

Colman McCarthy *Post* 9-17-74

The Other Crime Wave

The 1973 FBI crime report came out last week. Read by itself, it gives the nation its annual chill by revealing that a murder is committed every 27 minutes, a rape every 10 minutes, a robbery every 82 seconds, a burglary every 12 seconds. America's thugs have never been busier. Since 1968, violent crime has risen by 47 per cent and property crime has risen by 28 per cent.

The FBI crime report covers murder, forcible rape, aggravated assault, robbery, burglary, larceny-theft and auto theft. It is helpful to learn the statistical details of these seven crimes. But what about citizens who are not victimized by the hoods and thugs who spring from dark alleys but by the crimes of business interests, labor unions, government officials and even some of the law enforcers themselves? Only a few days after the report, the Wall Street Journal carried a story on the bribery and extortion going on in the meat business in New York City. This graft, the Journal reported, "adds about one cent or more directly to the retail price of each pound of meat sold in the city . . . It costs shoppers millions of dollars a year. It deprives government tax coffers of millions more . . ." This is only a small part of the evidence suggesting that violent crimes and property crimes—taken together, not the mere seven of the FBI report—are not so infrequent as to occur only every 27 minutes, 82 seconds or whatever the clock ticks, but occur in one form or another all the time to all citizens.

Because no government agency has the mandate to report on the totality of America's crime, the citizen is on his own so far as learning what thieves

and killers are out to get him is concerned. Clipping the papers is one method of examining the vastness of the nation's white collar criminality. One citizen who did so was William Nigut, who wrote in the June issue of the Chicago Journalism Review: "In recent years, some of America's best-known and most prestigious companies have been convicted on criminal charges of conspiring to fix prices on a wide variety of products and services, including asphalt, auto repairs, beer, book matches, bread, broilers, cigarettes, clocks, coal, construction materials, consumer electronic products, drugs, electric turbines, farm-equipment parts, gasoline, glass containers, hospital furnishings, ice cream cones, master key systems, milk, plumbing fixtures, printed materials, real estate sales, rock salt, school books and class rings, shipping containers, shoes, snack foods, tires, watches and water purification and other industrial chemicals."

The most serious violent crime is murder. The FBI puts the number for last year at 19,510. The corpses seem piled high until the book, "Muscle and Blood," by Rachel Scott is read. In researching occupational death, diseases and injury, the author—a labor reporter for The Baltimore Sun—visited the factories of some of America's major corporations, firms managed by decent, church-going officials who had "the resources to measure and control industrial hazards. Yet now as throughout American history, companies such as these shrug at the pleas of workers whose health they destroy in order to save money. They hire experts — physicians and researchers — who purposely misdiagnose industrial diseases as the ordinary diseases of

life, write biased reports, and divert research from vital questions. They fight against regulation as unnecessary and cry that it will bring ruination. They ravage the people as they have the land, causing millions to suffer needlessly and hundreds of thousands to die." Only occasionally does someone like Rachel Scott take time to seek out the victims of industrial slaughter but she is as much a crime reporter as the journalist covering the homicide beat. The victims killed by inhaling chemicals like vinyl chloride, beryllium or silica, are as dead as they would be if killed by a handgun or butcher knife.

One of the lasting accomplishments of the Nixon administration was to open the public's eyes to white collar crime. The only problem is that the public, now that the Colsons, Deans and Magruders are off in prison, may think that this particular crime wave which was generated by the educated and powerful, was the exception. It wasn't. The FBI report, for example, tells of the increase in certain types of street and residential robberies, but Ralph Nader put the situation into perspective when he noted in recent hearings on a federal criminal code reform that "newspapers and television highlight bank robberies as major events, yet the white-collar criminal inside the bank through fraud and embezzlement took six times more money in fiscal year 1973 than did the hold-up man." According to Nader, \$135.6 million was lost in bank frauds and embezzlements while \$22 million was lost in robberies. Frauds and embezzlements have increased 313 per cent since 1969 while bank robberies have increased 12 per cent.

A broad and documented examination of parts of the crime wave not covered in the FBI report is a newly published document called "Public Citizens Staff Report on White-Collar Crime." It tells of cases involving stock thefts, stock frauds, antitrust, official corruption, campaign contributions, FHA scandals and consumer frauds. The report tells of cases mostly in Washington or New York City, but these are "only a bare fraction of the white collar crimes committed during the 18 month period of the study." Yet the findings were enough to confirm what the National Advisory Commission on Standards and Goals for Criminal Justice stated in 1967: "The . . . robber . . . and burglar and the murderer know that their crimes are

pale in comparison with the larger criminality within the system . . . As long as official corruption exists, the war against crime will be perceived by many as a war of the powerful against the powerless; law and order will be just a hypocritical rallying cry, and 'equal justice' will be an empty phrase."

The white collar criminal has the instincts of a street criminal, but he has a better address, education and lawyer. He often gets away not only with his crimes—put at \$40 billion a year—and a light sentence or pardon when caught, but he has no governmental agency telling the public the details of his acts. At least with the FBI reporting that house robberies are up 64 per cent, a nervous citizen can slap an extra lock on his door. But how can we defend ourselves against price fixers, embezzlers, extortionists, mail frauders or stock manipulators if we are not informed about them? How can the public demand action from the police, as have women's groups on the recently publicized crime of rape? The Public Citizens report concluded that "law enforcement agencies devote meager resources to the investigation and prosecution of white-collar crime in relation to that expended on street crime." The term cover-up has had its vogue in recent months, but another kind exists—the cover-up of the fact that the most dangerous criminals are not necessarily those we stash away in our prisons in gray denim uniforms but can be those among us in the safest disguise of all, the white collar.