COLORADO’S RURAL WAR ON DRUGS:
A Case Study Of Grand Junction’s
Legalized Marijuana Implementation,
Politics, And Carceral Ethos

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October 27th, 1970
The Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention And Control Act was passed. Created 5 drug schedules based on a drug's addiction potential and medicinal values.

June 17th, 1971
President Nixon declares drugs as “public enemy number one”

July 1973
President Nixon created the Drug Enforcement Administration. Combined the Federal Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, the Office for Drug Abuse Enforcement, and the Office of Narcotics Intelligence

1980's
Expansion of the private prison industrial complex

1982
Nancy Reagan initiated the “Just Say No” campaign. Targeted young kids, eventually led to D.A.R.E

President Reagan signed the Comprehensive Crime Control Act (1984) and the Anti-Drug Abuse Act (1986) into law. Created 100:1 sentencing disparities for crack v. powder cocaine, and created mandatory minimum sentencing laws

1989
President George H.W. Bush created 1208 Program. Militarized state and local police for “counterdrug” measures

1990's
Started to see the creation and use of three-strikes laws and truth-in-sentencing laws

1994 Crime Bill
Largest crime bill, gave enormous funding to police and prison construction, incentivized more states to pass mandatory minimum sentencing laws

THE AMERICAN WAR ON DRUGS
AMERICAN MASS INCARCERATION

Mass incarceration has grown exponentially since the Nixon and Reagan eras, especially through the War on Drugs.

Starting to see a small decline in incarceration, but US remains world's largest jailer.

Still seeing increased policing in communities, power of plea bargains, judicial and prosecutorial discretion, private prisons, and strict sentencing laws.

*Data courtesy of the Sentencing Project*
Federalism describes the relationship between federal, state, and local governments in their implementations of policies.

When the state passes a new law or reform, cities and towns generally enact it, but may make changes to fit their localities. Rural and urban areas have different needs and community goals, which can explain variations in policy implementation.

- Rural:
  - More conservative
  - Close-knit community
  - Economy possibly rooted in agriculture, nonrenewable resources, etc.
  - More punitive-based views of safety and security

- Urban:
  - More liberal
  - Increased population diversity
  - Economy possibly rooted in white collar jobs
  - More community resources and funding

- Local Govt
- State Govt
- Federal Govt
When examining Grand Junction, Colorado how do socio-economic, political, and carceral characteristics explain why rural counties are resistant to implement state-wide drug law reforms and legalizations? And how do these characteristics contribute to upholding a rural carceral ethos related to local policy feedback loops?
METHODOLOGIES

**Qualitative**
- Data collection from Grand Junction’s local newspaper, the *Daily Sentinel*. Currently being coded in an excel spreadsheet by category.
- Dates range from January 2009 and will end approx. December 2016
- Literature review of works that discuss federalism, drugs, enforcement behaviors, local practices, carceral ethos, feedback loops, and politics.
- Works used were academic journals, peer-reviewed journals, or books.
- Included works from Michael Campbell II, Katherine Beckett, Anjuli Verma, Lisa Miller, Phillip Jenkins, and Michael Gizzi

**Quantitative**
- Data collection from the US Census Bureau, Mesa County Coroner’s Office, Mesa County Clerk and Recorder, Mesa County Sheriff’s Office, Grand Junction Police Dept., Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program, and various other websites in Grand Junction (i.e., GJ City Council).
GRAND JUNCTION, COLORADO

**Socio-economic contributors**

- Issues with drug trafficking, methamphetamine use, and drug overdoses
- Consistent rates of suicide

**Carceral characteristics**

- In 2021, the Police Dept. accounted for 33% of the total city budget
- And they have 33% of all fulltime employee positions**

**Marijuana Politics**

- Voted against Amendment 64 in 2012 with a 51.72% NO and 45.85% YES***
- Allowed medical marijuana dispensaries in early 2000’s
  - passed ordinance that banned dispensaries in city limits in 2011

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**Deaths in Mesa County, CO**

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*Data courtesy of US Census Bureau
**Data courtesy of the City of Grand Junction’s Adopted 2021 Budget
***Data courtesy of CO Secretary of State 2012 Amendment 64 Voting Results

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- Population*: approx. 63,597
- Mostly white (93%)
- Politically conservative
- Mesa County Sheriff’s Office, Grand Junction Police Dept., CO State Patrol, Western Colorado Drug Task Force, and DEA Office
- 4 hours away from next largest city
- I-70 runs through north side of town
- Issues with drug trafficking, methamphetamine use, and drug overdoses
- Consistent rates of suicide

- In 2021, the Police Dept. accounted for 33% of the total city budget
- And they have 33% of all fulltime employee positions**

- Voted against Amendment 64 in 2012 with a 51.72% NO and 45.85% YES***
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EMERGING THEMES FROM ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Remaining against implementing legal marijuana because of problems with methamphetamine and other opiates

Investing and continuing to support law enforcement & carceral solutions when community is in dire need of social services-based solutions

Preservation of local and rural carceral ethos through statements and positions of local actors (like the District Attorney, Law Enforcement Chiefs, Mayor, City Council Members, etc.) like broader patterns of the American carceral state
WHY THE GRAND JUNCTIONS OF AMERICA MATTER

There are cities like Grand Junction throughout America

- Cities that are relatively small but can have strong political impact in areas where there is one large metro area and smaller surrounding rural areas
- Places that implement strong levels of federalism against state and national political movements

Cities that have seen the effects of methamphetamine or other drugs

- This has been in the forefront of peoples’ minds recently since the beginning of the opiate epidemic
- Increased policing within smaller communities rather than $$$ being diverted to treatment-based resources under the guise of “safety”

Smaller cities that uphold conservative values in a “blue state”

- Other areas in their state are reconsidering the punitive approach to crime and drugs
- While rural areas are reluctant to adopt these approaches because of deeply held ‘tough on crime’ antics
I predict that Grand Junction was opposed to adopting recreational marijuana because of the long-felt effects of methamphetamine, which caused this conservative community to invest in carceral ‘treatment’ measures. These measures also upheld the criminalization of marijuana so local actors in this area could justify their expansive carceral response and deem this as an essential practice for the benefit of the community.


