

# Spatial Policing



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*The Influence of Time, Space, and  
Geography on Law Enforcement Practices*

SECOND EDITION

Edited by

**Charles E. Crawford**

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY



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*To Raeshell, Ryan, and Devin*





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# Introduction

Several high-profile incidents over the last few years in America have highlighted the need to understand policing actions in context. Citizens across the nation and in some cases the world have witnessed police use of force and tactics in some cities that were deeply disturbing. When a local or national news agency reports on a police-involved shooting, or we watch videos on social media of mistreatment and differential practices in minority neighborhoods that may only be a few blocks away, we may ask ourselves: how can policing actions be so different in that space or location? For example, are the differential practices simply a result of the group of people the police encounter? What is it about an area of the city that makes it a hot spot for crime at night? Why do the police act, speak, and patrol so differently across segments of the city? At their core, the questions all show an awareness of the influence of space, time, and geography on law enforcement.

Researchers have also begun to realize the importance of the situational context of police actions. Imagine a police officer apprehending a suspect. The officer may choose many different courses of action and options for the use of force if warranted. These choices do not exist in a vacuum and are conditioned by when and where the arrest takes place. Consider for a moment how the following dichotomies of spatial context can vary for an arrest: a public area versus private residence, night time versus early morning, and a high-risk patrol area versus a relatively safe suburban neighborhood. Clearly there are other spatial and temporal contexts that are much more complex, and all can greatly enhance the understanding of law enforcement practices.

*Spatial Policing* pulls together some of the leading researchers in policing, and those with research interests on the impact of spatial, cultural, and technological issues on criminal justice practices, to explore how widely varying

contexts can influence police actions. My own interest in this topic began through studying the situational framework of police use of force. The most significant findings tended to revolve around the actions of the citizen or arrestee in response to the officer's attempt to make the arrest. Nonetheless, there were some intriguing, significant results connected to space and time. For example, the dichotomy of a public space versus a private space may appear simple at first. However, a resident's home or apartment versus a public street or parking lot has a great deal of meaning.

Reflect on the spatial context of your own home. You have a sense of authority in this context; it is private and you have ownership. Now consider a police officer in your home ordering you to comply with various commands. This represents a challenge to the authority you believe exists in your own residence. Disobeying the commands, or resisting the arrest, is more likely to happen in this private spatial context. Imagine the same scenario, but this time the officer has asked you to step outside or walk with them a few feet to the patrol car, essentially bringing you into their world or the public space. Your basic rights and protections are still in place, but the feeling or sense of authority is greatly reduced, and compliance is more likely given this public context. This action capitalizes on the officer's knowledge of the shift in the spatial environment.

The previous example of public versus private space demonstrates one context. Imagine how the scenario would be complicated if the exchange took place on a college campus. Does a dormitory occupant have the same sense of ownership and authority to control the space in the presence of a campus police officer? Now change the geographic location to an inner city low-income area. Would the officer's attitude be different, or use of authority greater in the personal space than if it were only a few miles away in an upper middle class suburb? What if the space is now an area of a national border crossing; how would the officer's authority be impacted? If the officer was wearing a body camera or if the interaction was being streamed live on social media would the introduction of this surveillance technology change the outcome? Would the officer's and citizen's race or ethnicity further influence the actions taken during this encounter? How do police mark and define actions in cyberspace? These are challenging questions with many facets that will be explored within this text.

The issue of space in policing is probably something many practitioners and citizens are aware of, but may not have given this topic more than a passing thought other than noticing that an area looks more dangerous, or a person looks out of place at a particular location or time. Throughout its ten chapters *Spatial Policing* will investigate many of these spatial, geographic, and tech-



nological contexts to reveal how these changing environments shape policing practices.

Chapter 1: *Space and Policing* by Charles E. Crawford. In this chapter, I briefly review the debate over defining space and place, the theoretical contributions of the Chicago School of Criminology, and environmental criminology. In addition, I focus on two developments from the criminology of place that have had the most direct impact on policing: defensible space, and the “broken windows” thesis. This chapter also reviews how cities and police departments have come to terms with battles over space between various counterpublics. Furthermore, the chapter explores key theoretical contributions to understanding how police mark and respond to unique spatial contexts. It is only when police departments recognize the importance of the spatial context they patrol and the people contained within its boundaries that are they able to resolve conflict. In the end, space provides an important framework for understanding police operations in our society.

Chapter 2: *Remapping the City: Public Identity, Cultural Space, and Social Justice* by Jeff Ferrell. In this reprint of Ferrell’s classic article, he takes a fascinating look at the complexities and conflicts over public space. Ferrell illustrates that there are multiple groups engaged in battles over what may appear to be mundane public spaces: parks, parking lots, shopping areas, and sidewalks. As Ferrell points out, the conflict between these groups revolves around cultural space or the deep meanings groups attach to these locations. As space is redefined through conflict there must also be control of those who are deemed foreign in these recreated locations, bringing marginal groups into a direct confrontation with city officials and the criminal justice system.

Chapter 3: *Policing Cyberspace: Mass Surveillance and the Expansion of the State* by Frank Tridico. In this chapter, Frank Tridico explores the complexities and legalities of investigations and law enforcement actions in cyberspace. Increasingly our world relies on digital communications for critical parts of global economies and networks. As state powers increased after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, a host of new laws were passed that directly impacted how evidence would be seized and how information would be gathered, creating numerous challenges and legal questions in the face of cyberpolicing at each level of government.

Chapter 4: *Minorities, Space, and Policing* by Charles E. Crawford. In this chapter, I explore the police-minority relationship through a spatial framework. Many of America’s most violent urban disturbances have revolved around hostile police contact in Black communities or spaces. To gain some insight into how these events may unfold, I offer a review of recent high-pro-

file cases, leading theories, and critical research on what may be one of most enduring and serious problems in law enforcement—policing the minority space. Policing the minority space contains many challenges, as there is a rich detailed history of how these spaces were created and their relationships with law enforcement. By recognizing the distinctiveness of the minority space, possible improvements in police-citizen relationships and patrol practices may be revealed. Policy implications are discussed.

Chapter 5: Policing Borders: Immigration, Criminalization, and Militarization in the Era of Social Control Profitability by Martin Guevara Urbina and Ilse Aglaé Peña. In this chapter, Urbina and Peña explore in great detail one of the most contentious issues in recent American politics: that is, policing the border between the United States and Mexico. This unique spatial context of the border poses numerous challenges for policing in the face of globalization, immigration, and the increased militarization of law enforcement. Issues of citizenship, the Constitution, fighting terrorism, and the war on drugs are all discussed.

Chapter 6: Rural Law Enforcement: Real Police Work? by Robert Hartmann McNamara. In this chapter, McNamara explores the often-misunderstood policing context of rural space. The chapter offers a rich discussion of the definitional issues of rural locations. Many of the traditional crimes that are associated with urban areas such as gangs, drugs, and DUIs occur in the rural setting and represent distinctive challenges for police departments operating in this framework. Furthermore, policing rural areas can entail some unusual issues such as dealing with agricultural and wildlife crimes, and patrol officers having to cover sizeable distances to provide service.

Chapter 7: Policing Urban Spaces by Kim M. Lersch. In this chapter, Lersch offers a comprehensive account of policing in the urban environment. When citizens think about a law enforcement agency they typically envision the departments in our nation's largest cities. This is partly due to the considerable amount of research attention given to urban crime, police practices, and popular culture portrayals of these departments. Policing in the urban spatial context can be difficult, as the concept of neighborhood and community can vary dramatically across the city, resulting in differential treatment, patrol practices, and crime types.

Chapter 8: Policing Educational Spaces: Status, Practices, and Challenges by Emmanuel P. Barthe. In this chapter, Barthe describe the complexities of providing law enforcement service in the campus context. Perceptions of the safe and structured environment of a college or high school campus have been shattered in the last decade with a series of high-profile mass episodes of violence. The mandates of traditional law enforcement to protect lives and valu-

able property of both the school and students are at odds with campus law enforcement's service roots. Furthermore, the educational space raises difficult questions, such as where exactly does the campus end and how should various crimes be handled both in and around the school?

Chapter 9: The Meaning of Surveillance in Public Space by Gregory J. Howard and Elizabeth P. Bradshaw. In this chapter, Howard and Bradshaw explore contemporary surveillance practices, technologies, and their implications for policing, and the capacity of each to structure the use and experience of public space. Furthermore, the authors review not only concepts and implications of surveillance and information gathering, but also the resistance to such efforts and predictions for the future use of ever-increasing technology.

Chapter 10: Spatial Crime Prevention: Traditional Versus Non-Traditional Perspectives by Ronald G. Burns and Brie Diamond. In this final chapter, Burns and Diamond review the changing nature of law enforcement in the United States and the importance of crime prevention. Both practitioners and theorists since the Chicago School have realized that crime occurs in specific physical locations and environments. This knowledge has led to several developments to address the spatial context of crime prevention, including both physical and cyberspace. This spatial awareness of deterrence can be found in crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED), defensible space, and the technological innovations of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) applications. As Burns states, controlling space and preventing crime is at the heart of policing.

One of the goals I have for *Spatial Policing* is that it may serve as a starting point and resource for critically assessing how space and location impact law enforcement practices. The space in which we all interact either in public or private is a powerful influence on our lives. The space we occupy can enhance our feelings of ownership and authority, or it may give visual and cultural cues that show how powerless and unsafe we are in a given location. City planners, architects, and security agencies are well aware of the influence of space and location on behavior, and increasingly how the use of powerful technological tools may be used to both monitor and regulate space. This awareness is seen in criminology and in our nation's police departments today. After reading *Spatial Policing*, I hope that you will never look at any given space quite the same, and that you take the time to examine the design elements, visual cues, cameras, and other technologies that may be present and how each of these respond to the demands placed on a given location from various groups, and most importantly how the police operate in that spatial context.

