

Haffey  
Fall  
2003

**Social Problems**  
**Sociology 2031-20**  
**Fall 2003**  
**TR, 11:00am-12:15pm**

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*Kingsman*

Over forty years ago, a well-known American sociologist, C Wright Mills, wrote that "ours is a time of uneasiness and indifference." Despite unparalleled prosperity, Americans were suffering from the vague feeling that all was "somehow not right" (1959:11). Today many of us might be inclined to say the same thing. Contemporary American society presents a complicated picture. It is, on a whole, an affluent and powerful society. But it is also full of disturbing contradictions.

Ours is a society of enormous wealth – and growing poverty. It is a society that creates astonishing technological wonders – and frightening environmental degradations. It is a society premised upon a strong work ethic – and condemns millions of individuals to unemployment and no access to health care. It is a society of glittering spectacle and swelling ranks of homeless families, of fervent expressions of national optimism and widespread retreat into drugs, alcohol, fear, and insecurity. Sociology takes us to the intellectual center of these varied social problems / dilemmas.

As you will see throughout the semester, the sociological perspective is different from your usual way of seeing. We live in a society that emphasizes the individual and tends to look for reasons of action within individuals. Sociology encourages us to look beyond individual psychology and unique events to the predictable, broad patterns and regular occurrences of social life that influence individual destinies. Sociologists ask: What kind of society does this? What social conditions cause individuals to suffer, lose-out, to be forgotten? What are the social causes of poverty, crime, addiction, and war? Sociology directs our attention toward the social forces - the structural organization of society - that impact individual lives. It is an unusual form of vision.

This course is designed to familiarize students with sociological analyses of modern social problems. What are the foundations of the sociological approach to social problems? What are the various sociological perspectives used to describe and analyze social problems? What does sociology have to offer as possible solutions to these many problems? Further, this course is meant to assist you in the development of conceptual tools and analytic skills necessary to understand the dynamics of our social world. I hope that this course will serve as an important step in cultivating our "sociological imaginations," for it is this capacity to grasp the interplay of individual and society, personal biography and social history, self and world, that is the promise of sociology.

The two texts I have chosen for this course were written and designed to facilitate your understanding of a broad range of social problems and human values. The authors of these texts have worked hard to make a number of complex issues as understandable as possible. You must do a little work as well. You will be expected to have read and assimilated the required chapters each week. The reading assignments must be done before the topic is discussed in class. Also, please make it a practice to bring your books to class with you.

The following two texts are required reading for this course and are available at campus bookstores.

**Social Problems: A Brief Introduction. J. Coleman and H. Kerbo. 2003**

**Understanding Social Issues: Critical Thinking and Analysis. G. Berlage and W. Engleman. 2003**

There will be three in-class exams (9/30/03, 11/4/03, 12/16/03), each of which will count 25% toward your final grade. Each of these exams will require a familiarity with key concepts and fundamental sociological perspectives, and the capacity to display some of the higher levels of thinking: synthesis, analysis, criticism, and creative application. The other 25% of your grade is to be earned via your recitation. Your recitation instructor Beverly Kingston and I have designed the lecture/recitation to be complimentary, yet autonomous. It's much more fun this way!

It is important to me and extremely beneficial to you to make every possible effort to attend every class meeting (30 in all)! I do not have a policy of mandatory attendance. I hope you will find this class provocative and pertinent and that you will attend on a regular basis. Since some exam material comes from lectures and discussions as well as from the text, regular attendance can only help your grade. If, however, attendance on any certain date is not possible, it is the your responsibility to obtain the material covered in that particular class meeting. Another reason why I believe attendance is so vital is that the best way to understand social problems is through discussion – real interaction /exchange. I plan to devote a significant amount of class time to such discussion and expect everyone to participate. **I favor frequent and informed participation.** If you have any specific learning disability and require accommodation, please let me know.