



SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN AMERICAN SOCIETY

DEFLEUR

SOCIAL

PROBLEMS IN

AMERICAN SOCIETY

MELVIN L. DEFLEUR

UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

Houghton Mifflin Company
Dallas Geneva, Illinois

Boston
Hopewell, New Jersey

Palo Alto

London

Quotation on page 42 reprinted from "Julius Caesar,"
Act I, Scene II, 11, 192-195, in *The Complete Plays and
Poems of William Shakespeare* (edited by William A.
Neilson and C. J. Hill). Copyright © 1942 by Houghton
Mifflin Company. Copyright renewed 1969.

Glossary prepared by Timothy J. Kenslea.

Cover photograph: SKOLOS, WEDELL, RAYNOR

Copyright © 1983 by Houghton Mifflin Company.

All Rights Reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any
form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and
recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, except as may be
expressly permitted by the 1976 Copyright Act or in writing by the Publisher.

Requests for permission should be addressed in writing to Permissions, Houghton
Mifflin Company, One Beacon Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02108.

Printed in the U.S.A.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 82-81108

ISBN: 0-395-32567-6

PREFACE

In biblical times the principal problems of a society could be described in terms of the infamous “four horsemen of the apocalypse”—famine, war, disease, and death. Today, however, as societies have modernized and become increasingly complex, those four have been joined by literally dozens of others. In the contemporary United States we are confronted on all sides with a perplexing array of social troubles that often seem all but intractable. Yet, Americans are a generous people and endlessly pragmatic; they want to minimize the suffering of their fellow citizens, and they constantly try a variety of solutions designed to alleviate problem conditions in our midst.

How severe are those problems? What causes them? What are we trying to do about them? What success are we having? Those are the key questions, and they provide the organizing framework for the present book. It focuses on twenty significant social problems in American society. It reviews the nature and scope of each, analyzes what we know about its causes, describes and assesses various solutions that have been tried, and looks ahead to the prospects for the future. The problems studied were selected systematically; the discussion of each was prepared by an expert in that field; and each is reviewed within a framework that combines theory and research.

Selecting Problems To Analyze

This book is about the American society. Obviously many social problems that exist in the United States are found elsewhere. And, many have links to international influences or otherwise extend beyond our shores. The value of a comparative perspective cannot be denied. However, our reason for focusing on American problems is simply that these are the ones of greatest

interest to students. No course can cover everything, and a decision was made to cover to the best of our ability the major problems that trouble people in the United States. Students are being prepared to enter significant roles in this society as educated citizens and to assume leadership in its affairs. They need a thorough understanding of its social problems here and now. This is fundamental and a prerequisite to the development of a broader comparative perspective which can come later.

The topics treated in this text were not selected arbitrarily. Extensive research was conducted by the publisher and principal author with the cooperation of the community of scholars who are currently teaching social problems courses in American colleges and universities. Several hundred instructors were asked to identify and rank in importance the social problems about which they wanted their students to be especially knowledgeable. The twenty problems selected for inclusion in the book represent the choices of those concerned colleagues. The result of this effort was that the list includes not only the traditional topics that for decades have been dealt with in the social problems course, but several more recent concerns that have emerged in contemporary society—corporate crime, energy, environment, mass communication, and the often unanticipated impact of science and technology.

Consulting the Experts

Each chapter in the text was prepared by an expert in the particular social problem that it covers. Initial chapter drafts were professionally edited under the guidance of the principal author to achieve both a uniform style and a standardized topical framework. The end result in each case is a comprehensive analysis by a highly competent scholar intimately familiar with the issues

and ramifications of the topic, plus a simple and logical development of topics within the chapter.

Readability was a principal criterion for the final preparation of the manuscript. While the chapters intentionally introduce and use almost all of the basic concepts, theories, and research strategies of general sociology, the discussions are free of the complex jargon that can mar sociological writing. Each chapter has been transformed into a lively and readable account of a major social problem and what our society is trying to do about it.

Organization of the Text

Following the introductory chapter, Part I focuses on five traditional problems that are high on the list of concerns of the American public. These are topics that are often seen in newspaper accounts or on the evening television news.

They tend to be problems in which the deviant individual is the most conspicuous actor—crime, drug use, problem drinking, mental illness, and sexual deviance. In a common-sense way these are what most students think of first under the rubric “social problem.”

Part II presents five problems of a somewhat different sort, where a more sociological perspective is important. These are problems imposed on people by social forces largely beyond their control—by the workings of the social system where their personal choices are only a minor factor. They include the effects of racism on minorities, the consequences of sex discrimination, our failure to provide adequately for the aged, inequities in the distribution of health care, and the uneven rewards provided by our economic system.

Part III moves to an institutional setting. Here, crimes committed by giant corporations are analyzed (an innovative chapter). The problems of the political and economic system are reviewed. Our failures in public education are discussed. A spectrum of problems associated with families and intimate living are assessed.

Finally, institutionalized religion as an arena of conflict is shown to produce a range of problems.

Part IV deals with problems of the society as a whole. Population trends are reviewed to show how these can generate troublesome conditions. Changes and trends in the use of energy, particularly fossil fuels, are shown to be bringing a number of new problems to our society. The deterioration of our environment is a problem that touches us all. Our relatively new mass media of communication are having unwanted effects on their audiences. Finally, advances in science and technology often bring negative consequences and conditions that were not anticipated.

Each chapter can be read independently of any other, with the exception of the introductory chapter which should be read first in all cases. There is some minor advantage in following the sequence as set forth in the text, particularly in the first half of the book. Some cross-referencing has been included to help the student integrate his or her understanding. However, the structure was designed with a maximum of flexibility for the instructor in mind, so the chapters can be assigned in virtually any sequence after reading the introduction.

Within each chapter a brief historical introduction is provided for the particular social problem under study, and the problem is carefully defined. Its current scope and distribution in the social structure are then explained. Each chapter probes what we know about the causes of the problem and the various solutions that have been or are being tried. These solutions are assessed in terms of their effectiveness in minimizing the problem, and the outlook for the future is discussed. This approach provides a simple and uniform framework (The Problem, Causes, Solutions, and Prospects) for each chapter around which students can organize their understanding.

The Role of Theory

Chapter 1 sets the theoretical stage for the analysis of social problems. This introduction defines

social problems clearly, setting them off from other kinds of human difficulties and troubles. It reviews the major themes of all sociological analysis in terms of (1) the organization of social life, (2) its processes of change, and (3) the influence these have on individual behavior.

The major theoretical paradigms, or models, of sociology are set forth very simply in terms of four contrasting descriptions of how society is presumably organized and how it changes. These are the evolutionary paradigm, structural-functionalism, the conflict paradigm, and symbolic interactionism. These broad models of societal organization and change are used as starting points to show that four different perspectives on social problems can follow more or less logically from such sets of assumptions. These perspectives are social pathology, social disorganization, deviant behavior, and labeling. It is explained very clearly that these must be used selectively as aids in understanding social problems. However, they must also be supplemented with specific or unique explanations that pertain to a particular problem or solution to a problem. Thus, the general paradigms help readers understand the broad processes of organization and change that characterize modern society. The derived perspectives give a more focused interpretation of a particular social problem occurring within that society. And finally, causes and solutions of a given problem can be understood in detail as they are explained by highly specific theories.

Generally, then, the book does not take the reader on a lock-step trip through a uniform set of theoretical concepts. Some social problems texts do this. The result can be an unrealistic attempt to force every problem discussed into a rigid and sometimes inappropriate framework. In this text, the three levels of theory discussed above are used flexibly and selectively where they are relevant to understand or explain a given problem or a particular solution. Thus, every chapter makes use of theoretical tools as aids in understanding, but only where they are clearly relevant and needed to explain particular causal sequences or for background interpretation.

Learning Aids

The text includes several features to aid students in mastering the material and learning key points. Each chapter begins with an outline that corresponds to the major headings within the chapter, so that students can readily grasp the overall organization and the topics to be covered. Each chapter also ends with a numbered summary divided into four sections that correspond to the four major headings within the chapter (The Problem, Causes, Solutions, and Prospects).

Within each chapter, key terms have been set in boldface type, usually where they are defined in the text. These terms are also listed at the end of the chapter to alert students that these are concepts they should understand when they finish studying a particular chapter. The terms are also defined in the glossary at the end of the book.

Charts and photographs have been made an integral part of the teaching package. Charts and graphs illustrate visually many relationships and statistical data covered in the text. Photographs and their captions are intended not as fillers to break up the text, but as important reinforcing points to theories and other issues covered in the text.

Appendix: Writing About Social Problems

Most sociology courses usually require some writing by students in addition to short-answer tests to evaluate their understanding and ability to utilize the material they have learned. These writing assignments may range from essay questions of varying lengths on examinations to research papers. The appendix in this text provides suggestions on how to deal with these writing assignments. These suggestions are applied specifically to writing about social problems—how

to choose a topic and narrow it down to a manageable size, where to find source information relating to social problems, how to do field work and write up the results of your research, and how to write a book report, including where to find reviews of books dealing with social problems.

Study Guide

An extensive *Study Guide* has been prepared to accompany *Social Problems in American Society*. In addition to multiple-choice and true-false questions, the *Study Guide* provides a special section of suggestions on how to read and study *Social Problems in American Society*, with specific examples drawn from the text. The *Study Guide* also contains a section of preview and study guidelines, which combines a running commentary on each chapter with questions that require short answers, usually in the student's own words. This section can be particularly helpful, because the student must do something actively with the material learned from the text, rather than just recognize a right or wrong answer. Each chapter of the *Study Guide* ends with a few essay-type questions that require students to apply what they have learned by utilizing material from different chapters and by dealing with current problems in the news based on material they have learned in the text. And, finally, answers are given to all the multiple-choice, true-false, matching, and fill-in-the-blank questions so that students can quickly check their comprehension of the text and areas that they may need to study further. Students who use the *Study*

Guide conscientiously should expect to be well prepared for tests and examinations.

Acknowledgments

As has been indicated, this book represents the work of more than twenty specialists. Their names, institutional affiliations, and the chapters for which they were initially responsible are listed opposite the title. Working with each of these scholars has been a truly rewarding experience. Coordinating the writing of so many could have been a nightmare. The enthusiasm and high level of professional responsibility of each made it a delight.

Also to be commended for their talented contributions are the following reviewers who read the manuscript and offered significant suggestions for improvement:

Frank Clemente, Pennsylvania State University
Suzanne Corwin-Valenti, Dutchess Community College

Michael Granata, Houston Community College
Michael Grimes, Louisiana State University
Dean F. Johnson, Northwestern State University
John K. Lay, Jr., Butler County Community College

Martin N. Marger, Northern Kentucky University

Louis A. McCord, Eastern Kentucky University
Kenneth J. Mietus, Western Illinois University
Peter Morrill, Bronx Community College
Duane W. Smith, Dutchess Community College
Terry Timmins, Orange Coast College
Irving Witt, College of San Mateo

Melvin L. DeFleur

Contributors

Chapter 1

Introduction

Melvin L. DeFleur
University of Miami

Chapter 2

Crime and Delinquency

Harold J. Vetter
Ira J. Silverman
University of South Florida

Chapter 3

Drug Use

Harwin Voss
University of Kentucky

Chapter 4

Alcoholism and Problem Drinking

Shearon A. Lowery
Florida International University

Chapter 5

Mental Illness

Timothy Plax
Rockwell Corporation

Chapter 6

Sexual Deviance

Joann Sandlin
San Diego State University

Chapter 7

Racial and Ethnic Inequalities

Patrick McNamara
University of New Mexico

Chapter 8

Sex Discrimination

Marilyn Ihinger-Tallman
Washington State University

Chapter 9

Age Discrimination

Kenneth Smith
University of Miami

Chapter 10

Health Care

Hugh Lena
Providence College

Chapter 11

Economic Inequalities

Steven Stack
Pennsylvania State University

Chapter 12

Corporate Crime

Marshall Clinard
University of Wisconsin,
Madison
Peter Yeager
Boston University

Chapter 13

Government and Politics

Donald McQuarie
Bowling Green State University

Chapter 14

Public Schools and Education

Sarane Boockock
Rutgers University

Chapter 15

Families and Intimate Living

Frances A. Boudreau
Connecticut College

Chapter 16

Religion

William Osborne
Florida International University

Chapter 17

Population

Susan Philliber
Columbia University

Chapter 18

Energy

Charles Wolf
Polytechnic Institute of
New York

Chapter 19

Environment

Stan Albrecht
Brigham Young University

Chapter 20

Mass Communication

Melvin L. DeFleur
University of Miami

Chapter 21

Science and Technology

Jeffrey Hubbard
Sacramento State University

CONTENTS

511
G 702
342

PREFACE xvii

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	2
DEFINING SOCIAL PROBLEMS	4
General Characteristics of Social Problems	5
Society's Response to Social Problems	6
Contemporary Social Problems	9
THE SOCIAL ORIGINS OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS	10
The Development of Sociological Analysis	11
Theories of Society	13
Focused Perspectives on Social Problems	20
Unique Explanations of Specific Problems	24

PART I DEVIANT BEHAVIOR: INDIVIDUALS AT ODDS WITH SOCIETY

CHAPTER 2 CRIME AND DELINQUENCY

THE PROBLEM	32
Crime in American History	32
Defining and Classifying Crimes	33
The Criminals and the Victims	36
CAUSES	42
Biological Factors	42
Psychological Factors	43
Sociological Theories	43
Sociopsychological Theories	46
Conclusions	49
SOLUTIONS	50
Solving Crime: The Police and the Courts	50
Handling Criminals: The Corrections System	52

Juvenile Justice	55
Crime Prevention	56
PROSPECTS	58

CHAPTER 3 DRUG USE 62

THE PROBLEM	64
From the “Army Disease” to “Flower Children”	64
Today’s Problem Drugs: An Overview	67
An Epidemic?	68
Effects	72
CAUSES	76
Lindesmith’s Theory of Addiction	78
Differential Opportunity	79
The Theory of Differential Association	81
Lower-Class Culture	84
SOLUTIONS	86
Legal Controls	86
Treatment and Rehabilitation	87
PROSPECTS	92

CHAPTER 4 ALCOHOLISM AND PROBLEM DRINKING 96

THE PROBLEM	98
Wets versus Drys: The Temperance Movements	98
American Drinking Today	101
Costs and Consequences	102
Who Are the Problem Drinkers?	105
CAUSES	109
Biological Explanations	110
A Psychobiological Explanation: The Disease Model	110
Psychological Theories	111
Sociological Explanations	112
SOLUTIONS	115

Individual and Group Psychotherapy	116
Drug Therapy	116
Behavior Modification Techniques	117
Alcoholics Anonymous	118
PROSPECTS	120

CHAPTER 5

MENTAL ILLNESS 124

THE PROBLEM	126
Public Attitudes Through History	126
Contemporary Reactions to Mental Illness	129
Who Are the Mentally Ill?	132
CAUSES	137
The Medical Model	137
The Sociocultural Approach	138
SOLUTIONS	144
Therapies	144
Modifying the Social Environment	147
PROSPECTS	149

CHAPTER 6

SEXUAL DEVIANCE 152

THE PROBLEM	154
Defining the Problem: The Deviant Behavior Perspective	154
Changing Interpretations of Sexuality	155
Contemporary Sexual Problems	157
CAUSES	166
The Structural-Functional Approach to Sexual Norms	166
Explaining Individual Variations	166
SOLUTIONS	168
Castration and Hormonal Treatment	169
Aversion and Suggestion Therapy	169
Psychotherapy	171
Social and Cultural Change	171
PROSPECTS	172

PART II SOCIAL INEQUALITIES: SOME GET LESS FROM THE SYSTEM

CHAPTER 7 RACIAL AND ETHNIC INEQUALITIES 178

THE PROBLEM 180

- The Definition of a Minority 180
- A Short History 181
- American Minorities Today 185

CAUSES 195

- Maintaining Dominance and Submission 195
- Roots of Racism and Discrimination 199
- Discrimination Today: Race or Class? 199

SOLUTIONS 202

- Changing the Legal System 202
- Education 203
- Affirmative Action 205
- Voluntary Organizations 205

PROSPECTS 206

CHAPTER 8 SEX DISCRIMINATION 208

THE PROBLEM 210

- Sexism in American History 211
- Women in Contemporary America 216
- Evaluating Sexism 220

CAUSES 221

- Biology, Psychology, and Sexual Differences 221
- Socialization and Sex Roles 222
- Social Structure 225

SOLUTIONS 229

- Changing the Laws 229
- Educational Programs 230

Job Flexibility: The Workplace and Child Care	231
PROSPECTS	232

CHAPTER 9 AGE DISCRIMINATION 236

THE PROBLEM	238
Trends in Aging	238
Social Status of the Aged: An Evolutionary View	240
The Burdens of Aging	243
The Aged and the Rest of Society	251
CAUSES	252
Physical Aging	252
The Aged as a Minority Group	253
Personal Adjustment	256
SOLUTIONS	259
Senior Citizens' Groups and the Subculture of the Aged	259
Government Programs	260
PROSPECTS	262

CHAPTER 10 HEALTH CARE 266

THE PROBLEM	268
Progress in Health and Medicine	268
Inequalities in Health and Medical Care	271
The Soaring Costs of Care	274
The Effectiveness of American Medicine	276
CAUSES	277
The Organization of Medical Care	277
Illness as Deviant Behavior	282
The "Medicalization" of America	283
The Social and Physical Environment	284
SOLUTIONS	285
Government Programs	285
Reform Within the Medical System	288
Prevention	288
PROSPECTS	290

CHAPTER 11 ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES 294

THE PROBLEM 296

- Americans and Poverty 296
- Attitudes and Economics Today 298
- Inflation 299
- Unemployment 300
- Poverty 303

CAUSES 309

- Explaining Inflation 309
- Sources of Unemployment 310
- Are the Poor to Blame? 313
- Social Structure, Conflict, and Poverty 314

SOLUTIONS 316

- The Conservative Approach 316
- The Liberal Approach 317
- The Radical Approach 320

PROSPECTS 323

PART III GROUPS AND INSTITUTIONS: PROBLEMS IN COMPLEX SETTINGS

CHAPTER 12 CORPORATE CRIME 328

THE PROBLEM 330

- Public Policy Toward Private Enterprise: A Short History 330
- Defining and Controlling Corporate Crime 334
- The Extent of Illegal Behavior 335
- The Impact of Corporate Crime 338

CAUSES 340

- The Profit Motive and Deviance 340
- The Ethical Climate of the Firm 341
- Corporate Organization 343
- Industry Structure 346
- Regulation and Its Enforcement 346

SOLUTIONS	352
Stricter Enforcement	352
Changing Corporate Attitudes and Structures	352
Citizen Pressure	354
PROSPECTS	354

CHAPTER 13 GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

THE PROBLEM	360
The Development of Democracy	360
The Failures of American Democracy	363
CAUSES	366
Modern Pluralism	366
Power-Elite Theory	368
Ruling-Class Theory	376
SOLUTIONS	383
The Neoconservative Answer	383
Answers from the Left	384
PROSPECTS	385

CHAPTER 14 PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION

THE PROBLEM	390
The Changing Tasks of America's Schools	392
Grading the Schools	395
CAUSES	400
Changes in the Structure of American Society	400
Social Change and the Schools	401
Loss of Authority	402
Social Structure of Schools	406
SOLUTIONS	408
Changes Within the School	409
Changes Outside the School	413
Changes in the Relationships Between Schools and Their Environment	413
PROSPECTS	416

CHAPTER 15 FAMILIES AND INTIMATE LIVING 420

THE PROBLEM 422

- The Cross-Cultural Perspective 422
- The Family Through American History 424
- Family Organization Today 425
- Interpreting Changes in the Family 430
- Families in Trouble 431

CAUSES 435

- Changing Functions 435
- Changing Values 438

SOLUTIONS 440

- Reinforcing the Traditional Family 441
- Easing the Path to Change 442

PROSPECTS 443

CHAPTER 16 RELIGION 448

THE PROBLEM 450

- From Holy Commonwealth to Moral Majority 451
- Religions of America 454
- Religious Conflicts 457

CAUSES 461

- Bases and Characteristics of Religion 462
- Religion and Social Groups 464
- Deprivation and Protest 466

SOLUTIONS 468

- Pluralism and the Separation of Church and State 469
- Holy Commonwealth 469
- Civil Religion 470
- The Ecumenical Movement 472
- Secularization 472

PROSPECTS 473

PART IV CONFLICT AND CHANGE: SOCIETY IN TRANSITION

CHAPTER 17 POPULATION CHANGE 478

THE PROBLEM 480

Population Dynamics in the United States 480

Consequences of Population Change 487

CAUSES 492

The Theory of Demographic Transition 493

Social Disorganization and Population Changes 494

Conflicts, Politics, and Urban Problems 496

SOLUTIONS 499

Controlling Fertility 500

Regulating Migration 502

Aiding the Cities 502

PROSPECTS 503

CHAPTER 18 ENERGY 506

THE PROBLEM 508

The Oil Problem 508

The Real Energy Problem 511

Energy and Society: The Scope of the Problem 511

Energy and Equity 513

CAUSES 515

Limits to Growth 515

The Role of Institutions 517

Conflict of Values 519

SOLUTIONS 520

Renewable and Nonrenewable Energy Sources 523

Hard-Path and Soft-Path Energy Systems 523

Public and Private Institutions 526

Supply and Demand 529

PROSPECTS 533