

Using their idiosyncratic definitions, the authors in this volume argue—to my mind, fairly persuasively in many cases—that a variety of systematic bad outcomes afflict people doing contingent work. For example, many women find themselves in particularly bad contingent jobs, and for some of them bad dead-end temporary jobs are a long-term trap from which they can't seem to escape. There are suggestions—though not much evidence—that firms have failed to understand the costs to the bottom line of creating contingent jobs, and that cost reduction and flexibility benefits are overstated. Evidence from Australia—where the legal environment is very different from that of the United States—suggests that the role of contingent employees in buffering protected “core” employees may typically be very limited. Manipulation of experimental vignettes provides evidence that academics who accumulate time in adjunct faculty roles may hurt their chances of gaining tenure track positions.

Overall, this book is a compelling introduction to the human issues of the downside of contingent employment. It is written at a level that should be accessible and interesting to most undergraduate students.

The Future of Anomie Theory, edited by **Nikos Passas** and **Robert Agnew**. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997. 240 pp. \$50.00 cloth. ISBN: 1-55553-321-3.

CRAIG REINARMAN
University of California, Santa Cruz

Rumors of the death of Merton's anomie theory of deviance have been greatly exaggerated, it turns out. In his classic 1938 article, “Social Structure and Anomie,” Merton drew on Durkheim to outline an elegant theoretical framework for understanding deviance. In essence, he argued that anomie is caused when a culture universally inculcates certain success goals (e.g., the American Dream ideology that economic success and mobility are desirable and possible for everyone) while structural inequalities block many people's access to legitimate means for achieving those goals. This macrolevel breakdown in societal regulation is experienced at the micro level as “strain,” which increases the probability that some individuals will be pushed toward “deviant adaptations.”

From the Chicago School sociologists in the early twentieth century through Merton, Cohen, and Cloward and Ohlin well into the 1960s, poverty and class were causally central to theories of deviance and crime. But they were pushed into the sociological shadows by a curious conjuncture. Labeling theorists drew attention away from the causes of deviance by focusing, rightly, on the construction of the categories of deviance and how social control agents went about filling them. Critical criminologists complained that anomie/strain theorists focused only on street crime among the lower class and ignored “suite crime” among the powerful. Control theorists focused on delinquency in the general population (what Hagan and McCarthy in this volume insightfully call “school criminology”), which it explained in terms of individuals' bonds to conventional institutions rather than culture and social structure.

Historically, conservatism created a context that was increasingly inhospitable to anomie/strain theory. Politicians pushed aside liberal theories of crime and the rehabilitative ideal in favor of the demonization of deviants and a wave of imprisonment. Nothing about the priorities or policies of Nixon, Reagan, Bush, or Gingrich welcomed a theory that situated the source of deviance in dominant values and the structure of the status quo.

The authors of this thoughtful book provide a convincing critique of the various ways in which anomie/strain theory has been neglected for newer political or scientific fashions or abused by reductionist testing. They re-examine the empirical research based on the theory and find much support for its original formulation. They go on to propose a promising array of solutions to the problems identified by critics and to extend the theory in important ways.

For example, whether a disjuncture between universal goals and legitimate means pushes a given person toward deviance depends largely on how he or she interprets and reacts to that disjuncture. This interpretation and reaction are in turn a function of various intervening variables and mediating mechanisms, many (though not all) of which are associated with one's social-structural location. In several well-developed chapters, the contributors link the macro and micro dimensions of anomie/strain theory by creatively integrating theories of reference

groups, relative deprivation, social capital, and social support.

The book concludes with Rosenfeld and Messner's promising “institutional anomie” theory, which explores the intersection of culture and social structure with which Durkheim and Merton began. They pose the crucial question of whether markets “enhance or erode the moral order of a capitalist society.” Their wise answer is that it depends on how much the economy dominates other institutional spheres, such as the family, schools, and the state. If attachment to such conventional institutions is what prevents deviance, as control theories suggest, then to the extent that market dominance devalues them the society is likely to have more anomie and more deviance. For moral prohibitions to have practical force against, say, crime and delinquency, a society's noneconomic institutions must be vital and valued.

This sort of analysis helps connect the dots in our understanding of why the United States has higher crime rates than other industrialized democracies whose cultures and welfare states are less saturated by market logic. Presently, however, European Union states are contemplating cuts in social welfare spending and searching for policies that better facilitate capital accumulation. And next door, the former Soviet states continue to collapse into deeper anomie as the logic of the market marches through their institutions. As Merton himself notes in the Foreword, this suggests that “the future of anomie theory has already begun.”

Losing Legitimacy: Street Crime and the Decline of Social Institutions in America, by **Gary LaFree**. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998. 240 pp. \$27.00 cloth. ISBN: 0-8133-3450-0.

RICHARD ROSENFELD
University of Missouri, St. Louis
richard_rosenfeld@umslu.edu

In *Losing Legitimacy*, Gary LaFree seeks to explain U.S. street crime trends during the post-World War II period, particularly the dramatic increases that occurred between the mid-1960s and late 1970s. A second objective is to account for the pronounced differences in the rates, and disproportionate contribution to the time trends, of African Americans compared to whites. LaFree argues that the trends are related to changes in institutional “legitimacy.”

Declining legitimacy corresponded with the rapid crime increases during the 1960s and 1970s. High levels of legitimacy were associated with the comparatively low crime rates of the immediate postwar period, and indications of increasing legitimacy (or a halt in the decline) have accompanied the high but stable rates of street crime in recent years.

LaFree focuses on changes in three core institutions—the political system, economy, and family structure—arguing that variations in political trust, economic inequality, and family stability coincide with the crime trends. Crime rates rose during a period of diminishing trust in political institutions, increasing inequality, and decreasing family stability. The higher levels and sharper rises in African-American criminal involvement, he maintains, reflect the correspondingly lower levels of trust, greater inequality, and higher rate of family disruption among African Americans. Americans responded to the postwar crime increase and accompanying institutional crisis by expanding the size and scope of education, social welfare, and criminal justice institutions, thereby stabilizing crime rates in the 1980s and reducing them in the 1990s.

LaFree has tackled a major—arguably the major—problem in contemporary American criminology: the dramatic increase in crime that took place in the 1960s and 1970s in the United States, and the disproportionate impact on the aggregate trends of the rates of African Americans. His argument is equally significant. Big changes in crime were brought about by big changes in the structure and functioning of big institutions. Criticizing much contemporary research for its static, cross-sectional character, LaFree insists that the concepts and tools of longitudinal research are necessary to explain postwar crime trends. He is to be commended for taking on a critically important topic and for the sheer sweep of his institutional analysis.

Although his major argument is compelling and plausible, the supportive data LaFree offers are far from conclusive, and at several points his reading of the evidence is overly generous to his case. He presents the bulk of the evidence in the form of bivariate time series showing crime and institutional trends of one sort or another. And where he almost always sees a “clear connection” or “close relationship” between crime and institutional change, other readers are more likely to see a loose coupling or no relationship.