

# Social Problems

## ISSUES AND SOLUTIONS

THIRD EDITION



CHARLES ZASTROW

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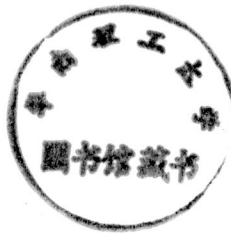
# SOCIAL PROBLEMS

*Issues and Solutions*

Third Edition

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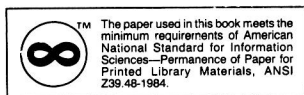
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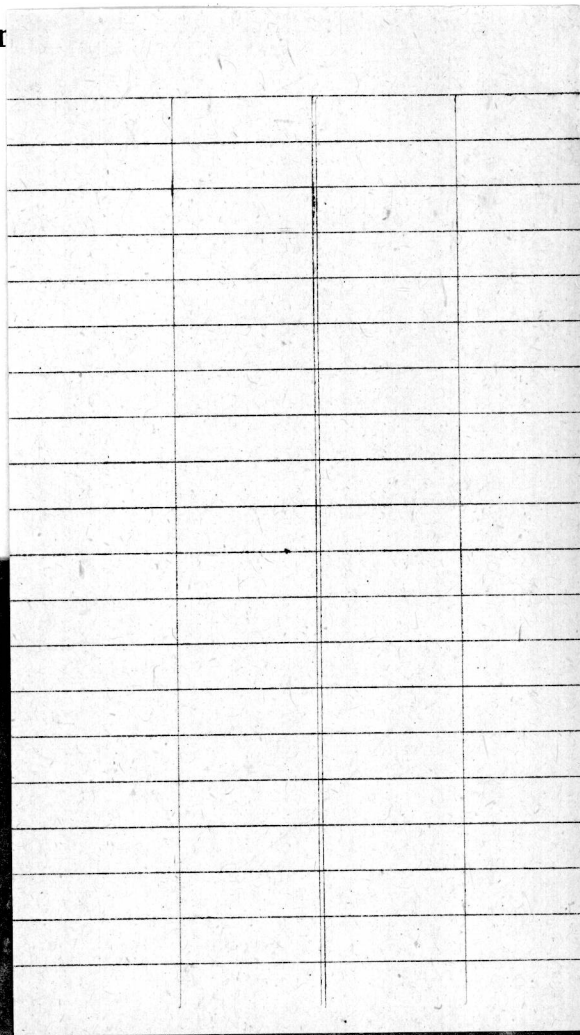


# **SOCIAL PROBLEMS**



The Nelson-Hall Series in Sociology

Consulting Editor: Jonathan H. Turner  
*University of California, Riverside*



# PREFACE

On a spring evening in 1964, Kitty Genovese was walking near her apartment building in a middle-class section of Queens, New York City. A man stalked her, grabbed her, and began stabbing her. She started screaming and broke free. Thirty-eight residents in nearby apartment buildings heard the blood-curdling screams and ran to their windows to watch. Ms. Genovese continued screaming, running, and trying to fight off her attacker for 37 minutes while these residents watched. Most of these witnesses reacted as if they were watching a television thriller. No one called the police or tried to intervene. If they had done something to help, Ms. Genovese probably would have survived.\* Ms. Genovese's tragic ending highlights some of the topics that will be covered in this text—assault, murder, violence, fear of becoming involved, and the impact that modern society has had on individuals.

Social problems courses are often among the most stimulating and educational courses taught in colleges and universities. Such courses describe tragic human conditions and personal and social problems faced by every human being. College students are often personally affected by these problems. This text presents ma-

terial on social problems in a stimulating and educational way.

The book has several goals:

- To provide a clear and concise description and analysis of major social problems in America
- To present and describe proposed solutions for resolving each of the problems discussed
- To stimulate interest in understanding and doing something about resolving social problems
- To provide an understanding of sociological theories that explain the nature of social problems and also generate proposals to resolve these problems
- To provide an awareness of the importance of sociological research in testing theories and in discovering social facts
- To help readers become aware of the importance of social movements in recognizing and solving social problems
- To instill a sense that problems indeed can be solved, while at the same time tempering this optimism with a realistic understanding of the difficulties involved in achieving this end
- To help readers sort out their values concerning convicted offenders, single parents, abusive parents, minority groups, big busi-

\*Ms. Genovese's tragic death is discussed further in chapter 14.

ness, social reformers, the emotionally disturbed, the physically impaired, and others

- To provoke thinking about some of the controversial issues surrounding contemporary social problems

The goals of *Social Problems*—and the specific social problems discussed—were determined in large part by an extensive survey of faculty members who teach social problems courses. Additional information on which problems to include was gathered from sociological writings, opinion polls, and news media coverage. Instead of seeking to explain all social problems from a few theoretical perspectives, this book uses more of an eclectic approach. Theories are presented that best help in understanding each social problem covered, and that promise to generate usable recommendations for alleviating each problem. Repeatedly it will be demonstrated that sociological research has disproved many “commonsense” beliefs.

Most other social problems texts give little attention to describing approaches for resolving social problems. Consequently, the author believes that developing the student’s critical thinking capacities is much more important than requiring the learning of unimportant facts to be recited on exams.

To the extent possible, jargon-free language is used so that the reader can grasp the material more readily.

## Plan of the Book

*Social Problems* is structured to cover material in this sequence: first, deviances and social variations experienced by individuals; then, inequality problems experienced by certain groups; next, problems of troubled institutions; and finally, problems of a changing world. This progression, from individual problems to more

complex problems, should help the reader understand them better.

The four parts are preceded by an introduction, “The Sociology of Social Problems,” which provides an orientation to the sociological approach to social problems. The components of a social problem are defined, a brief history of investigating social problems is presented, the role of social science in studying social problems is discussed, key sociological terms are defined, and the importance of social movements in resolving problems is described. An overview is given of the role of sociological theory and research in studying social problems.

Part I (“Deviance and Social Variations”) presents personal problems that involve issues of national concern. Separate chapters cover crime and delinquency, emotional and behavioral problems, drug abuse, and variations in human sexuality. Because so many people are affected by them (e.g., as crime victims or through emotional problems), these *personal* problems are recognized as major *social* problems in the United States.

Part II (“Inequality Problems”) presents dilemmas of discrimination and unequal distribution of resources. Chapter topics cover racism and ethnocentrism, sexism, ageism, and poverty.

Part III (“Troubled Institutions”) presents problems confronting key institutions. Chapters cover the family; health care; education; and big business, technology, and work.

Part IV (“Problems of a Changing World”) presents issues of immense dimensions that affect everyone. Chapter topics cover violence, terrorism, and war; urban problems; population; and environment.

Each chapter presents the following material about a social problem area:

- A description of the nature and extent of the problem

- Vivid case examples to illustrate the plight of those affected
- Sociological theoretical material and research findings on the causes of the problem
- Current efforts, programs, and services to resolve the problem
- Merits and shortcomings of current efforts to resolve the problem
- Contemporary controversial issues surrounding the problem
- Proposals to resolve the problem more effectively

A major intention of this book is to present proposals that have been advanced and programs that have been created to attempt a reso-

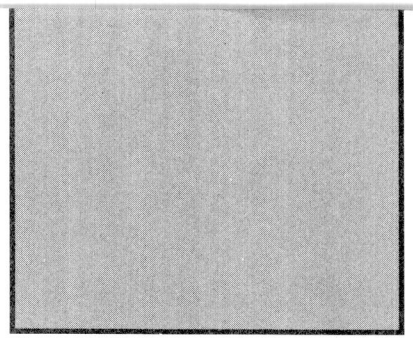
lution of each social problem reviewed. The text ends with an epilogue, which summarizes past and present approaches of the federal government to combat social problems and describes social trends that provide a view of the future.

## Acknowledgments

The author wishes to express deep appreciation to the following people who assisted in conceptualizing the text and helped in a number of ways with the writing: Kris Zastrow, Vicki Vogel, William Winter, Mathew Zachariah, Robert Scheurell, Donna Bergeon, Joan Sarauer, Lee H. Bowker, and Grafton H. Hull, Jr.



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## CHAPTER

# 1

# The Sociology of Social Problems



“Once upon a time, long, long ago,  
way before everything got screwed up . . .”

Drawing © William Hamilton



# 1. The Sociology of Social Problems

## **The Sociological Approach**

*Defining a Social Problem*

*Historical Foundations of Studying Social Problems*

*Role of Sociology and Social Science in Resolving Social Problems*

## **Social Movements and Social Problems**

*Agitation*

*Legitimation and Co-option*

*Bureaucratization and Reaction*

*Re-emergence of the Movement*

## **Consequences of Actions Taken on Social Problems**

*Resolution of the Problem*

*Partial Resolution of the Problem*

*Confinement of the Problem*

*Intensification of the Problem*

*Creation of New Problems*

*Shifting the Focus of the Problem*

*Maintaining the Organization*

*Deflection of Public Concern*

## **Role of Sociological Theory**

*Personal Troubles or Social Issues?*

*Prominent Macrosociological Theories*

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