

**Dewey, S., Zare, B., Connolly, C., Epler, R., & Bratton, R. (2019). *Outlaw Women: Prison, Rural Violence, and Poverty in the American West*. New York University Press.**

**Eason, J. M. (2017). *Big House on the Prairie: Rise of the Rural Ghetto and Prison Proliferation*. The University of Chicago Press.**

### **Fitting In: A Book Review Essay on Rural Prisons and Prisoner Re-entry through the Lens of a Rural Critical Criminology**

Rosemary Gido  
Professor Emerita  
Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice  
Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Joseph F. Donnermeyer  
Professor Emeritus  
School of Environment and Natural Resources  
The Ohio State University  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

#### **Introduction**

The social, cultural, and economic contexts of rural communities and rural peoples now have their own spotlight in criminology, with the recent start-up of the International Society for the Study of Rural Crime, the creation of a Division of Rural Criminology within the American Society of Criminology, and the establishment of a Rural Crime Working Group in the European Society of Criminology. There are now interconnected and internationally-based networks in which rural crime scholars can participate and share their theoretical and empirical insights on a wealth of criminological and criminal justice issues. There are now many examples of special issues published in journals on a variety of topics, such as safety and security in local communities of rural (and urban) Slovenia (Meško & Bobnar, 2019) and agricultural crime in the countries of southern Africa (Clack, 2018). And, there are now numerous books published on topics ranging from drug misuse (Shukla, 2016) and Pacific Islander youth violence (Irwin & Unemoto, 2016) amongst rural populations, to crime in rural and regional Australia (Harkness et al., 2016), to the deleterious effects of energy development on crime in rural communities (Ruddell, 2017).<sup>1</sup>

One of the newest developments in rural criminology is a focus on rural prisons and the re-entry of prisoners back to rural communities. Two examples are by Dewey and colleagues (2019) on female prisoners in a Wyoming correctional facility and Eaton (2017) on prison-siting as a form of economic development in a small town in Arkansas. Both are not merely narrow, academic works. They are part of a broader trend, beyond academic circles in a resurgence of interest in the rural United States (U.S.), especially since 2016 and the election of Donald Trump



as the United States' 45<sup>th</sup> president. With Trump's win coming largely from 2,600 U.S. counties where economic recovery was lagging since the 2007-2009 Great Recession, these regions of declining business in agriculture, manufacturing, mining, and logging were labeled as 'Trump Country'. This categorization has also equated *rural* with *agriculturally distressed*, erasing from public view the diversity of rural areas and regions that were doing well economically (Goetz et al., 2018a).

The renewed spotlight on rurality has also produced a number of best-selling books that focus on the lives of individuals growing up in rural poverty. J. D. Vance's 2016 book, *Hillbilly Elegy* has received the most attention and angry, critical responses from Appalachian scholars (Catte, 2019; Harkin & McCarroll, 2019) who resent its return to caricatures of Appalachian people and culture as poor, white, isolated, ethnically homogenous, and welfare-dependent. They critique Vance for broadcasting a new *culture of poverty*, one that includes opioid and methamphetamine addictions, unemployment, low education, and little motivation for change. Other recent best-selling books -- *Dignity* (Arnade, 2019), *Heartland* (Smarsh, 2019), and *Tightrope* (Kristof & WuDunn, 2020) -- provide pictorial and personal reflections on poverty in other 'heartland' rural areas of the U.S.

Joining sociologist Steven Stoll's carefully researched work on the dispossession of West Virginia's self-sufficient, white agrarian class (2017), *Outlaw Women, Prison, Rural Violence, and Poverty in the American West* (2017) and *Big House on the Prairie: Rise of the Rural Ghetto and Prison Proliferation* offer new scholarly insights into contemporary criminological issues related to rurality and particular geographic contexts in U.S. western and southern towns—poverty, gendered violence, mental illness and substance abuse, racism, and mass incarceration. This essay offers a critical assessment of each book through the 'lens' of critical rural criminology. We turn first to a discussion of two of the major themes from the books – the geography of Wyoming and its dominant frontier ethos as it relates to violence - and rural poverty in U.S. rural communities of color that seek its ameliorization through prison building as an economic development option. Even though the foci of both books are very specific, we also discuss larger lessons to be learned from each for the advance of rural criminological scholarship.

### ***Outlaw Women and the context of the rural West and mining towns' history***

Using the narratives of five composite characters to avoid detection in the sparsely populated areas of Wyoming from which they are drawn, the stories of 43 incarcerated and 28 paroled women interviewed between 2014 and 2015 summarize the complex realities of their lives. In chapter vignettes—Tami, Dakota, Itzel, Nedrah, and Janea—detail social marginalization in isolated "frontier" rural small towns in Wyoming. Labeled early on as members of criminal 'outlaw' families, their pathways to the American Dream are thwarted by limited education or occupational training, gender wage gaps, and partnering in interpersonal relationships marked by violence, substance abuse addiction, and compromised mental health. Each woman's alternative pathway leads to involvement in crimes ranging from the homicide of abusive men to illegal drug felonies and subsequent imprisonment in the state's only women's prison. A significant theme in each woman's cycling from home to prison and home again is *identity negotiation*—attempting to enact the 'individualist' role of responsibility for one's

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crimes imposed by therapeutic prison programming against the reality of a return to family and community that offers only stigma and limited services and resources to support the resumption of roles as mothers, wives, or breadwinners.

For Dewey et al., the social and cultural construction of rurality in the lives of these women is formed by the state of Wyoming's geographic vastness, harsh weather conditions, low population density, homogeneous racial-ethnic composition, and economic dependence on mineral-extractive industries. Echoing the work of feminist geographer, Jo Little (2017), the authors showcase Wyoming's dominant socio-cultural norms and social structures, evoking a *frontier ethos* and *conservative values* shaped by the American West's local histories and geographies. A review of 19<sup>th</sup> century mining community research by feminist historians beginning in the 1980s illustrates the gradual introduction of gender, race, and ethnicity into historiography and the uncovering of the cultural themes of hegemonic masculinities and women's socioeconomic marginalization—as presented in the book's major theoretical lens, the *architecture of gendered violence*.

America's traditional *white* mainstream history of the *old pioneer west* is characterized by adherence to historian Frederick Jackson Turner's (1894/1921) classic *frontier thesis*—a myth that omitted Native Americans, African Americans (Castaneda, 1992), Mexican, Chinese, and other immigrants (Barkan, 2007), women (Armitage, 2009), and LGBTQ individuals (Schmitt, 2017) from any role in the creation of America's individualistic and rugged character and culture. In one area of scholarly endeavor, feminist historians began to ask, “how women fit into the economic structure in the West through their labor” (Anderson, 1992, p. 481; Scott, 1986). Historiography up through the end of the 1970s had categorized 19<sup>th</sup> century western region women as ‘good women’ or ‘bad women.’ The stereotypical good women raised children and performed only domestic work. Submissive to men, they managed to civilize them and bring morality to ‘boom or bust’ violent rural mining camps and towns (Jameson, 1984). Bad women turned up in historical accounts primarily as prostitutes (McGrath, 1984), and 19<sup>th</sup> century western state penitentiaries incarcerated the worst of them—most generally African American, Euro American, and Hispanic American—who often served long sentences for minor crimes (Butler, 1997).

In contrast, the last four decades of feminist, Marxist, and poststructuralist cross-discipline developments in labor theory have charted the intersection of race, gender, ethnic, and class system inequalities and, importantly, documented women's successes in accessing paid wage labor (Dayton & Levenstein, 2012; Xavier & Zancarini-Fournel, 2013). Further, women's contributions to work in the American West have finally been acknowledged through published narratives, memoirs, and oral histories, documenting a range of women's work identity and role negotiations in patriarchal extractive-industry labor settings.<sup>2</sup> As a whole, this body of research has “highlight(ed) the intersection between the construction and control of spaces and the politics of gender” (Little & Panelli, 2003, p. 285). Yet, despite this progress, no intersectional framework was applied to the study of the era's male-perpetrated violence against women in these settings.<sup>3</sup>

With ever-increasing investments in global mining and resource extraction creating ‘boom and bust’ towns worldwide, rural criminologists have examined *frontier masculinities* in

contemporary mining towns and camps, combining the study of masculinity and crime and the geography of crime.<sup>4</sup> Carrington et al. (2010), using a case study of an Australian mining camp, found high rates of violence were related to a *transient, non-resident workforce* consisting of primarily young male workers, an Australian regional ethos of *rugged hyper masculinity* associated with mining, and *crimes linked to excessive alcohol usage*. An additional study of three largely white male Australian mining towns (Carrington et al., 2016) also illustrated the conflict between resident and non-resident men, echoing the framework of *Outlaw Women*, “the way in which the rural and the masculine intersect at a material and symbolic level” (p. 99).

Finally, a summary of findings from the latest and most comprehensive report of the effects of resource extraction industries on mining-dependent rural communities documents *Outlaw Women's* Wyoming setting. In these towns, there is: (1) substantial alcohol and substance abuse with accompanying crimes; (2) increases in violent crimes, particularly physical and sexual assaults; (3) greater numbers of convicted felons, related to drug dealing and sexual offenses; (4) more stress for law enforcement agencies that are under-resourced for dealing with the crime and disorder; (5) undermining of indigenous peoples' and other residents' cultures and traditions; and (6) community conflict and fragmentation along race, income, and employment lines due to the influx of a transient workforce (Power & Power, 2019, p. 4).<sup>5</sup>

These violent structural and cultural elements form the backdrop for the early and lifelong experiences with interpersonal violence that Janea, Tammi, and Itzel reflect upon in Wyoming State Prison. Isolated and without jobs or family/community support, Janea's life was defined by her oil rig supervisor husband's cycles of violence, while Itzel was a reluctant partner in Dante's methamphetamine business. As the significant body of rural sociologists' and criminologists' theoretical and empirical scholarship has continued to illustrate, rural women are at an even higher risk for lethal and nonlethal forms of interpersonal violence victimization worldwide (DeKeseredy, 2019). Notably, for the last 40 years, U.S. War on Drugs mass incarceration policies at local, state, and federal levels have targeted girls and women of color at the lowest levels of illegal drug 'work' and deposited them in jails and prisons, outpacing the rate of men's imprisonment for illegal substance use crimes (Drug Policy Alliance, 2018). With this has come a call for *gender responsive programming* to address the specific needs of incarcerated female substance users. Unfortunately, these treatment systems are too often utilized to legitimize correctional interventions (Bosworth & Fili, 2013, p. 232). Given the gradual recognition that women offenders present with both mental health and addiction *co-occurring disorders* (Gido & Dalley, 2009), rural state and county corrections agencies have acknowledged the need to address incarcerated women's *trauma* (Shaffer et al., 2019; Terry & Williams, 2014). Therefore, even in the very under-resourced environment of Wyoming's only state women's prison, an intensive treatment unit for addictions is offered. However, as the authors conclude, in combination with gender, race, ethnicity, and class, each woman's level of addiction or mental disorder and Wyoming's rural town social control mechanisms obviate against treatment systems that deny the realities of their lives.

### **Not-so-obvious lessons for a critical rural criminology**

*Outlaw Women's* significance extends well beyond its particular methodology, its specific findings, and the rich detail with which it demonstrates the complex contexts within which rural

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women experience violence, and the singular difficulties of female prisoners re-integrating back into their communities. This book is valuable to everyone who endeavors to engage in rural crime studies in two other ways, both very important for rural criminology's future trajectory.

The first lesson, a lesson to be learned by all rural criminologists, no matter the focus of their work, is the great need for frameworks in which to interpret the specifics, or, shall we say, empirically-derived facts. Theory, model, paradigm, etc., etc., etc., have diverse and specific meanings for different scholars. These differences are largely irrelevant quibbles, however, filled with pedantic silliness and academic arrogance when viewed from a broader point of view that it is concepts that form the basis on which all scholarship is based. As the late Jock Young (2011, p. 55) pointed out: "...but numbers are signs to be interpreted within specific cultural contexts, figures in themselves do not have any magical objectivity." Even though Young (2011) was criticizing the dominance of statistical analyses over theory, this comment applies equally well to qualitative evidence such as that found throughout *Outlaw Women* – there is nothing magical about quotes from interviews and observations from field-based research without a conceptual framework that is explicit and applied.

Now, what is a conceptual framework? A simple definition of a concept is a mental representation of reality. One might think that *Outlaw Women* falls short on conceptual accountability because the authors present their findings primarily through the composite narratives of five female inmates, but this interpretation would be inexact and misleading. As already mentioned, *Outlaw Women* begins with explicit recognition of the criminological concept of intersectionality (Collins, 2015) for understanding rural women's relationships with violence. But, Dewey and colleagues did much more, and that is because a second reading of the book is possible from the perspective for how these scholars framed their research design, rather than their specific findings, even though they fail for the most part to present a clearly-explicated theory in the book itself. Throughout their descriptions of these women's experiences, the concept of intersectionality provides them with an interpretive context that not only helped them compose their original research question and guide their methodological or data-gathering decisions but was embedded deeply in their interpretation of their data and the construction of their five fictional women.

Intersectionality itself is subject to various interpretations (Collins, 2015), but its fundamental meaning is the ways that two or more statuses occupied by individuals shape their experiences, and therefore their identities, within societies. It is quite facile to say that violence against women is caused by the patriarchy or male-dominated social structures of power and inequality, for what does that really mean? Intersectionality as a concept helps breakdown the constituent parts and understand context with a human face. The subjects of *Outlaw Women* are representative of a set of women whose violence is part of the structure of the very rural communities where they grew up and to which they will likely return. These rural communities are not "disorganized" by decades of economic exploitation and decline, but "reorganized" by these forces, a reorganization that causes a great deal of abuse for a great many rural women in a great number of small towns and rural regions of the U.S. By doing so, *Outlaw Women* avoids the individual blame fallacies of Vance (2016) and others who fail to see the social structural diversities of rural context through an intersectional gaze.

Hence, the first of two not-so-obvious lessons for all rural criminologists to be learned from *Outlaw Women* is the great need for the employment of at least elementary forms of theory. Despite the advance of rural criminological scholarship, there remain far too many facile references to rural as a homogenous sociological phenomenon that suggests the opposite of city life. There remain too many attempts to define rural places as places “where everyone knows everyone else”, which ignores the real criminological question of what a high density of acquaintanceship means for understanding crime and deviance. That is the underlying, universal value of *Outlaw Women* – rural is part of an intersectionality that gives us, potentially, a greater understanding of all rural crime and criminal justice issues.

A second and not-so-obvious lesson from *Outlaw Women* that is relevant to all rural criminologists is the strong need for the continued development of particular types of conceptual frameworks. The advocacy by the authors of this essay is for critical frameworks. Even though it is recognized that rural criminology should embrace a variety of viewpoints, the non-critical is best left for others to advocate and develop.

What is meant by critical? Pick up any book about critical criminology and one can readily find a dizzyingly array of critical perspectives, which often become the target of those who criticize a critical approach for its lack of coherency (DeKeseredy & Dragiewicz, 2018, p. 6). One attempt to bring unity to critical criminological perspectives is the following:

...all approaches to critical criminology argue for a structural explanation (yes, even postmodernity varieties) of crime, that is, crime is rooted in economic, social, and political inequalities and social class, racism, hate, and other forms of segmented social organization, reinforced and rationalized by culturally derived relativistic definitions of conforming, deviant, and criminal actions, which separate, segregate, and others cause governments at all levels and peoples everywhere to differentially and discriminately enforce laws and punish offenders. (Donnermeyer, 2012, p. 289)

This one-sentence definition, even though it is rather long-winded (but by necessity), nonetheless shows why *Outlaw Women* creates such a valuable lesson for rural criminologists. It attempts to include as many forms of intersectionality as possible, and by doing so, demonstrates how accounting for rural context interplays with other key sociological, cultural, and economic factors to create a critical analysis of the full range of topics that are of interest to rural criminologists. Hence, conceptualizing “rural” as one of many factors that create the lived-experiences of female prisoners in Wyoming frees up the concept of rural from its anachronistic past, allowing scholars to now build conceptual frameworks more generally, and critical ones, more specifically, that account for rurality in an integrative fashion with other key factors associated with explanations of crime, deviance and various criminal justice topics, including prisoner re-entry.

Examples of a rural-focused intersectionality can be found in Donnermeyer and DeKeseredy (2014), who applied the critical criminological concept of the square of crime as elaborated by Young (1992) to drug use, agricultural crime, and violence against women. The square of crime considers four dimensions possibly associated with any type of criminological issue. They include: (1) the state, including police agencies; (2) the public; (3) the offender; and

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(4) the victim; with the four forming the corners of a square. Their interplay or intersection helps scholars with their analyses of the context in which crime and criminal justice issues occur, hence, forming one kind of conceptual framework. For example, the interplay of the police and the public creates forms of social control, including the ability or efficacy of law enforcement within a community, and examples of the public's widespread support of Black Lives Matter during the Summer of 2020 can be examined in this way. A second interplay is between the victim and the offender which considers an assessment of crime on victims, but with the caveat that rural people's lifestyles (including their own involvement in illegal activities) make them susceptible to victimization, a pattern Robinson and Ryder (2014) wrote about in reference to a small town on the east coast titled "Constant Violence from Everywhere."

A third interplay and most apropos for the work by Dewey and colleagues is between the state and the offender, a determiner of recidivism. In *Outlaw Women*, the connections between why these subjects were arrested and the patterns of prison life, including the individualistic philosophy behind attempts at counseling and rehabilitation that ignores the structure of violence in the rural communities where these women grew up is found throughout their narratives. Yet, there is one key concept thing still missing from *Outlaw Women* that would advance their frame of reference ever more deeply. That is where the next book, *Big House on the Prairie* by John Eason, has value for the development of a critical rural criminology.

***Big House* and rural town demography and poverty since the 2007-2009 Great Recession**

*Big House on the Prairie* is John M. Eason's ethnography of the rural southern town, Forrest City, Arkansas, in the Yazoo Mississippi Delta. Spending 2007-2008 as a deeply embedded participant-observer in the community, Eason utilizes a case study method to explicate how Forrest City exemplifies rural southern towns where most of the U.S. *mass incarceration prison building boom* took place between 1989 and 1998. Grounding his methodology in the Chicago School social ecology model, the author also acknowledges his study's link to the work of rural critical criminologists (Donnermeyer, 2019) based on the study's focus on place and context (p. 171). Unfortunately, Eason's application of the concept of *rural ghetto* to characterize this community comprised of 61% African Americans and to label prison towns "a *quadruple stigma of rurality, race, region, and poverty*" (p. 16) detracts from his insightful observations on the intersections of racial stratification, power, poverty, and prison proliferation as an economic development strategy. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, the Great Recession has had a long-lasting impact on U.S. rural areas, with a generally lower economic recovery rate (Farquhar, 2018). It is, therefore, useful to review rural region demographic and economic trends in 2020, and, particularly, the concentrated poverty in Deep South southern towns like Eason's Forrest City.

**Rural America's demography and poverty trends**

In sharp contrast to associations of rurality with agricultural production and extraction of natural resources, today's rural America is neither economically nor socially homogeneous (and, it never was). While globalization has intensified the loss of manufacturing and farm-related employment over the last decade, rural county employment is primarily located in the service

industry sector (Ajilore & Willingham, 2019). Across rural regions, those communities with access to urban labor markets and natural amenities have been more economically resilient than remote or extractive-based towns (Goetz et al., 2018b). Further, the 2010 census has documented new patterns of Hispanic rural in-migration, rapidly adding layers of ethno-racial diversity to small rural towns before patterns of national migration and internal migration were disrupted by the Great Recession (Lichter, 2012).

The major demographic trends that are challenging rural America and especially its most isolated and distressed areas are population loss resulting from continued and recession-related outmigration, fertility decline, and the accompanying rural counties' profile of highest percentages of older Americans (Parker et al., 2018). With fewer local services and less diversified economies, poverty has become persistent in many rural regions. Post the Great Recession, the issue of the growth of poverty was being noted. By 2012, larger percentages of rural and urban, poor and non-poor lived in high poverty counties. Notably, African Americans were the most disadvantaged, with 13.2 percent of rural Blacks living in counties with poverty rates above 30 percent (Thiede et al., 2018, p. 128). In 2016, the share of the U.S. population in severe poverty reached its highest point in nearly 20 years (Bialik, 2017).

While the U.S. official poverty rate has improved since 2007, the South remains a region where poverty is disproportionately concentrated – having an average rural poverty rate of 20.5%, almost 6 percentage points above the region's urban average poverty rate (Economic Research Service, 2020). With a slowdown in national income growth between 2017 and 2018, Arkansas stood out as one of five states with a small increase in its poverty rate (Cooper & Wolfe, 2019). In St. Francis County, Arkansas, of which Forrest City is the county seat, 27.5% persons are below the poverty line, compared to the national statistic of 13.1% (IndexMundi, 2018). As a leading rural social demographer has observed, “spatial inequality is a fundamental and enduring characteristic of rural poverty in the U.S.” (Thiede et al., 2018, p. 109). For this majority Black southern Delta town and the history of regional racist policies governing the spatial distribution of Black populations as well as the economic forces that specifically impact this ‘rural place’, the *architecture* of poverty has produced long term disparities in educational attainment, family income, employment, health status, and community renewal (Hardy et al., 2018).

Author Eason documented this same socioeconomic profile for Forrest City during his 2007-2008 stay. As the nation's mass incarceration policy was producing the proliferation of prison building which Eason researched and quantified, is it any surprise that he found prison building to have limited economic impact in southern prison-building towns? The sad irony is that the town's ‘fathers’—white elite leaders and Black race leaders—became supporters of a localized mass incarceration policy, siting a federal prison filled with urban African American men as an economic development plan.

### **A not-so-obvious lesson for a critical rural criminology**

There is little wonder that *Big House on the Prairie* hit it big in various academic circles because of its focus on so many popular themes – prison siting in a rural town, rural ghettoization and poverty, and racial inequality. In some ways, it can be argued the book is a



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companion to Vance's *Hillbilly Elegy*, with a focus on individuals living in a small, rural community of Arkansas who frequently seem so "Hollywood" stereotypical through Eason's descriptions, but the association with Vance would mostly be unfair to this author. His work is more closely associated with the scholarship of Stoll (2017), Catta (2019), and others who find the individual-blaming underpinning of Vance's work troubling for academics, especially those with a critical bent.

Yet, it is a challenge to paint a vivid portrait of a single community and the people who live in it without tumbling into the same syndrome as Vance. Eason does not always succeed in his account of Forrest City of maintaining a more macro perspective and avoiding a reductionist tendency. In this respect, the book is uneven in its treatment of the subject matter, but nonetheless worth reading because it is so rare nowadays to find attempts to conduct community-level studies. Mostly gone are the heydays of classic anthropological/sociological works of single communities like *Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture* (Lynd & Lynd, 1929), *Community Power Structure: A Study of Decision Makers* (Hunter, 1953), and *Small Town in Mass Society* (Vidich & Bensman, 1969). With them too have declined community-based studies with a stronger focus of deviance and crime and the associated factors of inequality and ghettoization, such as Whyte's (1943) *Street Corner Society* and Anderson's (1990) *Streetwise: Race, Class and Change in an Urban Community*.

The unexpected lesson for all rural criminologists, from Eason's attempt to describe the efforts of a small town in Arkansas to rebuild its economy through the placement of a prison, is how much criminology, in general, has forgotten its roots in the Chicago School of Sociology and the School's emphasis on community studies. One reason is both simple and obvious – with the development of readily available large datasets, like the FBI's *Uniform Crime Report* and census data, plus the growth of statistical software packages, the community-based theory most identified with the Chicago School – social disorganization theory – morphed into a kind of addictive substance for the kind of quantitative analysis that Jock Young (2011) so correctly criticized in his well-worth reading more than once book, *The Criminological Imagination*.

Today, those who inject social disorganization theory into their intellectual veins mostly do so in a quick, cursory, and superficial way often because the high they are trying to achieve from publishing in a journal requires mention of theory. They never really apply it so much as they use it as a kind of academic "window dressing". And, even though the assumption that places, regardless of their population size, are disorganized is a gigantic piece of illogic and an assertion that is unsupportable by any form of evidence (quantitative or qualitative) (Donnermeyer, 2015), the decline of a focus on community or place, which is the essence of social disorganization theory before it became addicted to statistics, is a loss to criminology generally, and a real impediment to rural criminology's future development.

Hence, the unexpected lesson to be learned from Eason, and one that adds value to the scholarship found in *Outlaw Women*, is the great need for conceptual frameworks that can account for the diversity of contexts within rural places (and urban, as well) created by the variety of intersectionalities of the peoples who live there. Again, criminological theories adjusted for rural localities do not have to be critical to be useful, but non-critical theoretical

development is best left to other rural scholars. Even Eason (2017, p. 171-172) sees his study as one that:

...serves as an anchor for a new critical rural criminology focused on the context of crime and criminal justice outcomes. We can further this theoretical perspective by considering prison building as fundamental to the political economy of punishment.

Now, where to begin a critical rural criminology of community and crime? Simple – begin with one of the most cited sociologists ever, namely, C.W. Mills (1959), someone who Eason also cites. However, one must then realize that C.W. Mills did not get it completely right. The fundamental idea behind Mills' *The Sociological Imagination* is the notion that “public issues” or broad social structural and economic change influences the status of individuals, that is, “personal troubles”. We can clearly see this connection in the description of people depicted in both *Outlaw Women* and *Big House on the Prairie*. However, what must be added to Mills' idea is something he forgot. Individuals are not merely members of a society but are located within that society by a complexity of statuses, one of which is where each person lives. Eason's book was specifically about the decline of one rural place and its economy, and how that community attempted to reverse a trend that is common to so many rural places, as previously pointed out. Hence, adding to the intersectionality of rural peoples is the places where they live and of the forms of social organization, not disorganization, that define the local context. To a considerable degree, community remains a primary mediator between the individual and society, even in an age when forms of social media and electronic means for communication that ignore community boundaries seem so dominant.

Next, add in a conceptual framework of the fundamental elements of the concept of community to develop a critical approach that considers criminological topics within the millions of rural places found around the world. Do this by ignoring crime and simply concentrate on the concept of community. The four elements of a community include (Liepins, 2000): (1) people (and their characteristics); (2) spaces and structures (i.e., a built environment, which include farm fields and pastureland, parks, playing fields, etc.); (3) the human meanings assigned to spaces and structures and how they are used, and in turn, how spaces and structures enable the materialization of meanings; and (4) practices, that is, how spaces and structures are used, how spaces and structures influence practices, and how practices and meanings mutually influence each other. In a sense, these four elements mimic the square of crime, that is, they reciprocally influence each other.

As well, these elements are congruent with classic definitions of community from the halcyon days of community studies in sociology, and ironically, all with connections back to the Chicago School of Sociology. Consider, for example, George Hillery's synthesizing work from 1955 (p. 111) in which he observes that the “...community consists of persons in social interaction within a geographic area and having one or more additional ties.” Both recent and early definitions of community make it difficult to understand how the idea of “social disorganization” was ever spawned, but documentation about that unfortunate twist in flawed scholarship shall have to wait for a future article or book chapter.

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To create a critical community theory, not only must one discard the notion of social disorganization, and recognize that community is a mediator between large social structural forces and the lived experiences of individuals, but add in a third dimension, which is that people participate, nearly simultaneously, in multiple networks, some of which may be primarily local, and others of which are non-local but nonetheless, the meanings and practices of individuals still occur within specific geographic contexts. For example, a rural criminological scholar in Ireland shares ideas with a rural criminological scholar in South Africa, but they do so from perspectives conditioned in part by the places where they live and work.

This simultaneity of network involvement creates interesting possibilities. Hence, ministers of local churches may physically abuse their spouses, small business owners may be members of right-wing militias and domestic terrorist groups, and construction workers may be the local drug dealers. In other words, the simultaneity of people's lives, no matter how much their daily routines are dominated by social media today, is enacted out locally. Further, it is recognition of this diversity (i.e., intersectionality of their statuses) that is a way to develop a critical rural criminology of place.

### **A very brief conclusion**

Like any book ever written, there are flaws, mistakes, and imperfections in both *Outlaw Women* and *Big House on the Prairie*. Even though there is much about both that can be criticized, they are indeed important books that talk about the shared experiences of marginalized people in rural communities that are not disorganized, but indeed have been re-organized through economic decline and population loss.

In closing, there is much more to be found in both books that are beyond their immediate objectives and themes, if one uses one's "criminological imagination" (Young, 2011) to think critically about rural crime. We recommend two readings of both – the first is to grasp the authors' objectives for writing their monographs, for what they found, and for the conclusions they reach. On the second reading, think of a critical rural criminology of community and of the intersectionalities of the people who live in localities with fewer individuals and lower population densities as the definers of their contexts, and how their personal troubles are expressions of public issues mediated by place.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> For an account of the history of rural criminology and its recent developments, see Donnermeyer (2019). On page 6 is included a graphic presentation of both sources of scholarship and selected highlights of events that mark the advancement of rural criminology, including publications and conferences.

<sup>2</sup> Examples of memoirs and narratives of women's work roles: Backus, H. F. (1980). *Tomboy bride: A woman's personal account of life in mining camps of the west*. Pruett Publishing Company; Bell, M. (2002). *When Montana and I were young: A frontier childhood*. University of Nebraska Press; Gido, R. (2008). *Four Montana women: A celebration of courage in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century mining and ranching frontier*. Indiana University of PA Historical Reenactment; Litz, J. (2004). *The Montana frontier: One woman's west*. University of New Mexico Press; Moynihan, R.B., Duchamp, C.F., Armitage, S., Eds. (1990). *So much to be done: Women settlers on the mining and ranching frontier*. University of Nebraska Press; Sterry, N. (2003). *When the meadowlark sings*. Riverbend Publishing.

<sup>3</sup> There is just one book on domestic violence (with particular reference to Montana gold camps, 1840-1910) --a collection of 'stories': Mather, R. E. (1998). *Scandal of the west: Domestic violence on the frontier*. History West Publishing Co. See also the comprehensive legal analysis of domestic violence and homicide cases in Ramsey, C. B. (2011). Domestic violence and state intervention in the American west and Australia, 1860-1930, *Indiana Law Journal*, 86, 184-255.

<sup>4</sup> In the last decade, hydraulic fracturing (fracking) as a method for accessing natural gas has been championed as a key to economic growth in rural and economically distressed areas of Pennsylvania and the western states of North Dakota, Oklahoma, Colorado, and Texas. In Pennsylvania's northern rural county, Bradford, reports of rapes and violence increased in 2016. That same year, Dickinson, North Dakota reported a 300 percent increase in assault and sex crimes (McHenry, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> As of 2010, Hispanics became the largest minority group in rural and small-town areas (9.3%) compared to 8.2% African Americans. More than half of all Native Americans live in a rural or small-town area; 1.5% of rural and small-town residents report more than 2 races. (Housing Assistance Council, 2012).

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