Social Problems For The Twenty-First Century
Dedication

for Karen
J. John Palen

J. John Palen has authored twelve books on sociology and is a Professor of Sociology at Virginia Commonwealth University where he has received the College of Humanities and Sciences Distinguished Scholar Award. In 1997 he was designated a Fulbright Distinguished Scholar and has held the Fulbright Chair in North American Studies at the University of Calgary. He likes progressive jazz, hiking in the Blue Ridge Mountains, and exploring cities.
Preface

*Social Problems for the Twenty-First Century* is a text written for a new century and a new millennium. Although there are any number of social problems textbooks available, many of them were originally written during the 1970s or 1980s, before most of the students taking social problems now were even born. Social problems issues and knowledge have changed a great deal since Jimmy Carter was president.

This text makes two basic assumptions about social problems and how they should be presented. First, it assumes that scientific inquiry and research is the best means of understanding and predicting human behavior. Personal experiences and philosophical beliefs about the nature of human behavior can be both insightful and valuable; however, personal insights or common sense, even though sounding reasonable, should not be confused with empirical data.

Second, the text assumes that social facts never occur in a vacuum. Data rarely, if ever, “speak for themselves.” How a person interprets particular facts depends on his or her orientation, beliefs, and theoretical perspective. For example, those who believe that there is a fundamental contradiction between the American ideology of competitive individualism on one hand and the constraints of a rigid social system on the other hand, will view data on crime in one fashion. Those holding a functionalist or labeling perspectives may interpret the same data very differently. *Social Problems for the Twenty-First Century* presents data, scientific knowledge, and opinions as accurately and as fairly as possible. The goal is to build on students’ natural interest in social problems and encourage them to develop both a sociological perspective and a sociological imagination that will allow them to examine social problems in a critical fashion. Instructors and students alike have a right to expect that they can rely on a text to present research data accurately and honestly. If this is done, the instructor need have no reservation about stressing or advocating a particular theoretical approach or course or action. I believe instructors have every right—and sometimes an obligation—to tell their students where they stand on the social issues under discussion. *Social Problems for the Twenty-First Century* provides the instructor with a trustworthy base from which she or he can feel free to elaborate, disagree, and discuss.

*Social Problems for the Twenty-First Century* encourages the student to think about significant policy and social implications. “Everything everywhere is getting worse” approaches are not only inaccurate, but they also imply nothing can be done and discourage students from attempts to improve the future. However, students need to be made aware that “solutions” to problems often involve contradictions and trade-offs, and that social problems are not necessarily the consequence of social disorganization and/or breakdown. For example, the anti-Semitism of Nazi Germany was a product of a highly organized and smoothly functioning system, not the product of a system that was suffering from major internal dissonance.

Finally, a textbook also has to be honest about what it cannot do. It would be pompous to suggest that any social problems textbook has the answers to the nation’s ills. While this text makes some suggestions with regard to specific issues, there are no guaranteed surefire solutions.

I confess to being optimistic about the future. As expressed by Martin Luther King, Jr., “I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become reality. I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word.”
Organization of the Text

*Social Problems for the Twenty-First Century* is divided into six parts. Part One, *Looking at Social Problems*, introduces students to the ways in which sociologists use their sociological imagination and research to define and address social problems. It also discusses the major theoretical approaches and ways to distinguish bogus facts and dubious facts from real data in our fact-clogged era.

Part Two, *Problems of Inequality*, begins the focus on specific social problems by discussing the most crucial social issues today—those involving inequality. Chapter 2, “To Have and Have Not,” examines economic inequality and poverty. Chapter 3, “The Color Line,” delves into America’s most persistent and polarizing problem, the issues surrounding race. Chapter 4, “The Cracked Melting Pot,” broadens the discussion to our increas-ingly multiethnic society and the consequences of being Hispanic, Asian American, or Native American today. Chapter 5, “The Gendered Order,” examines gender inequality and the crucial role gender plays in defining social problems. This chapter was authored by Meg Wilkes Karraker.

Part Three, *Problems of the Global Setting*, examines social problems whose effects extend beyond national borders. Chapter 6, “The Question of People,” looks closely at the consequences of population growth, both for the world and for the United States, and fully explores the problem of immigration reform and its consequences. Chapter 7, “Urban Life and Deviance,” examines the city as the setting for most social problems and the role of city life in social problems. Chapter 8, “The Economy and the World of Work,” explores the ways in which downsizing, restructuring, and other economic changes unthought of two decades ago have affected individuals, families, and communities.

Part Four, *Problems of the Life Cycle*, deals with social problems that affect individual and society differently at different life stages. Chapter 9, “Education under Stress,” examines how America’s educational system has failed to adapt to the educational requirements of the new century. Chapter 10, “Ties That Bind: The Changing Family,” discusses the massive changes in marriage age, divorce rates, and out-of-wedlock births that are transforming the structure and definition of American families. Chapter 11, “Aging and Ageism,” looks at these emerging social problems as we move into an era when both the numbers and percentage of the aged population is dramatically increasing.

Part Five, *Problems of Violating Social Norms*, examines how selected social problems affect individuals as well as society. Chapter 12, “Crime and Violence,” discusses the social problem that opinion polls most commonly list as the nation’s most serious social problem—crime. Considerable attention is given to white-collar crime, organized crime, and professional crime as well as the more commonly covered street crime. Chapter 13, “Substance Abuse: Legal and Otherwise,” examines the social history and current status of alcohol abuse, drug usage, and cigarette smoking as well as how attitudes and policies have changed and are likely to change in the future. Chapter 14, “Problems of the Health System and Mental Disorders,” discusses the increasing problems associated with the restructuring and cutbacks of both insurance and health services in delivering adequate health and mental health services, and especially the social problems associated with the AIDS epidemic. Chapter 15, “Society and Sexuality,” discusses the social consequences of the sexual revolution over the past quarter-century, gender patterns, prostitution, and pornography.

Part Six, *Looking Ahead*, examines emerging social problems of the twenty-first century. Here the emphasis is on new social problems, especially the social consequences of environmental degradation and of war and terrorism.
Features of the Text

Chapter Opener and Outline. Each chapter opens with a vignette or quote that links to the chapter content. A detailed outline takes the reader through the chapter content.

Dubious Fact. Designed to sharpen the reader’s awareness of accuracy and honest discussion, each chapter opens with an eyebrow-raising “fact” that on the surface appears to be accurate. It is followed by the actual reality.

Boxes. Each chapter has two boxes designed to spark student interest and discussion.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE shows how people who get involved in community and society can have an impact on helping to fix a societal ill.

ONGOING ISSUES are provocative discussions of topics that are in the forefront of the field. Critical thinking questions at the end of each box provide practical applications.

Theoretical Approaches. Before detailed presentation of data, each chapter provides an examination of the topic as seen from functionalist, conflict, and interactionist perspectives.

Ethnic Issues. Although we live in a multiethnic society and Hispanics will soon be the largest minority population in America, social problems texts commonly combine a brief discussion of ethnicity into a chapter on race.

Social Problems for the Twenty-First Century has two chapters on race; Chapter 3, “The Color Line”, and Chapter 4, “The Cracked Melting Pot,” which discusses Latinos, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and white ethnic populations.

Gender Issue. Because of the importance of gender, this text includes a specially commissioned chapter, The Gendered Order, written by Meg Wilkes Karraker, associate professor of Sociology at St. Thomas University in Minnesota. From her unique position as Executive Officer for Sociologists for Women in Society, Dr. Karraker is able to look at gender issues from an intellectually stimulating, yet practical, point of view.

Toward the Future. Each chapter concludes its coverage of a topic with a section that discusses future prospects and the most likely developments regarding a social problem over the next several decades.

Questions for Discussion. Each chapter ends with a series of thought-provoking questions that can be used to stimulate classroom discussion or, as student assignments.

Photos and Illustrative Material. An extensive photo program with captions that elaborate upon text material, illustrates and emphasizes important text concepts. Tables, figures, and graphs have been designed with the beginning student in mind.

Suggested Resources. At the end of each chapter is a list of suggested websites, videos and films, books, and articles to expand on material discussed in the chapter.

Internet Exercises. Two exercises at the end of each chapter take the student online to analyze carefully-chosen sites and social issues relevant to each chapter and to students’ interests.

Glossary. A social problems text requires clear explanation of sociological terms. Key terms are defined in the margin of the text and there is a complete glossary at the end of the text.

Summary. A “bullet” summary helps students review the important themes of each chapter.

Methodological Appendix. A methods appendix provides an overview of the major ways of how to go about doing sociological research. This appendix can be used
as an adjunct to Chapter 1 for instructors who wish to devote more time to “how we know what we know.”

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- **Student’s Online Learning Center** is a web-based, interactive study guide featuring URLs relevant to each topic, self-grading quizzes, overviews, learning objectives, key term flashcards and more for each chapter. Please visit at www.mhhe.com/Palen.
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  - Access to *Northern Lights Research Engine* (received multiple Editor’s Choice awards for superior capabilities from *PC Magazine*)

**Student Study Guide**

Support for the Instructor

- **Instructor’s Manual**, prepared by John Mahoney, Virginia Commonwealth University, provides sociology instructors with detailed key terms, essay questions, additional lecture ideas, and much more.
- **Testbank**, also prepared by John Mahoney, Virginia Commonwealth University and fully coordinated with the Instructor’s Manual and Student Study Guide.
- **Computerized Testbank**, easy-to-use computerized testing program for both Windows and Macintosh computers.
• **PowerPoint Slides**, complete chapter-by-chapter slideshows featuring tables, illustrations, photos and more (may be accessed on the web to use with PageOut for creating individual websites for the class). Instructor’s are welcome to generate overhead transparencies from the slides if they wish to do so.

• **Instructor’s Online Learning Center** contains a variety of resources, activities, and classroom tips. The text’s Instructor’s manual, PowerPoint slides and more may be accessed electronically on this site.

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• **SocCity** is a veritable melting pot of sociology cybersources, information, and Internet activities for students and instructors alike. Just click on any of the four buttons on the left side of your screen and get started (www.mhhe.com/soscience/sociology).

• **Videos**—a wide variety of videos from the Films for Humanities and Sciences series as well as other sources is available to adopters of this text.
Although I take full responsibility for any errors in the volume, either of omission or commission, it is clear that the strengths of Social Problems for the Twenty-First Century are due to the contributions of a number of people. The text benefited from the assistance and talent of colleagues, both in sociology and at McGraw-Hill. Dr. Meg Karraker especially merits credit for authoring a splendid gender chapter. Jeffery Will joined in initially formulating plans for developing the text. My colleague, John Mahoney deserves credit for writing the excellent Internet exercises. The text also has profited from the comments and suggestions of a number of colleagues in sociology who reviewed early drafts of my manuscript. My sincere thanks go to:

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J. John Palen
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Social Problems for the Twenty-First Century is an exciting and contemporary integrated learning package, reflecting the concerns and problems of the new century and the new millennium. J. John Palen presents the latest sociological data, knowledge, and opinions so that any instructor, regardless of his or her theoretical orientation, will have a trustworthy base from which to elaborate, disagree, or discuss. The text builds on students’ natural interest in social problems and encourages them to develop both a sociological perspective and a sociological imagination that will allow them to examine social problems in a critical fashion.
Table 5.2 shows, white women earn more than black women, who in turn earn more than Hispanic women. However, the median weekly earnings for white women were the same as those for black men, but higher than those of Hispanic men.

The apparent trend is that women have made in earnings relative to men are largely due to the decrease of men's real earnings over the same period. Richard Hogran and Carolyn Futer have calculated that the declining gender gap in earnings is due not to women's progress toward achieving earnings equality, but rather to the fact that male earnings declined more rapidly in terms of constant dollars than did female earnings. Furthermore, Hogran and Futer argue that any small decline in the gender gap has been at the expense of a marginal increase in the racial gap in earnings.

The gap that persists between women's and men's earnings is largely due to industry, sex, and occupational segregation. According to Thomas Alvey, women tend to be "ghettoized" rather than spread across industries, occupations, firms, and specialties.76 U.S. Department of Labor statistics show that 61 percent of employed women work in technical, sales, and administrative support occupations, and 31.4 percent are employed in managerial and professional specialty occupations. One out of every five employed women works as a primary or secondary teacher, secretary, or cashier.79

Women now enter college in greater numbers than men and are entering certain high-paying fields in record numbers (e.g., by 1994 the percentage of women earning degrees in medicine, dentistry, and law had risen to 37.9, 38.5, and 43.0 percent respectively).80 Occupational disparities in pay persist, however, even at the highest levels. The glass ceiling refers to barriers to women's upward mobility through the highest levels in organizations. Among Fortune 500 companies, only 11.2 percent of corporate officers are women, and just 3.8 percent of the individuals holding one of the highest executive titles (chairman, vice chairman, chief executive officer, president, senior vice president, executive vice president) are women.81 A recent study of men and women in the corporate elite in southern California suggests that women are more likely than men to emphasize social networks and such strategies as obtaining advanced educational degrees or modifying behavior to break through the glass ceiling.82

Poverty and Economic Opportunity

Married-couple families with employed wives have the highest median annual income of any family type. As shown in Table 5.3, married-couple families in which the wife was not employed had a median income just 60 percent of that of married-couple

Dubious Fact

A chapter opening, eyebrow-raising Dubious Fact is designed to sharpen the reader's awareness of accuracy and honest reporting. This "fact" appears to be accurate but the Dubious Fact is followed by the actual reality.

Key Terms and Definitions in Margin

Key terms are defined in the margin on the page where the term is first introduced, making it easier for the reader to study the material.

Dubious Fact

The most deadly drugs in America are cocaine and heroin.

Cocaine and heroin cause roughly 13,000 deaths a year in the United States. Legal drugs are far more deadly. Alcohol causes 90,000 deaths a year, while tobacco causes over 400,000. Worldwide, 1 billion people a year die as a consequence of smoking tobacco.

Drugs as a Way of Life

Cramming for an exam, your roommate lights another cigarette and pours another cup of coffee. Writing an overdue term paper, you pop a pep pill to stay awake. Finishing several hours later, you both rely by having a beer. Two hours later, unable to fall asleep, you take a Sominex and an aspirin.

Extant of Usage

America has become a giant drugstore, where “better living through chemistry” seems to have become a national slogan. We accept that people cannot get through a normal day without taking drugs of some sort. If you doubt this, go through your living quarters and count the number of drugs you find. Include all prescription and nonprescription “medicines,” such as sedatives, tranquilizers, stimulants, and narcotic and alcoholic cough syrups. Because alcohol is a drug, include beer and alcoholic beverages in your total. Be sure not to overlook the pack of cigarettes with its addictive nicotine. Then include mild drugs, such as caffeine in coffee or tea. All the above are legal drugs.

Social Definitions of Drugs

In the first chapter we discussed C. Wright Mills’s distinction between private troubles and public issues. Drug abuse falls into the second category because it harms society and the problem can be resolved only with collective action. Today drug abuse is closely associated with crime. According to the National Institutes of Justice, the percentage of arrestees testing positive for illicit drug use ranged from 53 percent in San Jose to 80 percent in Chicago (based on urine samples of male arrestees in 25 cities). In New York City, where there-
Effective Tables

Easy-to-read tables present the latest findings and summarize important concepts.

Table 8.1 Woman’s Share of Major Occupational Groups, 1970–1995

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Group</th>
<th>Percent Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total labor force</td>
<td>38 43 45 46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executives, managers</td>
<td>19 31 42 43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional, specialty</td>
<td>44 49 54 53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technicians</td>
<td>44 46 51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>41 49 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative support, including clerical</td>
<td>73 77 77 79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private household</td>
<td>78 95 95 95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protective service</td>
<td>7 12 16 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other service</td>
<td>41 53 63 63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farming, forestry, fishing</td>
<td>9 15 16 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precision production, including craft</td>
<td>7 8 10 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machine operators</td>
<td>40 41 40 37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation workers</td>
<td>4 8 10 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handlers, laborers</td>
<td>17 20 20 19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The 1995 figures are based on the monthly Current Population Survey and are subject to greater sampling variability than the figures for 1970–1990, which are based on the decennial census.


Ethnic Issues

In order to realistically treat an important issue for the twenty-first century, this text includes two chapters on Race: Chapter 3, “The Color Line,” and Chapter 4, “The Cracked Melting Pot,” which discuss Latinos, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and white ethnic populations.
The Way We Never Were

In her books, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* and *The Way We Really Are: Coming to Terms with America’s Changing Families*, Stephanie Coontz argues that working mothers are here to stay. In *The Way We Really Are*, Coontz says: “One of the most common misconceptions about modern marriage is the notion that coprovider families are a new invention in human history. In fact, today’s dual-earner family represents a return to older norms, after a very short interlude that people mistakenly identify as ‘traditional.’

... Proponents of the modified male breadwinner family believe that if we could drastically reduce the number of single-mother households, raise wages for men, and convince families to get by on a little less, we might be able to get wives to quit work during their child raising years. ... But a return to the norm of male breadwinner families is simply not feasible for most Americans. It is not just a dollars-and-cents issue. Most women would not give up the satisfactions of their jobs even if they could afford to quit. They consistently tell interviewers they like the social respect, self-esteem, and friendship networks they gain from the job, despite the stress they may face finding acceptable child care and negotiating household chores with their husbands. ... Another reason women do not want to quit work is that they are not willing to surrender the increased leverage it gives them in the family. The simple truth is that women who do not earn income have much less decision-making power in marital relations than women who do.”

1. A good resource to begin with is the U.S. Department of Education’s home page, (http://www.ed.gov/index.html). Here, you will find links to many useful sites including, The Digest of Educational Statistics, The Encyclopedia of Educational Statistics, and The National Library of Education. Click on "Nations Report Card (NAPE)." NAPE stands for the National Assessment of Educational Progress, a congressionally mandated project that has been monitoring the academic performance of fourth, eighth, and twelfth graders since 1969. Click on “Science” and then go to “Findings" (http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/science/sci_findings.asp).
   a. What does NAPE have to say about the performance of U.S. students in the sciences?
   b. Check their performance in other subjects.
   c. Does NAPE make any provision for international comparisons of U.S. students with their counterparts in other nations?
2. Visit the website of the National Education Association (NEA), “America’s oldest and largest organization committed to advancing the cause of public education” (http://www.nea.org/). Click on the “Issues” button.
   a. What is the NEA’s position on Bilingual Education?
   b. What are the reasons that it gives for taking this position?
   c. What other issues that the NEA is currently concerning itself with?
   d. Would you consider this to be a liberal or conservative organization? Why?

As the new century begins, the American dilemma with race continues to polarize the population. Racism persists—but, compared to the last century, patterns of racial segregation are slowly declining and racial prejudice and discrimination are decreasing. During the twenty-first century, issues that the twentieth century defined as being racial questions will increasingly be redefined as issues of social class rather than color. The new century may see the African American population increasingly split between a middle-class segment growing in confidence and affluence and a truly disadvantaged segment isolated from the rest of the society. The success of the first group will further highlight the despair and desolation of the latter.

Paradoxically, the economic success of an African American suburban middle class raises the possibility that an African American heritage that survived 300 years of adversity could be weakened and undermined by economic success. This is what occurred with European and Asian immigrant populations. The common assumption, that the lives of blacks, because of race, will always be different than those of whites or Asian Americans, may not hold in the future. If the significance of race declines, African American heritage could come to have the same significance to future generations of middle-class suburbanites as Irish, German, or Italian heritage does now for European-background groups. In other words, having a black heritage would be something of interest but not something that strongly affects one’s daily life. It would be equivalent to being Japanese American or Italian American today.

For poor blacks, future prospects are guarded, but the turn of the century showed some positive signs. The downside is that, while affirmative action programs have...
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