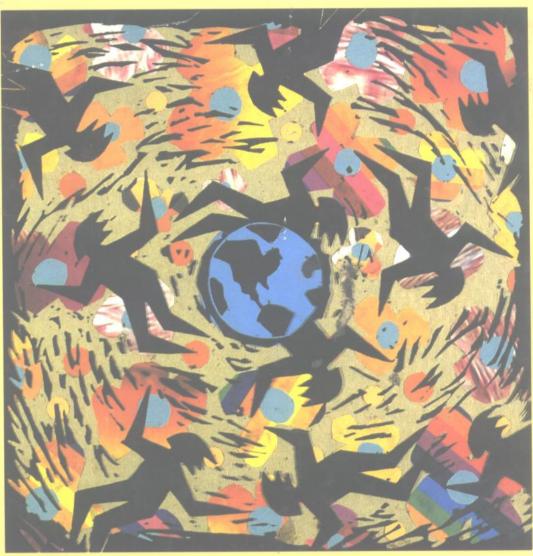
SOCIAL PROBLEMS



IN A DIVERSE SOCIETY

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Diana Kendall



Social Problems in a Diverse Society

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Social Problems in a Diverse Society

Preface

[A social problems course] can provide a mind-opening . . . overview of a field of study, providing a method of perceiving and understanding the social realities we construct, playing a central role in leading students through the cognitive developmental processes that turn unchallenged dualism and other oversimplifications about everyday life into the complex formulations that better represent the social world in which we live.

—Sociologists Michael Brooks and Kendall Broad explain how they view the social problems course in their introduction to the *Resource Manual* for Teaching Social Problems (ASA Teaching Resources Center, 1997:1)

his statement sums up the main reasons why I enjoy teaching the social problems course and why I wrote Social Problems in a Diverse Society. Teaching and learning about social problems can be highly rewarding experiences for both instructors and students. Although we live in difficult and challenging times, the social problems course provides an excellent avenue for developing patterns of critical thinking and learning how to use sociological concepts and perspectives to analyze specific social concerns ranging from drug addiction and violence to inequalities of race, class, and gender.

My first and foremost goal in writing this book is to make sociology *interesting* and *relevant* for students. Consequently, I have focused on topics and issues that my students—along with well-informed sociologists and reviewers around the country—have found to be of particular importance. To stimulate interest in reading the chapters and participating in class discussions, I have used lived experiences (personal narratives of *real* people) throughout all chapters to show how social problems affect people at the individual, group, and societal levels. Moreover, I have applied the sociological imagination and relevant sociological concepts and perspectives to all the topics in a systematic manner.

Social Problems in a Diverse Society is unique in that it focuses on the centrality of race, class, and gender in understanding people's life experiences and social problems in the United States and other nations. Throughout the text, an inclusive approach has been

used that focuses on *all* people, including people of color and white women. Unlike some books, however, people—especially people of color and white women—are shown not merely as victims of social problems, but also as seeking to bring about change in families, schools, workplaces, and the larger society. To facilitate the inclusion of previously excluded perspectives, Chapters 2 through 6 examine wealth and poverty, racial and ethnic inequality, gender inequality, and inequalities based on age and sexual orientation. Thereafter, concepts and perspectives related to race, class, and gender are intertwined in the discussion of specific social problems such as prostitution, lack of access to adequate health care, and problems in the workplace.

Social Problems in a Diverse Society is theoretically balanced in its approach to examining social problems. However, it includes a more comprehensive view of feminist and postmodern perspectives on a vast array of subjects—such as the effect of new technologies and how the media depict social issues—than any other social problems textbook. As a sociologist who specializes in social theory, I was disheartened by the minimal use of sociological theory in most social problems texts. Those that discuss theory typically do so in early chapters but do not use them as a systematic framework for examining specific social issues in subsequent chapters. Similarly, many texts give the impression that social problems can be solved if people reach a consensus on what should be done. However, Social Problems in a Diverse Society emphasizes that how people view a social problem is related to how they believe the problem should be reduced or solved. Consider poverty, for example. People who focus on individual causes of poverty typically believe that individual solutions (such as teaching people the work ethic and reforming welfare) are necessary to reduce the problem, whereas those who focus on structural causes of poverty (such as chronic unemployment and inadequate educational opportunities) typically believe that solutions must come from the larger society. Moreover, what some people see as a problem, others see as a solution for a problem (e.g., the sex industry as a source of income or abortion to terminate a problematic pregnancy).

Finally, I wrote Social Problems in a Diverse Society in hopes of providing students and instructors with a text that covered all the major social concerns of our day but did not leave them believing that the text—and perhaps the course as well—was a "depressing litany of social problems that nobody can do anything about anyway," as one of my students stated about a different text. I have written this book in hopes of resolving that student's problem, along with many others, because I believe that the sociological perspective has much to add to our national and global dialogues about a host of issues such as environmental degradation; domestic and international terrorism; discrimination based on race, class, gender, age, sexual orientation, or other attributes; and problems in education. Welcome to an innovative examination of social problems—one of the most stimulating and engrossing fields of study in sociology!

ORGANIZATION OF THIS TEXT

As I noted previously, the text has been organized with the specific plan in mind of introducing disparities in wealth and poverty, race and ethnicity, gender, age, and sexual orientation early on so that the concepts and perspectives developed in these chapters can be applied throughout the text. Chapter 1 highlights the advantages and disadvantages associated with new information technologies to draw students into an examination of highly relevant social problems, including job deskilling and invasion of privacy, at the end of the twentieth century.

Chapter 2 looks at wealth and poverty in the . United States and in global perspective. It provides concrete examples of how sociologists use social research methods to gain new insights into how people become wealthy and into problems such as homelessness, low-income and poverty-level neighborhoods, and the relationship between teen pregnancies and school dropout rates. The chapter concludes with a thematic question, which is applied to various topics throughout the text: "Can class-based inequality be reduced?" Chapter 3 integrates the previous discussion of class-based inequalities with an insightful examination of racial and ethnic inequality. The chapter ends on the optimistic note that perhaps the future of racial and ethnic relations will be better than the past as the children of today become the leaders of tomorrow. Chapter 4, gender inequality, highlights factors such as mainstream gender socialization and social structural barriers that contribute to the unequal treatment of women in the workplace, school, family, and other social institutions. Ageism and inequality based on age are discussed in Chapter 5, and Chapter 6 examines inequality based on sexual orientation, placing these important topics in a context similar to the studies of prejudice and discrimination rooted in racism and sexism in contemporary societies.

Chapter 7 links previous discussions of race, class, and gender to an analysis of prostitution, pornography, and the sex industry. The chapter provides up-to-date information on the globalization of prostitution and gives students insights into how sex workers view themselves, why they engage in this line of work, and why some other people view sex workers as a social problem. In Chapter 8, alcohol and other drugs are discussed in depth, and students are provided with information about the so-called "date rape drug" and about abuse of prescription drugs, over-the-counter drugs, and caffeine. Chapter 9 discusses crime and criminal justice, and Chapter 10 takes an incisive look at violence, particularly crimes such as murder, domestic violence, and hate crimes.

Beginning with Chapter 11, we examine some of the major social institutions in our society, such as health care, particularly problems of physical and mental illness, and note aspects of each that constitute a social problem for large numbers of people. Chapter 12 explores the changing family, with special emphasis on diversity in intimate relationships and families and child-related family issues. Chapter

13 presents contemporary problems in education, tracing the problems to issues such as what schools are supposed to accomplish, how they are financed, and why higher education is not widely accessible. Chapter 14 focuses on problems in politics and the economy and provides a variety of perspectives on political power and the role of the military-industrial complex in U.S. politics and the economy. Chapter 15 examines problems in the workplace, looking not only at workers' problems and workplace discrimination, but also at worker activism and how the global workplace is changing the United States and other nations. Chapter 16 provides a survey of problems associated with population and the environmental crisis, focusing particularly on the causes and consequences of overpopulation and high rates of global migration. Chapter 17 discusses urban problems, showing the powerful impact of urbanization on both the developed and developing nations of the world. Chapter 18 concludes the text with a look at global social problems related to war and terrorism. After examining such topics as militarism, military technology and war, and domestic and international terrorism, the text concludes with the hopeful idea that large-scale war and terrorism can be averted in the twenty-first century.

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

A number of special features have been designed to incorporate race, class, and gender into our analysis of social problems and to provide students with new insights into social problems that they hear about on the evening news. These distinctive features include the following.

Lived Experiences throughout Each Chapter

Authentic first-person accounts are used as vignettes—"real words from real people"—to create interest and show how the problems being discussed affect people as they go about their daily lives. Lived experiences provide opportunities for students to examine social life beyond their own experiences ("to live vicariously," as one student noted) and for instructors to systematically incorporate into lectures

and class discussions examples of relevant, contemporary issues that, more likely than not, have recently been on the evening news and in newspaper headlines. Some examples of lived experiences include the following:

- ◆ Lawrence Otis Graham, a Harvard-educated corporate lawyer and author, describes how much trouble he and many other middle- and upper-middle-class African Americans have getting taxis in cities such as New York and working in corporate America in the 1990s (Chapter 3, "Racial and Ethnic Inequality").
- ◆ Hazel Wolf, age ninety-five, of Seattle, Washington, discusses her trip to Decatur, Alabama, to visit with a group of elementary students who had seen her picture in USA Today and wrote letters to her (Chapter 5, "Inequality Based on Age").
- ◆ Nadia, a nineteen-year-old prostitute in New York City, explains how she went from being a minister's daughter to working in the sex industry (Chapter 7, "Prostitution, Pornography, and the Sex Industry").
- ◆ Cesille Hyde, age twenty-three, describes the night her car struck and killed a police officer who was directing traffic at an accident site and how she was subsequently charged with driving under the influence of alcohol (Chapter 8, "Alcohol and Other Drugs").
- ◆ Ruben Navarette, Jr., a Harvard graduate, recalls the day when his second-grade teacher divided the class into ability groups and notes how he believes that this process has a harmful effect on students, especially Latinos/as, African Americans, and Native Americans who attend racially integrated schools (Chapter 13, "Problems in Education").

▲ Interesting and Highly Relevant Boxed Inserts

Three different boxed features—Social Problems in the Media, Social Problems in Global Perspective, and Social Problems and Social Policy—highlight current hot topics involving various long-term social problems, such as the following:

- ◆ Social Problems in the Media: "Downsizing in the Comic Strips" shows how cartoons such as Dilbert have portrayed the impact of information technology and corporate downsizing on people's lives (Chapter 1, "Taking a New Look at Social Problems").
- ◆ Social Problems in Global Perspective: "Organized Crime: The Global Empire" describes international money laundering that includes U.S. cities such as New York, Los Angeles, Dallas, and Miami as points of entry or exit to destinations such as Moscow (Chapter 9, "Crime and Criminal Justice").
- ◆ Social Problems and Social Policy: "Is Affirmative Action a Problem or a Solution?" examines the continuing debate over affirmative action, citing advocates and critics ranging from newspaper columnist William Raspberry to critic Linda Chavez (Chapter 3, "Racial and Ethnic Inequality").

A Built-In Study Features

These pedagogical aids promote students' mastery of sociological concepts and perspectives:

- ◆ Chapter Outlines. A concise outline at the beginning of each chapter gives students an overview of major topics.
- ◆ Key Terms. Major concepts and key terms are defined and highlighted in bold print within the text. Definitions are provided the first time a concept is introduced; they are also available in the Glossary at the back of the text.
- Summary in Question-and-Answer Format. Each chapter concludes with a concise summary in a convenient question-and-answer format to help students master the key concepts and main ideas in the chapter.

STUDY GUIDE

Because I believe that the study guide is one of the most important study tools available to students, I prepared a comprehensive Study Guide for Social Problems in a Diverse Society. The guide provides

the following for each chapter: a chapter summary, learning objectives, a detailed chapter outline, a glossary of key terms, and a practice test composed of multiple-choice, true-false, matching, and fill-in-the-blank questions.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to personally thank the many people who made *Social Problems in a Diverse Society* a reality. First, I offer my profound thanks to the following reviewers who provided valuable comments and suggestions on how to make this text outstanding. Whenever possible, I incorporated their suggestions into the text. The reviewers are:

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When I say that I could not have written this book without the assistance of two people, I am not exaggerating. Without the fine work of Developmental Editor Harriett Prentiss, this book would not be in your hands at this moment. Harriett has the unique ability to get inside someone's head and help them to convey in writing what they are thinking. Throughout this project, especially in its final stages, Harriett's energy, insights, and writing skills made this book what it is today. Despite looming deadlines, she was always optimistic that everything would turn out just fine, and indeed it did. Finally, my husband, Terrence Kendall, has done so much outstanding advising, and editing—and sometimes consoling—on this and other texts I have written

that I have declared him to be not only a lawyer but also an "Honorary Sociologist."

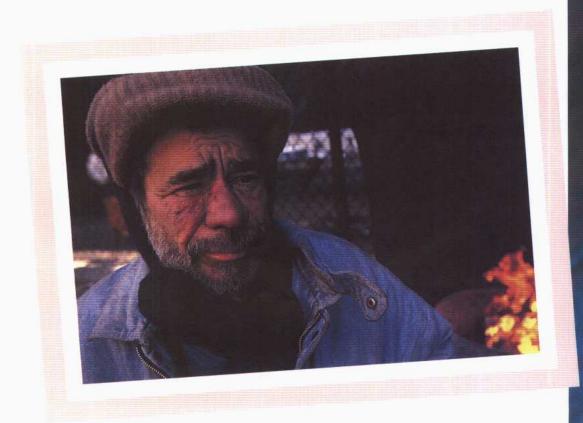
To each of you reading this preface, I wish you the best in teaching or studying social problems and hope that you will share with me any comments or suggestions you have about *Social Problems in a Diverse Society*. This text was written with you in mind, and your suggestions (with appropriate attribution) will be included whenever possible in future editions. Let's hope that our enthusiasm for taking a new look at social problems will spread to others so that we—together—may help to reduce or solve some of the pressing social problems we encounter during our lifetime.

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Chapter One

Taking a New Look at Social Problems



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