Social Problems, Thirteenth Edition, examines inherently interesting subjects such as corporate crime, racism, sexism, urban decay, poverty, health care, the changing economy, the politics of drugs, antigovernment movements, and terrorism. The typical book on social problems describes these phenomena separately, using a variety of explanations. Students exposed to such a mélange of approaches might retain their interest in these problems, but they probably would complete the book with little grasp of how social problems are interrelated and society’s role in their creation and perpetuation. This book is different. The approach is consistently sociological. There is a coherent framework from which to analyze and understand society’s social problems.

The overarching goal in Social Problems, Thirteenth Edition, is to capture the imaginations of our readers. We want them not only to be interested in the topics but also to become enthusiastic about exploring the intricacies and mysteries of social life. We want them, moreover, to incorporate the sociological perspective (imagination) into their explanatory repertoire. The sociological perspective requires, at a minimum, acceptance of two fundamental assumptions. The first is that individuals are products of their social environment. Who they are, what they believe, what they strive for, and how they feel about themselves are all dependent on other people and on the society in which they live. The incorporation of the sociological perspective requires that we examine the structure of society to understand such social problems as racism, poverty, and crime. This method, however, runs counter to the typical explanations people offer for social ills. The choice is seen in an example supplied by Thomas Szasz:

Suppose that a person wishes to study slavery. How would he go about doing so? First, he might study slaves. He would then find that such persons are generally brutish, poor, and uneducated, and he might conclude that slavery is their “natural” or appropriate social status. . . . Another student “biased” by contempt for the institution of slavery might proceed differently. He would maintain that there can be no slave without a master holding him in bondage; and he would accordingly consider slavery a type of human relationship and, more generally, a social institution supported by custom, law, religion, and force. From this point of view, the study of masters is at least as relevant to the study of slavery as is the study of slaves. (Szasz 1970:123–124)

Most of us, intuitively, would make the first type of study and reach a conclusion. This book, however, emphasizes the second type of study: looking at “masters” as well as “slaves.” An observer cannot gain an adequate understanding of racism, crime, poverty, or other social problems by studying only bigots, criminals, and the poor. Therefore, we focus on the social structure to determine the underlying features of the social world in an effort to understand social problems.

Because the emphasis is on social structure, the reader is required to accept another fundamental assumption of the sociological perspective (see Eitzen, Baca Zinn, and Smith 2013). We refer to the adoption of a critical stance toward all social forms. Sociologists must ask these questions: How does the social system really work? Who has the power? Who benefits under the existing social arrangements, and who does not? We should also ask questions such as, Is the law neutral? Why are some drugs illegal and others, known to be harmful, legal? Why are so few organizations in the United States—which is characterized as a democracy—democratic? Is U.S. society a meritocratic one in which talent and effort combine to stratify people fairly? Questions such as these call into question existing myths, stereotypes, and
official dogma. The critical examination of society demystifies and demythologizes. It sensitizes the individual to the inconsistencies present in society. But, most important, a critical stance toward social arrangements allows us to see their role in perpetuating social problems. In conclusion, the reader should be aware that we are not dispassionate observers of social problems.

Let us, then, briefly make our values more explicit. We oppose social arrangements that prevent people from developing to their full potential. That is, we reject political and social repression, educational elitism, institutional barriers to racial and sexual equality, economic exploitation, and official indifference to human suffering. Stating these feelings positively, we favor equality of opportunity, the right to dissent, social justice, an economic system that minimizes inequality, and a political system that maximizes citizen input in decisions and provides for an adequate healthcare system and acceptable living conditions for all people. Obviously, we believe that U.S. society as currently organized falls short of what we consider to be a good society. The problem areas of U.S. society are the subjects of this edition. So, too, are structural arrangements around the globe that harm people.

In 2001, the Colorado Commission on Higher Education (a state oversight commission appointed by the governor) commissioned a conservative watchdog group to evaluate teacher education programs in the state universities of Colorado. The report criticized the University of Colorado’s School of Education for pushing an agenda that “indoctrinates” students in issues of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. David Saxe, the principal investigator of the report, said, “More than any other reviewed institution, CU’s teacher education programs are the most politically correct and stridently committed to the social justice model” (quoted in Curtin 2001:1B). Suffice it to say that our approach to social problems would also be castigated by Mr. Saxe, for we are absolutely committed to social justice; and this means, among other things, understanding how many social problems of U.S. society are rooted in the hierarchical arrangements based on class, race, gender, and sexuality.

**NEW TO THIS EDITION**

Since the last edition of *Social Problems* was published, certain events have shaken U.S. society, and important trends have become even more significant, making a major revision necessary. For example,

- The U.S. has ended its involvement in the Iraq war and is committed to do the same in Afghanistan. The U.S. budget for the military continues to rise. The terrorist threat remains with us, both from external and internal sources.
- World population continues to increase by about 76 million a year, almost all of the increase in poor countries. Put another way, 157 new people join the world’s population every minute, 153 of them in developing countries.
- The U.S. population has moved past 300 million and will add another 120 million by 2050. At about 5 percent of the world’s population, the United States has an enormous environmental footprint—emitting one-fourth of the world’s greenhouse gases and using one-fourth of the world’s resources.
- Non-Whites will be the numerical majority in the United States by 2042. Immigration increases racial/ethnic tensions in some parts of the nation.
- Politics in the United States has been more and more polarized, resulting in factions unwilling to compromise.
- The Supreme Court has ruled that money is a form of speech and therefore cannot be curtailed in politics. As a consequence, money from large organizations and wealthy individuals is swamping elections and making a mockery of democracy.
• Although some large cities in the United States are showing signs of vigor, many are troubled with growing dependent populations, shrinking job markets, increasing racial tensions, and declining economic resources to meet their problems.
• The economy continues its massive transformation from a manufacturing economy to one based on service/knowledge. This causes disruptions as some companies fail while others succeed. Globalization, with jobs and tasks moving outside the country, adds to the unemployment woes accompanying the economic transformation.
• The Great Recession hit in 2007 and caused havoc on Wall Street, Main Street, and in families. Unemployment rose precipitously. Wall Street tumbled. The value of housing dropped, causing bankruptcies and foreclosures. These economic difficulties continue.
• Government bailouts of the banks and recovery efforts such as an economic stimulus, plus the cost of conducting two wars, raised the national debt dramatically to $15.8 trillion by July 2012. This huge debt provided a rationale to limit government by reducing or eliminating social welfare programs.
• Obamacare has been upheld by the Supreme Court. The public is divided on this healthcare reform.

This thirteenth edition of Social Problems considers each of these important trends and events as well as others. Some of the topics new to this edition are:
• Gender inequality and the workplace
• The new racial demography
• How the U.S. ranks among industrialized nations in investing in and protecting children
• The effects of the Great Recession on families
• Financing the 2012 political campaigns
• The politics of Obamacare
• A critique of trickle-down economics
• The continuing influence of the Tea Party movement
• The Latino Paradox
• The effects of gridlock in Congress
• The declining flow of immigrants from Mexico to the United States
• Efforts at voter suppression in many states
• Emptying out of much of the Great Plains and Appalachia while other rural areas are booming with natural resource extraction
• The trend toward returning to urban density
• China’s one-child policy
• The drug war on the U.S.–Mexico border
• The persistent problem of not enough jobs
• The Upper Big Branch and other mining disasters
• The discriminatory practices of banks in lending to African Americans and Latinos
• The role of inequality in the health of the public
• Twenty-first century warfare
• Legacy of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars

Six types of panels are included:
• Voices panels provide the personal views of those affected by a social problem.
• A Closer Look elaborates on a topic in detail.
• Social Problems in Global Perspective panels illustrate how other societies deal with a particular social problem. This global emphasis is also evident in panels and tables that compare the United States with other nations on such topics as crime/incarceration, medical care, and education.
• Social Policy panels look at policy issues and highlight social policies that work to alleviate particular social problems.
• Looking Toward the Future panels examine the trends concerning the social problems under consideration at the beginning of a new millennium.
• Speaking to Students panels address issues especially pertinent to college students.

Also included are:

• New MySocLab icons in the margins of the text highlight resources in Pearson’s unique online resource that enhance the content within the text.
• End-of-chapter pedagogy includes Chapter Reviews and Key Terms.

In summary, this new edition of Social Problems improves on the earlier editions by focusing more deliberately on five themes: (1) the structural sources of social problems; (2) the role of the United States in global social problems; (3) the centrality of class, race, gender, sexuality, and disability as sources of division, inequality, and injustice; (4) the critical examination of society; and (5) solutions to social problems.

NOTE ON LANGUAGE USAGE

In writing this book, we have been especially sensitive to our use of language. Language is used to reflect and maintain the secondary status of social groups by defining them, diminishing them, trivializing them, or excluding them. For example, traditional English uses masculine words (man, mankind, he) to refer to people in general. Even in the ordering of masculine and feminine or of Whites and Blacks within the discussion, one category consistently preceding its counterpart subtly conveys the message that the one listed first is superior to the other. In short, our goal is to use language so that it does not create the impression that one social class, race, or gender is superior to any other.

The terms of reference for racial and ethnic categories are changing. Blacks increasingly use the term African American, and Hispanics often refer to themselves as Latinos. In Social Problems, Thirteenth Edition, we use both of these terms for each social category because they often are used interchangeably in popular and scholarly discourse.

Also, we try to avoid the use of America or American society when referring to the United States. America should be used only in reference to the entire Western Hemisphere: North, Central, and South America (and then, in the plural, Americas). Its use as a reference to only the United States implies that the other nations of the Western Hemisphere have no place in our frame of reference.

SUPPLEMENTS

Instructor’s Manual and Test Bank Each chapter in the Instructor’s Manual includes the following resources: Chapter Summary, Learning Objectives, Critical Thinking Questions, Activities for Classroom Participation, and Suggested Films.
Designed to make your lectures more effective and to save preparation time, this extensive resource gathers together useful activities and strategies for teaching your Social Problems course. Also included in this manual is a test bank of over 1,500 multiple-choice, true/false, and essay questions. The Instructor’s Manual and Test Bank is available to adopters for download from the Pearson Instructors Resource Center at www.pearsonhighered.com.

**MyTest**  This computerized software allows instructors to create their own personalized exams, to edit any or all of the existing test questions, and to add new questions. Other special features of this program include random generation of test questions, creation of alternate versions of the same test, scrambling question sequence, and test preview before printing. For easy access, this software is available within the instructor section of the MySocLab for Social Problems, Thirteenth Edition, or for download from the Pearson Instructors Resource Center at www.pearsonhighered.com.

**PowerPoint Presentations**  The PowerPoint presentations for Social Problems, Thirteenth Edition, are informed by instructional and design theory. You have the option in every chapter of choosing from any of the following types of slides: Lecture, Line Art, and Image PowerPoints. The Lecture PowerPoint slides follow the chapter outline and feature images from the textbook integrated with the text. The Special Topics PowerPoint slides allow you to integrate rich supplementary material into your course with minimal preparation time. Additionally, all of the PowerPoints are uniquely designed to present concepts in a clear and succinct way. They are available to adopters for download from the Pearson Instructors Resource Center at www.pearsonhighered.com.

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