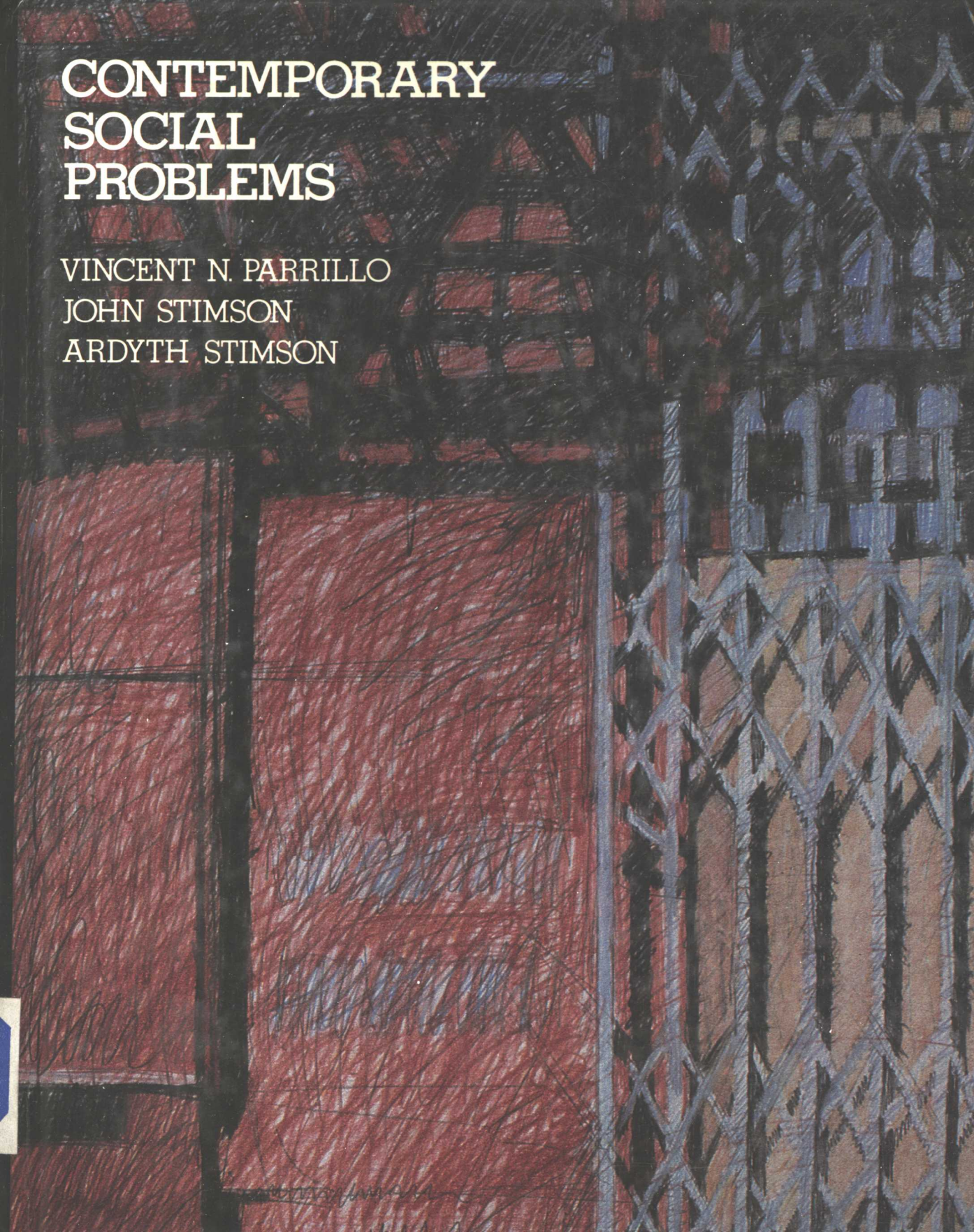


# CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL PROBLEMS

VINCENT N. PARRILLO  
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*To our spouses—Beth, Ardyth, and  
John—without whose support this book  
would not have been possible*

**W**e wrote this book because we wanted to create a lively and readable text providing students with more than a dry, depressing recitation of statistics and description. We involve students by smoothly integrating sociological theory and current knowledge, punctuated with boxed inserts exemplifying or augmenting the topics under consideration. In addition, we emphasize how the social definitions of problems impact upon perceived causes and attempted cures. Another important aspect of the book is our use of plausible, alternative future scenarios, giving readers an understanding of the possibilities for social change.

Chapters 1 and 2 establish the knowledge base for the sociological study of social problems. Chapter 1 examines impediments to studying social problems, the roles of the social scientist, the elements of a social problem, some misdirected “common sense” responses, and four major sociological orientations. These orientations are used in each chapter to describe the variety of theoretical contributions available to sociology. Chapter 2 departs from other social problems books in that it analyzes the impact of society on the individual, including problems of alienation and anomie, together with the search for meaningful identities. Here we show how people’s expectations and the social conditions generating their concepts about the quality of life affect their individual assessment of social problems and their solutions.

Following this grounding in the sociological perspective, the remaining chapters each focus upon specific social problems. Organized in thematic units of increasingly broader social categories, these 15 chapters are grouped in units about challenges to individuals, society, social institutions, and the quality of life. Significantly, each thematic section begins with an introduction to that grouping of chapters, providing a unifying direction of study. Throughout the book we employ an eclectic approach to show how the varying theoretical analyses (deviance, functionalist, conflict, and interactionist) each provide a different “lens” for examining a particular social problem.

Our colleague, Mary Lou Mayo, is the author of Chapter 11 on the family, and we thank her for her fine contribution. Yvonne Chilik offered invaluable research assistance, making our task a much lighter one. At John Wiley and Sons, we were fortunate to work with a creative and knowledgeable editorial and production staff. Specifically, we express our appreciation to Carol L. Luitjens and Irving L. Cooper for their faith and support in the project, to Karin Kincheloe for an attractive book

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## **PREFACE**

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Vincent N. Parrillo

John Stimson

Ardyth Stimson

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