these incidents was the sheer randomness of their timing and the locations of their occurrence. There was no pattern in the shootings. Some of the victims were shot in the early morning hours, others at various times throughout the late morning and afternoon, while still others were gunned down in the late evening. A Florida tourist was wounded outside of a Ponderosa restaurant; a terror analyst for the Federal Bureau of Investigation was killed in a Home Depot parking lot. It seemed that no one was safe at any time or at any place in the region. Schools were closed and outdoor events such as high school football games were cancelled as the area was paralyzed by fear.

While the case of the Beltway snipers garnered international attention, it should be noted that this type of violence targeted against random victims is the exception, not the rule. In fact, one could argue that the lack of a pattern in the location, time, and victim selection is what made this horrible tragedy especially newsworthy. If these same madmen had been targeting drug dealers or prostitutes in poor urban neighborhoods, more than likely this book would have had a different introduction since few of us would have been able to recall any details from the media reports of the incident (if there had been any national coverage at all).

Our journey through space, time and crime begins with a basic statement of fact: Crime is not evenly distributed across locations, times, victims, or targets. In every city in America, there are “safe” areas where serious crimes are

a relatively rare event. There are also not-so-safe areas where crimes—especially violent, predatory street crimes—are an everyday occurrence. Certain times of the day are safer than others, although this varies with the type of crime. While one is much less likely to become a victim of a violent assault during the day-time hours, one's home is at greater risk for an attack by a burglar during the same time frame. While some will (fortunately) live their entire lives free from serious incidents of crime, others, especially those who happen to be young, single, members of a minority group, and/or urban residents have a much higher likelihood of becoming a victim of crime. Far from being a random event that occurs without rhyme or reason, crime is concentrated in certain areas and at certain times.

The purpose of this book is to explore issues related to the spatial and temporal clustering of crimes. The book is divided into four sections. The first section, which includes Chapters 2 and 3, explores the issues of “why.” Why are some neighborhoods overrun with crime, while others enjoy safety, peace, and harmony among the local residents? In the second section, Chapters 4 and 5 explore the issue of “what.” Once a high crime location or time is identified, what can we do about it? How do the theories get translated into policy? The third section, which is comprised of Chapters 6 and 7, explores the issues of “how.” How do we know where the crimes are located? How do police agencies, security managers, and others identify the areas that need more crime prevention services or special patrol operations? The book ends with a critical examination of the various theories, policies, and strategies that have been presented throughout the text.

In this third edition, the research and references have been updated throughout the text. More examples have been provided from practitioners in the field as we have tried to make the book relevant to both students and working professionals. The most notable update is that Dr. Timothy Hart has been added as a co-author. Dr. Hart is the founder and co-editor of *Crime Mapping: A Journal of Research and Practice*. Currently he is the Director of the Center for the Analysis of Crime Statistics at University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Prior to joining the faculty at UNLV, Dr. Hart worked as a Statistician for the Bureau of Justice Statistics, a Program Analyst for the Drug Enforcement Administration and a Research Analyst for the Hillsborough County (Florida) Sheriff's Office. Dr. Hart brings an added level of expertise to this third edition. We both hope that you enjoy this book.