

A N N U A L      E D I T I O N S

# SOCIAL PROBLEMS



# The Annual Editions Series

Annual Editions is a series of over 65 volumes designed to provide the reader with convenient, low-cost access to a wide range of current, carefully selected articles from some of the most important magazines, newspapers, and journals published today. Annual Editions are updated on an annual basis through a continuous monitoring of over 300 periodical sources. All Annual Editions have a number of features designed to make them particularly useful, including topic guides, annotated tables of contents, unit overviews, and indexes. For the teacher using Annual Editions in the classroom, an Instructor's Resource Guide with test questions is available for each volume.



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Twenty-Third Edition

Printed in the United States of America

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Members of the Advisory Board are instrumental in the final selection of articles for each edition of Annual Editions. Their review of articles for content, level, currentness, and appropriateness provides critical direction to the editor and staff. We think you'll find their careful consideration well reflected in this volume.

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# To the Reader

In publishing ANNUAL EDITIONS we recognize the enormous role played by the magazines, newspapers, and journals of the *public press* in providing current, first-rate educational information in a broad spectrum of interest areas. Within the articles, the best scientists, practitioners, researchers, and commentators draw issues into new perspective as accepted theories and viewpoints are called into account by new events, recent discoveries change old facts, and fresh debate breaks out over important controversies.

Many of the articles resulting from this enormous editorial effort are appropriate for students, researchers, and professionals seeking accurate, current material to help bridge the gap between principles and theories and the real world. These articles, however, become more useful for study when those of lasting value are carefully collected, organized, indexed, and reproduced in a low-cost format, which provides easy and permanent access when the material is needed. That is the role played by *Annual Editions*. Under the direction of each volume's Editor, who is an expert in the subject area, and with the guidance of an Advisory Board, we seek each year to provide in each ANNUAL EDITION a current, well-balanced, carefully selected collection of the best of the public press for your study and enjoyment. We think you'll find this volume useful, and we hope you'll take a moment to let us know what you think.

Welcome to *Annual Editions: Social Problems 95/96*. When Democrat Bill Clinton was elected president in 1992 he expressed great optimism for social reform, based on what appeared to be an end to political deadlock. His campaign promises to eliminate welfare as we know it, to reinvent government, and to provide health care for every American has been much more difficult to achieve than he had envisioned. During the first two years of Clinton's presidency, both houses of Congress composed a Democratic majority, which, many believed, should have enabled him to make major changes in the way things had been done in the past. However, significant numbers of his own party apparently did not share his vision of what the future could and should be. At the conclusion of 1994, Congress shifted to a Republican majority, all but dashing the president's original hopes for an executive-legislative alliance. President Clinton, to achieve at least some of his campaign objectives, has been forced to reevaluate his strategies and goals. This edition of *Annual Editions: Social Problems* has been revised to reflect what has been occurring throughout the Clinton presidency.

The editor reviewed hundreds of articles for this edition. Due in part to a preoccupation of many authors with the political struggles going on between President Clinton and Congress over welfare and health care reform, current, informative, well-written articles on all areas included in the last edition were difficult to find for this edition. As a result some sections are shorter than desired, other sections were combined, and a new section on cities was created. The editor was faced with a dearth of information in some areas and a superabundance of high-quality information in others. To make room for new materials, some excellent articles that had become dated had to be deleted.

This edition begins with two articles examining various theories of social problems. Following this introductory section are eight units. Unit 1 clusters articles concerning the basic unit of society—the family—including the changes it is experiencing and the implications of these changes for society. Articles in the second unit examine the causes and impact of crime, delinquency, and violence in American society and what, if anything, can be done to control them. Unit 3 is a combination of articles dealing with the problems of the aged and health care. Unit 4 examines issues, trends, and public policies impacting on poverty and inequality. Unit 5 looks at the implications of existing immigration policies and the utility of or dysfunctions of cultural pluralism. Unit 6 is new and explores the problems facing cities and those who must live in them. Unit 7 examines sex and gender issues and the growing problems associated with drug abuse. The final unit examines global issues that transcend national geographic boundaries.

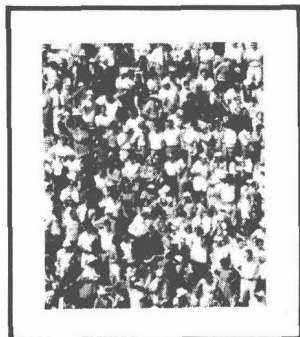
To assist the reader in identifying specific topics or issues covered in the various articles, we have created a *topic guide*. This guide lists various topics in alphabetical order and the articles in which they are discussed. A reader doing research on a specific topic is advised to check this guide first.

Most of the authors of the articles express serious concern about the troubled state of America's cities, families, economy, and deteriorating position as a world power, as well as concern about the conditions of Earth's environment, but they have not given up. Most suggest strategies to save the family, reduce crime, make cities safer, and improve the environment.

If you have suggestions for articles or topics to be included in future editions of this series, please write and share them. You are also invited to use the form provided on the last page of this book for rating the articles.

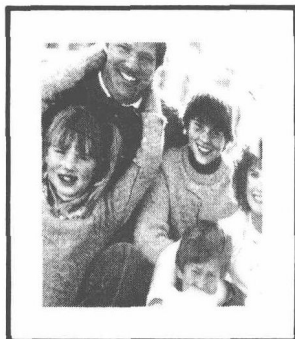


Harold A. Widdison  
Editor



## Introduction

Two introductory articles summarize the three major theoretical approaches to studying social problems: symbolic interactionism, functionalism, and conflict.

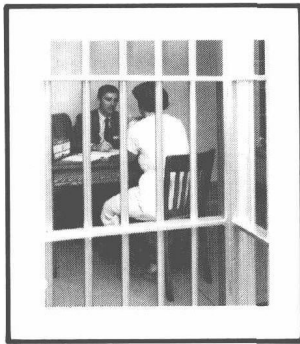


## Unit 1

## Parenting and Family Issues

Five selections examine how the socially stabilizing force of the family has been assaulted by the dynamics of economic pressure, unemployment, and homelessness.

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1. <b>Social Problems: Definitions, Theories, and Analysis</b> , Harold A. Widdison and H. Richard Delaney, <i>Dushkin Publishing Group/Brown &amp; Benchmark</i> , 1995.	5
This article, written specifically for <i>Annual Editions: Social Problems</i> , explores the complexities associated with defining, studying, and attempting to resolve "social" problems. The three major theoretical approaches— <i>symbolic interactionism</i> , <i>functionalism</i> , and <i>conflict</i> —are summarized.	
2. <b>How Social Problems Are Born</b> , Nathan Glazer, <i>The Public Interest</i> , Spring 1994.	14
Nathan Glazer examines various strategies, techniques, and processes through which <i>some social concerns become defined as "social problems"</i> while others do not.	
Overview	20
A. <i>THE FAMILY</i>	
3. <b>Fount of Virtue, Spring of Wealth: How the Strong Family Sustains a Prosperous Society</b> , Charmaine Crouse Yoest, <i>The World &amp; I</i> , August 1994.	22
Cross-cultural anthropological studies reveal that <i>strong, stable families</i> reduce the incidence of violence, poverty, drug abuse, sickness, mental illness, and dropping out of school.	
4. <b>Endangered Family</b> , <i>Newsweek</i> , August 30, 1993.	35
For many <i>African Americans</i> , marriage and childbearing do not seem to go together. After decades of denial and blame, a new candor is emerging as <i>blacks struggle to save their families</i> .	
5. <b>The Disease Is Adolescence</b> , Douglas Foster, <i>Utne Reader</i> , July/August 1994.	41
Across lines of race and class, the number of <i>preventable teenage deaths</i> is rising at an alarming rate. Dr. Barbara Staggers, an award-winning innovative physician, shares her insights and experiences as to the underlying causes.	
6. <b>Why Leave Children with Bad Parents?</b> Michele Ingrassia and John McCormick, <i>Newsweek</i> , April 25, 1994.	46
Under the pressure to preserve families, <i>social service agencies</i> bend over backwards to <i>return abused children to their parents</i> . As a result, thousands of abused kids' lives are placed in jeopardy each year.	



# Unit 2

## Crime, Delinquency, and Violence

Seven articles discuss the extent and significance of crime and delinquency in today's society.

### B. HOMELESSNESS

7. **The New Outlaws: Cities Make Homelessness a Crime**, George Howland Jr., *The Progressive*, May 1994. 51

**Homeless people** are suddenly discovering that they are criminals because of public pressure to clean up public places, abolish aggressive begging, and eliminate shantytowns. To satisfy such public demands, new laws are being enacted and old ones are being enforced. Bearing the full legal and social consequences of these laws are the homeless, who, by design, are the laws' **defenseless victims**.

### Overview

8. **Getting Serious about Crime**, George Lardner, *Washington Post National Weekly Edition*, November 29–December 5, 1993. 54  
56

People demand that something be done when crime hits close to home. But what is being done is not working. George Lardner argues that for **the justice system** to be effective, arrests must be coupled with **immediate and severe punishment**.

9. **Ethics, Neurochemistry, and Violence Control**, Stephen G. Post, *The World & I*, August 1994. 58

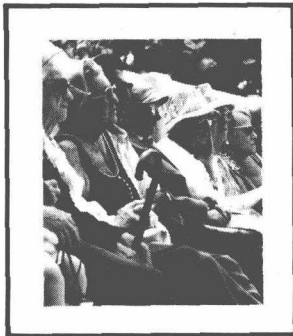
The allure of a quick fix for violence has encouraged the search for a **genetic link to violence** that can be chemically controlled. Stephen Post challenges this genetic perspective—claiming that violence is a complex interaction among social, psychological, societal, and biological factors.

10. **Crime Takes on a Feminine Face**, Chi Chi Sileo, *Insight*, December 20, 1993. 64

Driven by economic need, self-defense, or greed, **more women are turning to crime**, at a cost beyond the expense of incarceration—and with children often the innocent victims.

11. **Danger in the Safety Zone**, Jill Smolowe, *Time*, August 23, 1993. 67

In the past, most Americans believed that their homes, communities, and businesses offered safe havens in which to work, play, and relax, but not anymore. With **the rise in random violence**, fear-produced paranoia is gripping America.

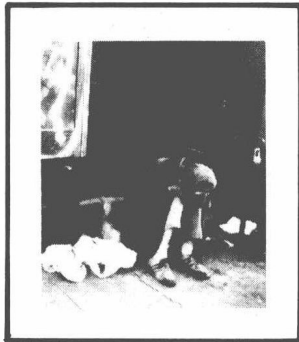


# Unit 3

## Aging, Health, and Health Care Issues

Seven articles discuss aging, health, and health care issues.

12. **Honey, I Warped the Kids**, Carl M. Cannon, *Mother Jones*, July/August 1993. 71  
Why is violence growing in our society? Carl Cannon points his finger at television. He argues that there is massive evidence clearly demonstrating a direct cause-and-effect **relationship between violence on television and violence in society**.
  13. **The Economics of Crime**, *Business Week*, December 13, 1993. 76  
The **profits from crime in America** exceed \$425 billion annually, and this does not include the misery, fear, and insecurity that crime leaves in its wake.
  14. **The Global Crime Wave and What We Can Do about It**, Gene Stephens, *The Futurist*, July–August 1994. 82  
Around the world, nations are reporting more murders, rapes, and robberies. Gene Stephens theorizes as to the underlying cause of this **wave of lawlessness** and suggests steps to combat it.
- 
- Overview** 88
- A. AGING**
15. **Old Money**, Christopher Georges, *The Washington Monthly*, June 1992. 90  
Robert Michels, an early social philosopher, discussed the propensity of administrators to get caught up in the seductive influences of money, power, and prestige. They cease being servants of the people and become rulers of the people. This process is clearly illustrated in the actions of those administering the largest nonprofit organization in the United States, **the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)**.
  16. **The New Face of Aging**, Jonathan Adolph, *New Age Journal*, March/April 1992. 95  
Jonathan Adolph suggests that **the current generation of elderly** should look beyond the stereotypes associated with aging and focus on using their skills, talents, and experience to resolve societal problems rather than limiting their focus to the losses and detriments that inevitably come with aging.
- B. HEALTH AND HEALTH CARE ISSUES**
17. **Risky Business**, Jeffrey Denny, *Common Cause*, Spring 1993. 101  
**Questionable business dealings** and lavish spending threaten to undermine the health insurance industry. Insurance premiums are rising, insurance companies are defaulting, and the lives and health of millions of people are threatened.
  18. **Deadly Migration**, Joseph LaDou, *Technology Review*, July 1991. 107  
Manufacturers in the United States, Europe, and Japan are relocating industries to less developed nations in order to take advantage of low wages and **to escape health and environmental regulations** back home. This industrial migration to poorer nations—with already bad sewerage systems and inadequate health protection—creates further suffering. The environmental agencies of wealthier countries need to be concerned with the consequences of industry's actions abroad.

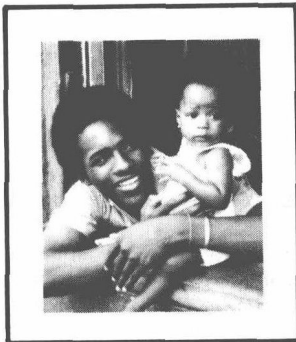


# Unit 4

## Poverty and Inequality

Five selections examine how inequality affects society and the institutions of education, women's rights, the economy, and welfare.

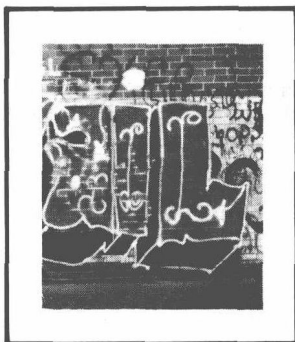
19. **Confronting the AIDS Pandemic**, Daniel J. M. Tarantola and Jonathan M. Mann, *The World & I*, January 1993. 112  
*AIDS has become pandemic.* By the year 2000, as many as 110 million people worldwide may be HIV positive and could drain as much as \$500 billion from the world's economy. The urgency for a solution necessitates a coordinated worldwide effort.
20. **Mental Illness Is Still a Myth**, Thomas Szasz, *Society*, May/June 1994. 117  
Psychiatrist Thomas Szasz, author of the classic book *The Myth of Mental Illness*, argues that *psychiatry is a branch of the law* or of secular religion, but it is not a science.
21. **Who's Protecting Bad Doctors?** Judith Warner, *Ms.*, January/February 1994. 123  
Is the American Medical Association protecting the American public by *weeding out bad doctors*? The answer is no, and, as revealed by Judith Warner, the reasons are both frightening and distressing.
- Overview 126
22. **Old Traps, New Twists**, Kent Weaver, *The Brookings Review*, Summer 1994. 128  
*Attempts to reform welfare* fail because they are unable to avoid one or more of the six "welfare traps." Kent Weaver identifies and discusses these traps and assesses the possibility of meaningful reform.
23. **Does Welfare Bring More Babies?** Charles Murray, *The American Enterprise*, January/February 1994. 133  
*Does welfare contribute significantly to illegitimacy?* Through detailed statistical analysis using data on African Americans, Charles Murray concludes that it does not.
24. **Going Private**, Camille Colatosti, *The Progressive*, June 1993. 139  
With a mandate to cut costs, U.S. governmental agencies are increasingly *turning programs and government-funded services over to private concerns*, with mixed results. The most vulnerable segments of American society often find themselves subject to benign neglect, abuse, and exploitation.
25. **No Exit**, Barbara Vobejda, *Washington Post National Weekly Edition*, March 15–21, 1993. 142  
Many *poor* people find themselves trapped in the inner city, surrounded by unemployment, underemployment, crime, violence, drugs, and inadequate social services. Most would leave if they could, but the *lack of opportunities along with bureaucratic traps* makes this virtually impossible.
26. **When Problems Outrun Policy**, Robert Haveman, *Challenge*, May/June 1993. 146  
Recent events have brought many Americans face to face with a series of harsh realities. While economic life for many remains prosperous, a *growing number of adult Americans are living below the poverty line*. Robert Haveman identifies major factors producing this situation and suggests solutions.



# Unit 5

## Cultural Pluralism: Race and Ethnic Relations

Three selections discuss various aspects of cultural pluralism: that it has been minimized, that diverse differences promote unity, and that diversity is the sign of social maturity.



# Unit 6

## Cities, Urban Growth, and the Quality of Life

Four articles examine the current state of cities in the United States and various other countries.

### Overview 154

27. **An American Melting Plot**, Mickey Kaus, *The Washington Monthly*, July/August 1992. 156

In a truly democratic society, opportunities are distributed according to merit and not by social class. America is moving toward a **system of class/race segregation**. To end this—as prescribed by Mickey Kaus—we must ensure that people from all social, ethnic, and racial categories intermix through a plan of compulsory national military or civilian service.

28. **America: Still a Melting Pot?** Tom Morganthau, *Newsweek*, August 9, 1993. 162

The United States accepts more **immigrants** than all other industrialized nations combined. Whether this is good for America and how long it can continue are hotly debated.

29. **Is White Racism the Problem?** Arch Puddington, *Commentary*, July 1992. 168

This article attempts to refute the argument that the **social and economic problems facing African Americans** are the product of white racism. Arch Puddington believes that the issue of black progress is confounded by economics, inner-city life, the American mass culture, and social opportunities.

### Overview 174

30. **Can We Stop the Decline of Our Cities?** Stephen Moore and Dean Stansel, *USA Today Magazine (Society for the Advancement of Education)*, March 1994. 176

Investing massive amounts of federal money in major U.S. cities has not stemmed urban decline. The authors suggest that the federal aid approach can never meet its urban objectives **until city government abandons its self-serving agenda** in favor of a "people-first" commitment.

31. **Visions of Community in an Urban War Zone**, Rob Gurwitt, *Governing*, December 1993. 182

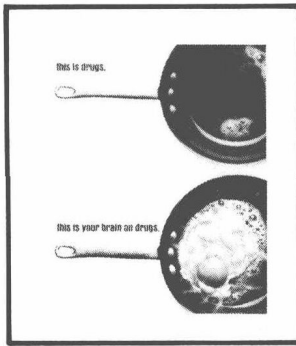
The Chicago Housing Authority is attempting **innovative tenant involvement programs** to create a sense of community in public housing projects. There was a significant decrease in crime, violence, and gangs in those housing complexes where a sense of community emerged.

32. **Cities of Violence**, *Washington Post National Weekly Edition*, November 15–21, 1993. 187

Evidently a **burgeoning crime rate** is partly a consequence of democracy. With freedom from totalitarian rule come expectations that cannot be realized immediately. The consequential results are often anger and violence. To support such claims, the cities of Johannesburg, Rio de Janeiro, and Moscow are used as case studies.

33. **Terminal Decline of a Nation**, Steve Slavin, *USA Today Magazine (Society for the Advancement of Education)*, March 1994. 192

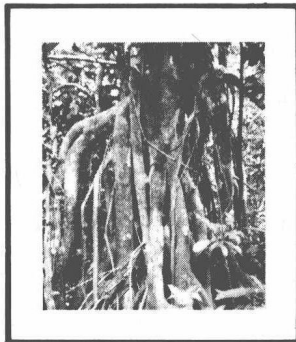
Americans have been so preoccupied with all their problems that very few have noticed that **the United States is rapidly going bankrupt**. Steve Slavin has noticed, and he argues that something must be done to reverse the trend of national decline—and it must be done quickly.



# Unit 7

## Drug and Sexual Issues

Four selections examine the dynamics of social control of the private lives of a society's citizens.



# Unit 8

## Global Issues

Five articles discuss common human social problems faced by people worldwide. Topics include the environment, inflation, and cultural misunderstanding.

### Overview

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34. **Off Course**, Karen Lehrman, *Mother Jones*, September/October 1993. 196

What is or should be the role for any academic program? Karen Lehrman looks at **women's studies programs** across the nation and concludes that many emphasize subjectivity over objectivity, feelings over facts, and instinct over logic.

35. **Truth and Consequences: Teen Sex**, Douglas J. Besharov and Karen N. Gardiner, *The American Enterprise*, January/February 1993. 202

For the year 1993, it was expected that there would be **about 1 million teenage pregnancies**. Of these, there would be 406,000 abortions, 134,000 miscarriages, and 490,000 live births, including 313,000 out of wedlock. In addition, 3 million teenagers would suffer from a sexually transmitted disease. This article explores the implications of these alarming statistics and discusses what can be done.

36. **A Society of Suspects: The War on Drugs and Civil Liberties**, Steven Wisotsky, *USA Today Magazine (Society for the Advancement of Education)*, July 1993. 208

"A decade after President Reagan launched **the war on drugs**, all we have to show for it are city streets ruled by gangs, a doubled prison population, and a substantial erosion of constitutional protections."

37. **Separating the Sisters**, *U.S. News & World Report*, March 28, 1994. 214

**Mainstream feminism** is made up largely of highly educated white women who have not adequately addressed the issues and problems of the "average" woman.

### Overview

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#### A. ENVIRONMENTAL

38. **The Rape of the Oceans**, *U.S. News & World Report*, June 22, 1992. 218

"**America's last frontier** is seriously overfished, badly polluted, poorly managed, and in deepening trouble." This article details some of the practices and policies that are intensifying the problem, such as new fishing technologies, changing definitions of what constitutes edible fish, wholesale dumping of fish, and international competition.

39. **The Mirage of Sustainable Development**, Thomas J. DiLorenzo, *The Futurist*, September/October 1993. 222

How do we achieve both **economic growth and environmental protection**? Economist Thomas DiLorenzo believes that private property rights will work better than international bureaucracies.

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**B. CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC**

- 40. The West's Deepening Cultural Crisis**, Richard Eckersley, *The Futurist*, November/December 1993. **227**

A striking feature of ***Western civilization*** is that, for all our success in reducing the toll of lives taken by disease, we have failed to diminish those exacted by despair.

- 41. A Decade of Discontinuity**, Lester R. Brown, *World Watch*, July/August 1993. **231**

With today's ***rising populations and declining natural resources***, "the 1980s may have been the last decade in which humankind could anticipate a future of ever-increasing productivity on all fronts." By any measure, "the boom we have experienced since mid-century is coming to an end."

- 42. Crowded Out**, Will Nixon, *In These Times*, September 5-18, 1994. **238**

***Population control*** advocates are often dismissed as racist and paranoid. But they increasingly have the facts on their side, as Will Nixon observes.

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# **SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

## **95/96**

**Twenty-Third Edition**

### **Editor**

**Harold A. Widdison**  
**Northern Arizona University**

Harold A. Widdison, professor of sociology at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, holds degrees in Sociology and Business Administration from Brigham Young University and Case-Western Reserve University. Employed as an education specialist with the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission, he was awarded a Sustained Superior Performance Award. As a medical sociologist, Dr. Widdison is actively involved in his community with the local medical center's neonatal committee, a founding member of Compassionate Friends, a member of the board of directors of the Hozhoni Foundation for the mentally handicapped, and a consultant on death, dying, and bereavement.

Cover illustration by Mike Eagle

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# Topic Guide

This topic guide suggests how the selections in this book relate to topics of traditional concern to students and professionals involved with the study of social problems. It is useful for locating articles that relate to each other for reading and research. The guide is arranged alphabetically according to topic. Articles may, of course, treat topics that do not appear in the topic guide. In turn, entries in the topic guide do not necessarily constitute a comprehensive listing of all the contents of each selection.

TOPIC AREA	TREATED IN:	TOPIC AREA	TREATED IN:
<b>Abortion</b>	35. Truth and Consequences: Teen Sex	<b>Drinking</b>	2. How Social Problems Are Born
<b>Abuse</b>	6. Why Leave Children with Bad Parents?	<b>Drugs</b>	2. How Social Problems Are Born 5. Disease Is Adolescence 9. Ethics, Neurochemistry, and Violence Control 36. Society of Suspects
<b>Adolescence</b>	5. Disease Is Adolescence	<b>Economy</b>	4. Endangered Family 19. Confronting the AIDS Pandemic 26. When Problems Outrun Policy 33. Terminal Decline of a Nation 39. Mirage of Sustainable Development
<b>African Americans</b>	4. Endangered Family 27. American Melting Plot 29. Is White Racism the Problem?	<b>Education</b>	27. American Melting Plot 28. America: Still a Melting Pot? 33. Terminal Decline of a Nation 34. Off Course
<b>Aging/Elderly</b>	15. Old Money 16. New Face of Aging	<b>Employment</b>	33. Terminal Decline of a Nation 37. Separating the Sisters
<b>Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC)</b>	23. Does Welfare Bring More Babies?	<b>Energy</b>	41. Decade of Discontinuity
<b>AIDS</b>	29. Confronting the AIDS Pandemic 35. Truth and Consequences: Teen Sex	<b>Environment</b>	18. Deadly Migration 38. Rape of the Oceans 39. Mirage of Sustainable Development 41. Decade of Discontinuity
<b>Alienation</b>	40. West's Deepening Cultural Crisis	<b>Ethics</b>	9. Ethics, Neurochemistry, and Violence Control
<b>American Medical Association</b>	21. Who's Protecting Bad Doctors?	<b>Family</b>	3. Fount of Virtue, Spring of Wealth 4. Endangered Family 5. Disease Is Adolescence 6. Why Leave Children with Bad Parents? 9. Ethics, Neurochemistry, and Violence Control 22. Old Traps, New Twists 24. Going Private
<b>Asians</b>	27. American Melting Plot	<b>Fathering</b>	4. Endangered Family
<b>Business/Industry</b>	15. Old Money 17. Risky Business 18. Deadly Migration 38. Rape of the Oceans	<b>Feminism</b>	34. Off Course 37. Separating the Sisters 42. Crowded Out
<b>Children</b>	5. Disease Is Adolescence 6. Why Leave Children with Bad Parents? 11. Danger in the Safety Zone 12. Honey, I Warped the Kids 14. Global Crime Wave 22. Old Traps, New Twists 23. Does Welfare Bring More Babies?	<b>Foreign Policy</b>	19. Confronting the AIDS Pandemic 28. America: Still a Melting Pot? 38. Rape of the Oceans
<b>Cities</b>	30. Can We Stop the Decline of Our Cities? 32. Cities of Violence	<b>Future</b>	16. New Face of Aging 27. American Melting Plot 39. Mirage of Sustainable Development 40. West's Deepening Cultural Crisis 41. Decade of Discontinuity
<b>Civil Liberties</b>	36. Society of Suspects	<b>Guns</b>	1. Social Problems 2. How Social Problems Are Born
<b>Conservation</b>	18. Deadly Migration 38. Rape of the Oceans		
<b>Crime and Delinquency</b>	7. New Outlaws 8. Getting Serious about Crime 10. Crime Takes on a Feminine Face 11. Danger in the Safety Zone 13. Economics of Crime 14. Global Crime Wave 25. No Exit 32. Cities of Violence 36. Society of Suspects		
<b>Democracy</b>	32. Cities of Violence		

TOPIC AREA	TREATED IN:	TOPIC AREA	TREATED IN:
<b>Health</b>	5. Disease Is Adolescence 15. Old Money 17. Risky Business 18. Deadly Migration 19. Confronting the AIDS Pandemic 24. Going Private 35. Truth and Consequences: Teen Sex	<b>Psychiatry</b>	20. Mental Illness Is Still a Myth
<b>Homeless</b>	7. New Outlaws	<b>Public Housing</b>	31. Visions of Community in an Urban War Zone
<b>Homicide and Murder</b>	5. Disease Is Adolescence 8. Getting Serious about Crime	<b>Public Policy</b>	22. Old Traps, New Twists
<b>Illegitimacy</b>	23. Does Welfare Bring More Babies?	<b>Race and Ethnic Issues</b>	27. American Melting Plot? 28. America: Still a Melting Pot? 29. Is White Racism the Problem? 34. Off Course 42. Crowded Out
<b>Immigration</b>	27. America: Still a Melting Pot?	<b>Sex</b>	35. Truth and Consequences: Teen Sex
<b>Industrialization</b>	40. West's Deepening Cultural Crisis	<b>Single Parents</b>	4. Endangered Family 23. Does Welfare Bring More Babies? 25. No Exit 26. When Problems Outrun Policy
<b>Infrastructure</b>	26. When Problems Outrun Policy	<b>Social Control</b>	9. Ethics, Neurochemistry, and Violence Control 20. Mental Illness Is Still a Myth
<b>Law</b>	7. New Outlaws 14. Global Crime Wave 20. Mental Illness Is Still a Myth 32. Cities of Violence	<b>Socialism</b>	39. Mirage of Sustainable Development
<b>Malpractice</b>	21. Who's Protecting Bad Doctors?	<b>Suicide</b>	5. Disease Is Adolescence
<b>Marriage</b>	4. Endangered Family 23. Does Welfare Bring More Babies?	<b>Taxes</b>	30. Can We Stop the Decline of Our Cities?
<b>Medicine</b>	17. Risky Business 21. Who's Protecting Bad Doctors? 24. Going Private	<b>Unions</b>	30. Can We Stop the Decline of Our Cities?
<b>Mental Health</b>	3. Fount of Virtue, Spring of Wealth 9. Ethics, Neurochemistry, and Violence Control 20. Mental Illness Is Still a Myth	<b>Violence</b>	3. Fount of Virtue, Spring of Wealth 5. Disease Is Adolescence 6. Why Leave Children with Bad Parents? 8. Getting Serious about Crime 9. Ethics, Neurochemistry, and Violence Control 11. Danger in the Safety Zone 12. Honey, I Warped the Kids 13. Economics of Crime 14. Global Crime Wave 31. Visions of Community in an Urban War Zone 32. Cities of Violence
<b>Migration</b>	18. Deadly Migration 30. Can We Stop the Decline of Our Cities?	<b>Welfare</b>	22. Old Traps, New Twists 23. Does Welfare Bring More Babies? 24. Going Private 33. Terminal Decline of a Nation 35. Truth and Consequences: Teen Sex 37. Separating the Sisters
<b>Multicultural/Cultural Pluralism</b>	27. American Melting Plot 28. America: Still a Melting Pot?	<b>Woman's Studies</b>	34. Off Course
<b>Parenting</b>	14. Global Crime Wave		
<b>Patients</b>	21. Who's Protecting Bad Doctors?		
<b>Police</b>	13. Economics of Crime 31. Visions of Community in an Urban War Zone		
<b>Pollution</b>	18. Deadly Migration 39. Mirage of Sustainable Development 41. Decade of Discontinuity		
<b>Population</b>	19. Confronting the AIDS Pandemic 42. Crowded Out		
<b>Poverty</b>	7. New Outlaws 10. Crime Takes on a Feminine Face 25. No Exit 26. When Problems Outrun Policy 29. Is White Racism the Problem?		

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# Introduction

Before initiating any analysis of social problems, it is always useful to agree on what it is that is being talked about. Things that are symbolic or seem to represent a serious social problem to one group might be seen by others as a symptom of a much larger problem, or even as no problem at all.

Two articles are included in this section that explore the complexities of social problems. While some individuals take a very simplistic black-and-white approach in defining social problems and, in turn, what must be done to eliminate them, sociologists realize how complex and intertwined social problems are in all aspects of social life. But even sociologists do not agree as to the best approach to take in the study of social issues.

The authors in the first article introduce the reader to sociology's three dominant theoretical positions and give examples of how those espousing each theory would look at specific issues. The three theories—symbolic interactionism, functionalism, and conflict—represent three radically different approaches to the study of social problems and their implications for individuals and societies. The perceived etiology of problems and their possible resolutions reflect the specific orientations of those studying them. As you peruse the subsequent articles, try to determine which of the three theoretical positions the various authors seem to be utilizing. The authors con-

clude this article by suggesting several approaches students may wish to consider in defining conditions as “social” problems and how they can and should be analyzed.

The second article in this section explores how social problems are born, that is, why some issues, actions, or behaviors become defined as significant social problems while others do not. This author believes that the logic underlying symbolic language is the critical factor in determining if an individual concern will eventually evolve into a societal-level social problem.

The editor felt it desirable to introduce this book of readings with a discussion of this type in order to help readers understand the social and sociological aspects of problems and issues plaguing modern society. The other 40 articles included in this edition range from what it is like to survive on the inhospitable streets of a large city to the pending destruction of the world's environment. The reader should ask why the issue addressed in each article is a social problem. Is it a case of rights in conflict, a case of conflicting values, or a consequence of conflicting harms? To find out, the reader might first skim over each article to get a general idea of where the author is coming from—that is, the author's theoretical position—and then reread the article to see just what the author indicates as the cause of the problem and what can or should be done to resolve or eliminate it.



# SOCIAL PROBLEMS:

## *Definitions, Theories, and Analysis*

**Harold A. Widdison and H. Richard Delaney**

### INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

When asked, "What are the major social problems facing humanity today?" college students' responses tend to mirror those highlighted by the mass media—particularly AIDS, child abuse, poverty, war, famine, racism, sexism, crime, riots, the state of the economy, the environment, abortion, euthanasia, homosexuality, and affirmative action. These are all valid subjects for study in a social problems class, but some give rise to very great differences of opinion and even controversy. Dr. Jack Kevorkian in Michigan and his killing machine is one example that comes to mind. To some he evokes images of Nazi Germany with its policy of murdering the infirm and helpless. Others see Kevorkian's work as a merciful alternative to the slow and agonizing death of individuals with terminal illnesses. In the latter light, Kevorkian is not symbolic of a potentially devastating social issue, but of a solution to an escalating social problem.

The same controversy exists at the other end of life—specifically, what obligations do pregnant women have to themselves as opposed to the unborn? Some individuals see abortion as a solution to the problems of population, child abuse, disruption of careers, dangers to the physical and emotional health of women, as well as the prevention of the birth of damaged fetuses, and they regard it as a right to self-determination. Others look at abortion as attacking the sanctity of life, abrogating the rights of a whole category of people, and violating every sense of moral and ethical responsibility.

Affirmative action is another issue that can be viewed as both a problem and a solution. As a solution, affirmative action attempts to reverse the effects of hundreds of years of discrimination. Doors that have been closed to specific categories of people for many generations are, it is hoped, forced open; individuals, regardless of race, ethnicity, and gender, are able to get into professional schools, and secure good jobs, with the assurance of promotion. On the other hand, affirmative action

forces employers, recruiting officers, and housing officials to give certain categories of individuals a preferred status. While affirmative action is promoted by some as a necessary policy to compensate for centuries of exclusion and discrimination, others claim that it is discrimination simply disguised under a new label but with different groups being discriminated against. If race, sex, age, ethnicity, or any other characteristic other than merit is used as the primary criterion for selection or promotion, then discrimination is occurring. Discrimination hurts both sides. William Wilson, an African American social scientist, argues that it is very damaging to the self-esteem of black individuals to know that the primary reason they were hired was to fill quotas.

Both sides to the debate of whether these issues themselves reflect a social problem or are solutions to a larger societal problem have valid facts and use societal-level values to support their claims. Robin William Jr. in 1970 identified a list of 15 dominant value orientations that represent the concept of the good life to many Americans:

1. Achievement and success as major personal goals.
2. Activity and work favored above leisure and laziness.
3. Moral orientation—that is, absolute judgments of good/bad, right/wrong.
4. Humanitarian motives as shown in charity and crisis aid.
5. Efficiency and practicality: a preference for the quickest and shortest way to achieve a goal at the least cost.
6. Process and progress: a belief that technology can solve all problems and that the future will be better than the past.
7. Material comfort as the "American dream."
8. Equality as an abstract ideal.
9. Freedom as a person's right against the state.
10. External conformity: the ideal of going along, joining, and not rocking the boat.
11. Science and rationality as the means of mastering the environment and securing more material comforts.
12. Nationalism: a belief that American values and institutions represent the best on earth.
13. Democracy based on personal equality and freedom.
14. Individualism, emphasizing personal rights and responsibilities.

## INTRODUCTION

15. Racism and group-superiority themes that periodically lead to prejudice and discrimination against those who are racially, religiously, and culturally different from the white northern Europeans who first settled the continent.

This list combines some political, economic, and personal traits that actually conflict with one another. This coexistence of opposing values helps explain why individuals hold contradictory views of the same behavior and why some issues generate such intensity of feelings. It is the intent of this article and the readings included in this book to attempt to help students see the complex nature of a social problem and the impact that various values, beliefs, and actions can have on them.

In the next segment of this article, the authors will look at specific examples of values in conflict and the problems created by this conflict. Subsequently the authors will look at the three major theoretical positions that sociologists use to study social problems. The article will conclude with an examination of various strategies and techniques used to identify, understand, and resolve various types of social problems and their implications for those involved.

As noted above, contemporary American society is typified by values that both complement and contradict each other. For example, the capitalistic free enterprise system of the United States stresses rugged individualism, self-actualization, individual rights, and self expression. This economic philosophy meshes well with Christian theology, particularly that typified by many Protestant denominations. This fact was the basis of German sociologist Max Weber's "The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism" (1864). He showed that the concepts of grace (salvation is a gift—not something you can earn), predestination (the fact that some people have this gift while others do not), and a desire to know if the individual has grace gave rise to a new idea of what constitutes success. Whereas, with the communitarian emphasis of Catholicism where material success was seen as leading to selfishness and spiritual condemnation, Protestantism viewed material success as a sign of grace. In addition, it was each individual's efforts that resulted in both the economic success and the spiritual salvation of the individual. This religious philosophy also implied that the poor are poor because they lack the proper motivation, values, and beliefs (what is known as the "culture of poverty") and are therefore reaping the results of their own inadequacies. Attempts to reduce poverty have frequently included taking children from "impoverished" cultural environments and placing them in "enriched" environments to minimize the potentially negative effects parents and a bad environment could have on their children. These enrichment programs attempt to produce attitudes and behaviors that assure success in the world but, in the process, cut children off from their parents. Children are forced to abandon the culture of their parents if they are to "succeed." Examples of this practice include the nurseries of the kibbutz in Israel and the Head Start programs in America. This practice is seen by some social scientists as a type of "cultural genocide." Entire cultures were targeted (sometimes explicitly, although often not intentionally) for extinction in this way.

This fact upsets a number of social scientists. They feel it is desirable to establish a pluralistic society where ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity exist and flourish. To them attempts to "Americanize" everyone are indicative of racism, bigotry, and prejudice. Others point to the lack of strong ethnic or racial identities as the unifying strength of the American system. When immigrants came to America, they put ethnic differences behind them, they learned the English language and democratic values, and they were assimilated into American life. In nations where immigrants have maintained their ethnic identities and held to unique cultural beliefs, their first loyalty is to their ethnic group. Examples of the destructive impact of strong ethnic loyalties can be seen in the conflict and fragmentation now occurring in the former Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia.

James Q. Wilson (1994:54–55) noted in this regard:

We have always been a nation of immigrants, but now the level of immigration has reached the point where we have become acutely conscious, to a degree not seen, I think, since the turn of the century, that we are a nation of many cultures. I believe that the vast majority of those who have come to this country came because they, too, want to share in the American Dream. But their presence here, and the unavoidable tensions that attend upon even well-intentioned efforts at mutual coexistence, makes some people—and alas, especially some intellectuals in our universities—question the American Dream, challenge the legitimacy of Western standards of life and politics, and demand that everybody be defined in terms of his or her group membership. The motto of this nation—*E pluribus unum*, out of the many, one—is in danger of being rewritten to read, *Ex uno plures*—out of the one, many."

## THEORETICAL EXPLANATIONS: SYMBOLIC INTERACTION, FUNCTIONALISM, CONFLICT

In their attempts to understand social phenomena, researchers look for recurring patterns, relationships between observable acts, and unifying themes. The particular way in which researchers look at the world reflects not only their personal views and experiences, but their professional perspective as well. Sociologists focus on interactions between individuals, between individuals and groups, between groups, and between groups and the larger society in which they are located. They try to identify those things that facilitate or hinder interaction, and the consequences of each. But not all sociologists agree as to the most effective/appropriate approach to take, and they tend to divide into three major theoretical camps: symbolic interactionism, functionalism, and conflict theory. These three approaches are not mutually exclusive, but they do represent radically different perspectives of the nature of social reality and how it should be studied.

### Symbolic Interaction

This theoretical perspective argues that no social condition, however unbearable it may seem to some, is inherently or objectively a social problem until a significant number of politically powerful people agree that it is contrary to the public