

Introduction

Lincoln County is a small, land-locked Third World country bordered on three sides by the state of Nevada and on the fourth by the state of Utah. On the surface, Lincoln County resembles nearby rural counties in the southwestern United States. The terrain is a vast, empty desert punctuated by only a few tiny villages. Here the natives earn a subsistence living raising cattle, maintaining the railroad line, running a youth detention camp and selling gasoline to tourists. Most other forms of economic activity are firmly discouraged by the conservative political structure.

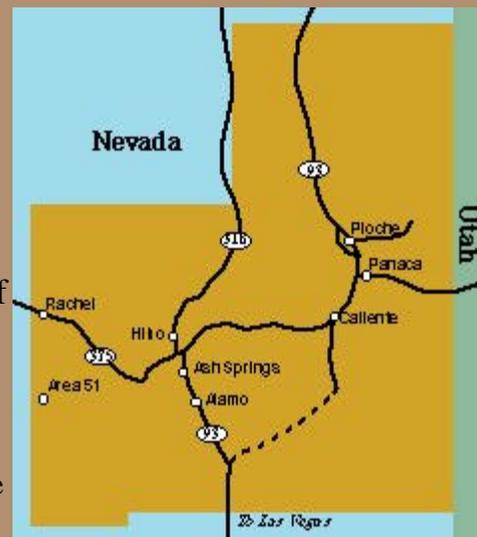
As with other Third World Countries, the problem is resources: There aren't any. There are few jobs and no opportunities for anyone with talent. Year after year, the most talented young people leave the county, and least ambitious stay. The only steady employer is the county and state government, and that's where most of the incompetence ends up.

The county is ruled by the Lincoln County Sheriff's Department, which, on a per capita basis, is one of the largest in the country. As the only police force in the county, its ostensible purpose is to enforce the laws of the State of Nevada, which the county pretends to be a part of. However, because there are no checks and balances, the Sheriff's Department can make its own rules. With no free press (aside from a feeble weekly newspaper), no local judges with law degrees and no active lawyers, the balance of power upon which democracy depends does not exist here.

In Lincoln County, a person charged with a crime is guilty until proven innocent. (See State vs. Chivers.) Other elected officials serve at the discretion of the Sheriff and may be removed if they oppose the Sheriff's goals. (See the recall of Floyd Lamb and Thomas Dill.) The Sheriff's Department regularly practices prior restraint against the press. (See film seizure cases.) This is the only public police force that also represents a secret federal entity (Area 51) and that has deputized members of that organization without public record or written agreement. Outsiders and opponents of the Sheriff are prosecuted to the fullest extent of Nevada Law (numerous cases) and are almost always found guilty, while the illegalities and improprieties of department personell and political allies are generally forgiven. (See Wilkinson Affair and Towery incidents.)

The role of the Sheriff's Department in Lincoln County has not been to enforce the law but to enforce morality -- as interpreted by the deputies. (See Harassing the Bar Owners.) What turns out to be "moral" in this case is whatever supports the power of the Sheriff and his deputies, while "immoral" is anyone or anything that would oppose them. The perception in the county is that justice comes down hardest on those who oppose the Sheriff and that if the deputies want to find something to charge you with, they will.

This not to say that the Sheriff's Dept is particularly efficient. Instead of employing the "best and brightest" it can attract only the dullest and dumbest. These are mostly local boys who have taken the easiest route to employment and don't have the imagination to try their luck elsewhere. It is fortunate that there is very little major crime here, because the department seems ill-equipt to handle it.



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