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PREFACE

In the three years since publication of the last edition of this book, unfolding events and social changes have redirected public thinking about some of our social problems. As a result of initiatives in California, Texas, and Washington, D.C., affirmative action has lost much of its potency. Welfare has become primarily a state program rather than a national one. Federal assistance to noncitizens has fallen drastically. Many observers who once viewed HMOs as the solution to soaring medical costs now see them as profit-motivated businesses that often deny important tests and treatments to patients in order to reduce costs.

Other trends contribute to public misgivings. Megamergers and advances in technology and telecommunications encourage corporate downsizing, displacing skilled workers while generating new jobs that typically involve low pay and limited upward mobility. Governments at every level struggle to balance budgets without overburdening taxpayers. Meanwhile, crime, drugs, shortcomings in the educational system, environmental disasters, homelessness, population growth, poverty, racism, sexism, single-parent families, declining urban infrastructure, and violence all contribute to create major differences between the American ideal and American reality.

Such pervasive problems stimulate extensive sociological inquiry; and indeed, many books examine this subject. While other texts are informative, however, my former co-authors and I originally wrote this book because none of these excited and intrigued students about the sociological perspective in studying social problems. Our goal was to create a lively, readable text providing students with more than a dry, depressing recitation of statistics and complex social policy analyses. Although gratified

by the strong response to previous editions, I have attempted in this fourth edition—my first solo effort with this text—to create an even more clearly written and comprehensive book that adopts a more consistent and succinct format throughout all chapters to hold student interest. Realizing that many students taking this course are not sociology majors, I also want to provide a grounding in basic sociological knowledge for analyzing social problems. Students already experience many of the problems examined here in their every-day lives and so have formed or accepted mythical or traditional explanations for them. My goal is to overcome these quasi-explanations and replace them with scientific concepts.

To establish this practical explanatory framework, in each chapter I apply sociological theoretical analysis to the factual content. Some other texts use only a Conflict perspective, but my approach is eclectic, offering Functionalist, Conflict, and Interactionist analyses, because I believe nonmajors should be acquainted with all viewpoints. In addition, two newer theoretical orientations: Feminist and Postmodern, appear in several appropriate chapters; and Chapter 14 includes discussion of the new Environmental orientation, which abandons the twin notions at its foundation (the status of humans as recent invaders and the goal of leaving nature alone) in favor of active human intervention in the natural world.

Instructors partial to one particular theoretical orientation can easily emphasize it in their classroom teaching while using this book as a source of supporting and contrasting ideas. Indeed, many past reviewers and adopters often have labeled the book's orientation as Functionalist, Conflict, or Interactionist, depending on their own predilections. No one should find the book antithetical to a particular theoretical view, yet the book does not indulge in amorphous sociological analyses. Readers will find more theoretical commentary and consistent application here than in most other texts.

The book is organized more cohesively than typical social problems books. Chapters are arranged to flow sequentially from microsocial to macrosocial topics; thematically, they are grouped into five parts, each of which begins with a two-page introduction to acquaint students with the interrelated chapter components, the main issues addressed, and important questions to think about while reading.

Each chapter begins with a "facts" page of provocative data to pique reader interest. A brief sociohistorical context section places each social problem in perspective, and an international context section describes how other societies confront particular social problems. The primary focus, however, is on present-day U.S. problems, their interrelationships, and the reasons they persist. The text also stresses how social definitions of problems affect perceived causes and attempted cures. Integrating sociological theory and current knowledge draws the student into fuller understanding; for this purpose, boxed inserts illustrate or augment the topics under consideration.

I have a strong interest in stimulating each student's sociological imagination. This term, coined by C. Wright Mills more than forty years ago, refers to people's ability to see how their personal experiences and the changes within society are interrelated. Two unique features of this book—Chapter 2 and the alternative futures scenarios in each chapter—employ what Mills called "the interplay of individuals and society, of biography and history, of self and world."

Chapter 2 looks at the individual in society and examines the problems of anomie and alienation caused by the modern world. Because individuals tend to define the troubles they endure in terms of blame and individual weakness, rather than in terms of historical and

societal change, they need to be shown the impact of society on individuals' expectations about the quality of their lives. This chapter helps students gain sociological insights into the social arrangements and structural conditions that form people's self-images and self-evaluations and create life chances. Included is a discussion of the Postmodern orientation, which is a natural extension of the notion of the individual's "lostness" in modern society.

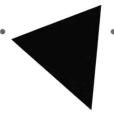
Alternative future scenarios, set in 2030, conclude each chapter. These encourage students to develop an awareness that several different directions and results are possible, depending on the policies we adopt now. I hope that these sections will generate student enthusiasm for investigating the sociological perspective and recognizing possibilities for change.

To maintain a flowing, readable style, I opted to run footnote citations at the back of the book instead of interrupting the text with parenthetical citations. Besides the boxed inserts mentioned previously, pedagogical aids include chapter summaries, annotated bibliographies, key terms, and an end-of-book glossary. An instructor's manual is available, with chapter overviews, chapter outlines, key terms, suggestions for class projects and activities, Internet exercises, and an annotated bibliography of relevant media materials. The manual also provides an objective test file and a set of essay/discussion questions for each chapter. Other available classroom instruction resources are a computerized test bank, an interactive Social Problems video, and Powerpoint® Presentation Software for Social problems.

The challenge of revising a book in so broad and rapidly changing a field as social problems was made less formidable by the dedicated efforts of many individuals. First, and most important, I wish to acknowledge the roles played by John Stimson of William Paterson University and Ardyth Stimson of Kean University, who co-authored earlier editions of this text. Although I have significantly revised those efforts at many levels, their ideas and approach to the subject remain evident here. Similarly, Mary Lou Mayo's past writings of the chapter on the family still shine through in this new edition. My thanks as well to Michelle DeAngelo for her research assistance on this edition.

I also thank the past users of the book for their many helpful suggestions and comments. Special thanks goes to reviewers A. Levine, El Camino College; Keith Durkin, McNeese State University; Earl Schaeffer, Columbus State Community College; Mark Rubenfeld, Loyola University New Orleans; and Angelika Hoeher, SUNY Agricultural and Technical College at Cobleskill. I should acknowledge reviewers of past editions of this book too: Lee D. Millar Bidwell, Longwood College; Anne R. Peterson, Columbus State Community College; Mary Jo Huth, University of Dayton; Lawrence S. Soloman, North Carolina State University; Robert H. Weller, Florida State University; and Stuart A. Wright, Lamar University.

Finally, I want to thank the editorial team especially Karen Hanson and Mary Beth Finch at Allyn and Bacon for their efforts in making this text a reality. Particular thanks go to Sarah Kelbaugh, Series Editor, for signing the project and helping get the work underway. Dusty Davidson did a masterful job in guiding the book through production and an on-time publication date. Steven Gray excelled in his copy editing and thoughtful commentary. I would also thank the following people for their professional excellence: Suzi Howard, photo research; Mike King, book design.



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