

Street Crime vs Corporate Crime and The Truth

As a society we need to reassess our understanding of crime and ask why is it that corporate crime advances virtually unhindered, while localized "street crime" has become such an obsession for so many. The answer lies somewhere in the mixed realm of our own hidden fears and our sense of powerlessness in the face of crime, and the immense power of vested interests who gain so much from the current situation.

Corporate crime is endemic the world over. Very few are ever held responsible for its devastating effects. It reaches into virtually every aspect of our lives, yet so widespread is its influence, we are often unaware of its presence. It hits us in so many ways: from the added-on costs in our supermarkets to the pollutants in the air we breathe, from the hidden costs of our banking and financial systems to the costs of medicines we take for our illnesses. The tenacles of corporate crime touch all these areas and many more.

Yet we rarely speak of it, read of it, or hear of it for any sustained period. We have become totally preoccupied with individual "street crime", although corporate violence and crime inflict far more damage on society than all the street crime combined. Just one major tobacco company, for example, arguably kills and injures more people than all the "street criminals" put together. Public corruption, pollution, procurement fraud, financial fraud and occupational homicide inflict incredibly serious damage on workers, consumers, citizens and the environment. Why on earth is a criminal justice system geared to sifting the poor and minor offenders, pretending it is dealing with crime and social harm, when all the major harm is being done by the hidden rulers of our world, the multinational corporations?

A major reason for this is the consistent presentation by the media of crime as being primarily personal. Through newspaper, radio and especially tabloid talk shows, and in the news and entertainment on television, crime is deliberately portrayed in manageable portions of murder, muggings, burglaries and theft, allowing the age-old notion of scapegoat full rein.

The public perception of crime is largely shaped by corporate media and tabloid television, which focus overwhelmingly on street crime, illegal drug use, robberies and theft. If these media devoted proportionate time to the corporate muggings and homicides that are carried out through fraud, unsafe products, usurious lending policies, pollution, occupational accidents and starvation wages, public perceptions would shift to reflect reality more accurately. This will never happen. The same big business people who perpetrate corporate crime control the media through colossal advertising budgets, cross-directorships and ownership.

The actual functions of the criminal justice system are unstated, unacknowledged, and even illicit. Any criminal justice system reflects the values (or lack thereof) of those who hold power in society. Thus, criminal law in America has become a political instrument, formulated and enforced by those with status and power against those who predominantly are status poor and powerless.

By and large, our prisons are reserved for those with dark skin, little money, or unconventional lifestyles. The powerful manage, most of the time, to escape the sanctions of the criminal justice system. Either they have the means to hire good defense lawyers or they are able to make a better impression on juries and judges. At another level it's been demonstrated time and again that violations of environmental, workplace safety, and other laws by corporations and hospitals are seldom prosecuted as crimes and punished by incarceration, though they kill and maim far more persons and rob and damage far more property than street crime committed by poor people.

We are left with the question: what is real crime and who are the biggest criminals? Until we start to focus on crime in its global corporate context and not restrict ourselves merely to the localized street version, we will never learn to identify and grapple with some of the biggest criminals in our society. And we will never create a society where the common good is achieved, where people are truly respected for who they are, where true justice prevails.

Correspondence: Troy T. Thomas, H-01001, ~~CSP-LAC~~
P.O. ~~BOX 4430~~, Lancaster, CA 93539