Power and Deviance/Bureaucracy

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http://www.iastate.edu/~soc.134
Power and deviance

- Conflict perspective: defining and punishing deviance is form of social control by “haves” against “have-nots”
- “Have-nots” are more likely to be labeled and punished for crime
- Our legal system doesn’t protect us equally from the dangers to us from rich people and poor people
  - Reiman: Label “crime” refers not to actions that cause most misery and suffering, but primarily to dangerous actions of the poor
- Corporate crime: Estimated cost of white-collar crime (e.g., fraud, embezzlement) in 1997 was $338 billion (10,000 times amount stolen in bank robberies, 20 times thefts)
- Health care: “preventable medical errors” resulted in 98,000 deaths and 1 million injuries to hospitalized Americans and cost $29 billion
- Workplace safety: Reiman estimates over 30,000 annual deaths from occupational disease and hazard

Jeffrey Reiman’s (2001) *The Rich Get Richer and the Poor Get Prison*
How are Americans murdered?

### How Americans Are Murdered

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total (weapon known)</th>
<th>Firearms</th>
<th>Knife or Other Cutting Instrument</th>
<th>Other Weapon: Club, Arson, Poison, Strangulation, etc.</th>
<th>Personal Weapon: Hands, Fists, etc.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12,943</td>
<td>8,393</td>
<td>1,743</td>
<td>1,815</td>
<td>892</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### How Americans Are Really Murdered

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total (weapon known)</th>
<th>Occupational hazard &amp; disease</th>
<th>Knife or other cutting instrument including scalpel</th>
<th>Firearms</th>
<th>Other weapon: club, poison, strangulation, prescription drug, other medical treatment.</th>
<th>Personal weapon: hands, fists, etc.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>94,681</td>
<td>30,238</td>
<td>13,743</td>
<td>8,493</td>
<td>41,315</td>
<td>892</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Jeffrey Reiman’s (2001) *The Rich Get Richer and the Poor Get Prison*
Scapegoating the young

- **Violent crime**
  - Teenagers commit just 13% of violent crime
  - They are more likely to be victims than offenders

- **Drug use**
  - Most drug users are adults, but teenagers are more likely to be arrested

- **Results of scapegoating teenagers**
  - Status offenses that apply only to young
  - Constitutional rights of young ignored
  - Youth culture targeted for censorship
  - Youths given harsher punishments than adults
  - Offenders against children receive lenient sentences

Source: Mike A. Males’ The Scapegoat Generation
Social dilemmas

- Social dilemma: potential for a society’s long-term ruin because of individuals’ tendency to pursue their own short-term interests (p. 290)
- Tragedy of the commons: situation in which people acting individually and in their own self interest use up commonly available (but limited) resources, creating disaster for the entire community (p. 291)
- Free-rider problem: tendency for people to refrain from contributing to the common good when a resource is available without requiring any personal cost or contribution (p. 292)
  - Once considered a major problem for social movements; some argued that social movements must provide “selective incentives”

- Critique
  - People do not always pursue their own short-term interests
  - Instead, people connect their identities to those of their families, networks, ethnic groups, religions, nations, etc.