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State-Corporate Crime and Criminological Inquiry

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The term *state-corporate crime* refers to serious social harms that result from the interaction of political and economic organizations. The need for such a concept emerged from our examination of events such as the explosion of the space shuttle *Challenger* and the fire at the Imperial chicken processing plant in Hamlet, North Carolina.¹ This research made us aware of a class of organizational crimes that were the collective product of the joint actions between a state agency and a business corporation. This suggested that an additional conceptualization of deviant organizational relationships between government agencies and business corporations was needed. Since those original papers on the concept and theory of state-corporate crime, we, and a number of other researchers, have used the concept to analyze a wide variety of organizational harms.² This chapter will describe the origins and development of the concept of state-corporate crime, review some of the research that has been carried out under this rubric, present the theoretical framework that has been most often utilized, and assess where the study of state-corporate crime might go in the future. Before we will address these issues, however, we will sketch out the historical context for considering the relationship between power and crime and explore the relationship between state-corporate crime and criminological inquiry.

Power and Crime in Historical Context

Modern history is dense with crimes flowing from decisions taken by economic and political elites. From the physical and cultural destruction of Native people in North America, South America, Africa, and the South Pacific during the 18th and 19th centuries, to the World Wars, aerial bombings, genocides, and ethnic displacements of the 20th century, political leaders have authorized the ruination of uncountable millions of innocent human lives. In the 20th century alone, nearly 200 million civilians were killed in the great wars and politically orchestrated genocides.³ Many times that number were maimed, lost loved ones, or had their material lives destroyed as a by-product of 20th-century power-games.

Political leaders of the 21st century show no inclination to break with the past habits of slaughter. In place of world wars, humanity now faces the threat of revolutionary terrorism in both rich and poor nations, imperial wars such as the U.S. invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, continued ethnic cleansings, violent internal conflicts in so-called “failed states,” and numerous “small wars” around the planet.⁴ Instead of periods of the world *at* war, we may have entered an era of the world *in* war, characterized by constant conflicts through which leaders of both great and small nations maneuver for competitive advantage within a unitary capitalist world order. To the extent that this assessment is correct, the 21st century may rival its predecessor in terms of inflicted death and brutality, particularly as the tools of war designed and manufactured in developed nations become increasingly deadly and ever more available worldwide through legal and underground international arms trading.⁵ It would be a mistake, however, to assign exclusive blame for history’s great crimes of violence to political leaders alone. Political elites rarely act without the prompting or support of at least some economic elites. In the dominant social systems of modern history—fascism, communism, and liberal democracy—it is often difficult to determine where economic interests end and political ones begin. As C. Wright Mills noted, a “circulation of elites” ensures that major economic and political decision-makers are typically drawn from the same pool of powerful social actors pursuing a shared vision of a desired social order.⁶ We may eventually find the same to be true of the 21st century’s emerging social system of illiberal theocracy.⁷

Despite the close connections between wealth and power, the institutional arrangements and cognitive frameworks of liberal democratic societies, including the United States, create an image that economics and politics are, or should be, kept apart by a bright line that separates money from power. This is, of course, a social fiction. It is, however, an important one because the premise that the rich and poor are political equals is the very heart of democracy’s claim to legitimacy.

Attractive and legitimizing though it may be, the idea that economic inequality does not intrude into the realm of political governance overlooks a fundamental social reality. What is economic is always political; what is political is always economic. Nevertheless, there is a tendency in liberal-democratic discourse to treat economics and politics as separate spheres. This is as true of academic discourse as it is of elite political narratives. Contemporary social scientists have largely forgotten what our 19th century counterparts knew so well. There is neither economics nor politics; there is only political-economy.

The indivisible linkage of economics and politics means that economic elites have been as guilty of letting the blood of innocents as their political counterparts. From the trade in selling Africans into New World slavery, to the multitudes whose bodies and spirits were broken by the unyielding machines and labor practices of early industrialization, to those who have died, are dying, and will die from the destruction of ecosystems in the pursuit of corporate profit, economic decisions have been the source of at least as much, if not more, human sorrow and suffering as decisions by political leaders.

Ever since Edwin Sutherland introduced the concept of “white-collar crime,”⁸ a small subset of criminologists have sought to understand the crimes and social harms generated by economic and political elites. Influenced,

however, by hegemonic ways of thinking that imagine a fundamental distinction between economics and politics, early inquiries into crimes of the powerful soon divided into studies of white collar and corporate crime on the economic side⁹ and studies of political criminality and state crime on the political side.¹⁰ This division has remained largely unquestioned since these early inquiries into elite criminality. The concept of *state-corporate crime* that we have developed seeks to breach the conceptual wall between economic crimes and political crimes in order to create a new lens through which we can examine the ways crimes and social injuries often emerge from intersections of economic and political power.

Our approach to the problem of crime contradicts much of what has come to be taken for granted in criminology, sociology, and political science about elite crime. For this reason, before expanding further on the notion of state-corporate crime, we want to examine more fully the dominant consciousness that we hope to fracture.

Crime and Criminological Consciousness

Our approach to crimes of the powerful contradicts the ideological frame that dominates contemporary analyses of wrongdoing in two ways. First, as we already observed, contrary to the typical practice of separating economics and politics into distinct fields of inquiry, we begin with the premise that political and economic practices are mutually interrelated in ways that deserve serious investigation by criminologists and other analysts of elite wrongdoing.

Second, we question the utility of the dominant understanding of crime as it has been used by orthodox criminology and other social sciences—as well as by the wider society. Most of the cases of state-corporate crime that have been examined do not involve *crimes* in the juridical sense of the word. That is, most do not involve violations of *criminal law*. Some cases, such as the ValueJet crash,¹¹ Enron-era stock manipulations,¹² and the Firestone-Explorer rollover deaths,¹³ involve one or more violations of *regulatory law*. From a legal standpoint, however, violations of regulatory law are not crimes. The distinction between crime and regulatory violations, however, is itself an expression of political power. The deployment of regulatory rather than criminal law systems to address harms that can *only* be caused by corporate and governmental elites was a juridical move prompted by the interests of the same economic and political elites it was designed to control.¹⁴ By design, America's regulatory legal structure has ensured that elite offenses and offenders remain "administratively segregated" from the crimes of the poor.¹⁵ This has important consequences. The creation of a regulatory legal system isolates elite wrongdoers from the harsh penal sanctions and social stigma that are routinely assigned to street criminals. Because they are categorized as "regulatory violations," most of the crimes typical of powerful actors are perceived as less serious than "real" crime," even though the measurable harm they cause vastly exceeds the physical and financial damage caused by street crime.¹⁶

Although violations of regulatory laws are not crimes in a juridical sense, criminologists who analyze white collar and corporate crimes have, for the most part, accepted the idea that regulatory violations should be examined as forms of legal wrongdoing.¹⁷ The concept of state-corporate crime as used here,

however, extends the scope of criminology even further, incorporating harmful social actions that violate neither criminal nor regulatory laws. Several recent situations, such as corporate collaboration with Germany's Nazi regime,¹⁸ the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq,¹⁹ and questionable linkages between military contractors and the U.S. government,²⁰ involve actions taken under the full authority of national laws. Thus, these social harms violated neither criminal nor regulatory law at the time of their commission. While these offenses may have been legal according to national laws, they and many other elite wrongs can be evaluated according to the laws and human rights standards established in the international arena, and therefore also fall within the legitimate purview of criminological inquiry.²¹ By reaching beyond criminal and regulatory law, the study of state-corporate crime challenges the juridical and conceptual limitations that have kept criminology focused largely on private crimes among individuals. We contend that criminology's focus on interpersonal crimes is largely responsible for its general inattention to the ways that economic and political elites can bring death, disease, and loss to tens of thousands of persons through a single decision, and can impact entire human groups through the creation of systems of oppression and exploitation. It is these greater crimes we wish to examine.

When we speak about criminal systems of oppression and exploitation here we are referring to egregious structures such as slavery, genocide, ethnic cleansing, and political imprisonment that have been condemned by international law, rather than larger systems of exploitation such as capitalism, fascism, or communism. These latter systems, it might be argued, are also guilty of causing widespread and wrongful social harm by the ways in which they give some the ability to dominate others. Two of the three—communism and fascism—have been so condemned. The difference between fascism and communism on the one hand, and capitalism on the other, however, may be only that fascist and communist nation states have been defeated by capitalist ones and, in the aftermath of those defeats, their brutalities have been judged and condemned. The capitalist world has not yet faced any comparable defeat and judgment. There may be some validity to the idea that all accumulative social systems, whether fascist, communist, or capitalist, are guilty of great crimes. Such sweeping critiques are beyond the scope of our inquiry. Rather, we seek to understand specific moments when political and economic interests have intersected in ways that produced a specific set of demonstrable harms.

Elite Crime and Criminology

Despite the enormous costs of economic and political wrongdoing, those who study crime—i.e., *criminologists*—have devoted scant attention to the harms flowing from the misuse of political and economic power. One need do little more than examine the contents of major academic outlets for criminological writings to verify this claim. Between 2000 and 2005, the official journal of the American Society of Criminology, *Criminology*, the official journal of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, *Justice Quarterly*, and the official journal of the British Society of Criminology, the *British Journal of Criminology*, published a total of 575 articles. Of these, 533 examined either patterns of street crime, the institutions of police, courts, and corrections designed to

control street crime, or theory and research aimed at explaining the causes of street crime. Only 18 articles, a mere 3 percent of the total, were in any way devoted to what could be considered crimes by those wielding some degree of concentrated economic or political power.³¹

This emphasis on street crime challenges the claim that criminology is an independent academic discipline shaped by internally generated intellectual guidelines. To the contrary, criminology is largely an extension of the political state, an academic enterprise whose subject matter is defined primarily by external political and ideological forces. There are a number of reasons for this.

First, criminology is typically defined narrowly as the study of *crime* rather than more broadly as a study of the ways humans can harm one another. This means that the subject matter of criminology, as Thorsten Sellin observed long ago, will always be shaped by what governments *choose* to criminalize, rather than by analytic criteria independent of these political processes. Political-economic arrangements and hegemonic consciousness dominate the definition of crime rather than any calculus of demonstrable social harm.

The use of illegal drugs, for instance, causes far fewer deaths and much less illness every year than cigarette smoking. Yet, the volume of research by criminologists studying patterns of illegal drug use, drug-related crimes, and drug law enforcement far exceeds that exploring the efforts of cigarette manufacturers to hide information about the hazards of cigarettes from the public, their efforts to market cigarettes to youth despite bans on such promotion, and their programs to purvey a known deadly substance in less-developed countries that do not have smoking bans or limitations on cigarette advertising.

It might be argued that such comparisons are not valid because cigarettes are legal, while marijuana, cocaine, and heroin are not. Moreover, hiding research findings and engaging in questionable marketing practices are regulatory violations, not crimes. But that is precisely our point. To the extent that criminologists take their lead from politically motivated decisions influenced by powerful economic interests, criminology will continue to buttress rather than analyze the dominant social order.

Second, criminological research is *ameliorative* in nature. Either explicitly or implicitly, most criminological research is aimed, not only at understanding crime as a category of human behavior, but toward reducing crime. For this reason, criminology is substantially influenced by contemporaneous social concerns. Like all social problems, crime problems are socially constructed interpretations of danger and risk.²⁵ Social harms become social problems only when moral entrepreneurs galvanize public sentiment around some area of private trouble, resulting in its redefinition as a public issue and the stimulation of popular demands for some form of public—usually governmental—relief.²⁶

Since the rise of national mass media, beginning with newspapers and magazines in the 19th century, the successful construction of social problems has required that issues achieve relatively high-profile status within the channels of mass communication before they can become the focus of popular demands for change.²⁷ National mass media, however, are far more inclined to discuss public awareness about ordinary street crimes than about harms by economic and political elites.

The mass media have become adept at reporting interpersonal crimes committed anywhere in the country, imbuing them with a sense of immediate and *local* threat.²⁸ Elite criminality fits far less comfortably within existing channels

of mass communication. In the last forty years, the United States has experienced a succession of media mobilizations of public sentiment—or “moral panics”—around issues of interpersonal victimization, such as crimes against the elderly, drive-by-shootings, missing children, crack babies, a supposed new generation of super-predators, and most recently the threats posed by “illegal” immigrants from Mexico and Central America.²⁹ Insofar as criminology is attentive to these social constructions, an ongoing parade of interpersonal threats take their turn as “the next big thing” in criminology, revealing the power of the social construction of social problems to shape what criminologists will find worthy of inquiry.

Third, criminology is *individualistic* in focus. Criminological inquiry tends to focus on the ways specific individuals cause willful harm to other identifiable individuals. Harms that deviate from this ideal-type of crime fit poorly with contemporary criminological consciousness. It is certainly understandable that people will fear the immediate and specific harm to their physical or material security posed by real or imagined threats (e.g., robbery, burglary, identity theft). What is important, however, is that this fear dominates: public consciousness of crime even though the likelihood of interpersonal victimization by street crime is lower than becoming the victim of less specific but far more widespread harms caused by corporate and governmental deviance. Each year in the United States, more people will suffer illness or early death due to environmental pollution than will suffer physical injury due to a violent street crime.³⁰ Similarly, relatively few people will be the victims of robbery or burglary, but nearly *everyone* in the United States will suffer financial loss due to malfeasance in high places.³¹ Nevertheless, overall public sentiment remains far more focused on the threat of street crimes than potential victimization by corporate or governmental deviance.³² Studies of perceived crime seriousness suggest that *when asked*, research subjects assign equal seriousness to both corporate and street crimes that cause injury or death.³³ Reported perceptions of seriousness are not the same as public action, however. Seriousness rankings are intellectual exercises. Fear of crime, however, is an emotional experience that is heightened by the idea of individuals who would deliberately harm others. For instance, the similarity in seriousness assigned to corporate and street crimes applied only to cases where the corporate offender *intentionally* pursued some action that caused death or injury.³⁴ This emphasis on *individual* guilt, deeply entrenched in American law, culture, and political ideology mutes potential public fear of elite wrongdoers because they do not cause harm directly, but through their control over institutions of power.

When it comes to public policy, the fear factor that surrounds street crime ensures that the acts committed by individual criminals against individual victims will receive more public and political attention than corporate or governmental crimes that harm larger numbers of people. This, in turn, directs criminology to focus its attention more toward explaining what causes *individuals* to become criminal than on understanding how organizational frameworks generate corporate and political crimes. These latter crimes rarely involve individual “bad guys” who intentionally plan to harm specific victims. As a result, they fit poorly within the individualistic consciousness of contemporary society and contemporary criminology.

Fourth, political and economic crimes involve *complex causal chains*. Crimes resulting from elite decisions are committed rarely, if ever, by the officials who

authorize them. Consider the political crimes of the United States emanating from the Cold War. The U.S. *geo-policy* of containing the Soviet Union's influence within its Eastern European boundaries was transformed into *strategic goals* by leaders in a variety of governmental agencies such as the State Department, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Department of Defense, and the National Security Council. These strategic goals were then passed down the chain of command to military units, CIA operatives, and clandestine "assets" charged with designing and carrying out *tactical missions* in support of the strategic goals.³⁵

The front-line cold warriors who helped agent provocateurs plant bombs in third-world countries, trained foreign police in the use of torture, helped plan and fund counterrevolutions in developing socialist nations, carried out assassinations of leaders who seemed to threaten U.S. Cold War interests, or fought in what came to be known as *low intensity warfare* against governments that did not support U.S. interests, were far removed from the leaders whose policies they were carrying out.³⁶ If anything questionable or illegal came to light, leaders could always claim "plausible deniability," saying they had not ordered the specific crimes in question. They may not have meant that some specific, heinous crime be committed in the name of freedom and democracy. Nevertheless, they created a political culture and organizational frameworks that ultimately led to heinous acts that would not have occurred without that culture and those frameworks.

We find a similar chain-of-command issue in the more recent scandals involving the torture of U.S. captives in the "war on terror." There is substantial evidence that in Afghanistan, in Camp X-Ray in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and in Iraq—most notably in the Abu Ghraib prison—members of the U.S. armed forces and privately contracted interrogators were enmeshed in a system where abuse of so-called "enemy combatants" had become routine.³⁷ The Bush Administration, however, was successful in using claims to plausible deniability to protect both its inner circle and military leaders by limiting prosecutions to the lowest levels of involvement.³⁸

It is probably true that no high-level U.S. official specifically *ordered* torture. Yet, it is also true that the Bush Administration appointed an Attorney General who had previously drafted legal opinions justifying torture on narrow legal technicalities such as the fact that Al Qaeda is not a nation and has not signed the Geneva Convention.³⁹ Decisions of this sort at the top of the political pyramid go a long way toward creating an organizational climate in which the torture of suspected terrorists—regardless of how minimal the evidence—can easily be interpreted as heroic duty.

Similarly, when corporate managers mandate accelerated production, increased worker output, or reduced costs, they are not specifically ordering increases in injuries due to assembly-line speed-ups, intensification of repetitive-motion tasks, or reductions in expenditures for safety equipment or worker training, even though such outcomes are predictable.⁴⁰ Thus, like political leaders, plausible deniability means that those who issue such orders will normally not be seen as guilty for the causal chain leading to the harms those orders cause. When it comes to widely disbursed harms such as environmental damage or consumer injuries, the insulation between elites and the causal process leading to harm becomes even thicker. The ability of Union Carbide Corporation to isolate its managerial chain from responsibility for the deadly 1984 leak

of methyl isocyanate gas in Bhopal, India, that killed over 15,000 people is a particularly vivid case of plausible deniability in operation.⁴¹ Contemporary narratives of harms resulting from decisions by economic and political elites lack clear villains. This is perhaps appropriate since many of these harms are the products of complex organizational arrangements, not the mendacity of specific individuals.⁴² Without straightforward causal chains leading from criminal to victim, however, these crimes fit poorly within the dominant consciousness of criminology, and therefore receive less attention from criminology than the harms they cause would seem to warrant.

Fifth, criminology is an *academic discipline*. This means that criminologists are disciplined by the organizational demands of higher education. The ability to survive and advance in a university setting requires that criminologists not only teach, but also that they conduct research and publish research findings. As Tombs and Whyte have noted, governments provide little or no funding for research into wrongdoing by political leaders or their allies in business, industry, or the military.⁴³ When governments fund criminological research—and governments are the primary source of criminological research dollars—these monies are primarily designated for research into the causes and control of crimes and vices associated with poor and less powerful segments of society.⁴⁴

The structure of research financing plays a significant role in determining what the majority of criminologists will investigate. Well-funded areas of study attract scholars anxious to advance their careers. Government-sponsored research also funds graduate students interested in criminology, thereby increasing the likelihood that many of these future scholars will develop research agendas along government-supported lines of inquiry. Meanwhile, as public financing of universities shrinks, university administrators become increasingly insistent that new faculty members bring in overhead-generating research dollars, further ensuring that most criminologists will have little choice but to dance to the tune played by the governmental pipers of research dollars. Finally, the most prestigious private and public universities are closely linked to governmental and business interests. Scholars who pose serious challenges to the hegemonic social system have long been seen as unattractive candidates for employment or promotion in these schools.⁴⁵

State-Corporate Crime: Origins And Development

Knowing when an idea first appeared is far different than knowing how it began. Although the term *state-corporate crime* made its first public appearance in a series of papers presented in 1990,⁴⁶ unraveling its origins and evolution is a longer story that embraces more than two decades of collaborative effort to understand crimes of the powerful.

In the mid-1980s, as part of an early inquiry into globalization, we examined how the growing power of transnational corporations headquartered in cosmopolitan centers enabled them to shape laws of interest in the peripheral and semi-peripheral nations to which they were increasingly outsourcing components of production and distribution. This work was published in the journal *Social Problems* as “The Space Between Laws: Corporate Crime in the Transnational Context.”⁴⁷ We came away from this initial inquiry with a heightened awareness of the importance of understanding the intersection

of economics and politics in the production of corporate crimes and social harms.

About the time we were completing “The Space Between Laws,” Ron began a project focused on unraveling the organizational origins of the *Challenger* explosion. As he examined the relevant documents, he became increasingly sensitized to how the controversial *Challenger* launch decision involved interactions between a political organization, The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and Morton Thiokol, Inc., a private business corporation. Acting in concert, these two organizations produced a technological failure of far-reaching consequence.⁴⁸ This clearly suggested a need for criminology to develop clearer conceptualizations of deviant inter-organizational relationships between business and government.

In 1989, over dinner at the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP) meeting in Berkeley, we discussed the issue, and Ray suggested labeling harms resulting from these interactions “state-corporate crime.” Ron thought the term fit the problem, and began incorporating it into his work on the *Challenger*, including “State-Corporate Crime: A Case Study of the Space Shuttle *Challenger* Explosion,” which he presented at the Edwin Sutherland Conference on White Collar Crime: 50 Years of Research and Beyond.⁴⁹ We continued working together to refine the concept of state-corporate crime, and to develop a more elaborated theoretical framework for it.

We presented our first joint efforts at the American Society of Criminology (ASC) meeting in 1990 in a paper titled “Toward an Integrated Theory of State-Corporate Crime.” We noted that, despite their ubiquity, structural relations between corporate and governmental organizations had been largely left out of the study of corporate crime. Instead, two nearly independent bodies of research had developed. Theory and research in the area of corporate crime had concentrated primarily on organizational deviance within private business corporations. Paralleling that work, but seldom intersecting with it, others had examined crimes and malfeasance initiated by governments, what Chambliss had called “state-organized crime.”⁵⁰ We suggested that, rather than seeing these as separate problems, it would be useful for criminologists to examine how organizational deviance frequently emerges at the interstices of corporations and government. We used the term state-corporate crime to denote these types of crimes and offered the following definition:

State-corporate crimes are illegal or socially injurious actions that occur when one or more institutions of political governance pursue a goal in direct cooperation with one or more institutions of economic production and distribution.⁵¹

Less than a year later, in September 1991, a fire in the Imperial chicken processing plant in Hamlet, North Carolina, killed 25 workers and injured another 49. Based on reports about working conditions at the Imperial Processing Plant that Ray heard from his students at UNC-Charlotte, and from what he already knew about the North Carolina Occupational Safety and Hazards Administration (OSHA), he recognized the Imperial fire as another potential candidate for state-corporate crime inquiry. Ray began working with his colleague Judy Aulette to gather and analyze data on the distant and proximate causes of an increasingly apparent case of industrial murder. As part of this work, Ray analyzed the ways in which larger conditions created by the state, such as an anti-regulatory, pro-business climate and an under-funded North Carolina OSHA

were important contributing precedents to the Imperial fire. This led him to revise the definition of state corporate crime as—

illegal or socially injurious actions that result from a mutually reinforcing interaction between (1) policies and/or practices in pursuit of the goals of one or more institutions of political governance and (2) policies and/or practices in pursuit of the goals of one or more institutions of economic production and distribution.⁵²

The deviant interorganizational relationships that serve as the basis for state-corporate crime can take several forms. Kramer's analysis of the space shuttle *Challenger* explosion,⁵³ and Kauzlarich and Kramer's study of the relationship between the U.S. government and weapons manufacturers in the nuclear weapons production process,⁵⁴ both emphasize the central and direct role of the state in initiating a cooperative activity involving government and business that led to a deviant outcome. Aulette and Michalowski's examination of the fire at the Imperial Food Products chicken processing plant in Hamlet, North Carolina,⁵⁵ and Matthews and Kauzlarich's analysis of the crash of ValuJet Flight 592,⁵⁶ suggest a different kind of relationship, one where government omissions permit corporations to pursue illegal and potentially harmful courses of action which, in a general way, facilitate the fulfillment of certain state policies

Corporate crime can take two distinct forms. One is *state-initiated corporate crime* and the other is *state-facilitated corporate crime*. State-initiated corporate crime occurs when corporations, employed by the government, engage in organizational deviance at the direction of or with the tacit approval of the government. State-facilitated corporate crime occurs when government regulatory institutions fail to restrain deviant business activities, either because of direct collusion between business and government or because they adhere to shared goals whose attainment would be hampered by aggressive regulation.

As a sensitizing concept the term "state-corporate crime" has three useful characteristics. First, it directs attention toward the way in which deviant organizational outcomes are not discreet acts but rather the product of the relationships between different social institutions. Second, by focusing on the relational character of the state,⁵⁷ the concept of state-corporate crime highlights the ways in which horizontal relationships between economic and political institutions contain powerful potentials for the production of socially injurious actions. This relational approach provides a more nuanced understanding of the processes leading to deviant organizational outcomes than approaches that treat either businesses or governments as closed systems. Third, the relational character of state-corporate crime also directs us to consider the vertical relationships between different levels of organizational action: the individual, the institutional, and the political-economic. These insights lead toward the development of a theory of state-corporate crime.

Toward a Theory of State-Corporate Crime

In addition to an important revision of the concept of state-corporate crime, our 1990 ASC paper also introduced an integrated theoretical framework to analyze organizational offenses such as state-corporate crimes. We noted that

there were three major theoretical approaches to the study of corporate crime that and each corresponded to a different level of social action. The first was differential association theory as developed by Sutherland.⁵⁸ The second was based on organizational theory and it argued that organizations could be criminogenic either due to the performance emphasis on goals⁵⁹ or as a result of defective standard operating procedures.⁶⁰ This organizational approach would eventually be merged with an anomie perspective on corporate crime.⁶¹ The third approach located the criminogenic forces in the wider political economic structure of capitalism.⁶² Differential association addressed the individual level of action; organizational theory focused on specific institutional factors promoting or retarding corporate crime; and political-economic or radical approaches examined the way that broad, pre-existing societal characteristics interact with both the individual and organizational level of action.

Although the differential association, organizational, and political economic perspectives represented divergent approaches to explaining corporate and government crime, we believed that they could be brought together into an integrated theoretical framework. The structure, dynamics, and cultural meanings associated with the political economic arrangements of any particular society will shape the goals and means of economic and political organization, as well as the constraints they face. The organizational level of analysis links the internal structure of specific economic or political units with the external political-economic environment and with the way in which the work-related thoughts and actions of the individuals who occupy positions in those units are conditioned by the requirements of the positions they hold and by the procedures of the organization. Differential association, by focusing on the social relations that give meaning to individual experience, directs us to examine the symbolic reality derived from social interaction within bounded organizational niches.

Table 1 presents an analytic framework for this integrated theory of organizational deviance.⁶³ This framework links the three levels of analysis discussed above with three catalysts for action. These catalysts are (1) motivation or performance pressure, (2) opportunity structure, and (3) the operationality of control. This framework is designed to indicate the key factors that will contribute to or restrain organizational deviance at each intersection of a catalyst for action and a level of analysis.

This theoretical framework is based on the proposition that criminal or deviant behavior at the organizational level results from a coming together of pressure for goal attainment, availability, perceived attractiveness of illegitimate means, and an absence of effective social control. The first catalyst for action is the emphasis on goal attainment. Political and economic structures, organizations, and individuals may place greater or lesser emphasis on the attainment of rationalized goals as the engine for social action. A highly goal oriented individual, working in an organization that evaluates performance strictly on goal attainment by its workers, in a society whose cultural and institutional framework emphasizes goal attainment above all else, will be more susceptible to pursuing deviant organizational strategies than if one or more of these conditions are absent.

The second catalyst for action suggests that organizational deviance is more likely in a society where legitimate means are scarce relative to goals. The likelihood of deviance increases for those organizations or organizational subunits

Table 1. An integrated theoretical model of state-corporate crime

Levels of Analysis	Catalysts for Action		
	Motivation	Opportunity	Control
Institutional Environment	Culture of competition Economic pressure Organizational goals Performance emphasis	Availability of legal means Obstacles and constraints Blocked goals/strain Availability of illegal means Access to resources	International reactions Political pressure Legal sanctions Media scrutiny Public opinion Social movements
Organizational	Corporate culture Operative goals Subunit goals Managerial pressure	Instrumental rationality Internal constraints Defective SOPs Creation of illegal means Role specialization Task segregation Computer, telecommunication, And networking technologies Normalization of deviance	Culture of compliance Subcultures of resistance Codes of conduct Reward structure Safety & quality control Communication processes
Interactional	Socialization Social meaning Individual goals Competitive individualism Material success emphasis	Definitions of situations Perceptions of availability & attractiveness of illegal means	Personal morality Rationalizations & techniques of neutralization Separation from consequences Obedience to authority Group think Diffusion of responsibility

where the allocation of means by the internal structure is inadequate relative to the organization’s goals, increasing the likelihood that individuals will perceive themselves to be blocked from access to legitimate means and will subsequently seek deviant alternative routes.

Finally, the operationality of social control at all three levels will serve as both an important constraint on organizational deviance and as a critical element in constructing symbolic frameworks that will operate at the societal, organizational, and personal levels as time passes. Thus societies with high operationality of social control are more likely to produce organizations with strong corporate cultures favoring compliance with laws and regulations. Individuals who function in these organizations in such a society will be more likely to develop forms of personal morality that would mitigate against engaging in organizational deviance.

By its very nature, state-corporate crime directs us to examine the linkages between levels of analysis and catalysts for action. When the topic is profit-oriented violations of law by some business, it is possible, although not necessarily sufficient, to treat the crime as organizationally self-contained. Injurious social actions that result from concerted actions by organizations operating in different social spheres (e.g., production vs. governance), however, require that we must expand the analysis, and that is what this theoretical framework attempts to do.

Conclusion

In the years following our initial inquiry into state-corporate crime, it appears that a number of criminologists have found the concept to be a useful way to think about the crimes of the powerful. State-corporate crime is discussed in several popular criminology textbooks⁶⁴ and in a number of textbooks on white-collar, corporate, and government crime.⁶⁵ Articles on the topic have also been published or reprinted in quite a few anthologies dealing with crimes of the powerful.⁶⁶ But most important, the development of the concept and theory of state-corporate crime has resulted in the production of a substantial body of criminological research.

Soon after the initial formulation appeared, other scholars began adapting the concept and its associated theoretical model to a number of other social harms. In addition to the case studies of the *Challenger* explosion, the fire at Hamlet, the contamination wrought by nuclear weapons production, and the crash of ValuJet 592, the concept of state-corporate crime has been used to analyze historical offenses such as corporate collaborations with the Nazi regime during World War II, and contemporary violations such as state-corporate corruption in the world of private military organizations. Some applications of the state-corporate crime model have examined offenses that begin with governments (e.g., the invasion and occupation of Iraq). Others have explored injurious collaborations that began in the realm of business but that could not develop without governmental acts of commission or omission (e.g., Firestone-Explorer rollover deaths). Much of this research has now been gathered together in an anthology titled, *State-Corporate Crime: Wrongdoing at the Intersection of Business and Government*.⁶⁷

In the concluding chapter of *State-Corporate Crime*, David Kauzlarich and Rick Matthews take stock of theory and research regarding the subject.⁶⁸ They argue that much has been accomplished in this study of elite deviance, considering that the concept of state-corporate crime is less than 20 years old. Much has been learned about the manner in which motivation, opportunity, and control impact the genesis and persistence of these organizational harms at the intersection of business and government. Penny Green and Tony Ward concur, and argue that “the approach developed by state-corporate crime scholars is a significant advance toward developing a powerful integrated theoretical model, and can easily be synthesized with our framework for analyzing state crime.”⁶⁹

As for the future, the study of state-corporate crime has enormous potential to contribute to criminology. Great power and great crimes are inseparable. It is only those with great power who, with the stroke of a pen, the giving of an order, or a knowing nod of the head can send thousands to their deaths or consign millions to lives to unrelenting want and misery. Those who occupy positions within the organizational structures of the state and transnational corporations have such power. As criminologists, we need to continue to engage in inquiries that identify, describe and explain the variety of social harms that emanate from the intersection of business and government. In particular, we need to examine harms that occur at the international level, such as crimes of globalization and crimes of empire.

In an era of economic globalization it is important to explore the impact of neo-liberal policies and practices. Transnational corporations (TNCs), national

states, and international financial institutions act together to privatize the global economy and promote free market policies. New legal frameworks favorable to TNCs and investors are adopted, business regulations are gutted, taxes are cut, welfare services and other public interventions on behalf of social and economic equality are withdrawn. The consequences of these policies and practices are great crimes; that is, preventable social harms such as economic inequality, poverty, environmental destruction, hunger, disease, and premature death.⁷⁰ And, ironically, greater levels of what criminologists normally focus on: conventional forms of interpersonal violence and property crime.

Given the imperial designs of the current US government it is also imperative to analyze the crimes of empire. As the neo-conservatives who make up the George W. Bush administration have pursued their geo-political strategy to project American power, secure access to and control over oil supplies, reshape the political culture of the Middle East, and make that part of the world a laboratory for radical free market policies, massive state-corporate crimes have been committed. Under the cover of the global war on terrorism, the US has engaged in wars of aggression, violations of International Humanitarian Law (war crimes), torture, and other violations of human rights.⁷¹

In a significant number of criminologists began to analyze state-corporate crimes, such as the crimes of globalization and the crimes of empire, it would transform criminological inquiry and could have enormous political implications. As William Chambliss, one of the pioneers of the study of the crimes of the powerful, has observed, "If we begin our work today by researching and analyzing [these] crimes. . . we will be on the cutting edge of a revitalized science. If we fail to do so, we will have little relevance to the world of the 21st century."⁷²

Endnotes

1. Kramer, 1990a; Kramer and Michalowski, 1990; Aulette and Michalowski, 1993.
2. See Michalowski and Kramer, 2006.
3. Rummel, 1994.
4. Coll, 2004; Berkeley, 2002; Pilger, 2001.
5. Greider, 1999; Keller, 1995.
6. Mills, 1956.
7. Clarkson, 1997.
8. Sutherland, 1940.
9. Sutherland, 1949; Hartung, 1950; Geis, 1967; Clinard and Yeager, 1980.
10. Turk, 1969; Schafer, 1974.
11. Matthews and Kauzlarich, 2000.
12. Michalowski and Kramer, 2003.
13. Mullins, 2006.
14. Pearce, 1976; Sklar, 1988.
15. Sutherland, 1949.
16. Hills, 1987; Reiman, 2003; Lynch and Michalowski, 2005.
17. Friedrichs, 2004.
18. Matthews, 2006.
19. Kramer and Michalowski, 2005.
20. Rothe, 2006.
21. Chambliss, 1989, 1995; Green and Ward, 2004; Kramer, Michalowski and Rothe, 2005.

22. It is interesting to note that while criminological inquiry into elite crime is relatively absent from criminology *journals*, since the publication of Sutherland's *White Collar Crime* criminologists have written or edited a number of influential books about crimes by political and/or economic elites. See, for instance, *Criminality and the Legal Order*, Austin Turk, 1969; *The Political Criminal*, Stephen Schafer, 1974; *Elite Deviance*, David Simon, 1982; *On The Take*, William Chambliss, 1988; *The Criminal Elite*, James Coleman, 1985; *Crimes by the Capitalist State*, Gregg Barak, 1991; *Beyond the Limits of the Law*, John McMullan, 1992; *Political Crime in Contemporary America*, Kenneth Tunnell, 1993; *Crimes of the American Nuclear State*, David Kauzlarich and Ronald Kramer, 1998; *Corporate and Governmental Deviance*, Erman and Lundman, 2001, *State Crime: Governments, Violence and Corruption*, Penny Green and David Tony Ward, Richard 2004.
23. Sellin, 1938.
24. Glantz et. al., 1996.
25. Spector and Kitsuse, 2000; Schehr, 2005.
26. Gusfield, 1984; Nelson, 1986.
27. Demers and Viswanath, 1999.
28. Altheide, 2002; Ferrell and Websdale, 1999.
29. Best, 1995; Cohen, 1972; Carpenter, 2005; Reinerman and Levine, 1997.
30. Burns and Lynch, 2004.
31. Shover, Fox and Mills, 2001.
32. Chiricos, Padgett, Gertz, 2000.
33. Rossi, et., al., 1974 ; Wolfgang et. al., 1985; Rebovich, 2002.
34. Rossi, et., al., 1974.
35. Kennan, 1967.
36. Blum, 2004; Herman, 1982; Klare and Kornbluh, 1989.
37. Danner, 2004; Hersh, 2004; Ratner and Ray, 2004; Lewis, 2005.
38. Schmitt, 2005.
39. Danner, 2004; Greenberg and Dratel, 2005.
40. Aulette and Michalowski, 1993.
41. Moro and Lapierre, 2002.
42. Kramer, 1984.
43. Tombs and Whyte 2003.
44. NIJ, 2005.
45. Schrecker, 1986.
46. Kramer 1990a; 1990b; Kramer and Michalowski, 1990.
47. Michalowski and Kramer, 1987.
48. For a more comprehensive analysis of the *Challenger* launch see Vaughan, 1997.
49. Kramer, 1990a, 1990b.
50. Chambliss, 1989.
51. Kramer and Michalowski, 1990.
52. Aulette and Michalowski 1993: 175.
53. Kramer, 1992.
54. Kauzlarich and Kramer, 1993.
55. Aulette and Michalowski, 1993.
56. Matthews and Kauzlarich, 2000.
57. Wonders and Solop, 1993.
58. Sutherland, 1940; 1949.
59. Gross, 1978; Finney and Lesieur, 1982; Kramer, 1982.
60. Hopkins, 1978.
61. Vaughan, 1982; 1983; 1997; Passas, 1990.
62. Quinney, 1977; Barnett, 1981; Young, 1981 Michalowski, 1985.
63. Created by Kramer and Michalowski, 1990 and revised by Kauzlarich and Kramer, 1998.

64. Barkan, 2006; Barlow and Kauzlarich, 2002; Siegel, 2001.
65. Friedrichs, 2004; Green and Ward, 2004; Ross, 2003; Simon, 2001; Slapper and Tombs, 1999.
66. Friedrichs, 1998; Geis, Meier and Salinger, 1995; Potter, 2002; Shover and Wright, 2001; Tunnell, 1993.
67. Michalowski and Kramer, 2006.
68. Kauzlarich and Matthews, 2006.
69. Green and Ward, 2004: 51.
70. Derber, 2002; Falk, 1999.
71. Kramer and Michalowski, 2005; Kramer, Michalowski and Rothe, 2005.
72. Chambliss, 1995:9.

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