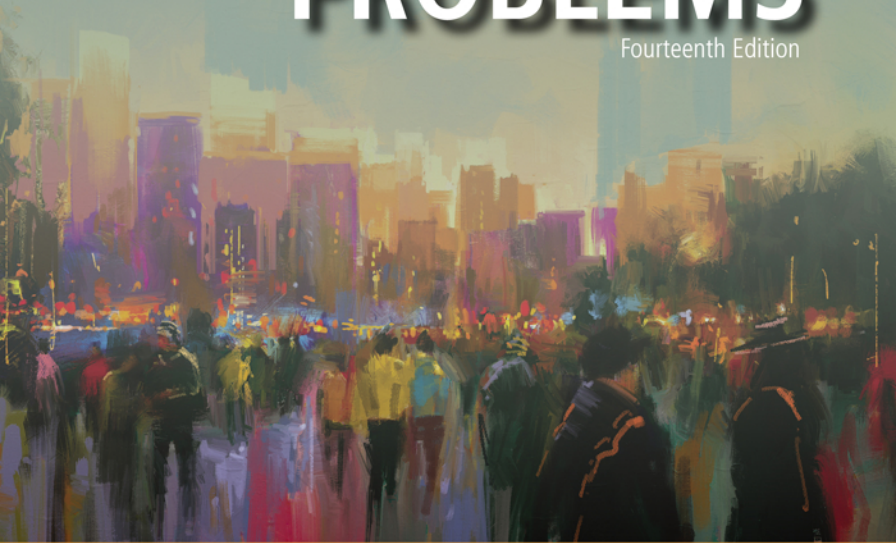


# SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Fourteenth Edition



D. Stanley Eitzen | Maxine Baca Zinn | Kelly Eitzen Smith

 Pearson

# Social Problems

**FOURTEENTH EDITION**

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# Preface

**S***ocial Problems*, Fourteenth 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*, Fourteenth 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 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 that tend to focus on individual behavior and choices. 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. 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 health care 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 an optimal 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.

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## Organization of the Book

The organizing theme of this book is that many aspects of social problems are conditions resulting from cultural and social arrangements, in particular social problems resulting from wealth and power and the bias of our current system

(introduced in Part One). The focus is on power because the powerful, by making and enforcing the laws, create and define deviance. They determine which behaviors will be rewarded and which ones punished. The powerful influence public opinion, and they can attempt to solve social problems or ignore them.

Part Two focuses on problems of people, location, and the environment. Specifically, we cover social problems resulting from population changes, both in the United States and globally. We end the section with a closer look at environmental problems arising from both population growth and cultural norms.

Part Three examines a crucial element of U.S. social structure: the various manifestations of social inequality. It describes inequality based on wealth, race/ethnicity, gender, and disability.

Part Four examines the impact of social structure on individuals. Deviant behavior is activity that violates the norms of an organization, community, or society. Consequently, deviance is culturally defined and socially labeled. Certain behaviors are also labeled as deviant because they conflict with the interests of the powerful in society. Public policy, then, reflects the values and interests of those in power and is codified into law. Members of society are also taught how to respond to deviants. The law and these structured responses to deviants are societal reactions that establish deviance in social roles; paradoxically, the degraded status that results from societal reactions reinforces the deviance that society seeks to control. Deviance, then, is fundamentally the result of social structure. We examine these processes in relation to two types of deviance: crime and drug use.

Part Five describes problems found within five representative institutions: the economy, the family, the education system, the health care system, and the government.

The book concludes with a chapter that answers this question: What do we do about social problems? The solutions may come from the

bottom up—that is, people organize through human agency to change social structures, or from the top down—social policies determined by the powerful.

## 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 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 threat of terrorism remains high globally, as evidenced by high-profile attacks in France and Belgium.
- World population continues to increase by about 80 million a year, almost all of the increase in poor countries.
- The U.S. population has moved past 320 million and will add another 120 million by 2050. At about 4 percent of the world's population, the United States has an enormous environmental footprint—it is the second largest emitter of the world's greenhouse gases and uses one-fourth of the world's resources.
- Racial/ethnic minorities will be the numerical majority in the United States by 2042. Immigration increases racial/ethnic tensions and conflicts in some parts of the nation. Growing conflicts between the police and minority groups have sparked protests and discussions about racial discrimination.
- Politics in the United States has become 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. The effects of the Recession continue to affect U.S. families.
- 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 \$19 trillion by 2016. This huge debt provides 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 health care reform.

This fourteenth 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:

- Expanded discussion of the concentration of corporate wealth
- The Occupy Wall Street movement
- Islamophobia

- Increasing tensions over immigration
- The drought in California
- Corporate polluters and lobbying
- Increasing tension between the public and the police after a series of deaths of Black men at the hands of police
- The Black Lives Matter movement
- Campus incidents of racism
- Transgender and intersex issues
- Marijuana legalization: lessons from Colorado
- The growing gap between the rich and poor
- Same-sex marriage court ruling
- The controversy over Common Core Standards
- Affordable Care Act statistics
- Terrorism in France

Six types of feature boxes are included:

- Voices boxes 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 boxes 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 boxes look at policy issues and highlight social policies that work to alleviate particular social problems.
- Looking Toward the Future boxes examine trends concerning the social problems under consideration at the beginning of a new millennium.
- Speaking to Students boxes address issues especially pertinent to college students.

Also included are:

- End-of-chapter Chapter Reviews and Key Terms.

## 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. In *Social Problems*, Fourteenth Edition, we use the terms Blacks and African Americans interchangeably, and Hispanics and Latinos interchangeably.

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 more than 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](http://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 for download from the Pearson Instructors Resource Center at [www.pearsonhighered.com](http://www.pearsonhighered.com).

**PowerPoint Presentations** The PowerPoint presentations for *Social Problems*, Fourteenth 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. 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](http://www.pearsonhighered.com).

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*D. Stanley Eitzen  
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The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much, it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little.

—*Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Second Inaugural Address, 1937*

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## Chapter 1

# The Sociological Approach to Social Problems



## Learning Objectives

- 1.1 Understand the major social trends facing Americans and their potential consequences.
- 1.2 Explain the complex nature of defining a social problem.
- 1.3 Explain and apply the sociological imagination to different social problems.
- 1.4 Understand the four basic research designs and research methods that sociologists use to study social problems.

## An Introduction to Social Issues

### 1.1 Understand the major social trends facing Americans and their potential consequences.

The official population of the United States surpassed 321 million in 2015. With a net gain of one person every twelve seconds, the United States' population is projected to reach more than 416 million by 2060. What will life in the United States be like with an additional 100 million people? Will the problems of today be eliminated or reduced, or will they have worsened? Consider the following social trends:

**Immigration and the browning of America.** Immigration from Latin America and Asia is fueling population growth. By 2042, the race/ethnicity mix will be such that racial minorities will surpass Whites as the numerical majority. The increasing numbers of racial minorities will likely fuel racial/ethnic unrest among them as they experience discrimination and low-paying, demeaning jobs and among the native-born, who fear that the low wages of recent immigrants either take away their jobs or keep their wages low. With the additional millions of immigrants added in the coming decades, previously White rural areas and small towns will begin to deal with the challenges of new ethnic and racial residents.

**The graying of America.** After 2030, one in five U.S. residents will be at least 65 (similar to the proportion in Florida today). The increase in the number of elderly will cause problems with funding Social Security and Medicare, placing a greater burden on the young to support the elderly through these programs. This divide between workers who support the old with payroll taxes will have both racial and generational dimensions because the workers will be increasingly people of color and the elderly overwhelmingly White (Harden, 2006).

**The widening inequality gap and the plight of the poor.** Today, the wealth and income of the affluent grows rapidly while the income of workers languishes. The inequality gap now is at record levels, resulting in a diminished middle class. As the middle class is squeezed, the trend is for more downward mobility rather than upward mobility.

At the bottom of the class system, nearly one in seven Americans is poor: 45.3 million Americans were "officially" poor in 2013. The government considers those with incomes at or below 50 percent of the poverty level to be "severely poor." In 2013, 19.9 million Americans were in this category. In the coming decades, how will poverty be addressed? The trend has been for the federal government to reduce "safety net" programs that help the poor, such as welfare to single mothers, nutrition programs, and Head Start, leading to speculation that the poor will always be with us, and their numbers will increase.

**The increasing power of money to influence elections and public policy.** A 2010 Supreme Court decision allows corporations and other organizations to spend unlimited amounts to elect or defeat political candidates. In a second ruling in 2014, the Supreme Court removed the aggregate limit on the amount individual donors can give to candidates, political action committees, and political parties. Individuals can thus spend millions to further their candidates and causes. Add to this the influence of organizations through their lobbyists to influence policies. The consequence of this inverse relationship between money and power

is obvious. Where, we might ask, is the voice of the poor heard? What happened to our democratic ideals?

**Increasing globalization and the transformation of the economy.**

The U.S. economy has undergone a dramatic shift from one dominated by manufacturing to one now characterized by service occupations and the collection, storage, and dissemination of information. As a result of this transformation, relatively well-paid employment in manufacturing products such as automobiles has dwindled and been replaced with jobs in lower-paying service industries. Most of the manufacturing is now done in foreign countries where U.S. corporations produce the same products but with cheaper labor, lower taxes, and fewer governmental controls. Some services, such as research, accounting, and call centers, have also been transferred to overseas companies to increase profits. Currently, these trends have negatively affected U.S. workers by making their jobs more insecure and reducing or eliminating their benefits.

In the coming decades, as 100 million people are added and new technologies enhancing globalization are developed, will the working conditions and standard of living of U.S. workers decline or be enhanced?

**Increasing threats to the environment.** Currently, the United States, at about 4.5 percent of the world's population, consumes one-fourth of the world's energy, most particularly oil, and it is the world's greatest producer of greenhouse gases, which cause global warming. Population increases lead to more traffic congestion, more suburban sprawl, and more landfills. Population growth also means greater demand for food, water, fossil fuels, timber, and other resources. At present, land is being converted for development (housing, schools, shopping centers, and roads) at about twice the rate of population growth. Adding another 100 million people with today's habits (large houses, gas-guzzling transportation, suburban sprawl, and the consumption of products designed to be obsolete) will lead to an ecological wasteland. But perhaps recognition of the negative environmental impacts of current usage patterns will lead to our reducing waste, finding alternative energy sources, making greater use of mass transit, increasing housing density, and finding other ways to sustain and even enhance the environment.

At the global level, the earth is warming because of human activities, most prominently the use of oil and other carbons. Global warming will have disastrous effects during this century—coastal flooding, shifting agricultural patterns, violent weather, spread of tropical diseases, and loss of biodiversity, to name a few.

**Growing global inequality.** While the United States' population will increase by nearly 100 million before midcentury, the world will grow by 50 percent, adding 3 billion (for a total of 9 billion) people. Almost all of this growth will



The numbers seeking refuge in homeless shelters have increased dramatically in recent years.



More than one billion people worldwide do not have access to safe drinking water.

tions profit from exploiting the resources and labor of the poorest countries. This gap between the fortunate few and the impoverished, desperate masses continues to widen.

The underdeveloped world, already in dire straits, will face enormous obstacles in providing the minimum of food, water, housing, and medical attention for their peoples as they add billions in population. The result will be ever-greater numbers of desperate people on this planet, making the world less safe. Unless the affluent nations and international organizations make structural changes to aid the underdeveloped countries, conflicts over scarce resources will increase, as will sectarian and tribal violence and acts of terrorism. Although the United States is considered one of the wealthiest nations, see Table 1.1 for a summary of social problems experienced by children.

**An increasingly dangerous world.** September 11, 2001, unleashed a chain of negative events. Those terrorist acts on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon caused death and destruction and redirected government policies. The United States responded with a war on Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and a preemptive war on Iraq, presumably to squelch terrorism and spread democracy throughout the Middle East. To fight the war on terror, the United States suspended the civil rights of prisoners, including their protection from the use of techniques that many would define as torture, and spied on American citizens. Suicide bombers (the “guided missiles” of the militarily weak) have destabilized the Middle East and threaten terror worldwide. There is the growing threat of nuclear proliferation, most notably from North Korea and Iran. As the world’s population soars, with its consequent poverty, hunger, water shortages, disease, and political chaos, the United States will be increasingly unsafe. Will we face these incredible problems and find solutions? That is the ultimate question.

These issues highlight the social problems addressed in this book. Although the focus is on the problematic side of social life, our hope is that readers will find this exploration intriguing, insightful, and useful.

occur among the poorest nations. Today, an estimated 1.1 billion people are undernourished. Most do not have clean water and adequate sanitation. Half of the world’s people live on less than \$2 a day, one-sixth on less than \$1 a day. Diseases such as malaria, chronic diarrhea, Ebola, dengue, and parasites ravage hundreds of millions across the globe. At the other extreme, the richest nations live lavish lifestyles, consuming and wasting most of the world’s resources. Multinational corporations

**Table 1.1** How America Ranks Among Industrialized Countries in Investing in and Protecting Children**Are America's Children Ready to Compete in the Global Arena?**1<sup>st</sup> in gross domestic product1<sup>st</sup> in number of billionaires

Second to worst in child poverty rates (just ahead of Romania)

Largest gap between the rich and the poor

1<sup>st</sup> in military spending1<sup>st</sup> in military weapons exports1<sup>st</sup> in number of people incarcerated

Worst in protecting children against gun violence

30<sup>th</sup> in preschool enrollment rates24<sup>th</sup> in reading scores for 15-year-olds28<sup>th</sup> in science scores for 15-year-olds36<sup>th</sup> in math scores for 15-year-olds1<sup>st</sup> in health expenditures25<sup>th</sup> in low birthweight rates26<sup>th</sup> in immunization rates31<sup>st</sup> in infant mortality rates

Second to worst in teenage births (just ahead of Bulgaria)

The U.S. is the only country in the world besides Somalia—which lacks a legally constituted government—that has failed to ratify the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child.

If we compare Black child well-being in America to child well-being in other nations, according to UNICEF:

- 72 nations have lower infant mortality rates including Sri Lanka, Cuba, and Romania.
- 132 nations have a lower incidence of low birthweight including the Congo, Cambodia, and Guatemala.

**SOURCE:** Courtesy of The Children's Defense Fund.

## Defining Social Problems

### 1.2 Explain the complex nature of defining a social problem.

Typically, social problems have been thought of as social situations that a large number of observers felt were inappropriate and needed remedying. Early U.S. sociologists applied a medical model to the analysis of society to assess whether some pathology was present. Using what were presumed to be universal criteria of normality, sociologists commonly assumed social problems resulted from “bad” people—maladjusted people who were abnormal because of mental deficiency, mental disorder, lack of education, or incomplete socialization. These social pathologists, because they assumed the basic norms of society are universally held, viewed social problems as behaviors or social arrangements that disturb the moral order. For them, the moral order of U.S. society defined such behaviors as alcoholism, suicide, theft, and murder as social problems.

Sociologists in the 1920s and 1930s began to focus more broadly on the conditions of society that fostered problems. Societies undergoing rapid change from the processes of migration, urbanization, and industrialization were thought to have pockets of social disorganization. Certain areas of the cities undergoing the most rapid change, for example, were found to have disproportionately high rates of crime, family breakdowns, and mental disorders.



In the past few decades, many sociologists have returned to a study of problem individuals—deviants who violate the expectations of society. The modern study of deviance developed in two directions. The first sought the sources of deviation within the social structure. Sociologists saw deviance as the result of conflict between the culturally prescribed goals of society (such as material success) and the obstacles to obtaining them that some groups of people face. The other, of relatively recent origin, has focused on the role of society in creating and sustaining deviance through labeling those people viewed as abnormal. Societal reactions are viewed as the key in determining what a social problem is and who is deviant.

## The Objective and Subjective Nature of Social Problems

### Objective reality of social problems

The notion that societal conditions harm certain segments of the population and therefore are social problems.

There is an **objective reality of social problems**. In other words, conditions in society (such as poverty and institutional racism) induce material or psychic suffering for certain segments of the population; sociocultural phenomena prevent a significant number of societal participants from developing and using their full potential; discrepancies exist between what a country such as the United States is supposed to stand for (equality of opportunity, justice, democracy) and the actual conditions in which many of its people live; and people are fouling their own nests through pollution and the indiscriminate use of natural resources. This objective approach assumes that some kinds of actions are likely to be judged a problem in any context. Therefore, one goal of this book is to identify, describe, and explain situations that are objective social problems.

There are several dangers, however, in defining social problems objectively. The most obvious is that subjectivity is always present. To identify a phenomenon as a problem implies that it falls short of some standard. But what standards are to be used? Will the standards of society suffice? In a pluralistic society such as the United States, there is no uniform set of guidelines. People from different social strata and other social locations (such as region, occupation, race, and age) differ in their perceptions of what a social problem is and, once defined, how it should be solved. Is marijuana use a social problem? Is pornography? Is the relatively high rate of military spending a social problem? Is abortion a social problem? There is little consensus in U.S. society on these and other issues. All social observers, then, must be aware of the **subjective nature of social problems**.

### Subjective nature of social problems

The idea that what is and what is not a social problem is a matter of definition. Thus, social problems vary by time and place.

In defining social problems, we must also guard against the tendency to accept the definitions of social problems provided by those in power. Because the powerful—the agencies of government, business, and the media—provide the statistical data (such as crime rates), they may define social reality in a way that manipulates public opinion, thereby controlling behaviors that threaten the status quo (and their power). The congruence of official biases and public opinion can be seen in historical examples. Slavery, for instance, was not considered a social problem by the powerful in the South, but slave revolts were. In colonial New England, the persecution of witches was not a social problem, but the witches were. From the standpoint of U.S. government, dispossessing Native Americans of their lands was not a social problem, but the Native Americans who resisted were.

Thus, to consider as social problems only those occurrences so defined by the public is fraught with related dangers. First, to do so may mean overlooking conditions that are detrimental to a relatively powerless segment of the society. In other

words, deplorable conditions heaped on minority groups tend to be ignored as social problems by the people at large. If sociologists accept this definition of social problems as their sole criterion, they have clearly taken a position that supports existing inequities for minority groups.

Second, defining social problems exclusively through public opinion diverts attention from what may constitute the most important social problem: the existing social order. If defined only through public opinion, social problems are limited to behaviors and actions that disrupt the existing social order. From this perspective, social problems are manifestations of the behaviors of abnormal people, not of society; the inadequacies and inequalities perpetuated by the existing system are not questioned. The distribution of power, the system of justice, how children are educated—to name but a few aspects of the existing social order—are assumed to be proper by most of the public, when they may be social problems themselves.

By overlooking institutions as a source of social problems (and as problems themselves), observers disregard the role of the powerful in society. To focus exclusively on those who deviate—the prostitute, the delinquent, the drug addict, the criminal—excludes the unethical, illegal, and destructive actions of powerful individuals, groups, and institutions in U.S. society and ignores the covert institutional violence brought about by racist and sexist policies, unjust tax laws, inequitable systems of health care and justice, and exploitation by the corporate world.

## Types of Social Problems

The previous description reveals issues that must be addressed while examining social problems. First, sociologists have difficulty agreeing on an adequate definition of social problems. Second, debate continues over the unit of analysis: Are individuals or social systems the focus of inquiry? In this book, we examine two main types of **social problems**: (1) acts and conditions that violate the norms and values present in society and (2) societally induced conditions that cause psychic and material suffering for any segment of the population.

**NORM VIOLATIONS** Sociologists are interested in the discrepancy between social standards and reality for several reasons. First, this traditional approach directs attention to society's failures: the criminals, the mentally ill, the school dropouts, and the poor. Sociologists have many insights that explain the processes by which individuals experience differing pressures to engage in certain forms of **deviant behavior** (actions that violate the norms of a social organization) because of their location in the social structure (social class, occupation, age, race, and role) and in space (region, size of community, and type of neighborhood). A guiding assumption of our inquiry here, however, is that norm violators are symptoms of social problems, not the disease itself. In other words, most deviants are victims and should not be blamed entirely by society for their deviance; rather, the system they live in should be blamed. A description of the situations affecting deviants (such as the barriers to success faced by minority group members) helps explain why some categories of persons participate disproportionately in deviant behavior.

Another reason for the traditional focus on norm violation is that deviance is culturally defined and socially labeled. The sociologist is vitally interested in the social and cultural processes that label some acts and persons as deviant and others

**Social problems**  
Societally induced conditions that harm any segment of the population and acts and conditions that violate the norms and values found in society.

**Deviant behavior**  
Activity that violates the norms of a social organization.

as normal. Because by definition some social problems are whatever the public determines, social problems are inherently relative. Certain behaviors are labeled as social problems, whereas other activities (which by some other criteria would be a social problem) are not. People on welfare, for example, are generally considered to constitute a social problem, but slumlords are not; murder is a social problem, but killing the enemy during wartime is rewarded with medals; a prostitute is punished, but the client is not. The important insight here is that there is nothing inherently deviant in any behavior—it is the label given to that behavior by society that makes it deviant. The members of society, especially the most powerful members, determine what is a social problem and what is not.

**SOCIAL CONDITIONS** The second type of social problem emphasized in this text involves conditions that cause psychic and material suffering for some category of people in the United States. Here, the focus is on how the society operates and who benefits and who does not under existing arrangements. In other words, what is the bias of the system? How are societal rewards distributed? Do some categories of persons suffer or profit because of how schools are organized or juries selected because of the seniority system used by industries or because of how health care is delivered? These questions direct attention away from individuals who violate norms and toward society's institutions as the generators of social problems.

Social problems of this type generate individual psychic and material suffering. Thus, societal arrangements can be organized in a way that is unresponsive to many human needs. (See "Social Problems in Global Perspective: Social Welfare States," which compares the United States with other nations.)

## Social Problems in Global Perspective

### Social Welfare States: A Mixture of Capitalism and Socialism

The nations of Western Europe, Scandinavia, and Canada have generous welfare policies for their citizens, certainly much more generous than those available in the United States (the description here is general, characterizing all the nations to a degree, although there are variations among them). These nations are capitalistic, permitting private property and privately owned businesses, but to a much greater degree than in the United States, these nations have publicly owned enterprises and some nationalization of industry, typically transportation, mineral resources, and utilities.

Most important, these nations provide an array of social services to meet the needs of their citizens that is much greater than in the United States. These

services include a greater subsidy to the arts (symphony orchestras, art exhibitions, artists, auditoriums), more public spaces (parks, public squares, recreation facilities), more resources for public libraries, universal preschool education, free public education through college, universal health insurance, housing subsidies to help low-income families, paid leave for new parents (mother and father), the provision of safe government childcare facilities, extended unemployment benefits, paid vacations, and excellent retirement benefits, including paid long-term care if necessary.

These services are expensive, resulting in relatively high taxes, almost double the rate in the United States, but if you add to taxes the costs of private health

insurance, medical care, and the cost of private social services such as daycare, the total is more or less equal (Feagin, Feagin, and Baker 2006:483).

As a result of this extensive and universality of social services, the people in the social welfare states have several advantages over those living in the United States: longer life expectancy, lower infant and maternal mortality, greater literacy, less poverty and homelessness, lower rates of violent crime, a lower proportion of single-parent households, and a proportionately larger middle class.

Are the people in these countries less free than Americans? There is freedom of speech and freedom of the press in each of the nations. The governments in these countries, for the most part, permit greater individual freedom than in the United States for personal behaviors (greater acceptance of homosexuality, legalization of prostitution, few restrictions on abortion, and so on).

Is there a downside? These countries are not immune to economic problems such as recessions, high unemployment, and citizen unrest over high taxes. In the past few years, the governments in these countries have reduced some of their social programs, but they are still much more generous than the United States (which has also curbed its more meager welfare programs). Typically, government leaders in each of these countries have argued that more austere programs are needed to stimulate the economy and permit the government to pay its bills. These measures have met with citizen protest, particularly from the labor unions, which are much stronger than in the United States. It will be interesting to see how reduction in the welfare state plays out. If the austerity measures hold, will the countries follow the U.S. example and become more unequal, experience increased social unrest, see a rise in social problems? Or, as conservatives argue, will more capitalism and less socialism make these nations more efficient and more prosperous?

When health care is maldistributed, when poverty persists for millions, when tax laws permit a business to write off 50 percent of a \$100 luncheon but prohibit a truck driver from writing off a sandwich eaten at a truck stop, when government is run by the few for the benefit of the few, when businesses supposedly in competition fix prices to gouge the consumer, when the criminal justice system is biased against the poor and people of color, then society and its formal organizations are not meeting the needs of individuals. But these conditions often escape criticism and are rarely identified as social problems. Instead, the focus has often been on individuals who vent their frustration in socially unacceptable ways. A major intent of this book is to view individual deviance as a consequence of existing societal arrangements.

## The Sociological Perspective

### 1.3 Explain and apply the sociological imagination to different social problems.

There is a very strong tendency for individuals—laypeople, police officers, judges, lawmakers, and social scientists alike—to perceive social problems and prescribe remedies from an individualistic perspective. For example, they blame the individual for being poor, with no reference to the maldistribution of wealth, low-wage work, and other socially perpetuated disadvantages that blight many families generation after generation; they blame dropouts for leaving school prematurely, with no understanding that the educational system fails to meet their needs. This type of thinking helps explain the reluctance of people in authority to provide adequate welfare, health care, and compensatory programs to help the disadvantaged.

**Person-blame**

The assumption that social problems result from the pathologies of individuals.

**System-blame**

The assumption that social problems result from social conditions.

**Sociological imagination**

The ability to see the societal patterns that influence individuals, families, groups, and organizations.

**Recidivism**

Reinvolvement in crime.

The fundamental issue is whether social problems emanate from the pathologies of individuals (**person-blame**) or from the broader institutions in which deviants are involved (**system-blame**).

In this book, we approach social problems from a sociological perspective, with an emphasis on the system-blame approach. Sociology is the study of society and other social organizations, how they affect human behavior, and how these organizations are changed by human endeavors. C. Wright Mills (1916–1962), in his classic *The Sociological Imagination* (1959), wrote that the task of sociology is to realize that individual circumstances are inextricably linked to the structure of society. The **sociological imagination** involves several related components (Eitzen and Smith 2003:8):

- The sociological imagination is stimulated by a willingness to view the social world from the perspective of others.
- It involves moving away from thinking in terms of the individual and her or his problem and focusing rather on the social, economic, and historical circumstances that produce the problem. Put another way, the sociological imagination is the ability to see the societal patterns that influence individuals, families, groups, and organizations.
- Possessing a sociological imagination, one can shift from the examination of a single family to national budgets, from a poor person to national welfare policies, from an unemployed person to the societal shift from manufacturing to a service/knowledge economy, from a single mother with a sick child to the high cost of health care for the uninsured, and from a homeless family to the lack of affordable housing.
- To develop a sociological imagination requires a detachment from the taken-for-granted assumptions about social life and establishing a critical distance (Andersen and Taylor 2000:10–11). In other words, one must be willing to question the structural arrangements that shape social behavior (i.e., system-blame).

When we have this imagination, we begin to see solutions to social problems not in terms of changing problem people—but in changing the structure of society.

Let's consider the social problem of criminal behavior. Why is the **recidivism** rate (reinvolvement in crime) of ex-convicts so high? The person-blamer points to the faults of individual criminals: their greed, their feelings of aggression, their weak control of impulse, their lack of conscience. Using a sociological imagination, the system-blamer directs attention to very different sources: the penal system, the scarcity of employment for ex-criminals, and even the schools. For example, 20 to 30 percent of inmates are functionally illiterate; they cannot meet minimum reading and writing demands in U.S. society, such as filling out job applications. Yet they are expected to leave prison, find a job, and stay out of trouble. Illiterate ex-criminals face unemployment or at best the most menial jobs, with low wages, no job security, and no benefits. System-blamers argue that first the schools and later the penal institutions have failed to provide these people with the minimum requirements for full participation in society. Moreover, lack of employment and the unwillingness of potential employers to train functional illiterates force many to return to crime to survive.

The inner-city poor are another social problem. The conditions of the urban poor, especially African Americans, have deteriorated since the mid-1960s. Some observers believe this deterioration is the result of welfare programs (Murray 1984) and laziness. William J. Wilson makes a more compelling system-blame argument, however (1987). He claims that the urban ghetto poor endure because of the disappearance of hundreds of thousands of low-skill jobs, those mainly involving physical labor, in the past forty years or so. Wilson's contention, supported by research, is that the pathologies of the urban poor (such as teenage pregnancy, illegitimacy, welfare dependency, and crime) are fundamentally the consequence of too few jobs.

Interpreting social problems solely within a person-blame framework has serious consequences. First, because societal causes are not addressed, social problems remain in place (Davis-Delano 2009). Second, it frees the government, the economy, the system of stratification, the system of justice, and the educational system from any blame. Instead of focusing on the poor, what are those elements of society that keep poor people poor, such as segregated schools, unfair wages, not enough jobs, and the high cost of housing and health care?

A related consequence is how the problem is treated. A person-blame approach demands a person-change treatment program. If the cause of delinquency, for example, is defined as the result of personal pathology, then the solution must clearly lie in counseling, behavior modification, psychotherapy, drugs, or some other technique aimed at changing the individual deviant. The person-blame interpretation of social problems provides and legitimates the right to initiate person-change rather than system-change treatment programs. Under such a scheme, norms that are racist, sexist, or homophobic, for example, go unchallenged.

A final consequence of a person-blame interpretation is that it reinforces social myths about the degree of control individuals have over their fate. It provides justification for a form of **Social Darwinism**: that the placement of people in the stratification system is a function of their ability and effort. By this logic, the poor are poor because of their behavior. In short, they deserve their fate, as do the successful in society. Thus, in this viewpoint, little sympathy exists for government programs to increase welfare to the poor. (See "A Closer Look: William Graham Sumner and Social Darwinism" for an example of this ideology.)

## The System-Blame Approach to Social Problems

We emphasize the system-blame approach in this book. We should recognize, however, that the system-blame orientation has dangers. Social problems are highly complex phenomena that have both individual and systemic origins. Individuals, obviously, can be malicious and aggressive for purely psychological reasons. Clearly, society needs to be protected from some individuals, and they should be held accountable for their actions. Moreover, some people require particular forms of therapy, remedial help, or special programs on an individual basis if they are to function normally.

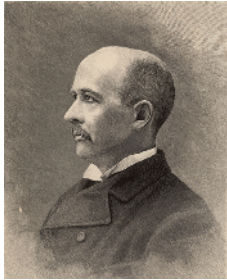


Why do some criminals commit crimes after they are released from prison? Is it entirely their fault, or are there social forces that limit their choices and lead them to continued criminal behavior?

### Social Darwinism

The belief that the place of people in the stratification system is a function of their ability and effort.

## A CLOSER LOOK

**William Graham Sumner and Social Darwinism**

William Graham Sumner

William Graham Sumner (1840–1910), the sociologist who originated the concepts of folkways and mores, was a proponent of Social Darwinism.

This doctrine, widely accepted among elites during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was a distorted version of Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection. From this viewpoint, success is the result of being superior. The rich are rich because they deserve to be. By this logic, the poor also deserve their fate because they are biological and social failures and therefore unable to succeed in the competitive struggle.

Social Darwinism justified not only ruthless competition but also the perpetuation of the status quo. Superior classes, it was believed, should dominate because their members were unusually intelligent and moral. The lower classes, on the other hand, were considered inferior and defective. Their pathology was manifested in suicide, madness, crime, and various forms of vice.

On the basis of this philosophy, Sumner opposed social reforms such as welfare to the poor because they rewarded the unfit and penalized the competent. Such reforms, he argued, would interfere with the normal workings of society, halting progress and perhaps even contributing to a regression to an earlier evolutionary stage.

Despite these issues, the system-blame approach is the guiding perspective of this book for three reasons. First, because average citizens, police officers, legislators, social scientists, and judges tend to interpret social problems from an individualistic perspective, a balance is needed. Moreover, as noted earlier, a strict person-blame perspective has many negative consequences, and citizens must recognize these negative effects of their ideology.

A second reason for using the system-blaming perspective is that the subject matter of sociology is not the individual—who is the special province of psychology—but society. Because sociologists focus on the social determinants of behavior, they must make a critical analysis of the social structure. Thus, the sociologist looks behind the facades to determine the positive and negative consequences of social arrangements. The sociologist's persistent questions must be: Who benefits under the existing arrangements? Who does not? For this reason, there should be a close fit between the sociological approach and the system-blaming perspective.

A final reason for the use of the system-blame approach is that the institutional framework of society is indeed the source of many social problems (such as racism, poverty, and war). An exclusive focus on the individual ignores the strains caused by the inequities of the system and its resistance to change. A guiding assumption of this book is that because institutions are human-made (and therefore are not sacred), they should be changed whenever they do not meet the needs of the people they were created to serve.

# Studying Social Problems: The Craft of Sociology

## 1.4 Understand the four basic research designs and research methods that sociologists use to study social problems.

The analysis of social problems depends on reliable scientific data and logical reasoning. Before we describe how sociologists gather reliable data and make valid conclusions, let us examine the kinds of questions sociologists ask and the two major obstacles sociologists face in obtaining answers to these questions.

### Sociological Questions

To begin, sociologists ask factual questions (the following is taken in part from Eitzen, Baca Zinn, and Smith, 2016). For example, let's assume we want to know whether the United States' public education system provides equal educational opportunities for all youth. To determine this, we need to conduct an empirical investigation to find the facts concerning such items as the amount spent per pupil by school districts within each state. Within school districts, we need to know the facts concerning the distribution of monies by neighborhood schools. Are these monies appropriated equally, regardless of the social class or racial composition of the school? Are curriculum offerings the same for girls and boys within a school? Are extra fees charged for participation in extracurricular activities, and does this affect the participation of children by social class?

Sociologists also may ask comparative questions—that is, how does the situation in one social context compare with that in another? Most commonly, these questions involve the comparison of one society with another. Examples here might be the comparisons among industrialized nations on infant mortality, poverty, murder, drug use, or the mathematics scores of 16-year-olds. Or, using the previous example, how do states compare to each other on per-pupil spending? How does the United States compare to Sweden on educational equality? These are all examples of comparative questions.

A third type of question a sociologist may ask is historical. Sociologists are interested in trends. What are the facts now concerning divorce, immigration, crime, and political participation, for example, and how have these patterns changed over time? Figure 1.1 provides an example of a trend over time by examining the earnings of men and women in the United States from 1959 to 2012. What accounts for the plateau of men's earnings from 1972 on and the gradual increase in the earnings of women during those years? While the gap between men and women has narrowed, why is the female-to-male ratio still so low? What kept this ratio stable at around 60 percent from 1959 to 1982?

The three types of sociological questions considered so far determine the way things are. But these types of questions are not enough. Sociologists go beyond the factual to ask *why*. Why have real wages (controlling for inflation) declined since 1973 in the United States? Why are the poor, poor? Why do birth rates decline with industrialization? Why do some people commit crimes and not others? These types of "why" questions lead to the development of theories. A **sociological theory** is a set of ideas that explains a range of human behavior and a variety of social and societal

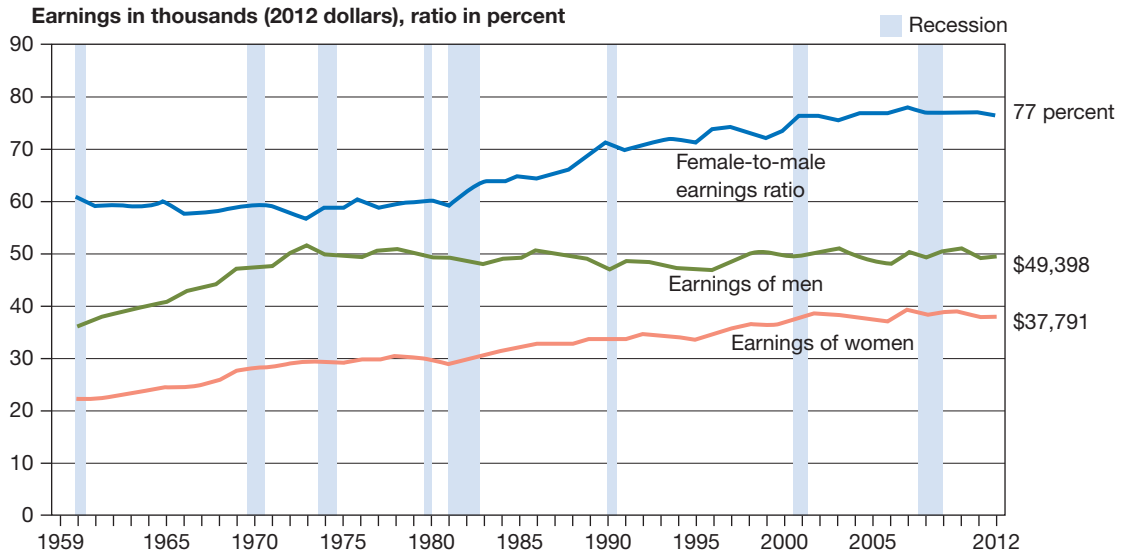
### Sociological theory

A set of ideas that explains a range of human behavior and a variety of social and societal events.



**Figure 1.1** Female-to-Male Ratio and Median Earnings of Full-Time, Year-Round Workers 15 Years and Older by Sex: 1960–2012

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey



**NOTE:** Data on earnings of full-time, year-round workers are not readily available before 1960. Implementation of 2010 Census population controls began in 2010.

events. A researcher's theoretical approach guides the research process from the types of questions asked to the development of a hypothesis to the analysis of the results. Thus, theory not only helps us to explain social phenomena—it also guides research.

## Sources of Data

Sociologists do not use aphorisms to explain behavior, nor do they speculate based on faulty samples or authorities. Because we are part of the world that is to be explained, sociologists must obtain evidence that is beyond reproach. In addition to observing the canons of science scrupulously, four basic sources of data yield valid results for sociologists: survey research, experiments, observation, and existing data. We describe these techniques briefly here.

**SURVEY RESEARCH** Sociologists are interested in obtaining information about people with certain social attributes. They may want to know how political beliefs and behaviors are influenced by differences in sex, race, ethnicity, religion, and social class. They may want to determine whether poor people have different values from other people in society, the answer to which will have a tremendous impact on the ultimate solution to poverty. Or they may want to know whether voting patterns, work behaviors, or marital relationships vary by income level, educational attainment, or religious affiliation.

To answer these and similar questions, the sociologist may use personal interviews, written questionnaires, or online surveys to gather the data. The researcher may obtain information from all possible subjects or from a selected **sample** (a representative part of a population). Because the former method is often impractical, a random sample of subjects is selected from the larger population. If the sample is selected scientifically (i.e., each individual in the population under study has an equal chance of being included in the sample), a relatively small proportion can yield satisfactory results—that is, the inferences made from the sample will be reliable about the entire population. For example, a probability sample of only 2,000 from a total population of 1 million can provide data very close to what would be discovered if a survey were taken of the entire 1 million.

A special type of survey research, the **longitudinal survey**, holds special promise for understanding human behavior. This type of research collects information about the same persons over many years. For example, the Panel Study of Income Dynamics at the University of Michigan is the longest running longitudinal household survey in the world. It began in 1968 and has followed more than 18,000 individuals and their descendants, collecting data on health, marriage, child development, income, employment, and other topics (University of Michigan, 2015).

**EXPERIMENTS** A **variable** is something that can be changed, such as a characteristic, value, or belief. To understand the cause-and-effect relationship among a few variables, sociologists use controlled experiments. Let us assume, for example, that we want to test whether students' attitudes toward aging are affected by what they see in film. Using the experimental method, the researcher will take a number of students and randomly assign some to watch a film that portrays aging in a negative light, accompanied by a neutral lecture on aging statistics. The other group, the **control group**, will not watch the film but will hear the same lecture on aging. (The control group is a group of subjects not exposed to the independent variable—in this case, the film.) Before viewing the film, all the students will be given a test of their attitudes toward aging. This pretest establishes a benchmark from which to measure any changes in attitudes. The other group is called the **experimental group** because they are exposed to the independent variable—the film. The researcher might hypothesize that those students in the experimental group will have more negative attitudes toward aging than the control group that only heard the neutral lecture. Following the film and lecture, the students in both groups will be tested again on their attitudes toward aging. If this posttest reveals that the experimental group differs from the control group in attitudes toward aging (the **dependent variable**), then it is assumed that the film (the **independent variable**) is the source of the change. In other words, the independent variable is the presumed cause, and the dependent variable is the presumed effect of the independent variable.

**OBSERVATION** Famed baseball great Yogi Berra once said in his unique way: "You can observe a lot by just watching." There are two methods of observation in sociological research: participant and nonparticipant. Using **participant observation**, the researcher actually joins the group being studied in order to fully understand their behavior. For example, in order to study a particular religious group, the researcher might become a member, attending ceremonies and studying their beliefs. The

### Sample

A representative part of a population.

### Longitudinal survey

The collection of information about the same persons over many years.

### Variable

Something that can be changed such as a characteristic, value, or belief.

### Control group

A group of subjects that is not exposed to the independent variable in an experiment.

### Experimental group

A group of subjects that is exposed to the independent variable in an experiment.

### Dependent variable

The variable being measured in an experiment. It may or may not be affected by the independent variable.

### Independent variable

A variable that may or may not affect the dependent variable.

### Participant observation

The researcher joins the group being studied in order to understand their behavior.

researcher, without intervention, can observe as accurately as possible what occurs in a community, group, or social event. This type of procedure is especially helpful in understanding such social phenomena as the decision-making process, the stages of a riot, the attraction of cults for their members, or different employment experiences. For example, in 2001, Barbara Ehrenreich published her book *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America*. In her book, she details her experiences working as a waitress, hotel maid, Walmart employee, house cleaner, and nursing home aide. Her experiences show the difficulties of paying for housing and transportation on low wages.

### Nonparticipant observation

The researcher does not join the group or participate directly in any activities being observed.

Using **nonparticipant observation**, the researcher does not become a part of the group they are studying, nor participate directly in any activities being observed. The goal of nonparticipant observation is to observe events and social interactions in their natural environment. Nonparticipant observation is often used with other research methods like surveys, interviews, and existing data,

**EXISTING DATA** The sociologist can also use existing data to test theories. The most common sources of information are the various agencies of the government. Data are provided for the nation, regions, states, communities, and census tracts on births, deaths, income, education, unemployment, business activity, health delivery systems, prison populations, military spending, poverty, and so on. Important information can also be obtained from such sources as corporations, athletic teams and leagues, unions, and professional associations. Statistical techniques can be used with these data to describe populations and the effects of social variables on various dependent variables.

## Objectivity

A fundamental problem with the sociological perspective is that bane of the social sciences—objectivity. We are all guilty of harboring stereotyped conceptions of different social groups. Moreover, we interpret events, material objects, and people's behavior through the perceptual filter of our own religious and political beliefs. When fundamentalists oppose the use of certain books in school, when abortion is approved by a legislature, when the president advocates cutting billions from the federal budget by eliminating social services, or when the Supreme Court denies private schools the right to exclude certain racial groups, most of us rather easily take a position in the ensuing debate.

Sociologists are thus caught in a dilemma. On the one hand, they are members of society with beliefs, feelings, and biases. On the other hand, though, their professional task is to study society in a disciplined and scientific way. This latter requirement is that scientist–scholars be dispassionate, objective observers. In short, if they take sides, they lose their status as scientists.

### Value neutrality

To be absolutely free of bias in research.

This ideal of **value neutrality** (to be absolutely free of bias in research) is problematic. First of all, should scientists be morally indifferent to the implications of their research? In sociology, often the types of problems researched and the strategies used tend either to support the existing societal arrangements or to undermine them. Should sociologists remain neutral about these implications?

Second, is a purely neutral position possible? Most likely, it is not. This argument is based on several related assumptions. One is that the values of the scholar–researcher

enter into the choices of what will be studied and what questions will be asked. For example, in the study of poverty, a critical decision involves the object of the study—should one study the poor themselves or the system that tends to perpetuate poverty among a certain segment of society? The answer might very well depend on the researcher's values. Or, in choosing to study female prostitution, whether one believes that female prostitutes are sexually empowered or that they are exploited may change the types of questions asked or the interpretation of what is observed.

Furthermore, our values lead us to decide from which vantage point we will gain access to information about a particular social organization. If researchers want to understand how a prison operates, they must determine whether they want a description from the inmates, from the guards, from the prison administrators, or from the state board of corrections. Each view provides useful insights about a prison, but obviously a biased one.

In summary, bias is inevitable in the study and analysis of social problems. The choice of a research problem, the perspective from which one analyzes the problems, and the solutions proposed all reflect a bias that either supports the existing social arrangements or does not. Moreover, unlike biologists, who can dispassionately observe the behavior of sperm and the egg at conception, sociologists are participants in the social life they seek to study and understand. As they study homelessness, poor children, or urban blight, sociologists cannot escape from their own feelings and values. They must, however, not let their feelings and values render their analysis invalid. In other words, research and reports of research must reflect reality, not as the researcher might want it to be. Sociologists must display scientific integrity, which requires recognizing biases in such a way that these biases do not invalidate the findings. When research is properly done in this spirit, an atheist can study a religious sect, a pacifist can study the military–industrial complex, a divorced person can study marriage, and a person who abhors the beliefs of the Ku Klux Klan can study that organization and its members.

As you read this book, keep in mind the organizing theme is that many aspects of social problems are conditions resulting from cultural and social arrangements, in particular social problems resulting from wealth and power and the bias of our current system (as we discuss next in Chapter 2). The focus is on power because the powerful, by making and enforcing the laws, create, define, and punish deviance. The powerful influence public opinion, and they can attempt to solve social problems—or ignore them.

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## Chapter Review

### 1.1 Understand the major social trends facing Americans and their potential consequences.

- The United States is currently facing a number of trends that will have a great impact on social life: population increase; increasing numbers of racial and ethnic minorities; an aging

population; widening inequality between the wealthy, the middle class, and the poor; the increasing influence of power and money in politics; globalization and the transformation of the economy; increasing global inequality and the threat of terrorism and war; and threats to the environment.

## 1.2 Explain the complex nature of defining a social problem.

- Historically, U.S. sociologists have viewed social problems in terms of social pathology: “Bad” people were assumed to be the sources of social problems because they disturbed the prevailing moral order in society.
- In the 1920s and 1930s, sociologists focused on the conditions of society, such as the rapid changes accompanying urbanization and industrialization, as the sources of social problems.
- More recently, many sociologists have returned to a study of problem individuals—deviants who violate the expectations of society. The modern study of deviance has developed in two directions. The first sought the sources of deviation within the social structure. The other has focused on the role of society in creating and sustaining deviance through labeling those viewed as abnormal. In this view, societal reactions are assumed to determine what a social problem is and who is deviant.
- There is an objective reality to social problems; some conditions or situations induce material and psychic suffering. There are several dangers, however, in defining social problems objectively. Subjectivity cannot be removed from the process. A standard must be selected, but in a pluralistic society, there are many standards.
- This book examines two types of social problems: (a) acts and conditions that violate the norms and values of society and (b) societally induced conditions that cause psychic and material suffering for any segment of the population. The key to understanding both types of social problems is the distribution of power.

## 1.3 Explain and apply the sociological imagination to different social problems.

- The sociological imagination involves (a) a willingness to view the social world from the

perspective of others; (b) focusing on the social, economic, and historical circumstances that influence families, groups, and organizations; (c) questioning the structural arrangements that shape social behavior; and (d) seeing solutions to social problems not in terms of changing problem people—but of changing the structure of society.

- The focus is on the structure of society rather than on “problem” individuals. A guiding assumption of our inquiry is that norm violators are symptoms of social problems. These deviants should not be blamed entirely for their deviance; the system in which they live should also be blamed.
- The person-blame approach, which we do not use, has serious consequences: The social sources of social problems are ignored, and it justifies the logic of Social Darwinism, which holds that people are rich or poor because of their ability and effort or lack thereof.
- In this book, we emphasize the system-blame approach because the subject matter of sociology is not the individual, but rather the social determinants of behavior.

## 1.4 Understand the four basic research designs and research methods that sociologists use to study social problems.

- Sociology depends on reliable data and logical reason. Sociologists ask factual, comparative, and historical research questions.
- Sociologists use a variety of methods: surveys, experiments, observation, and the use of existing data sources.
- Although value neutrality is impossible in the social sciences, bias is minimized by the norms of science.

## Key Terms

**Control group** A group of subjects that is not exposed to the independent variable in an experiment.

**Dependent variable** The variable being measured in an experiment. It may or may not be affected by the independent variable.

**Deviant behavior** Activity that violates the norms of a social organization.

**Experimental group** A group of subjects that is exposed to the independent variable in an experiment.

**Independent variable** A variable that may or may not affect the dependent variable.

**Longitudinal survey** The collection of information about the same persons over many years.

**Nonparticipant observation** The researcher does not join the group or participate directly in any activities being observed.

**Objective reality of social problems** The notion that societal conditions harm certain segments of the population and therefore are social problems.

**Participant observation** The researcher joins the group being studied in order to understand their behavior.

**Person-blame** The assumption that social problems result from the pathologies of individuals.

**Recidivism** Reinvolvement in crime.

**Sample** A representative part of a population.

**Social Darwinism** The belief that the place of people in the stratification system is a function of their ability and effort.

**Social problems** Societally induced conditions that harm any segment of the population and acts and conditions that violate the norms and values found in society.

**Sociological imagination** The ability to see the societal patterns that influence individuals, families, groups, and organizations.

**Sociological theory** A set of ideas that explains a range of human behavior and a variety of social and societal events.

**Subjective nature of social problems** The idea that what is and what is not a social problem is a matter of definition. Thus, social problems vary by time and place.

**System-blame** The assumption that social problems result from social conditions.

**Value neutrality** To be absolutely free of bias in research.

**Variable** Something that can be changed such as a characteristic, value, or belief.

## Chapter 2

# Wealth and Power: The Bias of the System



## Learning Objectives

- 2.1** Explain the mechanisms that promote monopolistic capitalism and the consequences of each on a capitalist society.
- 2.2** Understand the links among wealth, power, and the U.S. political system.
- 2.3** Summarize the consequences of concentrated power in the United States.

The study of social problems requires the critical examination of the structure of society. Some readers will find this approach uncomfortable, even unpatriotic. In this regard, introducing his critical analysis of the United States, political scientist Michael Parenti has said, and we agree,

If the picture that emerges in the pages ahead is not pretty, this should not be taken as an attack on the United States, for this country and the American people are greater than the abuses perpetrated upon them by those who live for power and profit. To expose these abuses is not to denigrate the nation that is a victim of them. The greatness of a country is to be measured by something more than its rulers, its military budget, its instruments of dominance and destruction, and its profiteering giant corporations. A nation's greatness can be measured by its ability to create a society free of poverty, racism, sexism, imperialism, and social and environmental devastation, and by the democratic nature of its institutions. Albert Camus once said, "I would like to love my country and justice too." In fact, there is no better way to love one's country, no better way to strive for the fulfillment of its greatness, than to entertain critical ideas and engage in the pursuit of social justice at home and abroad. (1995: 6)

The thesis of this book is that many of the problems of U.S. society result from the maldistribution of wealth and power. In essence, the state is not a neutral agent of the people but is biased in favor of those with wealth—the upper social classes and the largest corporations. Our analysis shows that, contrary to popular belief, the U.S. system does not produce a society that is democratic, just, and equal in opportunity. Rather, we find that the United States is an upside-down society, with the few benefiting at the expense of the many.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first describes the U.S. economy, with its concentration of corporate and private wealth. The second examines the political system and its links to the economic elites. The final section explores the consequences of such concentrated power.

## U.S. Economy: Concentration of Corporate Wealth

### 2.1 Explain the mechanisms that promote monopolistic capitalism and the consequences of each on a capitalist society.

Three conditions must be present for pure **capitalism** to exist: private ownership of the means of production, personal profit, and competition. The U.S. economy has always been based on these principles of capitalism; however, the present economy is far removed from a free enterprise system. The major discrepancy between the ideal system and the real one is that the U.S. economy is no longer based on competition among more-or-less equal private capitalists. Instead, the U.S. economy is dominated by huge corporations that, contrary to classical economic theory, control demand rather than respond to the demands of the market. However well the economic system might once have worked, the increasing size and power of corporations disrupt it. This development calls into question what the appropriate economic form is for a postindustrial society.

#### Capitalism

An economic system characterized by private ownership of the means of production, personal profit, and competition.



## Monopolistic Capitalism

Karl Marx, more than 130 years ago, when bigness was the exception, predicted that capitalism was doomed by several inherent contradictions that would produce a class of people bent on destroying it (see the insert on “Karl Marx and Self-Destruct Capitalism”). The most significant of these contradictions for our purposes is the inevitability of monopolies. Marx hypothesized that free enterprise would result in some firms becoming bigger and bigger as they eliminate their opposition or absorb smaller, competing firms. The ultimate result of this process is the existence of a monopoly in each of the various sectors of the economy. Monopolies, of course, are antithetical to the free enterprise system because they, not supply and demand, determine the price and the quality of the product.

For the most part, the evidence in U.S. society upholds Marx’s prediction. Less than 1 percent of all corporations produce more than 80 percent of the private-sector output. A few corporations dominate most sectors of the U.S. economy. Instead of one corporation controlling an industry, the typical situation is domination by a small number of large firms. When four or fewer firms supply 50 percent or more of a particular market, a **shared monopoly** or **oligopoly** results, which performs much as a monopoly or cartel would. Most economists agree that above this level

### Shared monopoly

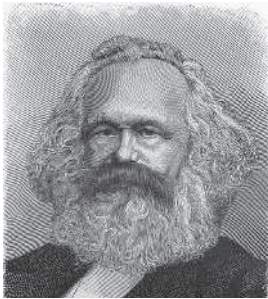
When four or fewer firms supply 50 percent or more of a particular market.

### Oligopoly

When a small number of large firms dominate a particular industry.

### A CLOSER LOOK

#### Karl Marx and Self-Destruct Capitalism



Karl Marx (1818–1883) was one of history’s greatest social theorists. His ideas have fueled revolutionaries and revolutions. His writings have had an enormous impact on each of the social sciences. His intellectual contributions to sociology include (1) elaboration of the conflict model of society, (2) the theory of social change based on antagonisms between the social classes, (3) the insight that power originates primarily in economic production, and (4) concern with the social origins of alienation.

Marx believed the basis of social order in every society is the production of economic goods. What is produced, how it is produced, and how it is exchanged determine the differences in people’s wealth, power, and social status. Marx argued that because humans must organize their activities to clothe, feed, and house themselves, every society is built on an economic base. The exact form this organization takes varies among societies and across time. The form that people choose to solve their basic economic problems would, according to Marx, eventually determine virtually everything in the social structure, including polity, family structure, education, and religion. In Marx’s view, all these social institutions depend on the basic economy, and an analysis of society will always reveal its underlying economic arrangements.

Because it owns the means of production, the social class in power uses the noneconomic institutions to uphold its position. Thus, Marx believed that religion, the government, and the educational system are used by the powerful to maintain the status quo.

Marx argued that every economic system except socialism produces forces that eventually lead to a new economic form. In the feudal system, for example, the market and factory emerged but were incompatible with the feudal way of life. The market created a professional merchant class, and the factory created a proletariat (working class). Thus, new inventions create a tension with the old institutions, and new social classes threaten to displace old ones. Conflict results, and society is rearranged with a new class structure and an alteration in the division of wealth and power based on a new economic form. Feudalism was replaced by capitalism; factories and the ownership of capital replaced land ownership.

Capitalism, Marx maintained, also carries the seeds of its own destruction. Capitalism will produce a class of oppressed people (the proletariat) bent on destroying it. The contradictions inherent in capitalism are (1) the inevitability of monopolies, which eliminate competition and gouge consumers and workers; (2) lack of centralized planning, which results in overproduction of some goods and underproduction of others, encouraging economic crises such as inflation, slumps, and depressions; (3) demands for labor-saving machinery, which force unemployment and a more hostile proletariat; (4) employers who will tend to maximize profits by reducing labor expenses, thus creating a situation where workers will not have enough income to buy products, thus the contradiction of causing profits to fall; and (5) control of the state by the wealthy, the effect of which is passage of laws favoring themselves and thereby incurring more wrath from the proletariat. All of these factors increase the probability that the proletariat will build class consciousness, which is the condition necessary for class conflict and the ushering in of a new economic system.

Sources: Robert J. Werlin. 1972. "Marxist Political Analysis." *Sociological Inquiry* 42 (Nos. 3-4):157-181; Karl Marx. 1976. *Karl Marx: Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy* (T. B. Bottomore, Trans.). New York: McGraw-Hill, pp. 127-212. See also Michael Harrington. 1976. *The Twilight of Capitalism*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

of concentration—a four-firm ratio of 50 percent or more—the economic costs of shared monopoly are most manifest (e.g., higher prices by 25 percent). Government data show that a number of industries are highly concentrated (e.g., each of the following industries has four or fewer firms controlling at least 60 percent: light bulbs, breakfast cereals, milk supply, turbines/generators, aluminum, cigarettes, beer, chocolate/cocoa, photography equipment, trucks, cosmetics, film distribution, soft drinks, snack foods, guided missiles, and roasted coffee [Mokhiber, 2010]).

This trend toward ever-greater concentration among the largest U.S. business concerns has accelerated because of two activities—mergers and interlocking directorates.

**MEGAMERGERS** There are thousands of mergers each year, as giant corporations become even larger. Some of the largest mergers in U.S. history have occurred in recent years (e.g., Comcast’s acquisition of Time Warner Cable and AT&T set to merge with DirecTV in 2015). There have also been megamergers combining U.S. and foreign firms (e.g., Daimler and Chrysler, British Petroleum and Amoco, and Deutsche Bank and Bankers Trust). The federal government encouraged these mergers by relaxing antitrust law enforcement on the grounds that efficient firms should not be hobbled.

This trend toward megamergers has at least five negative consequences: (1) it increases the centralization of capital, which reduces competition and raises prices for consumers; (2) it increases the power of huge corporations over workers, unions, politicians, and governments; (3) it reduces the number of jobs (for example, when Citicorp and Travelers combined to make Citigroup, 10,400 jobs were eliminated); (4) it increases corporate debt; and (5) it is nonproductive. Elaborating on this last point, mergers and takeovers do not create new plants, products, or jobs. Rather, they create profits for chief executive officers, lawyers, accountants, brokers, bankers, and big investors.

**INTERLOCKING DIRECTORATES** Another mechanism for the ever-greater concentration of the size and power of the largest corporations is **interlocking directorates**, the linkage between corporations that results when an individual serves on the board of directors of two companies (a **direct interlock**) or when two companies each have a director on the board of a third company (an **indirect interlock**). These arrangements have great potential to benefit the interlocked companies by reducing competition through the sharing of information and the coordination of policies.

Looking globally, in 2011 three systems theorists at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology analyzed the linkages among 37 million companies, transnational corporations, and investors worldwide. They found that just 147 firms make up a dominant core with interlocking stakes in one another (controlling 40 percent of the wealth in the network), and 737 firms controlled 80 percent of the wealth in the entire network (Upbin, 2011).

In the United States, the 1914 Clayton Act made it illegal for a person to serve simultaneously on corporate boards of two companies that were in direct competition with each other. Financial institutions and indirect interlocks, however, were exempt. Moreover, the government has had difficulty determining what constitutes “direct competition.” The result is that, despite the prohibition, more than 90 percent of large U.S. corporations have some directors interlocked with other corporations. When directors are linked directly or indirectly, the potential exists for cohesiveness, common action, and unified power. Clearly, the principles of capitalism are compromised when this phenomenon occurs.

Despite the relative noncompetitiveness among the large corporations, many of them devote considerable efforts to convincing the public that the U.S. economy is competitive. Many advertisements depict the economy as an Adam Smith–style free market with competition among innumerable small competitors. This, however, is a myth. Competition does exist among the mom-and-pop stores, but they control only a minute portion of the nation’s assets. The largest assets are located among the very large corporations, and competition there is minimal.

### Interlocking directorate

The linkage between corporations that results when an individual serves on the board of directors of two companies or when two companies each have a director on the board of a third company.

### Direct interlock

The linkage between corporations that results when an individual serves on the board of directors of two companies.

### Indirect interlock

When two companies each have a director on the board of a third company.

## Transnational Corporations

The thesis of the previous section is that there is a trend for corporations to increase in size, resulting eventually in huge enterprises that join with other large companies to form effective monopolies. This process of economic concentration provides the largest companies with enormous economic and political power. If, for example, we compare government budgets with gross corporate revenues, in 2009, the sales of Walmart, Royal Dutch Shell, and ExxonMobil each exceeded the gross domestic product of Indonesia (the fourth most populous country in the world). Combining these three transnational corporations, their sales revenues were more than the combined economies of the world's poorest 118 countries, with a total population of more than 800 million.

Another trend—the globalization of the largest U.S. corporations—makes their power all the greater. This fact of international economic life has very important implications for social problems, both at home and abroad.

A number of U.S. corporations have substantial assets overseas, with the trend to increase these investments rapidly. In 2009, six of the top fifteen multinationals in sales were U.S.-based corporations (Forbes, 2010). U.S. corporations are shifting more and more of their total assets outside the United States to increase profits. Resources necessary for manufacture and production tend to be cheaper in many other nations. Most significantly, U.S. corporations increase their profits by moving their production facilities from high-wage situations to low-wage, nonunion countries. Moreover, foreign production costs are lower because labor safety laws and environmental protection laws are much more lax than in the United States.

The consequences of this shift in production from the United States to other countries are significant. These include the loss of tax revenue for the United States, the lowering of wages for workers, and the reduction or even drying up of many semi-skilled and unskilled jobs in the United States.

Another consequence of the twin processes of concentration and globalization of corporations is the enormous political and economic power wielded by gigantic transnational corporations. In essence, the largest corporations control the world economy. Their decisions to build or not to build, to relocate a plant, or to start a new product or scrap an old one have tremendous impacts on the lives of ordinary citizens in the countries they operate from and invest in and on their disinvestment in U.S.-based operations.

Finally, transnational corporations tend to meddle in the internal affairs of other nations to protect their investments and maximize profits. These activities include attempts to overthrow governments considered unfriendly to corporate interests and payment of millions of dollars in bribes and political contributions to reactionary governments and conservative leaders in various countries.

## Concentration of Wealth

The domination of the U.S. economy by large corporations results in the undue concentration of wealth among a few corporations and individuals. For example, in 2015 Apple posted record high cash and investments of more than \$200 billion (enough to give every American in the United States \$636). They also posted the biggest quarterly profit of any company in history, due largely to iPhone sales, with 74.5 million iPhones sold in just three months (Krantz, 2015a).



The six heirs to the Walmart fortune are worth more than \$100 billion, yet many Walmart employees complain they cannot feed their families on Walmart's low wages.

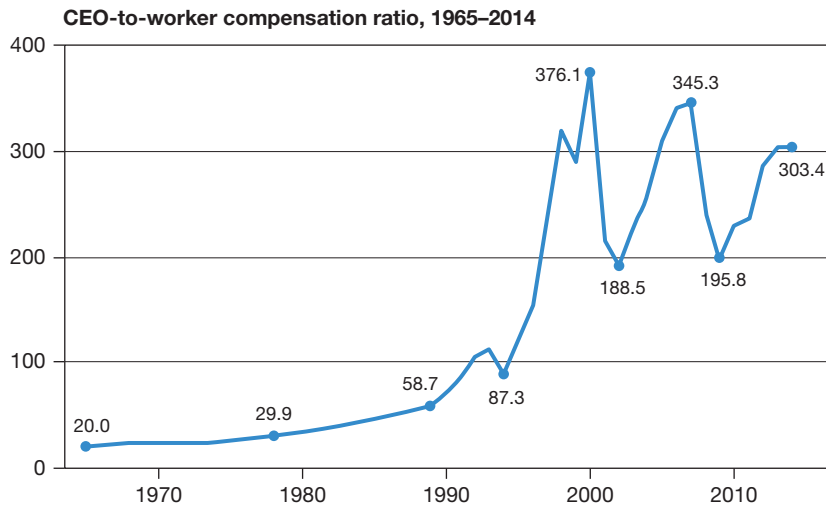
Corporate wealth of course translates into enormous wealth for individuals. In July 2015, technology stocks made a huge leap, putting \$19 billion dollars (in one day) into the hands of five top executives and founders of Google, Amazon, and Facebook (Krantz, 2015b). In 2015, the two wealthiest Americans were Bill Gates, head of software giant Microsoft, with an estimated fortune of \$79.2 billion, and Warren Buffett of Berkshire Hathaway, with \$62.1 billion (Forbes, 2015). The six heirs to the Walmart fortune were worth a combined \$100 billion in 2013—more wealth than the bottom 40 percent of Americans (Nolan, 2013).

The Occupy Wall Street movement brought the ever-increasing concentration of wealth in the hands of a few to the forefront in 2011. The movement's slogan was "We are the 99 percent," reflecting the belief that 99 percent of Americans are suffering because of the actions of the richest 1 percent.

The increasing gap between the ultra-rich and everyone else is highlighted when looking at the difference in earnings between the heads of corporations and the workers in those corporations. In 1965, the average chief executive officer (CEO) of a Fortune 500 corporation was paid twenty times more than the average worker. By 2014, it had risen dramatically to 303 times more (see Figure 2.1). Put another

**Figure 2.1** CEO-to-worker compensation ratio, 1965–2014

**SOURCE:** Lawrence Mishel and Alyssa Davis, Economic Policy Institute, Issue Brief #399, June 21, 2015. Figure C, Page 7. <http://www.epi.org/publication/top-ceos-make-300-times-more-than-workers-pay-growth-surpasses-market-gains-and-the-rest-of-the-0-1-percent/>



**NOTE:** CEO annual compensation is computed using the "options realized" compensation series, which includes salary, bonus, restricted stock grants, options exercised, and long-term incentive payouts for CEOs at the top 350 U.S. firms ranked by sales.

way, from 1978 to 2014, inflation-adjusted CEO compensation increased 997 percent (Mishel and Davis, 2015). In 2014, the average salary of CEOs was \$16.3 million. The typical American worker making the national average salary would have to work 233 years to equal that amount, and a minimum wage worker working full time would match the CEOs' salary in 636 years (Condon and Rexrode, 2012).

The figures above use average worker and CEO salaries and thus mask some of the larger disparities *within* companies. In August 2015, the United States Securities and Exchange Commission adopted a rule that public U.S. companies will have to provide investors with a ratio showing how the median pay of their workers compares to their CEO's salary. This reporting of pay ratios will begin after January 2017 and will allow analysts to examine pay disparities within individual companies and within certain industries.

We began this section by pointing out that three conditions must be present for pure capitalism to exist: private ownership of the means of production, personal profit, and competition among economic organizations. As we have seen, the U.S. economy is no longer based on competition among more-or-less equal private capitalists. Instead, huge corporations, contrary to classical economic theory, control demand rather than respond to the demands of the market.

## Political System: Links Between Wealth and Power

### 2.2 Understand the links among wealth, power, and the U.S. political system.

Although the U.S. government appears democratic, with elections, political parties, and the right to dissent, the influence of wealth prevails. This influence is seen in the disproportionate rewards the few receive from the politicoeconomic system and in government decisions that consistently benefit them. For example, as we have seen, the domination of the U.S. economy by large corporations results in an ever-growing gap between the wealthy and everyone else. Congress has increased this upper-class feast by reducing taxes on capital gains (taxes on the profits from the sale of property) and by allowing the affluent to place as much of their income as they wish in special tax-deferred pay plans not available to the less well-to-do. Since 2001, tax cuts have resulted in more than half a trillion dollars going to the richest 1 percent.

Senator Bernie Sanders argues that the United States is, increasingly, an oligarchy. An **oligarchy** is a government ruled by the few. In Sanders's words, "Oligarchy refers... to the fact that the decisions that shape our consciousness and affect our lives are made by a very small and powerful group of people" (Sanders, 1994:B1). Other critics have taken this a step further, suggesting that the United States is a **plutocracy** (a government by or in the interest of the rich; e.g., Parenti, 2008:27–39).

#### Oligarchy

A political system that is ruled by a few.

#### Plutocracy

A government by or in the interest of the rich.

### Government by Interest Groups

**Democracy** may be defined as a political system that is of, by, and for the people. It is a system under which the will of the majority prevails, there is equality before the law, and decisions are made to maximize the common good. The principles that define a democracy are

#### Democracy

A political system that is of, by, and for the people.

**Filibuster**

The Senate rule that allows a senator to hold the floor for an unlimited time as a strategy to prevent a vote.

**Cloture**

The vote needed to end a filibuster.

violated by the rules of the Senate (see “Social Policy: The Structure of the Senate as a Barrier to Democracy”), and by special-interest groups, which by deals, propaganda, and the financial support of political candidates, attempt to deflect the political process for their own benefit. Individuals, families, corporations, unions, professional associations, and various other organizations use a variety of means to obtain tax breaks, favors, subsidies, and favorable rulings from Congress and its committees, regulatory agencies, and executive bureaucracies.

Special interests (e.g., National Rifle Association [NRA], the pharmaceutical industry, labor unions, dairy farmers) hire lobbyists to persuade legislators to vote for legislation in their favor. At the national level, lobbying in 2014 was a \$3.24 billion business, and there were 11,870 registered lobbyists (OpenSecrets.org, 2015).

## Social Policy

### The Structure of the Senate as a Barrier to Democracy

The U.S. Senate is designed to thwart popular will in at least two ways: the filibuster and the disproportionate power of small states.

The **filibuster** is a self-imposed rule of the Senate not found in the Constitution. It is the practice of holding the Senate floor to prevent a vote on a bill. In 1917, the Senate adopted a rule that allowed the Senate to end a debate with a two-thirds majority vote for “**cloture**.” For the next fifty years, the Senate tried to invoke cloture but usually failed to gain the necessary two-thirds votes. Filibusters were used primarily by segregationists seeking to derail civil rights legislation. South Carolina’s Strom Thurmond, for example, filibustered for 24 hours and 18 minutes (the all-time record) against the Civil Rights Act of 1957. The southern senators tried to stymie antilynching legislation in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, but failed when cloture was invoked after a fifty-seven-day filibuster. In 1975, the Senate reduced the number of votes required for cloture from two-thirds (sixty-seven) to three-fifths (sixty). That is the rule now in place.

The political composition of the Senate in 2013 was fifty-three Democrats; two Independents, who caucus with the Democrats; and forty-five Republicans. Despite the public’s election of a Democratic president in 2012 and adding enough Democrats to have a relatively large majority in the Senate, the Democrats have not been able to get legislation passed for two reasons: The Republicans often vote as a bloc to block the agenda of the Democrats and the difficulty in garnering sixty votes to defeat a filibuster. The use of the filibuster or the threat of a filibuster, once a relatively rare parliamentary move, has

become commonplace. Since 2006, when Republicans became a minority in the Senate, there were almost 400 filibusters through the end of 2012.



In 2013, Texas Senator Wendy Davis became famous when she wore pink tennis shoes and held the Senate floor for just under 13 hours in an attempt to stop an anti-abortion bill.

The popular will is also thwarted in the Senate by the extraordinary power of small states (the following is from MacGillis, 2009). For example, climate change legislation faces tough odds in the Senate because the states dominated by agriculture, coal, and oil, which are typically underpopulated states, are opposed. The coal state of Wyoming has a single vote in the House, compared to New York's twenty-nine and California's fifty-three. In the Senate, however, each state has two, making Wyoming's senators equal in numerical weight to California's senators. North and South Dakota, with a combined population of 1.4 million, have twice as many senators as Florida (18.3 million), Texas (24.3 million), or Illinois (12.9 million). A few additional inequities with each state having two senators, regardless of population size:

- California is seventy times as large as the smallest state, Wyoming.
- The ten largest states have more than half the people in the United States, yet have only a fifth of the votes in the Senate.
- The twenty-one smallest states combined have fewer people than California, yet they have forty-two senators, while California has only two.

Although three small states (Vermont, Delaware, and Rhode Island) favor the Democrats, most of the states with small populations and large land areas are staunchly Republican. Thus, the Senate structure is not only unequal, it has a built-in bias. Is this what the founders of the United States had in mind when they wrote the Constitution?

Interested parties lobby because there can be a significant payoff. In 2003 and 2004, for instance, 840 U.S. corporations lobbied Congress to change the tax laws enabling transnational companies to bring home their overseas earnings at a tax rate of 5.25 percent instead of 35 percent (the following is from Belsie, 2009). They succeeded, accruing benefits through the new law—the American Jobs Creation Act of 2004. These benefits were stunning. For every dollar spent on lobbying for the tax break, corporations reaped a \$220 benefit on their U.S. taxes—a 22,000 percent return on their investment. Those corporations spending more than \$1 million on tax lobbying did even better—a 24,300 percent return. For example, Eli Lilly & Co. spent \$8.52 million lobbying for this bill. It reaped more than \$2 billion in return.

The argument supporting lobbying is that on various issues, there are lobbyists on both sides. Thus, it is argued, there is a balance of viewpoints that legislators weigh in their decision-making. The evidence, however, does not support such a cheerful view. Of the top twenty organizations in spending to influence legislation, there is only one quasi-liberal group, the AARP. All of the rest speak for the top 1 percent of the income distribution (Kuttner, 2012). The existence of lobbyists does not ensure that the national interest will be served, only that the interests of the powerful typically get their way. Who, for example, speaks for the interests of minority groups, the poor, the mentally challenged, children, renters, migrant workers—in short, who speaks for the relatively powerless? And if there is a voice for these people, does it match the clout of lobbyists backed by immense financial resources?

## The Financing of Political Campaigns

Perhaps one of the most undemocratic features (at least in its consequences) of the U.S. political system is how political campaigns are financed (see “A Closer Look: Undemocratic Elections in a Democracy?”). Campaigns are becoming increasingly expensive, with money needed to pay for staff, direct-mail operations, phone banks, computers, consultants, and media advertising. The cost of the presidential and congressional election in 2012 was almost \$6.3 billion (up from \$3 billion in 2000), including monies from the federal government,



## A CLOSER LOOK

**Undemocratic Elections in a Democracy?**

A democracy is a political system that is of, by, and for the people. Democratic principles include (1) fair and open elections, (2) access by the people to accurate information, (3) accountability of the governors to the governed, (4) political equality among all citizens, and (5) due process of law. The United States claims to be a democracy. Is it?

The short answer is that the United States is a democracy in theory but not always in practice. We focus here on elections. Indian novelist Arundhati Roy has said this about elections: “I think it is dangerous to confuse the idea of democracy with elections. Just because you have elections doesn’t mean you’re a democratic country” (cited in Mickey Z, 2006:7). Consider the following undemocratic practices in U.S. elections.

First, the writers of the Constitution framed what they considered a democracy, but they allowed voting only for White male property owners, which, of course, excluded women, Native Americans, Blacks, and renters. Senators were not popularly elected. Clearly, most of the governed had no power. The framers also set up the Electoral College, a device that gave the ultimate power of electing the president to the elite in each state and gave extraordinary power to the least populous states. Now most of these undemocratic principles have been overturned by amendments to the Constitution. But the Electoral College remains, allowing for a president to be elected with fewer votes than his or her opponent (e.g., George W. Bush was elected president in 2000 with 539,893 *fewer* votes than Al Gore). The Electoral College gives *all* electoral votes from a state to the winner in that state (e.g., in 2000 with nearly 3 million votes cast in Florida, George W. Bush won by a disputed margin of 537 votes and received all of Florida’s twenty-five electoral votes, giving Bush a majority in the Electoral College). And, to top it all, an electoral vote in Wyoming (in 2004) corresponded to 167,081 persons, while an electoral vote in California represented 645,172 persons (because the number of electors is determined by the number of senators and representatives in that state, giving states with small populations disproportionate votes). In short, the Electoral College may or may not reflect the popular will. The winner-take-all system means that minorities may not be represented. Assume that a state has five districts, each electing a representative to the House of Representatives. If this state is predominantly Republican, it could have all five Republican representatives even though 40 percent (in this hypothetical case) are Democrats. Also, what if 30 percent of the state’s citizens are Latino? It is possible that their voice will not be heard in Washington. Similarly, a city may have a seven-member city council elected at large by majority vote. The usual result is that not one council member represents a poor section of the city.

Disenfranchisement also occurs when state legislatures under partisan control deliberately shape congressional districts (called **gerrymandering**) to increase their advantage. By moving the district boundaries (made all the easier these days with computers), the party in power can take an area that is overwhelmingly composed of their party members and move some of them to a neighboring area

**Gerrymandering**

When the party in power shapes voting districts as a means to keep itself in power.

that is more evenly split. In this way, they can make both districts their districts. Thus, the system is rigged to help the party in power remain in power (Wang, 2013). When a party wins an election, as the Republicans did in 2010, there is a probability that they will make changes in the election laws to benefit them. In anticipation of the 2012 election, Republican-dominated legislatures in thirty-eight states pushed for measures to keep racial/ethnic minorities, the young, and the poor from voting. Similar to the use of literacy tests and poll taxes in the segregated South after the Civil War, these legislatures erected barriers to the fundamental right to vote (Jackson, 2011). The targeted groups tend to vote for Democratic candidates. To stifle college students from voting, for example, states may not allow them to register if they have an out-of-state driver's license or they may schedule a primary vote during Spring Break. Under the guise of protecting from voter fraud (a very minor problem, at best), states may require a government-issued ID (driver's license or passport) in order to register. There are 21 million people in the U.S. without government IDs, typically the poor.

The two-party system that has emerged in the United States (political parties are not mentioned in the Constitution) is a major impediment to democracy. Corporations, special interests, and wealthy individuals sponsor both parties. The federal government subsidizes the two major parties, which keeps the strong parties strong and the weak parties weak. Third-party candidates are often excluded from political debates because, it is argued, they have no chance of winning, a self-fulfilling prophecy. The election laws also make it difficult for third parties to get on the ballot. "How can U.S. elections be deemed truly democratic when only 'major' candidates are allowed to participate in televised debates and only those accepting inordinate amounts of cash from wealthy/corporate donors are considered 'major' candidates?" (Mickey Z, 2006:7).

Finally, as shown in this chapter, money makes the difference in politics. The people get to vote between candidates selected by the wealthy (corporations, interest groups, or individuals), which means that voting does not always express the public will. As Mark Green says: "Because average voters pull levers but big donors pull strings, often public sentiment wants one thing while political elites deliver something else" (Green, 2006:6). Thus, when public sentiment is at odds with the moneyed interests, the public often loses.

individuals, political parties, and organizations (OpenSecrets.org, 2015). Barack Obama raised \$750 million for his presidential campaign in 2008 and \$715 million in 2012.

The cost of winning a seat in Congress is enormous. In 2010, the average winning House race cost \$1.4 million, and the average winning Senate race cost almost \$10 million. Computed another way, assuming a 40-hour workweek, House members must raise, on average, \$367 an hour every week during their two-year term; Senators must come up with \$815 an hour (Gilson, 2012). Obviously, candidates must either be wealthy or accept money from various sources to finance their expensive campaigns. These costly campaigns favor incumbents, who have an easier time raising money than their opponents. The most favored recipients of political money are the chairs of powerful congressional committees.



Candidates from both political parties hobnob with the rich and famous to finance their political campaigns.

Congress has attempted to curb the role of money in elections, but with little success. Donors and their lawyers have always found ways around the spending limit (Economist, 2012). In 2002, it passed the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (also known as the McCain-Feingold law). This law limited the use of “soft money” in federal elections. Before this act was passed, individuals, corporations, unions, and other organizations were allowed to give unlimited amounts of money to political parties at the national, state, and local levels or to other private organizations that are technically independent of the candidates. Because the election laws did not cover this tactic, the amounts raised were unlimited. This loophole allowed wealthy persons to contribute to the Republican and Democratic national parties (and indirectly to the presidential candidates).

McCain-Feingold did eliminate soft money in federal elections (buttressed by a favorable Supreme Court decision in 2003), but it did not limit the giving of large sums to affect election outcomes. A number of ways were employed to navigate the system and give large donations to build support among Democrat or Republican voters. The loophole used is called 527s, which are advocacy groups, tax exempt under Section 527 of the Internal Revenue Code, that finance political advertisements while not directly calling for the election or defeat of specific candidates (Dwyer, 2004). Democrats, for example, created such organizations as the Media Fund and America Coming Together. Working through these organizations, billionaires George Soros and Peter Lewis pledged a total of \$15 million, creating among other strategies the liberal Internet organization MoveOn.org. Republicans have set up comparable groups, such as the Leadership Forum, a fund-raising group headed by Washington lobbyists.

McCain-Feingold also limited maximum contributions to \$2,300 per election cycle. While technically adhering to this limitation, corporate executives, lobbyists, and other insiders could maximize their political influence by a sophisticated system of bundling—the pooling of a large number of contributions. Both political parties use this tactic.

Another method to raise money is through contributions to a “foundation” or to a favorite charity of a candidate. Through this loophole, donors could give unlimited contributions to a candidate, with their identities hidden from the public record. For example, during the 2008 campaign, four major defense contractors—Northrop Grumman, General Dynamics, Boeing, and Lockheed Martin—donated hundreds of thousands of dollars to the symphony orchestra in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Why? Well, the orchestra is a favorite charity of Representative John Murtha, the chairman of the congressional committee that gives out lucrative defense contracts (Hernandez and Chen, 2008). Similarly, lobbyists can donate to favorite causes of the legislator, such as the \$336,224 that Representative James Clyburn received for his James E. Clyburn Research and Scholarship Foundation (Schouten and Overberg, 2009). A fourth way to funnel special-interest money legally is to honor members of Congress. In 2008, special

interests donated \$35.8 million to honor legislators. A fifth source of money is the contributions to underwrite the expenses of political conventions. Although technically not a political contribution, the parties and candidates are beholden to the contributing corporations.

**THE SUPREME COURT DECISIONS IN 2010 AND 2014** As noted, while McCain-Feingold attempted to control spending, it was not always successful because of various ways to evade the law. With a Supreme Court decision in 2010 (*Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*), these efforts to get around McCain-Feingold were no longer necessary. By a landmark 5–4 decision, the Supreme Court struck down the laws of twenty-two states and the federal government. It invalidated part of the McCain-Feingold campaign finance reform law that sought to limit corporate influence by ruling that the constitutional guarantee of free speech means that corporations, labor unions, and other organizations can spend unlimited sums to help elect or defeat political candidates (see Figure 2.2 of the Top Contributors to the 2012 Presidential Campaign). These organizations are still barred from making direct contributions to politicians, but they can now legally give unlimited amounts for ads to sway voters, as long

**Figure 2.2** Top Contributors to the 2012 Presidential Campaign

**SOURCE:** Top Contributors Retrieved from Online: <https://www.opensecrets.org/pres12/>, Copyright © 2015. Reprinted by permission.

### Top Contributors

#### Barack Obama (D)

1	University of California	\$1,212,245
2	Microsoft Corp	\$814,645
3	Google Inc	\$801,770
4	US Government	\$728,647
5	Harvard University	\$668,368

#### Mitt Romney (R)

1	Goldman Sachs	\$1,033,204
2	Bank of America	\$1,013,402
3	Morgan Stanley	\$911,305
4	JPMorgan Chase & Co	\$834,096
5	Wells Fargo	\$677,076

**NOTE:** The organizations themselves did not donate, rather the money came from the organizations' PACs, their individual members or employees or owners, and those individuals' immediate families. Organization totals include subsidiaries and affiliates.

as the ads are produced independently and not coordinated with a candidate's campaign. In effect, Exxon can spend millions to defeat an environmentalist candidate or Goldman Sachs could fund the entire cost of every congressional campaign in the United States (Alter, 2010). As the *New York Times* editorialized: "The court's conservative majority has paved the way for corporations to use their vast treasuries to overwhelm elections and intimidate elected officials into doing their bidding" (*New York Times*, 2010: para 1).

After the Supreme Court decision, individuals and groups were still limited to contributing \$2,500 in the primary and another \$2,500 in the general election directly to a candidate. But now individuals and groups could give unlimited amounts to an outside group (super PAC [political action committee]), if it is independent of a candidate. This "independence" has become a charade, however, since the super PACs are typically run by close political associates of the candidate. It is clear that the contributions to a super PAC benefit the candidate just as if they were given directly to the candidate (Wertheimer, 2012b). As evidence, the super PACs launch media blitz after media blitz in line with the political position of a candidate or attacking those of the candidate's opponent. The sources of these political donations can be kept secret.

In 2014, the Supreme Court ruled 5–4 to strike down caps on the total amount individuals can donate directly to federal campaigns and political parties (*McCutcheon v. Federal Election Commission*). The limits on contributions to a single candidate by an individual donor were still in place as of 2015.

These rulings have changed the political landscape. Small donors, who played a major role in the 2008 presidential election, have become irrelevant, being unable to match the treasuries of special interests and wealthy individuals. Super donors played a major role in the 2012 Republican presidential primaries, as two-thirds of the money for the candidates' super PACs came from mega-donors who contributed at least \$500,000 (Schouten, Schnaars, and Korte, 2012).

Money has been interpreted by a majority of the Supreme Court as a form of speech, and big money trumps small money. So the "speech" of the wealthy is more important than the "speech" of ordinary citizens. For example, 196 donors provided

about 80 percent of the money raised by super PACs in 2011. Commentator Ari Berman says the 2012 election was not defined by the 1 percent, but actually the super rich—the .0000063 percent (Berman, 2012). Casino magnate Sheldon Adelson and his wife, for example, donated \$52.2 million to groups favoring Republican candidates.

In sum, the super PACs corrupt democracy in two ways (Wertheimer, 2012a). First, they allow a relatively few super-rich

In 2008, PhRMA, the pharmaceutical trade group, spent \$200,000 on federal elections. After the *Citizen United* decision, it spent \$9.5 million.



individuals and interest groups to have undue influence over the results of elections. For example, in the unsuccessful 2012 attempt to recall Republican Governor Scott Walker in Wisconsin, Walker won as his supporters outspent their opponents by 7.5 to 1. Ninety percent of that money came from out-of-state billionaires, business groups, and the National Rifle Association (Dreier, 2012). Second, super PACs allow the ultra-rich and wealthy interests to buy influence over government policy.

A flood of corporate spending will likely inundate future elections. What will be the effects of this newly unleashed torrent of attack advertisements? Will the United States be a functioning democracy with this triumph of money equating with political power?



Being wealthy or having access to wealth is essential to a successful political campaign.

## Candidate Selection Process

Closely related to the financing of campaigns is the process by which political candidates are nominated. Being wealthy or having access to wealth is essential for victory because of the enormous cost of the race. A few wealthy individuals can fund their own candidacy. For example, in 2010 Meg Whitman spent \$138 million of her own money to run for governor of California. Typically, though, a serious candidate for high office must raise a considerable amount, and most of this will represent a limited constituency—wealthy individuals and special-interest groups.

Affluent individuals and the largest corporations influence candidate selection by giving financial aid to those candidates sympathetic with their views and withholding support from those whose views differ. The parties, then, are constrained to choose candidates with views that are congruent with the monied interests.

## The Power Elite

Most people think of the machinery of government as a beneficial force promoting the common good, and it often is. But although the government can be organized for the benefit of the majority, it is not always neutral. The state regulates; it stifles opposition; it makes and enforces the law; it funnels information; it makes war on enemies (foreign and domestic); and its policies determine how resources are apportioned. In all these areas, the government is generally biased toward policies that benefit the business community. In short, power in the United States is concentrated in a **power elite**, and this elite uses its power for its own advantage.

Power in the United States is concentrated among people who control the government and the largest corporations. This assertion is based on the assumption that power is not an attribute of individuals but rather of social organizations. The elite in U.S. society are those people who occupy the power roles in society. The great political decisions are made by the president, the president's advisers, Cabinet members, members of regulatory agencies, the Federal Reserve Board, key members of

### Power elite

People who occupy the power roles in society. They either are wealthy or represent the wealthy.

Congress, and the Supreme Court. Individuals in these government command posts have the authority to make war, raise or lower interest rates, levy taxes, dam rivers, and institute or withhold national health insurance.

Formerly, economic activity was the result of many decisions made by individual entrepreneurs and the heads of small businesses. Now, a handful of companies have virtual control over the marketplace. Decisions made by the boards of directors and the managers of these huge corporations determine employment and production, consumption patterns, wages and prices, the extent of foreign trade, the rate at which natural resources are depleted, and the like.

The few thousand people who form this power elite tend to come from backgrounds of privilege and wealth. Although the very wealthy have a disproportionate impact on public policy, it would be a mistake, however, to equate personal wealth with power. Great power is manifested only through decision-making in the very large corporations or in government.

The interests of the powerful (and the wealthy) are served, nevertheless, through the way in which society is structured. This bias occurs in three ways: by the elite's influence over elected and appointed government officials at all levels, by the structure of the system, and by ideological control of the masses.

As noted earlier, the wealthy receive favorable treatment either by actually occupying positions of power or by exerting direct influence over those who do. Laws, court decisions, and administrative decisions tend to give them the advantage over middle-income earners and the poor.

More subtly, the power elite can get its way without actually being mobilized at all. The choices of decision makers are often limited by what are called **systemic imperatives**; that is, the institutions of society are patterned to produce prearranged results, regardless of the personalities of the decision makers. In other words, a bias pressures the government to do certain things and not to do other things. Inevitably, this bias favors the status quo, allowing people with power to continue to exercise it. No change is easier than change. The current political and economic systems have worked and generally are not subject to questions, let alone change. In this way, the laws, customs, and institutions of society resist change. Thus, the propertied and the wealthy benefit, while the propertyless and the poor remain disadvantaged.

In addition to the inertia of institutions, other systemic imperatives benefit the power elite and the wealthy. One such imperative is for the government to strive to provide an adequate defense against our enemies, which stifles any external threat to the status quo. Thus, Congress, the president, and the general public tend to support large appropriations for defense and homeland security, which in turn provide extraordinary profit to many corporations. In addition, the government protects U.S. transnational companies in their overseas operations so that they enjoy a healthy and profitable business climate. Domestic government policy also is shaped by the systemic imperative for stability. The government promotes domestic tranquility by squelching dissidents.

Finally, the interests of the power elite are served through ideological control of the masses. U.S. schools, churches, and the media possess this power. The schools, for instance, consciously teach youth that capitalism is the only correct economic system. This indoctrination to conservative values achieves a consensus among the

### Systemic imperatives

The economic and social constraints on political decision makers that promote the status quo.

citizenry concerning the status quo. Each of us comes to accept the present arrangements in society because they seem to be the only options that make sense. Thus, there is general agreement on what is right and wrong. In sum, the dominance of the wealthy is legitimized.

## The Consequences of Concentrated Power

### 2.3 Summarize the consequences of concentrated power in the United States.

Who benefits from how power is concentrated in U.S. society? Consider how the president and Congress deal with the problems of energy shortages, a huge national debt, inflation, or deflation. Who is asked to make the sacrifices? Where is the budget cut—are military expenditures reduced or are funds for food stamps slashed? When Congress considers tax reform, which groups benefit from the new legislation or from the laws that are left unchanged? When the economy was on the verge of collapse in 2008, who was bailed out by the government—the unemployed? The newly bankrupt? Those who lost their homes through foreclosure? No, the government spent many hundreds of billions of dollars to lift up the banks and insurance companies (some of which were perpetrators of the Great Recession). When a corporation is found guilty of fraud, violation of antitrust laws, or bribery, what are the penalties? How do they compare with the penalties for crimes committed by poor individuals? When there is an oil spill or other ecological disaster caused by a huge enterprise, what are the penalties? Who pays for the cleanup and the restoration of the environment? The answers to these questions are obvious: The wealthy benefit at the expense of the less well-to-do. In short, the government is an institution run by people—the rich and powerful or their agents—who seek to maintain their advantageous positions in society. Let's examine more closely some of the consequences of power in the hands of a few.

### The Powerful Control Ideology

The media, through movies, television, radio, books, magazines, newspapers, and advertising, are major players in the creation of the culture, shaping what we think and do. The media play an influential role in a democracy because a democracy hinges on whether there is an informed electorate. The people need unbiased information and the push-and-pull of public debate if they are to be truly informed. These conditions become problematic, however, when the sources of information are increasingly concentrated in a few huge conglomerates guided only by commercial and bottom-line values. Consider the following:

- In 1983, 50 corporations controlled media in the United States. Today, just 6 corporations control 90 percent of what Americans read, watch, or listen to. They are: Comcast, News Corporation, Disney, Viacom, Time Warner, and CBS.
- In February 2014, Comcast announced its intentions to merge with Time Warner Cable. Critics argue that the merger will put too much power in the hands of one company (Comcast, which also owns NBC) to control prices and media content (Ciandella, 2014).





In addition to amusement parks, Disney has media holdings including ABC, ESPN, The Disney Channel, Hyperion Books, ABC radio, Walt Disney pictures, Miramax Films, Buena Vista Productions, and Pixar.

monopolized control? First, the media help to define reality by determining what is important and, conversely, what is not. This shapes our understanding of what is a social problem. For instance, the evening news focuses much more on street crime than it does on white-collar and corporate crime.

Second, diverse opinions are rarely heard. Because a few media giants control the content and distribution of programming, smaller companies with distinctive viewpoints are increasingly rare. The content of talk radio, for example, leans heavily to the political right, as evidenced by the views of Rush Limbaugh, Glenn Beck, G. Gordon Liddy, Oliver North, Sean Hannity, Armstrong Williams, Michael Savage, Bob Grant, and Laura Ingraham. In a nation that is divided more or less equally politically, there are relatively few progressive voices on the radio. Conservatives, on the other hand, charge that the print media are biased toward the liberal position on political issues.

Third, reporting is sometimes compromised by conflict of interest. For example, did NBC, when it was owned by General Electric, report extensively on the long-term contamination of the Hudson River by a GE plant? Similarly, media corporations might shy away from news that is too critical of the government because of the corporation's political leanings, they do not want to offend customers, or they depend on government subsidies and favorable legislation.

Fourth, a media giant may, through its subsidiaries, push a political stance. For example, Clear Channel Communications, with 1,200 radio stations, used its considerable market power to drum up support for the war in Iraq. Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, songs such as Cat Stevens' "Peace Train" and John Lennon's "Imagine" were blacklisted in the corporation's stations. The network sponsored pro-war rallies and a continuous barrage of uncritical comment (Marshall, 2003). When one of the Dixie Chicks said she was ashamed that President Bush came from Texas, Clear Channel Communications banned the Dixie Chicks' music from its country music stations (as did Cumulus Media).

Fifth, big stories (war, corruption, the economy, legislation) are often pushed aside in favor of "hot" stories, such as kidnappings and murders and salacious stories about celebrities.

- Until the 1980s, one company could legally own no more than seven AM and seven FM radio stations. Today, Clear Channel Communications owns 1,200 radio stations. Critics of Clear Channel argue that the company uses its considerable power to promote artists that align with their conservative politics while punishing those that do not.

These examples show the extent to which a few major corporations control what we see, hear, and read. What does it mean when the information and entertainment we receive are increasingly under

Finally, the messages we hear and see tend to focus on problem individuals rather than on problems with structural origins. Thus, the media pull us away from sociological interpretations—with critical consequences for social policy, as we will see throughout this book.

## Powerful Corporations Receive Benefits

A general principle applies to the government's relationship to big business: Business can conduct its affairs either undisturbed by or encouraged by government, whichever is of greater benefit to the business community. The government benefits the business community with hundreds of billions in subsidies annually. Corporations receive a wide range of favors, tax breaks, direct government subsidies to pay for advertising, research and training costs, and incentives to pursue overseas production and sales. The following are examples of governmental decisions that were beneficial to business.

- State and local governments woo corporations with various subsidies, including tax breaks, low-interest loans, infrastructure improvements, and relatively cheap land. In 2006, for example, Mississippi offered Kia, the Korean automaker, \$1 billion in incentives to build a plant (Georgia offered Kia \$400 million). Similarly, to keep the New York Stock Exchange in New York City, the city and state of New York offered an incentive package worth more than \$1 billion. Citizens for Tax Justice argued that when these subsidies occur, corporations manage to shield as much as two-thirds of their profits from state corporate income taxes. "The result: Money that could be spent on real economic development opportunities flows instead into the pockets of executives and the bill gets passed along to small taxpayers—local businesses and workers" (Singer, 2006:6).
- Eleven days after the terrorist attacks of September 2001, Congress rushed through a \$15 billion bailout of the airlines. Congress, however, did not provide any relief to the 140,000 fired airline workers or to the 2 million people employed by the hotel industry whose jobs were imperiled (Hightower, 2002a).
- The government often funds research and develops new technologies (for example, the Internet) at public expense and turns them over to private corporations for their profit. This transfer occurs routinely with nuclear energy, synthetics, space communications, and pharmaceuticals.
- Transnational corporations are permitted to set up tax havens overseas to make various intracompany transactions from a unit in one foreign country to another, thus legally sheltering them from U.S. taxes.
- In 2003, Congress passed the Medicare Prescription Bill. The pharmaceutical industry, using 675 lobbyists from 138 firms, nearly seven lobbyists for each senator, was successful in achieving favorable treatment in the legislation, including (1) a prohibition on the Medicare program from using its bargaining clout to directly negotiate deep drug-price discounts (one estimate is that prohibition will increase profits by \$139 billion over eight years) and (2) a ban on the reimportation of prescription drugs from Canada, which cost about 50 percent less than in the United States (Public Citizen, 2003).

- The more than \$700 billion in government bailouts to the banks and financial firms in 2008 actually rewarded them for their reckless behaviors that led to the Great Recession (see Chapter 14).
- The government installs price supports on certain commodities, increasing the profits of those engaged in those industries and simultaneously costing consumers. For example, subsidies in agriculture were \$15.4 billion in 2010. Farmers also received \$5.7 billion in subsidies for ethanol, the fuel made from corn.
- The federal government directly subsidizes the shipping industry, railroads, airlines, and exporters of iron, steel, textiles, paper, and other products.
- Perhaps the best illustration of how business benefits from government policies is the benefits provided by the tax code. To illustrate: General Electric reported profits of \$14.2 billion in 2010, \$5.1 billion of which came from its U.S. operations. Although the top corporate tax rate is 35 percent, GE paid no U.S. taxes, actually receiving a refund of \$3.2 billion.

**FOREIGN POLICY FOR CORPORATE BENEFIT** The government has supported foreign governments that are supportive of U.S. multinational companies, regardless of how tyrannical these governments might be. The U.S. government has directly intervened in the domestic affairs of foreign governments to protect U.S. corporate interests and to prevent the rise of any government based on an alternative to the capitalist model (Parenti, 2008:85). In Latin America, for example, since 1950 the United States has intervened militarily in Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, Chile, Uruguay, Nicaragua, Grenada, and Panama. As political scientist Michael Parenti characterizes it:

Sometimes the sword has rushed in to protect the dollar, and sometimes the dollar has rushed in to enjoy the advantages won by the sword. To make the world safe for capitalism, the United States government has embarked on a global counter-revolutionary strategy, suppressing insurgent peasant and worker movements throughout Asia, Africa, and Latin America. But the interests of the corporate elites never stand naked; rather they are wrapped in the flag and coated with patriotic appearances. (1988:94)

In summary, this view of power argues that the power of wealthy individuals and the largest corporations is translated into public policy that disproportionately benefits the power elite. Throughout U.S. history, there has been a bias that pervades government and its policies. This bias is perhaps best seen in the aphorism once enunciated by President Calvin Coolidge and repeated by contemporary presidents: "The business of America is business."

### Trickle-Down Solutions Disadvantage the Powerless

Periodically, the government is faced with finding a way to stimulate the economy during an economic downturn. One solution is to spend federal monies through unemployment insurance, government jobs, infrastructure projects, and housing subsidies. In this way, the funds go directly to the people most hurt by shortages, unemployment, inadequate housing, and the like. Opponents of such plans contend that the subsidies should go directly to the wealthy in the form of tax reductions.

Proponents of tax cuts argue that this will help the economy by encouraging companies to hire more workers, add to their inventories, and build new plants. Subsidizing the business class in this way, the advocates argue, benefits everyone. To provide subsidies to businesses rather than directly to needy individuals is based on the assumption that private profit maximizes the public good. In effect, proponents argue, because the government provides direct benefits to businesses and investors, the economic benefits indirectly trickle down to all.

Trickle-down solutions hurt the disadvantaged in at least two ways. First, reducing taxes on the wealthy increases the inequality gap between the “haves” and the “have-nots.” In effect, the already fortunate become more fortunate, while the less fortunate trail ever further behind them. Moreover, reduced tax rates mean less revenue for the government. The result is a greater national debt, which then is used to justify cutting welfare programs. But, proponents of tax cuts believe that economic growth and revenues will result from them. The evidence, however, does not support this claim. Consider what has happened since the 2001 Bush tax cuts, the largest in U.S. history. The nonpartisan Congressional Research Service concluded in 2010 that the economy performed better in the time before the Bush tax cuts than after the tax cuts were enacted. Furthermore, the period from 2000 to 2007 was characterized by the weakest job growth since the Great Depression (Zakaria, 2012; see also Bernstein, 2012). The decade following the Bush tax cuts also saw a rapid rise in the federal debt.

There are at least two reasons government officials tend to opt for these trickle-down solutions. First, because government officials tend to come from the business class, they accept the conservative ideology, which says that what is good for business is good for the United States. The second reason for the pro-business choice is that government officials are more likely to hear arguments and receive contributions from the powerful. Because the weak, by definition, are not organized and they offer relatively little financially to political campaigns, their voice is not heard or, if heard, not taken seriously in decision-making circles.

Although the government most often opts for trickle-down solutions, such plans are not very effective in fulfilling the promise that benefits will trickle down to the poor. The higher corporate profits generated by tax credits and other tax incentives do not necessarily mean that companies will increase wages or hire more workers. It is more likely that corporations will increase dividends to the stockholders, which further increases the inequality gap. Job creation is also not guaranteed because companies may use their newly acquired wealth to purchase labor-saving devices. If so, then the government programs will actually have widened the gulf between the haves and the have-nots.

## The Powerless Bear the Burden

The following examples demonstrate that in many cases, the powerless in society bear the burden of the decisions made by those in power.

After the Great Recession hit in late 2007, federal and state governments had to reduce or eliminate programs. Where were the cuts made? Typically, social programs for the disadvantaged were targeted, not subsidies for businesses or tax breaks for homeowners. In the 2008–2009 school year, twenty-four states reduced their funding for early childhood education (mostly needed by children from low-income families).

Low-income children's access to health care has also declined because of state budget cuts. So, too, have programs providing low-income families with temporary cash-assistance support, and childcare subsidies been reduced (Austin, 2010). Public school education has taken the biggest hit. The result is the laying off of large numbers of teachers; increasing class sizes; cutting electives such as music, art, and sports; eliminating summer school programs; and shortening the academic year.

When threatened by war, the government sometimes institutes a military draft. A careful analysis of the draft reveals that it is really a tax on the poor. During the height of the Vietnam War, for instance, only 10 percent of college men were drafted, although 40 percent of draft-age men were in college. Even for those educated young men who ended up in the armed services, there was a greater likelihood of their serving in noncombat jobs than for the non-college-educated. Thus, the chances of getting killed while in the service were about three times greater for the less educated than for the college educated. Even more blatant was the practice that occurred legally during the Civil War. The law at that time allowed the affluent who were drafted to hire someone to take their place in the service.

In the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, the government decided not to have a draft but rely instead on volunteers. While patriotism was undoubtedly a factor in the decision of the volunteers to enlist, economic incentives (for example, enlistment bonus) to those from disadvantaged backgrounds were also a powerful motive. In effect, the battles were fought overwhelmingly by young men and women from the working and lower classes.

Following the devastation from Hurricane Katrina in Louisiana and Mississippi in 2005, priorities were set by decision makers as to where rebuilding should be initiated and where it should be delayed or ignored. In New Orleans, the bulk of the money spent first went to the business community and for repairing the Superdome (home field for the New Orleans Saints). Left behind were low-income families. Although Congress required that half of federal grant money help low-income people, some 90 percent of \$1.7 billion in federal money spent in Mississippi went to repair condominiums for the affluent, rebuild casinos and hotels, and expand the Port of Gulfport (Eaton, 2007).

The poor, being powerless, can be made to absorb the costs of societal changes. In the nineteenth century, the poor did the backbreaking work that built the railroads and the cities. Today, they are the ones pushed out of their homes by urban renewal and the building of expressways, parks, and stadiums.

## Reprise: The Best Democracy Money Can Buy

Billions are spent on each federal election campaign. The consequence of this flood of money in elections is that it sabotages democracy in several ways. First, it makes it harder for government to solve social problems.

How can we produce smart defense, environmental, and health policies if arms contractors, oil firms, and HMOs have a hammerlock over the committees charged with considering reforms? How can we adequately fund education and child care if special interests win special tax breaks that deplete public resources? (Green, 2002:4)

Second, and related to the first, the have-nots of society are not represented among the decision makers. Moreover, because successful candidates must either be wealthy or be beholden to the wealthy, they are a different class of people from a different social world than most Americans.

Third, the money chase creates part-time elected officials and full-time fundraisers. Not only is their time disproportionately spent in raising money, but their positions on policies become more and more in line with the politics of those who shower them with money.

Fourth, money diminishes the gap between the two major political parties because the candidates and parties seek and receive funds from the same corporate sources and wealthy individuals. Democrats in need of funds, even though they are more inclined than Republicans to support social programs and raising taxes, must temper these tendencies or lose their monetary support from wealthy interests. As Robert Reich has observed, "It is difficult to represent the little fellow when the big fellow pays the tab" (Reich, 1989:A29).

Fifth, the money chase in politics discourages voting and civic participation (of the twenty-four Western democracies, the United States ranks twenty-third in voting turnout). In the 2000 presidential election, 49 percent of those who could have voted did not vote. This meant in effect that George W. Bush was elected by 24 percent of the electorate.

Sixth, big money in politics means that special interests get special access to the decision makers and receive special treatment from them.

In sum, the current politicoeconomic system is biased. It works for the benefit of the few at the expense of the many. Because the distribution of power and the organization of the economy give shape and impetus to the persistent social problems of U.S. society, the analysis of these problems requires a politicoeconomic approach.

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## Chapter Review

### 2.1 Explain the mechanisms that promote monopolistic capitalism and the consequences of each on a capitalist society.

- Three conditions must be present for pure capitalism to exist: private ownership of the means of production, personal profit, and competition. The major discrepancy between the ideal system and the real one is that the U.S. economy is no longer based on competition among more-or-less equal private capitalists.
- Although government sometimes works for the benefit of all, the state is not a neutral agent of the people but is biased in favor of the upper social classes and the largest corporations.
- Marx's prediction that capitalism will result in an economy dominated by monopolies has been fulfilled in the United States. But rather than a single corporation dominating a sector of the economy, the United States has shared monopolies, whereby four or fewer corporations supply 50 percent or more of a particular market.
- Economic power is concentrated in a few major corporations and banks. This concentration has been accomplished through mergers and interlocking directorates. Transnational corporations yield extreme power over the world economy.

- The domination of the U.S. economy by large corporations has resulted in undue concentration of wealth for corporations and a few individuals. The inequality gap in the United States is the widest of all the industrialized nations. The gap continues to grow especially because of tax benefits for the affluent.

## 2.2 Understand the links among wealth, power, and the U.S. political system.

- Democracy is a political system that is of, by, and for the people. Democracy is undermined by special interests, which use money to deflect the political process for their own benefit.
- Congress occasionally attempts to reduce the power of money over politics, but wealthy individuals, corporations, and interest groups find legal ways to avoid these constraints. In 2010, the Supreme Court ruled that individuals and organizations can give unlimited amounts to super PACs because money, in the Court's view, is a form of speech that is protected by the Constitution. In 2014, the Supreme Court ruled 5–4 to strike down caps on the total amount individuals can donate directly to federal campaigns and political parties. These rulings have significant consequences for democracy.
- The power elite in society (those who control the government and the largest corporations) tend to come from backgrounds of privilege and wealth. Their decisions tend to benefit the wealthy disproportionately. The power elite is not organized and conspiratorial, but the interests of the wealthy are served, nevertheless, by the way in which society is organized. This bias occurs through influence over elected and appointed officials, systemic imperatives, and ideological control of the masses.

## 2.3 Summarize the consequences of concentrated power in the United States.

- The powerful control the dissemination of ideas. In 1983, fifty corporations controlled media in the United States. Today, just six corporations control 90 percent of what Americans read, watch, or listen to.
- The government benefits the business community with hundreds of billions in subsidies annually. Corporations receive a wide range of favors, tax breaks, direct government subsidies to pay for advertising, research, and training costs, and incentives to pursue overseas production and sales. Business also benefits from governmental actions through foreign policy decisions, which typically are used to protect and promote U.S. economic interests abroad.
- The government supports the bias of the system through its strategies to solve economic problems. The typical two-pronged approach is, on the one hand, to use trickle-down solutions, which give the business community and the wealthy extraordinary advantages; and, on the other hand, to make the powerless bear the burden for solving social problems such as recessions and the growing national debt.
- The flood of money to support political parties and candidates sabotages democracy in several ways: (a) It makes it more difficult to solve social problems; (b) the interests of the have-nots are not served; (c) the money chase creates part-time legislators and full-time fundraisers; (d) money diminishes the gap between the two major parties because both seek and receive funds from the same corporate and individual sources; (e) it discourages voting and civic participation; and (f) big money in politics leads to a bias in the laws passed and the subsidies provided.

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## Key Terms

**Capitalism** An economic system characterized by private ownership of the means of production, personal profit, and competition.

**Cloture** The vote needed to end a filibuster.

**Democracy** A political system that is of, by, and for the people.

**Direct interlock** The linkage between corporations that results when an individual serves on the board of directors of two companies.

**Filibuster** The Senate rule that allows a senator to hold the floor for an unlimited time as a strategy to prevent a vote.

**Gerrymandering** When the party in power shapes voting districts as a means to keep itself in power.

**Indirect interlock** When two companies each have a director on the board of a third company.

**Interlocking directorate** The linkage between corporations that results when an individual serves on the board of directors of two companies or when two companies each have a director on the board of a third company.

**Oligarchy** A political system that is ruled by a few.

**Oligopoly** When a small number of large firms dominate a particular industry.

**Plutocracy** A government by or in the interest of the rich.

**Power elite** People who occupy the power roles in society. They either are wealthy or represent the wealthy.

**Shared monopoly** When four or fewer firms supply 50 percent or more of a particular market.

**Systemic imperatives** The economic and social constraints on political decision makers that promote the status quo.



## Chapter 3

# World Population and Global Inequality



## Learning Objectives

- 3.1** Understand the factors affecting world population growth.
- 3.2** Describe the extent of world poverty and the consequences of that poverty.
- 3.3** Explain the relationship between the United States and poor nations around the world.
- 3.4** Discuss how the U.S. and other wealthy nations can help impoverished countries.

In this text, we address social problems at the societal as well as the global level. The countries of the world vary widely in levels of material conditions. Some nations are disproportionately poor, with rampant hunger, disease, and illiteracy. Other nations are exceptionally well off, with ample resources. Here are some facts concerning the uneven distribution of the world's wealth:

- The richest 1 percent of adults own approximately half of the world's household wealth, while the least well-off 80 percent own just 5.5 percent (Elliott and Pilkington, 2015).
- The 85 richest people on the planet have the same wealth as the poorest 50 percent (3.5 billion people) (Elliott and Pilkington, 2015).
- In 2013, the richest nation in the world was Qatar, with a per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) based on purchasing power parity of more than \$105,000 dollars, while the poorest was the Democratic Republic of Congo, with less than \$400 dollars. The United States was the seventh wealthiest nation at that time (Aridas and Pasquali, 2013).
- In 2015, there were 2,089 billionaires worldwide. The top four countries in numbers of billionaires were the United States (537), followed by China (430), India (97), and Russia (93) (*Hurun Research Institute*, 2015).

The reasons for such global inequality include, as one might suspect, the degree of geographic isolation, climate, overpopulation, and the existence of natural resources. Another key determinant is the effect of power. The poor nations are poor because they have been and continue to be dominated and exploited by powerful nations and corporations that have extracted their wealth and labor. This continuing domination of the weak by the powerful has resulted in an ever-widening gap between the rich and poor nations.

This chapter examines the plight of the poorest countries and the role of the richest—especially the United States—in maintaining global inequality. The first section focuses on world population growth, examining in particular the variables affecting why some nations have high growth and others do not.

The second section examines poverty throughout the world and the social problems generated by impoverishment such as hunger, unhealthy living conditions, and economic/social chaos. The third and fourth sections explore the relationship of the United States with the poor nations, historically through colonialism and currently through the impact of multinational corporations and official government policies.

## World Population Growth

### 3.1 Understand the factors affecting world population growth.

The number of people on this planet constitutes both a major problem and potential future calamity. The world population reached an estimated 7.3 billion in the fall of 2015, and at its current rate of growth, the net addition annually is around 80 million people needing food, water, and medicine. Furthermore, each new additional human

encroaches on the earth's environment, adding to the dangers of climate change, soil depletion, and limited fresh water (see Chapter 6).

To put the population growth curve in perspective: It took all of human history (about 50,000 years) until about 1830 to reach the first billion. The next billion took 100 years (1930); the third billion, 30 years (1960); the fourth billion, 15 years (1975); the fifth billion, 12 years (1987); the sixth billion, 12 years (1999); the seventh billion, 13 years (2011). Note that the momentum since the world reached 7 billion is slowing. It all depends on the fertility rate. For example, the United Nations' projection of 9.1 billion in 2050 assumes a global fertility rate of 2.01 children per woman in the years between 2045 and 2050. But half a child more and the world population would stabilize at 10.5 billion in 2055. Half a child less, and it stabilizes at 8 billion (Whitty, 2010).

Most of the current population growth occurs in the less-developed nations, where poverty, hunger, and infectious disease are already rampant (see Figure 3.1). There is a strong inverse relationship between per capita GNP and population growth rates—the lower the per capita GNP, the higher the population growth. For example, the less-developed nations are expected to increase in population from 5.6 billion in 2009 to 8.2 billion in 2050, whereas the more developed countries are projected to grow from 1.2 billion to just 1.3 billion (Bremer et al., 2009). This is a consequence of **differential fertility** (differences in the average number of children born to a woman by social category). To illustrate, the country with the highest **fertility rate** (the average number of births per woman) in 2014 was Niger (6.89 children born/woman), followed closely by Mali (6.16), Burundi (6.14), and Somalia (6.08). In comparison, the United States averaged 2.01 children born/woman (Central Intelligence Agency, 2015). The facts reveal a future world population that will be overwhelmingly from poor developing countries, placing enormous strain on resources such as housing, fuel, food, water, and medical attention.

How do the nations of the world deal with the problems of expanding population? Basically, there are three ways to reduce fertility—through economic development, family-planning programs, and social change.

## Demographic Transition

Historically, as nations have become more urban, industrialized, and modernized, their population growth has slowed appreciably. Countries appear to go through three stages in this process, which is known as the **modern demographic transition**. In the agricultural stage, both birth and death rates are high, resulting in a low population growth rate. In the transition stage, birth rates remain high, but the death rates decrease markedly because of access to more effective medicines, improved hygiene, safer water, and better diets. Many nations are presently in this stage, and the result for them is a population explosion. Much later in the process, as societies become more urban and traditional customs have less of a hold, birth rates decline, slowing the population growth and eventually stopping it altogether (some countries like Japan now have negative population growth). Especially important to population growth is the “critical cohort” of those under age 20. There are more than 2 billion in this category in the developing countries. These young people will soon become

### Differential fertility

Differences in the average number of children born to a woman by social category.

### Fertility rate

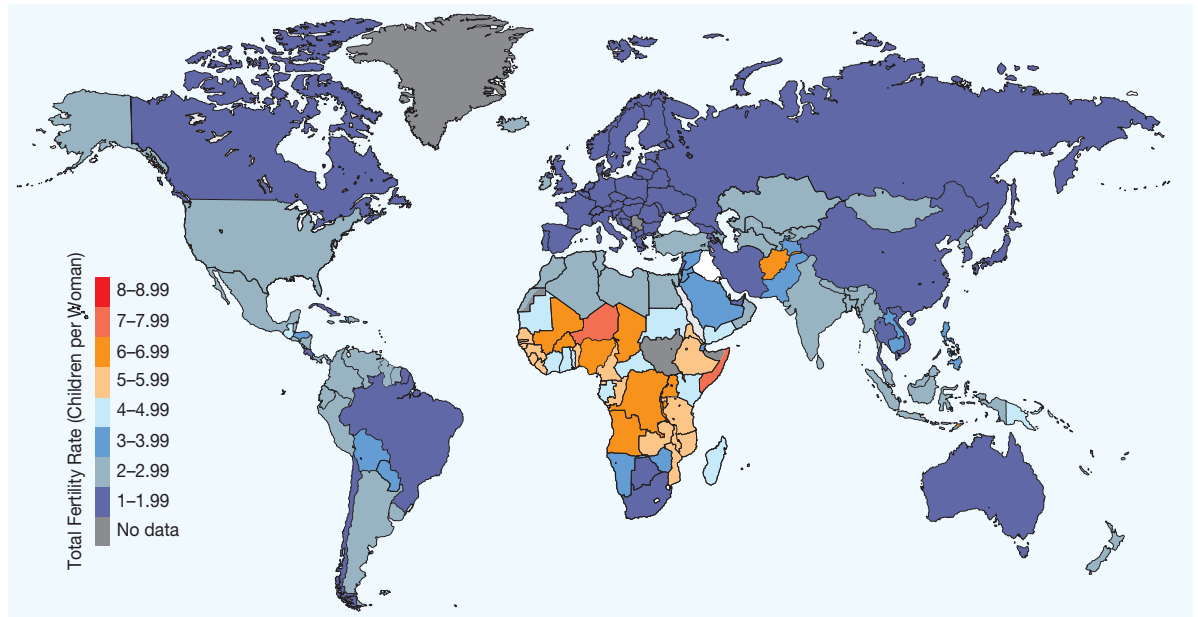
The average number of children born to each woman.

### Modern demographic transition

A three-stage pattern of population change occurring as societies industrialize and urbanize, resulting ultimately in a low and stable population growth rate.

**Figure 3.1** Global Fertility Rates, 2005–2010

SOURCE: Reprinted by permission from Max Roser.



parents (400 million are already between 15 and 19). What will be the fertility of this critical cohort? If the growth rate continues to slow, the demographic transition, with its accompanying urbanization, medical advances, and the liberation of women from traditional gender roles, will have worked.

The concept of a demographic transition is supported empirically. For example, birth rates in the developed world and the less-developed world are down dramatically. Overall, due to increased urbanization, better access to contraceptives, and more women being educated, the global fertility rate has declined from an average of 4.92 children per woman in 1950 to 2.5 now. According to the United Nations, approximately 43 percent of the world's peoples live in countries at or below the replacement rate of 2.1. To illustrate the extremes in fertility, Uganda has moved only slightly downward from a birth rate of 7.0 in 1960 to 5.97 in 2014. Iran, on the other hand, has experienced one of the most rapid fertility declines ever recorded—from an average of 7.7 births per woman in 1966 down to 1.85 in 2014.

The problem, of course, is that the modern demographic transition experienced in Europe took about 200 years. With relatively high growth rates in the less-developed world plus a huge cohort in (or soon to be in) the childbearing category, this length of time is unacceptable because the planet cannot sustain the massive growth that will occur while the demographic transition runs its course. But the fertility rate is dropping more quickly than expected, even in the less-developed countries. Worldwide, the use of contraception has risen from 10 percent of married women in



The World Bank estimates that about \$8 billion would make birth control readily available globally.

health into their missions. National governments, beginning with India in 1951, began to adopt family-planning policies (see “Social Problems in Global Perspective: China’s One-Child Policy”). As a result, fertility rates have fallen. Declines are most significant in Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean. Only in sub-Saharan Africa does the average remain well above 5. The nations with the least use of modern contraceptives are largely rural and agricultural, with very low per capita incomes.

the 1960s to 63 percent in 2013 (Clifton and Kaneda, 2013). The global fertility rate will continue to decline, but with so many women of childbearing age in the less-developed countries, the world’s population is projected to increase to about 9.1 billion in 2050, when it will (theoretically) stabilize.

## Family Planning

Beginning in the 1960s, international organizations such as the World Health Organization and UNICEF incorporated reproductive

# Social Problems in Global Perspective

## China’s One-Child Policy

In 1979, the successor to Chairman Mao, Deng Xiaoping, began a series of economic reforms leading to unprecedented economic growth (an average of 10 percent annually for thirty years), millions escaping poverty, a burgeoning middle class, and a modernizing of the nation’s infrastructure and cities. Also in that year, China initiated a one-child-per-family policy to limit the population growth in the world’s most populous nation.

The controversial policy worked. In 1970, the average Chinese woman had 5.8 children, now it is less than two. It is estimated that it prevented 300 million births (the equivalent of the population of Europe). Even with this policy, China’s population in 2015 was 1.36 billion, the largest in the world, followed by India’s population of 1.25 billion. India, in contrast

to China’s one-child policy, encourages small family size through family planning, female literacy programs, and sterilization, which has reduced the birth rate over the past fifty years from six births for each woman of childbearing age to 2.5. Still, India grows by 48,000 every day and will surpass China as the world’s largest population before 2030.

The one-child policy has not been universal within the country (*Economist*, 2011), with about two-thirds required to have only one child (Wang, 2012). The policy is aimed primarily at the ethnic Han Chinese living in urban areas (92 percent of Chinese are ethnic Hans). Furthermore, the one-child policy was relaxed in 2013. Under new rules, married couples can now have a second baby if just one parent is an only child. Also, exceptions were made for ethnic minorities and rural couples whose first child was

a girl or disabled (Chinese society has traditionally favored boys over girls) (Qing, 2015).

The policy is implemented through incentives (Fitzpatrick, 2009). Although the actual benefits for complying with the rule vary from place to place, they may include an extra month's salary each year until the child is 14, higher wages, interest-free loans, better housing, etc. For those who have an extra child, there may be punishments such as a stiff fine, not receiving raises on the job, unemployment, or occasionally forcing the abortion of a fetus.

There are some significant consequences of this policy. On the positive side, it did limit population growth and this, in turn, aided the economic growth of the nation. But it gave rise to abortions, as parents

wanted their only child to be a male (thus reinforcing the secondary status of females in society). This resulted in a skewed male/female ratio (normally 105 males per 100 females, became 120 males per 100 females). After more than thirty years of this policy, there are now fewer marriages because there are not enough eligible brides. This also has an implication for manufacturing in China because the typical assembly line worker is a young woman, yet the numbers of young women are declining. A final consequence: Traditionally, elderly Chinese were dependent on the adult children for support and housing in their declining years. With several children, the burden was shared, but with the one-child policy, now there is only one child to take care of aging parents.

The United Nations estimates that about 200 million worldwide would like to prevent pregnancy, but are not using effective contraception either because they cannot afford it or are not knowledgeable about it (in the poorest countries, fewer than one in five married women use a modern method of contraception). The World Bank estimates that it would take \$8 billion to make birth control readily available on a global basis. Such availability would reduce the projected world population from 10 billion to 8 billion during the next sixty years. The important point is that family-planning programs do work. Beginning in the late 1960s, the United States and the United Nations began funding such programs.

Formal policies by the United States, beginning with the Reagan and Bush administrations (1980–1992), have not supported the efforts of international organizations to promote contraceptive use. Because of popular opposition to abortion and the use of the drug RU-486 (a pill that induces a relatively safe miscarriage in the early stages of pregnancy), the United States withdrew aid from the United Nations Population Fund and the International Planned Parenthood Federation. President Clinton reversed these policies, but President George W. Bush reinstated them in 2001. President Obama, however, restored U.S. funding for the United Nations Population Fund and rescinded the antifamily policy of the Bush administration (going back to President Reagan) that required all nongovernmental organizations that receive federal funds to refrain from performing abortions or citing abortion services offered by others.

## Societal Changes

The third strategy to reduce population growth involves societal changes. Ingrained cultural values about the familial role of women and about children as evidence of the father's virility or as a hedge against poverty in old age must be changed.

Religious beliefs, such as the resistance of the Roman Catholic hierarchy and of fundamentalist Muslim regimes to the use of contraceptives, are a great obstacle to population control. However, religion is not an insurmountable barrier. Despite the Catholic hierarchy's resistance to family planning, some nations with overwhelming



The Catholic Church has always had an official policy against birth control.

to change the role of women. When women are isolated from activities outside the home, their worth depends largely on their ability to bear and rear children. Conversely, fertility rates drop when women gain opportunities and a voice in society. Research has shown that increasing the education of women is one of the most effective ways to reduce birth rates. Educated women are more likely than uneducated women to marry later and use effective methods of family planning (*New York Times*, 2002).

Unplanned social change, such as economic hard times, also affects birth rates. Recent data show that economic difficulties for individual families in less-developed countries can cause couples to delay marriage and to be more likely to use contraceptives. When enough families are affected negatively by an economic downturn, the fertility rate can fall for a nation. This is opposite the usual relationship of declining birth rates accompanying long-term economic success (the demographic transition).

Thus, in the long run, the population problem may abate, perhaps even reducing economic inequality and altering the balance of power among nations. However, for those living now, their lives will be negatively affected by the current population growth in developing nations, environmental degradation, and the overwhelming poverty of billions.

Catholic majorities have extremely low birth rates. As examples, Italy had a fertility rate of 1.42 in 2014, Spain a rate of 1.48, and Chile had a 1.84 rate, each below the average of 2.11 needed to sustain a stable population. And some Muslim countries have instituted successful family planning. For example, in addition to Iran's fertility rate of 1.85, Lebanon and Bahrain each had less than a 2.0 fertility rate in 2014. Perhaps the most significant social change needed to reduce fertility is

## Global Inequality

### 3.2 Describe the extent of world poverty and the consequences of that poverty.

The World Bank defines poverty as living on less than \$1.25 a day (adjusted for inflation). Using this criterion, worldwide poverty is declining. Compared with 1990, the poverty rate has fallen from 43 percent of the world's population to 17 percent in 2011 (the most recent data available). This represents a decline from 1.91 billion people in

1990 to 1 billion (The World Bank, 2015). The progress is uneven in the developing world, however. There has been dramatic progress in East Asia, with a drop from 78 percent in 1981 to just 8 percent in 2011, and in South Asia, where the poverty rate declined from 61 percent to 25 percent. Sub-Saharan Africa, though, had only a modest reduction, from 53 percent to 47 percent. Despite these declines in poverty, the global inequality gap is enormous. This gap is found within nations. In Haiti, for example, more than half the citizens live below the poverty level (see “Social Problems in Global Perspective: Why Is Haiti So Poor?”).

## Social Problems in Global Perspective

### Why Is Haiti So Poor?

Persistent poverty in Haiti is historic and systemic. Consider the following reasons:

- 1. Long history of violence.** When Columbus first landed on the island of Hispaniola, Arawak Indians inhabited the island. But the entire native population perished in about thirty years from newly introduced European diseases. To replace them, African slaves were imported by the Spaniards and the French. The French established themselves on the western end (the Haitian third of the island), where they developed large sugar cane plantations. Haiti became the most productive French colony in the western hemisphere in sugar and coffee. But slavery was a cruel and violent system. By 1789, the French Revolution broke out. French colonies became restive. By now, 30,000 Whites, 40,000 mulattoes, and 500,000 slaves populated Haiti, and there were more and more slave revolts. Finally, by 1804, the slaves had thrown out their White masters and Haiti became the first independent Black republic in the world. It was violent and loss of life was great. Sadly, the government of the new Black republic of Haiti has a long history of ruling by violence and corruption.
- 2. Government culture of corruption.** Almost every Haitian president since independence has seen his office as an opportunity for personal power and wealth. The same is true of lesser officials in government, so on the current scale of corruption, Haiti still ranks 183rd, with 185 being the worst. This means that revenues, taxes, duties, and so on, as well as foreign loans and foreign aid, vanish into the pockets
- of everyone who gains any kind of access before it can be spent to finish public projects such as roads, schools, and medical programs that would benefit Haitian people. In recent decades, the Haitian army and police have also been heavily involved in the lucrative illegal drug trade.
- 3. Isolation and vindictive ostracism.** Haiti became a small nation surrounded by largely English- and Spanish-speaking countries (the language of Haiti is Creole, a form of French). The United States refused even to recognize Haiti until 1862. The French, in the 1820s, threatened to re-invade Haiti and thus coerced the Haitians to pay the French an annual indemnity for the losses they incurred in the slave revolts that led to Haiti’s independence in 1804. These payments were demanded by the French until 1888, which often took half of Haiti’s annual GDP. And as long as this indemnity was not paid off, other European nations refused loans or aid. Haiti was treated as a pariah nation by the colonial powers.
- 4. Lack of education.** Slaves were never offered an education. Leaders among them emerged charismatically, but at independence less than 10 percent of the population could read or write. Most of those who were literate were the mulattoes. Thus, they emerged as the ruling class, which also controlled more and more of the wealth in Haiti. In the 200 years since, the literacy rate has only increased, to 30 percent. Thus, government and business, which require literacy, are restricted to a small minority that increasingly controls the power and wealth.



**5. Corporate exploitation of the poor.** Having obtained favorable deals with government and business interests in Haiti, foreign corporations (mostly U.S.) have negotiated highly profitable assembly plants in which they employ poor Haitians for wages as low as 10 to 14 cents an hour, assured by repressive Haitian dictators that no unions will be allowed, no human rights observers permitted, and other such conditions. When Father Aristide, the first president in Haitian history to be elected by the poor in 1991, tried to increase the minimum wage to 25 cents an hour, he was overthrown in a coup by the Haitian army, which had been paid off by U.S. corporate interests. One example of corporate profits: A pharmaceutical company developed a blood plasma collection business in Haiti. Haitian poor could “sell” the plasma in a pint of their blood as often as once a week and “earn” as much as \$295 a year. The pharmaceutical company then resold the plasma for seven times the price they had paid. Corporations involved in Haiti actively enlisted the support of the U.S. military as necessary to protect their interests. In 1915, Woodrow Wilson sent 2,000 U.S. marines into Haiti to occupy and take over the

Haitian government to “bring stability to Haiti.” They stayed until 1934.

- 6. Few natural resources.** Haiti’s terrain is mostly mountainous. The once productive French sugar plantations on the central plain, river valleys, and coastal regions have long since deteriorated in fertility and erosion. Mountainsides have been denuded of trees by logging for export and firewood for daily use and are also badly eroded. Small bauxite deposits wait to be exploited, but otherwise Haiti has no mineral resources and must import all of its fossil energy fuels.
- 7. Population pressures.** At the time of independence in 1804, the population of Haiti was less than 500,000. Today, it is 10.4 million.
- 8. Major natural disasters.** Haiti lies in “Hurricane Alley” and endures major storms. The devastating earthquake of 2010 reminded the world that Port-au-Prince, the capital, is built right over an active major earthquake-prone fault. The earthquake displaced more than 1.5 million Haitians, and more than 230,000 lost their lives.

**SOURCE:** Bartel, Floyd G., “Why Is Haiti So Poor?” February 10, 2010. Copyright 2010. Used by permission.

The underdeveloped and developing nations are not only characterized by poverty and hunger but also by relative powerlessness because most of them were colonies and remain economically dependent on developed nations and transnational corporations, especially those of North America and Europe. These nations are also characterized by high fertility rates, high infant mortality, unsanitary living conditions, high rates of infectious diseases, low life expectancy, and high illiteracy.

There is a striking maldistribution in **life chances** (the chances throughout one’s life cycle to live and experience the good things in life) between those living in the developed and those in developing nations. The significance of worldwide poverty and its concentration in the developing-world nations cannot be overstated. The gap between the rich and poor countries is increasing, and the gap between the rich and poor within the poor countries is increasing.

### Life chances

The chances throughout one’s life cycle to live and experience the good things in life.

## Food and Hunger

The United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization maintains that the world’s agriculture produces enough food to provide every person with at least 2,720 kilocalories every day for the world’s population (cited in World Hunger Education Service, 2011). Food production, however, is unevenly distributed, resulting in

795 million (one in nine people) being malnourished in 2014, about one in every six of the world's children being underweight, and around 9 million people dying of malnutrition each year. How can we explain these chilling figures?

An obvious source of the problem is rapid population growth, which distorts the distribution system and strains the productive capacity of the various nations. The annual increase of 75 to 80 million people requires an enormous increase in grain production

just to stay even. The United Nations predicts that a population increase to 9 billion people in 2050 will require a 60 percent increase in food production to meet demand.

A number of factors are shrinking the productive land throughout the world, in rich and poor countries alike. The earth loses 24 billion tons of topsoil each year. Irrigation systems that tap underground reserves are dropping water tables to dangerously low levels in many areas, causing the land to revert to dry-land farming. Air pollution and toxic chemicals have damaged some crops and water sources. The rising concentration of greenhouse gases (see Chapter 6) is changing the climates negatively. Each year, millions of acres of productive land are converted to housing and roads. A growing number of people in developing countries are affluent enough to eat like Westerners; that is, they are eating more meat (Krugman, 2008). The result is that a good deal of grain is diverted to feed livestock (it takes about 8 pounds of grain to produce a pound of beef; 6 pounds of grain to produce a pound of pork). Another important diversion of grains away from the food chain is the government-subsidized conversion of crops into fuel (e.g., corn into ethanol).

Most significant, of course, is that almost all the population increase is occurring in regions and countries that are already poor. Because of low levels of economic development, the various levels of government, farmers, and others in these countries lack adequate money and credit for the machinery, fertilizer, pesticides, and technology necessary to increase crop production to meet the increasing demand. The high cost of oil has an especially devastating effect on food production in poor nations. Food production in developing-world nations is also more adversely affected by natural disasters (floods and droughts) than it is in more affluent nations because these countries are less likely to have adequate flood control, irrigation systems, and storage facilities.

Another way to explain the food problem is to view it as a poverty problem. Food supplies are adequate, but people must have the resources to afford them. Because the poor cannot afford the available food, they go hungry. Although this view of poverty is correct, it has the effect of blaming the victims for their plight.



Rapid population growth strains the food sources in some poor nations.

To do so ignores the political and economic conditions that keep prices too high, make jobs difficult to obtain and poorly paid, and force too many people to compete for too few resources.

The major problem with food shortages is not food production, although that is exceedingly important, but the political economy of the world and of the individual nations. Economic and political structures thwart and distort the production and distribution of agricultural resources. The primary problem is inequality of control over productive resources. In each country in which hunger is a basic problem, a small elite controls most of the land, and the rest of the population is squeezed onto small plots or marginal land or is landless. For example, although colonial rule ended in southern Africa decades ago, the small White minority still controls most of the arable land. The evidence is that when the few control most of the agriculture, production is less effective than when land is more equally apportioned among farmers. Yields per acre are less, land is underused, wealth produced is not reinvested but drained off for conspicuous consumption by the wealthy, and credit is monopolized. Most important, monopoly control of agricultural land is typically put into cash crops that have value as exports but neglect basic local needs.

Agriculture controlled by a few landowners and agribusiness interests results in investment decisions made on the basis of current profitability. If prices are good, producers breed livestock or plant crops to take advantage of the prices. This approach results in cycles of shortages and gluts. Small farmers, on the other hand, plant crops on the basis of local needs, not world prices.

The way food surpluses are handled in a world in which more than a billion people are chronically hungry is especially instructive. The grain surplus is handled by feeding more than a third of the world's production to animals. Crops are allowed to rot or are plowed under to keep prices high. Surplus milk is fed to pigs or even dumped to keep the price high. The notion of food scarcity is an obvious distortion when the major headaches of many agricultural experts around the world are how to reduce mountains of surplus and keep prices high.

From this point of view, then, the problem of food scarcity lies in the social organization of food production and distribution. The solution to hunger is to construct new forms of social organization capable of meeting the needs of the masses. The problem, though, goes beyond the boundaries of individual countries. The policies of the rich nations and multinational corporations are also responsible for the conditions that perpetuate poverty in the developing world. The United States, for example, supports the very conditions that promote hunger and poverty.

## Sickness and Disease

Chronic malnutrition, an obvious correlate of greater numbers of people and poverty, results in high infant mortality rates, shorter life expectancies, and a stunting of physical and mental capacities. Children are disproportionately the victims. We know that protein deficiency in infancy results in permanent brain damage. Vitamin deficiencies, of course, cause a number of diseases such as rickets, goiter, and anemia. Iron deficiency is a special problem for hungry children: Some 25 percent of men and 45 percent of women (60 percent for pregnant women) in developing countries are anemic, a condition of iron deficiency. Vitamin deficiencies make the

individual more susceptible to influenza and other infectious diseases. Health in overpopulated areas is also affected by such problems as polluted water and air and inadequate sewage treatment.

The United Nations estimates that 783 million people do not have access to clean water and that 2.5 billion do not have access to adequate sanitation. This lack of a safe water supply and sanitation results in millions of cases of water-related diseases and 6 to 8 million deaths every year (UNwater.org, 2013). Polluted water, contaminated food, exposure to disease-carrying insects and animals, and unsanitary living conditions make the world's poor highly vulnerable to, among other diseases, chronic diarrhea, tuberculosis, malaria, Ebola, dengue, hepatitis, cholera, and parasites (see "A Closer Look: The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's War Against Malaria"). Infectious and parasitic diseases cause more than half of the annual deaths in sub-Saharan Africa. In addition to these diseases, one has emerged in the last thirty years or so with devastating effects—HIV.

#### A CLOSER LOOK

##### **The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's War Against Malaria**

Bill Gates, the cofounder of Microsoft, and his wife, Melinda, founded the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The foundation is richly endowed with money from Bill Gates, the richest person in the United States, plus the bulk of the fortune of the second wealthiest person in the United States, Warren Buffett. In 2010, the foundation had an endowment of \$37 billion.

The efforts of the foundation are directed at three main problems: global health, global development, and programs in the United States to improve education. We focus here on one part—the eradication of malaria, which the foundation, working with other organizations, hopes to eradicate in the next decade.

Malaria is a disease of the developing world, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. The disease is caused by a parasite transmitted by certain types of mosquitoes. More than 1 million African children have been saved from malaria since 2000, yet in 2011 some 781,000 people died from it, with 85 percent children under 5 years old. Bill Gates feels that the corporate world is not working on the problem because the potential profits are few. "More money is being spent finding a cure for baldness than developing drugs to combat malaria. The market does not drive scientists, thinkers, and governments to do the right things" (quoted in Gardner, 2009). The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation seeks to fill the void. It funds research to discover, develop, and clinically test malaria vaccines; it develops new malaria drugs that are more effective and affordable; it develops improved methods for malaria control (effective pesticides, insecticide-treated bed nets that protect against mosquitoes); it distributes insect nets and other protective gear; and it works to develop greater public awareness about malaria and advocate for effective research and control (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2011).

**Pandemic**

A worldwide epidemic.

HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, is transmitted through the exchange of bodily fluids, usually through sex, but also from contaminated needles, contact with tainted blood, or during birth for an infant born of an infected mother. Since the start of the AIDS **pandemic** (a worldwide epidemic) some three decades ago, more than 40 million have died. AIDS remains among the top 10 leading causes of death with 5,600 newly infected each day, two-thirds of these new infections in sub-Saharan Africa. HIV/AIDS is the worst epidemic in human history, surpassing the Black Death that ravaged Europe in 1348, killing approximately 25 million.

## The New Slavery

**New slavery**

The new slavery differs from traditional slavery in that it is, for the most part, not a lifelong condition and sometimes individuals and families become slaves by choice—a choice forced by extreme poverty.

Often the poor must place themselves in debt bondage, using one's family as collateral, thus enslaving their children.

By conservative estimate, there are 27 million slaves in the world today, and the number is growing. Slavery today (the **new slavery**), just as slavery in other times, means the loss of freedom, the exploitation of people for profit, and the control of slaves through violence or its threat. But today's forms of slavery also differ from the past. First, slavery is no longer a lifelong condition, as the slave typically is freed after he or she is no longer useful (e.g., a prostitute who has AIDS). Second, sometimes individuals and families become slaves by choice—a choice forced by extreme poverty. The population explosion in the poorest nations has created a vast supply of potential workers who are desperate and vulnerable, conditions that sometimes translate into enslavement. Often, the poor must place themselves in bondage to pay off a debt. Faced with a crisis (crop failure, illness), an individual borrows money, but having no other possessions uses his or her family's lives as collateral. The slave must work for the slaveholder until the slaveholder decides the debt is repaid. This situation is problematic because many slaveholders use false accounting or charge very high interest, making repayment forever out of reach. Sometimes the debt can be passed to subsequent generations, thus enslaving offspring. Debt bondage is most common in South Asia.

Impoverishment may also lead desperate parents to sell their children (often told that the children will have good jobs) to brokers, who in turn sell them to slaveholders. This practice is common in Thailand as the conduit for young girls to end up as prostitutes in brothels against their will. The United Nations Children's Fund estimates that 200,000 children in West and Central Africa are sold into slavery annually by their parents. Most come from the poorest countries, such as Benin, Burkina Faso, or Mali, where up to 70 percent of the people live on less than \$1 a day. Faced with grinding poverty, parents may sell their children to traders for as little as \$15, in the hope that the children will find a better life. Girls end up



as domestic workers or prostitutes while boys are forced to work on coffee or cocoa plantations or as fishermen. Sometimes, poor young people with little prospect for success may deal directly with a broker who promises legitimate jobs, but once they are away from their homes, violence is used to take control of their lives.

There is an international traffic in slavery, involving forced migration, the smuggling of illegal immigrants, and criminal networks. At any one time, some 2.4 million people worldwide are victims of human trafficking (United Nations, quoted in Lederer, 2012). The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) estimates that 800,000 people are trafficked across national borders each year, not including millions trafficked within their own countries. At least 80 percent of the victims are female, up to half are minors, and 75 percent of all victims are trafficked into commercial sexual exploitation (Central Intelligence Agency, 2012). These victims come from Asia, Africa, Latin America, Eastern Europe, and the nations of the former Soviet Union, where as many as two-thirds of women live in poverty. The anti-trafficking program at Johns Hopkins University estimates that 1 million undocumented immigrants are trapped in the United States in slavelike conditions (Bowe, 2007). The State Department estimates that as many as 50,000 women and children (and a smaller number of men) are smuggled into the United States each year to be forced into prostitution, domestic service, or as bonded labor in factories and sweatshops. Immigrants pay as much as \$50,000 (in debt bondage) to get smuggled into the United States, with false promises of decent jobs. Once in this country, most find their passports are stolen, and they are forced to work as prostitutes or maids, on farms, or in sweatshops. They may be locked up, but even if not, they are trapped because they fear violence by the slaveholders, and they fear the police because they are illegals and because they are strangers in a strange land.

## Concentration of Misery in Cities

In 1800, just 3 percent of the world's population lived in cities. In 1950, less than 30 percent were urban dwellers. In 2010, 50.5 percent of the world's population was urban. And, by 2050, when the planet's population reaches 9 to 10 billion, about 70 percent will likely live in cities, some of them **megacities** (an urban population of more than 10 million) (Bruinius, 2010).

In 1950, only two cities qualified as "megacities." Today, there are twenty-eight worldwide, and by 2030, there will likely be another twelve. Most of these huge urban places are in the developing countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America (India, for example, has twenty-five of the 100 fastest growing cities worldwide). China provides another example of this rapid urbanization. In 1979, city dwellers represented just 10.6 percent of China's population. In 2012, the nation was 51.27 percent urban, with 160 cities of 1 million or more.

A major problem is that the infrastructure of cities in the developing world is overwhelmed by the exploding population growth (e.g., housing, schools, mass transportation, roads, sanitation, water treatment). A second problem is providing employment for their citizens. The special problem is to find employment for new immigrants to the cities—the farmers pushed off the land because of high rural density and the resulting poverty. The people who migrate to the cities are, for the most part, unprepared for life and work there. The cities, too, are unprepared for them. Aside from the obvious problems of housing, schools, and sanitation, the cities of the developing

### Megacity

An urban population of more than 10 million people.

nations do not have the industries that employ many workers. Because their citizens are usually poor, these countries are not good markets for products, so there is little internal demand for manufactured goods.

Another massive problem of the cities in the developing world is the mushrooming of squatter settlements (“shantytowns”). Shantytowns are the fastest growing sections of cities of the developing countries. Poor residents have little choice but to create houses out of scraps (tin, plywood, paper) on land that does not belong to them (in streets, alleys, or ravines or on hillsides). The result is millions struggling to survive without clean water, sanitation, schools, and other infrastructure. The lack of sanitation forces excrement to pile up, creating serious health dangers.

How do squatters react to their deplorable situation? They are unemployed or work at the most menial of tasks. They are hungry. Their children remain illiterate. They suffer the indignities of being social outcasts. Will their alienation lead to terrorism and/or revolutionary activity? Some observers believe that for those experiencing abject poverty, the struggle is for the next meal, not for a redistribution of power. Others see the growing squatter settlements as breeding grounds for riots, terrorism, and radical political movements. The prospects for the cities of the developing countries are bleak. Their growth continues unabated. Unbelievable poverty and hunger are common. The inequality gap between the rich and poor is staggering. Jobs are scarce. Resources are limited and becoming scarcer as the number of inhabitants increases. The capital necessary for extensive economic development or for providing needed services is difficult to raise.

In sum, the high growth rates of cities, combined with the high concentration of people who are poor, unemployed, angry, hungry, and miserable, magnifies and intensifies other problems (such as racial and religious animosities, resource shortages, and pollution).

## U.S. Relations with the Developing World

### 3.3 Explain the relationship between the United States and poor nations around the world.

There is a huge gap between the rich and poor nations of the world. About 85 percent of the world’s people live in the overpopulated and poverty-afflicted developing world, yet these nations produce only one-tenth of the world’s industrial output and one-twelfth of its electric power output.

The nations of the developing world are underdeveloped for a number of reasons, including geography, climate, lack of arable land and minerals, and a history of continuous warfare; but the rich nations are also responsible. The developing-world economies are largely the result of a history of colonialism and of economic domination by the developed nations in the postcolonial era.

As recently as 1914, approximately 70 percent of the world’s population lived in a **colony** (a territory controlled by a powerful country that exploits the land and the people for its own benefit). In many cases, poor countries were colonized for one or more of their natural resources, and they continue to be used by rich countries to obtain resources as cheaply as possible. As colonies of superpowers, their

#### Colony

A territory controlled by a powerful country that exploits the land and the people for its own benefit.

resources and labors were exploited, leadership was imposed from outside, and the local people were treated as primitive and backward. Crops were planted for the colonizer's benefit, not for the needs of the indigenous population. Raw materials were extracted for exports. The wealth thus created was concentrated in the hands of local elites and the colonizers. Population growth was encouraged because the colonizer needed a continuous supply of low-cost labor. Colonialism destroyed the cultural patterns of production and exchange by which these societies once met the needs of their peoples. Thriving industries that once served indigenous markets were destroyed. The capital generated by the natural wealth in these countries was not used to develop local factories, schools, sanitation systems, agricultural processing plants, or irrigation systems. Colonialism also promoted a two-class society by increasing land holdings among the few and landlessness among the many.

Although the process began centuries ago and ended, for the most part, in the 1960s, the legacy of colonialism continues to promote poverty today. In short, the heritage of colonialism that systematically promoted the self-interest of the colonizers and robbed and degraded the resources and the lives of the colonized continues. Vestigial attitudes, both within and outside these countries, and the continued dependency of developing nations on the industrialized superpowers, exacerbate their problems. As a result, the gap between the developing world and the industrial nations continues to widen.

This section explores the relationship of the United States to the developing world, focusing on the economic mechanisms that maintain dependency and the political policies that promote problems within these countries.

## Transnational Corporations

Gigantic **transnational corporations**, most of which are U.S.-based, control the world economy. Their decisions to build or not to build, to relocate a plant, to begin marketing a new product, or to scrap an old one have a tremendous impact on the lives of ordinary citizens in the countries in which they operate and in which they invest.

In their desire to tap low-wage workers, the multinational corporations have tended to locate in poor countries. Although the poor countries should have benefited from this new industry (by, say, gaining a higher standard of living and access to modern technology), they have not for the most part. One reason is that the profits generated in these countries are mostly channeled back to the United States. Second, global companies do not have a great impact in easing the unemployment of the poor nations because they use advanced technology whenever feasible, which reduces the demand for jobs. Also, the corporations typically hire workers from a narrow segment of the population—young women.

The global corporations have enormous advantages over local competition when they move into an underdeveloped country. Foremost, they have access to the latest technology in information technology, machinery, or genetic engineering. Second, they receive better terms than local businesses when they borrow money. They are preferred customers because their credit is backed by their worldwide financial resources. Moreover, global banks and global corporations are, as noted in Chapter 2, closely tied through interlocking directorates and shared ownership. Thus, it is in the interest of these banks to give credit under favorable conditions to

### Transnational corporation

A profit-oriented company engaged in business activities in more than one nation.



their corporate friends. Finally, the global corporations have an enormous advantage over local companies through their manipulation of the market, influence over local government officials, and their control of workers.

Two activities by transnationals are highly controversial because they have negative costs worldwide, especially to the inhabitants of developing nations—arms sales and the sale of products known to be harmful.

**ARMS SALES** The wealthy nations sell or give armaments to the poorer nations. Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has been the number one seller of arms abroad, accounting for 31 percent of all weapons sales in 2014, selling major conventional weapons to 94 countries (Harte, 2015).

The United States is actively engaged in promoting and financing weapons exports through 6,500 full-time government employees in the Defense, Commerce, and State Departments. These sales efforts are motivated by what was deemed to be in the national interests of the countries involved and by the profit to the manufacturers (in the United States, the multinationals most involved are Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Raytheon, Northrop Grumman, and General Dynamics). Not incidentally, the top ten arms-exporting companies give millions in political contributions (political action committees and soft money) during federal election campaigns.

There are several important negative consequences of these arms sales. First, they fan the flames of war. The United States sells weapons to countries actively engaged in military conflict. So rather than working to promote stability in already tense regions, the search for profits exacerbates the situation. Second, the United States has become an informal global shopping center for terrorists, mercenaries, and international criminals of all stripes. These gun sales are made through retail stores (not corporations), as the United States has such a lax system of controls over gun dealers and transactions at gun shows. September 11 and the subsequent war on terrorism have not changed U.S. gun control policies.

A third consequence is that arms sales can boomerang; that is, they can come back to haunt the seller (a phenomenon known as “blowback”). For example, the United States has sold armaments to Iraq to aid in their fight with Iran, only to have those weapons used against its forces in the Gulf War in 1990 and the Iraq War of 2003 and beyond. Similarly, the United States aided the freedom fighters in Afghanistan as they fought the Soviets, only to have those weapons used later by Al-Qaeda and the Taliban against the United States after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

Fourth, the United States, in its zeal to contain or defeat regimes unfriendly to its interests, has sold arms to countries that are undemocratic and that violate human rights (Jackson, 2011).

### Corporate dumping

The exporting of goods that have either been banned or not approved for sale in the United States because they are dangerous.

**CORPORATE SALES THAT ENDANGER LIFE** **Corporate dumping**, the exporting of goods that have either been banned or not approved for sale in the United States because they are dangerous, is a relatively common practice (see Chapter 6). Most often the greatest market for such unsafe products is among the poor in the developing world. These countries often do not bar hazardous products, and many of their poor citizens are illiterate and therefore tend to be unaware of the hazards involved with the use of such products.

The United States and other industrialized nations continue to use the nations of the developing world as sources of profits as nations purchase these unhealthy products. For example, the Dalkon Shield intrauterine device was sold overseas in forty-two nations after the manufacturer, A. H. Robins, withdrew it from the U.S. market because of its danger to women. Similarly, after the Consumer Product Safety Commission forced children's garments with the fire retardant called tris phosphate off the domestic market because it was found to be carcinogenic, the manufacturer shipped several million garments overseas for sale.



Corporate dumping may entail the shipping of toxic wastes to the developing world for disposal.

Chemical pesticides pollute water, degrade the soil, and destroy native wild-life and vegetation. The use of the most potent pesticides is banned in the United States. This ban, however, does not pertain to foreign sales: 25 percent of the pesticides exported by the United States are restricted or banned by the Environmental Protection Agency for domestic use.

Another form of corporate dumping, in the literal sense of the word, is the practice of shipping toxic wastes produced in the United States to the developing world for disposal. This practice is attractive to U.S. corporations because the Environmental Protection Agency requires expensive disposal facilities, whereas the materials can be dumped in developing-world nations for a fraction of the cost. The host nations engage in such potentially dangerous transactions because they need the money.

Some companies dump workplace hazards as well as hazardous products and waste materials in poor nations. Governmental regulations often require U.S. corporations to provide a reasonably safe environment for their workers. These requirements, such as not exposing workers to asbestos, lead, or other toxic substances, are often expensive to meet. Thus, many corporations move their manufacture (and unsafe working conditions) to a country with few or no restrictions. This move saves the companies money and increases their profits, but it disregards the health and safety of workers outside the United States.

Corporate dumping is undesirable for three reasons. First, and most obvious, it poses serious health hazards to the poor and uninformed consumers of the developing world. Second, the disregard of U.S. multinational corporations for their workers and their consumers in foreign lands contributes to anti-U.S. feelings in the host countries. Third, many types of corporate dumping have a boomerang effect; that is, some of the hazardous products sold abroad by U.S. companies are often returned to the United States and other developed nations, negatively affecting the health of the people in those countries. For example, the United States imports about one-fourth of

its fruits and vegetables, and some of this produce is tainted with toxic chemical residues. In sum, large U.S. transnational corporations and government policies serve to create social problems within developing, poor countries.

## United States in the Global Village

### 3.4 Discuss how the U.S. and other wealthy nations can help impoverished countries.

In the global economy, the fate of the world's poorest nations and the poor within these nations is of crucial importance to all nations. Huge gaps in income, education, and other measures of the quality of life make the world less safe. And, as the population growth surges in the developing world, the inequality gap will widen and the world will become less stable. Unless wealthy nations do more to help the poor nations catch up, the twenty-first century will witness Earth split into two very different planets, one inhabited by the fortunate few, and the other by poverty-stricken, desperate masses.

What can the wealthy nations do to help the impoverished nations? First, the affluent nations can pledge more resources targeted for development aid. The United Nations set a goal for the rich nations to give 0.7 percent of Gross National Income (GNI) to alleviate poverty in the poor nations. There are two major problems with this. First, the rich nations have failed to meet this obligation, giving instead around 0.2 to 0.4 percent, falling more than \$100 billion short each year. Second, the type of aid often is not helpful. Rather than targeted to meet the needs of the poor, it is sometimes designed to meet the strategic and economic interests of the donor countries (see "Social Policy: Are Microloans the Answer for the World's Poor?"); the aid benefits powerful domestic interest groups; and too little aid reaches those who most desperately need it (Shah, 2009). For example, in 2008, the U.S. government spent \$26 billion in foreign aid to address the plight of the world's poor. Much of this aid, however, was for armaments, not humanitarian aid. In the case of Egypt, the United States gave \$1.3 billion in 2008 to buy weapons; only \$103 million for education, and \$74 million for health care (O'Brien, 2008).

The United States spent \$610 billion in 2014 on military defense. What if the United States committed 10 percent of the annual military budget, combining it with the largesse of other wealthy nations, to eradicate diseases such as poliomyelitis and leprosy and reduce the spread of infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis? How much would it take to give every child a basic level of literacy? The World Bank estimates that about \$8 billion would make birth control readily available globally.

The wealthy nations can provide humanitarian aid to the developing nations with three provisos: (1) that it is truly humanitarian (such as technology and agricultural equipment to improve local economies, medical supplies, food, inoculation programs, family planning, sewage treatment systems, water treatment) and not military aid; (2) that the aid reaches the intended targets (those in need), not the well-off elites; and (3) that the governments in the impoverished nations have sensible plans for using the new resources, such as spending on health (e.g., the vaccination of children) and education, especially for women.

## Social Policy

### Are Microloans the Answer for the World's Poor?

The 2006 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Muhammad Yunus, an economics professor from Bangladesh. Since the 1970s, Yunus, through his Grameen Bank, has been offering very small loans (usually under \$100) to the impoverished to start activities such as buying a dairy cow or a mobile phone that villagers can pay to use. Since then, the Bank has disbursed more than \$5.3 billion to nearly 7 million borrowers who have no collateral. They pay a high interest rate (as much as 20 percent) to service these small loans, but 98 percent of the loans are paid off. Ninety-six percent of these loans are to women because traditionally, banks in the developing world lend only to men.

This model for helping the world's poorest has attracted funds from various foundations (e.g., Michael and Susan Dell Foundation, Google.org, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation) and from the World Bank, which grants loans of as little as \$1,000 for enterprises such as brick making. Through these foundations, 91 million borrowers received microloans, with loans totalling more than \$70 billion by the end of 2009. The goal of the Microcredit Summit Campaign is to reach 175 million of the world's poorest families.

Without question, this microcredit movement has helped many poor women and their families, but there

are problems. At the personal level, most borrowers do not climb out of poverty and many are trapped in a spiral of debt (Bajaj, 2011). At the societal level, while microloans help some individuals and families, they do not have an impact on the poverty rate in the larger society (Bruck, 2006:67; Cockburn, 2009:9). Bangladesh and Bolivia, for example, have two of the most successful microcredit programs in the world, but they also remain two of the poorest countries of the world.

Two plans should be added to the microcredit program. At the microlevel, lending should be combined with other initiatives, such as education and health care. And foremost, the structural causes of poverty in these impoverished nations must be addressed. While small enterprises are good, what are needed are enterprises that hire workers. Moreover, the microloans initiative seeks solutions in the market and thus relieves government from their responsibilities for reducing poverty (Cockburn, 2009:9). In the eyes of many, the market is a major source for the abject poverty in the world. Although microloans do help many individuals, they must be combined with structural societal reforms necessary to reduce overall poverty.

How much commitment should the United States make to bringing poor nations up to a minimum standard? Many citizens, corporations, and politicians are indifferent to the plight of the poor, hungry, and sick far away. Many have misgivings about helping corrupt governments. Others are opposed to our support of family planning and the funding of abortion.

The ultimate interest of the United States is best served if there is peace and stability in the developing world. These goals can be accomplished only if population growth is slowed significantly, hunger and poverty are alleviated, and the extremes of inequality are reduced.

If the United States and other developed nations do not take appropriate steps, human misery, acts of terrorism against affluent nations, tensions among neighbors, and wars—even nuclear war—will increase. The last factor becomes especially relevant given that a number of developing nations have nuclear bomb capabilities.

Moreover, a number of developing-world countries have been alleged to use chemical weapons. The ultimate question is whether the way these steps are implemented will help the developing world reduce its dependence on the more developed nations, the hunger and misery within their countries, and in the process, international tensions. We ignore the poor of the developing world at our peril.

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## Chapter Review

### 3.1 Understand the factors affecting world population growth.

- In 2015, the world population reached 7.3 billion and was increasing by 80 million annually. Most of the population growth occurs in the developing world, where food, housing, health care, and employment are inadequate to meet present and future needs.
- There are three ways to reduce high fertility in the developing world: (a) economic development (modern demographic transition), (b) family-planning programs, and (c) social change, especially through the changing of traditional women's roles.

### 3.2 Describe the extent of world poverty and the consequences of that poverty.

- The global poverty rate is declining; however, 1 billion people live on less than \$1.25 per day.
- Hunger is a worldwide problem, especially in the developing world, but even there, food production is adequate to meet the needs of all of the people. The problem of hunger results from high prices, unequal distribution of food, overreliance on cash crops, and concentration of land ownership among very few people—all the consequences of the political economy in these nations and the world. Furthermore, the amount of productive land is shrinking in rich and poor countries alike because of the loss of topsoil, the lowering of water tables from irrigation and overgrazing, and pollution.
- Approximately 783 million people do not have access to clean water, leading to illness and 6 to 8 million deaths each year. A huge worldwide problem, especially among the poor in

sub-Saharan Africa, is HIV/AIDS. Since 1980, more than 60 million people have contracted this disease worldwide, with more than 40 million deaths.

- It is estimated that there are 27 million slaves in the world. The new slavery is a consequence of extreme poverty, resulting in debt bondage and the sale of people to slaveholders.
- Within the nations experiencing the most rapid population growth, cities are growing much faster than rural areas. Today, there are 28 megacities with a population of more than 10 million, placing enormous pressure on infrastructure to support so many inhabitants.

### 3.3 Explain the relationship between the United States and poor nations around the world.

- The developing world is underdeveloped for a number of reasons, the most important of which is a heritage of colonialism. Colonialism destroyed local industries and self-sufficient crop-growing patterns, drained off resources for the benefit of the colonizers, and promoted local elites through concentration of land ownership among the few. In the postcolonial era, the dependency of the developing world and its control by outside forces continue.
- Transnational corporations, the majority of which are based in the United States, control the world economy. Their power in the underdeveloped nations perpetuates the dependency of many developing-world nations on the United States.
- Transnationals add to the tensions in developing-world countries through arms sales and

corporate dumping of products known to be dangerous.

### 3.4 Discuss how the U.S. and other wealthy nations can help impoverished countries.

- If the United States and other developed nations do not take appropriate steps, human misery, acts of terrorism against affluent nations, tensions

among neighbors, and wars—even nuclear war—will increase.

- The ultimate interest of the United States is best served if there is peace and stability in the developing world. These goals can be accomplished only if population growth is slowed significantly, hunger and poverty are alleviated, and the extremes of inequality are reduced.

## Key Terms

**Colony** A territory controlled by a powerful country that exploits the land and the people for its own benefit.

**Corporate dumping** The exporting of goods that have either been banned or not approved for sale in the United States because they are dangerous.

**Differential fertility** Differences in the average number of children born to a woman by social category.

**Fertility rate** The average number of children born to each woman.

**Life chances** The chances throughout one's life cycle to live and experience the good things in life.

**Megacity** An urban population of more than 10 million people.

**Modern demographic transition** A three-stage pattern of population change occurring as societies industrialize and urbanize, resulting ultimately in a low and stable population growth rate.

**New slavery** The new slavery differs from traditional slavery in that it is, for the most part, not a lifelong condition and sometimes individuals and families become slaves by choice—a choice forced by extreme poverty.

**Pandemic** A worldwide epidemic.

**Transnational corporation** A profit-oriented company engaged in business activities in more than one nation.

## Chapter 4

# Demographic Changes in the United States: The Browning and Graying of Society



## Learning Objectives

- 4.1 Understand the myths and facts about immigration in the United States.
- 4.2 Understand the demographic trends on aging in the United States.
- 4.3 Assess the potential problems of the “graying of America.”

**Demography** is the scientific study of a population—its current size, distribution, and composition as well as changes over time. Two major population shifts are transforming U.S. society—one with external sources and the other internal. The first is the “new immigration.” The racial landscape and rate of population growth are greatly affected as approximately 1 million immigrants annually, mostly Latino and Asian, set up permanent residence in the United States. The second population change is internal—the age of the population is rising rapidly. Both of these demographic transitions have profound implications for social problems, creating some and exacerbating others. The facts, myths, and consequences of these two demographic changes are the subjects of this chapter.

### Demography

The study of population size, distribution, composition, and changes over time.

## New Immigration and the Changing Racial Landscape

### 4.1 Understand the myths and facts about immigration in the United States.

The United States is shifting from an Anglo-White society rooted in Western culture to a society with three large racial/ethnic minorities, each of them growing in size while the proportion of Whites declines (parts of this chapter are taken from Eitzen, Baca Zinn, and Smith 2016, and Baca Zinn, Eitzen, and Wells 2014). Consider the following facts:

- *More than one-third of the people in the United States are African American, Latino, Asian, or Native American.* Five states have non-White majorities (Arizona, California, Texas, New Mexico, and Hawaii). Minorities make up the majority in six of the eight U.S. cities with more than a million people—New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, Detroit, and Dallas.
- *Racial minorities are increasing faster than the majority population.*
- *African Americans have lost their position as the most numerous racial minority.* In 1990, for the first time, African Americans were less than half of all minorities. By 2000, Latinos outnumbered African Americans 42.7 million to 39.7 million. By 2050, Latinos will comprise a projected 29 percent of the U.S. population, with African Americans at about 13 percent.
- *Immigration now accounts for a large share of the nation’s population growth.* Today, 13 percent of current U.S. residents are foreign-born.
- *New patterns of immigration are changing the racial composition of society.* Among the expanded population of first-generation immigrants, the Asian-born now outnumber the European-born, and those from Latin America, especially Mexicans, outnumber both. Let’s take a closer look at immigration patterns in the United States.

### Immigration Patterns

**Immigration**, the permanent movement of people into a country to which they are not native or do not possess citizenship, is the foundation of U.S. society. Historically, immigration has been a major source of population growth and ethnic diversity. Immigration waves from northern and southern Europe, especially from 1850 to 1920, brought many millions of people, mostly Europeans, to America. In the 1920s, the

### Immigration

The movement of people into a destination country to which they are not native or do not possess citizenship.

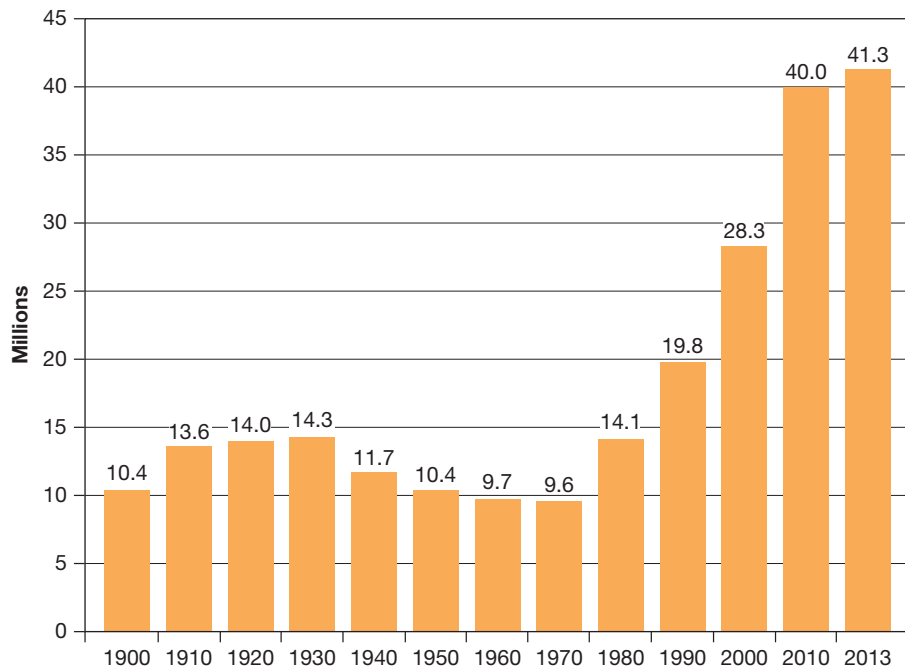


United States placed limits on the number of immigrants it would accept, the operating principle being that the new immigrants should resemble the old ones. The “national origins” rules were designed to limit severely the immigration of Eastern Europeans and to deny the entry of Asians.

The Immigration Act amendments of 1965 abandoned the quota system that had preserved the European character of the United States for nearly half a century. The new law encouraged a new wave of immigrants, only this time the migrants arrived not from northern Europe but from the Third World, especially Asia and Latin America. The result, obviously, is a dramatic alteration of the ethnic composition of the U.S. population. And the size of the contemporary immigrant wave has resulted in a visible and significant number of U.S. residents who are foreign-born—41.3 million in 2013 (13 percent of the total population, up from 8 percent in 1990). (See Figure 4.1.) About 1 million immigrants enter the United States legally each year. Another 2.5 million people enter the United States illegally each year, but many return to their native countries either voluntarily or by force if caught by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (see the “Social Policy” panel). Although the number that enters clandestinely is impossible to determine, the Department of Homeland Security’s Office of Immigration Statistics estimated the unauthorized immigrant population at about 11.4 million in March 2012 (Zong and Batalova 2015). Roughly 71 percent of these undocumented immigrants were born in Mexico and other Central American countries.

**Figure 4.1** Foreign-Born Population: 1900–2013 (millions).

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of the Census.



## Social Policy

### The Unintended Consequences of Rigid Policing of the Border

The U.S.–Mexican border is 1,989 miles in length. U.S. policy has been to increase the policing of this border, apprehending those who crossed illegally and sending them back to Mexico. Congress passed the Secure Fence Act of 2006, authorizing 700 miles of “two layers of reinforced fencing” along the border, and roughly one-third of the border is now fenced.

Until the 1990s, the border was patrolled but passage was relatively easy. In the early 1980s, there were about 2,500 Border Patrol officers; now there are 21,000. The agency’s annual budget has risen accordingly. The Border Patrol, in the last decade, has directed its efforts especially to areas where border crossings were the easiest (around San Diego, California, and El Paso, Texas). As a result, the likelihood of successfully crossing the border has decreased dramatically. The Border Patrol has stopped millions of people from entering the United States illegally. These arrests are filmed and shown to the public, promoting ever-greater fears about the waves of Mexican workers flooding into the United States.

The increased emphasis on sealing the border has had two unintended consequences. First, it shifted the crossing routes to more remote but more dangerous areas. Using alternative routes has tripled the cost of getting across the border illegally and resulted in many people dying of thirst and exposure in long marches across the desert.

Second, and related to the first, those successful in crossing now tend to stay in the United States rather than move back and forth between the two countries.

In the past, many undocumented workers came to the United States, usually without their families, to follow the harvest or do other jobs for brief periods, and then returned to their families in Mexico. Now, with better policing, the migrants know that if they go back to Mexico, the odds are greater that they will not be able to return. This “seawall effect” keeps them here, and for that reason, they now arrive with their families and tend to stay. In other words, the increased militancy by the Border Patrol has had the effect of building a “wall” that, rather than keeping migrants out, actually keeps them in.



Most unauthorized immigrants enter the United States by crossing the border with Mexico. The United States vigorously tries to stop illegal crossings of the Mexican border by the use of 21,000 Border Patrol officers, who patrol in vehicles, on horses, and in boats, helicopters, and planes. Also, advanced technology such as reconnaissance drones and seismic, magnetic, and infra-red sensors are employed to stem the flow of illegal immigration. Moreover, a third of the border has been fenced at great expense.

After a high of more than 1.6 million arrests of unauthorized immigrants in 2000, the number in 2014 was 315,943 (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement 2015). This significant drop in patrol arrests is because of heightened border control efforts,

but just as important is the very slow U.S. economy and high unemployment, making jobs more uncertain and the diminished rewards not worth the risks for potential illegal immigrants (Jordan 2011).

The settlement patterns of this new migration differ from previous flows into the United States. Whereas previous immigrants settled primarily in the industrial states of the Northeast and Middle Atlantic regions or in the farming areas of the Midwest, recent immigrants have tended to locate on the two coasts and in the Southwest. Asians have tended to settle on the West Coast; Mexicans, although predominantly in the Southwest, are also scattered across the country, from urban Chicago to rural Kansas, as are other Latinos (e.g., Cubans in Florida and Puerto Ricans and Dominicans in New York).\*

California is a harbinger of the demographic future of the United States. As recently as 1970, California was 80 percent White, but since then, it has been uniquely affected by immigration. The result is that Whites in California now are a numerical minority: In 2010, there were 14 million Latinos, 4.8 million Asians, and 15 million Whites. Latino children for the first time were a majority of California's under-age-18 population.

Los Angeles has the largest population of Koreans outside Korea, the biggest concentration of Iranians in the Western world, and a huge Mexican population. The diverse population of southern California speaks 88 languages and dialects. One-fourth of California's schoolchildren are studying English as a foreign language. Greater Los Angeles has more than fifty foreign-language newspapers and television shows that broadcast in Spanish, Mandarin, Armenian, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese. For example, in one ZIP code—90706—lies Bellflower, where thirty-eight languages are spoken (Mohan and Simmons 2004).

For all this diversity, though, California, especially southern California, is becoming more and more Latino. California holds nearly half the U.S. Latino population and well over half the Mexican-origin population. Latinos are expected to surpass Whites in total California population by 2025. Similar concentrations of Latinos are found in Arizona and Texas. Historian David Kennedy argues that there is no precedent in U.S. history of one immigrant group having the size and concentration that the Mexican immigrant group has in the Southwest today (Kennedy 1996:68).

## Conflicts over Immigration

Despite the fact that the United States is a country founded by immigrants, immigration is a controversial topic, as our politicians fight over immigration policy. In November 2014, President Obama laid out an immigration plan that included multiple issues like improving border security and high-tech visas. What caused an uproar among republicans was the inclusion of protection for approximately 5 million undocumented immigrants from deportation. Obama also created a program in 2012 (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) that has legalized more than half a million undocumented immigrants brought to the United States as children. The continuation of these policies and the future of immigration reform will be based on the outcome of the 2016 presidential election.

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\*Note that there is a wide diversity among immigrant groups. For example, although there are more than 3 million Latinos living in Florida, they come from several ethnic backgrounds: Cubans, Puerto Ricans, South Americans, Central Americans, Mexicans, and Dominicans.

**HEIGHTENING TENSIONS** The latest wave of immigration has taken place in a historical context that includes the restructuring of the U.S. economy and an increasingly conservative political climate. New immigrants have always been seen as a threat to those already in place. The typical belief is that immigrants, because they will work for lower wages, drive down wages and take jobs away from those already settled here. These fears increase during economic hard times, when businesses downsize or when they outsource jobs, pay lower wages, and replace workers with technology as they adapt to the economic transformation. The hostility toward immigrants is also the result of the common belief that the new immigrants increase taxes because they require services (education, health care, and welfare) that cost much more than the taxes they produce.

The situation is worsened further by where the new immigrants locate. Typically, they move where immigrants like themselves are already established. For example, 20 percent of the 90,000 Hmong in the United States live in Minnesota, mostly around Minneapolis–St. Paul. Approximately 40 percent of all Asian Americans live in California. This tendency of migrants to cluster geographically by race/ethnicity provides them with a network of friends and relatives who provide them with support. This pattern of clustering in certain areas also tends to increase the fear of nonimmigrants toward them. They fear that wages will be depressed and taxes will be greater because their new neighbors are relatively poor, tend to have children with special needs in school, and likely do not have health insurance.

A second tendency is for new immigrants to locate where other poor people live for the obvious advantage of cheaper housing. A problem often arises when poor Whites live side by side with one or more racial minorities. Despite their common condition, tensions in such situations are heightened as groups disadvantaged by society often fight each other for relative advantage. The tensions between African Americans and Asian immigrants were evidenced, for example, during the South Los Angeles riots in 1992, when roughly 2,000 Korean-owned businesses were looted or damaged by fire.

The result of these factors is commonly an anti-immigrant backlash. Opinion polls taken over the past fifty years report consistently that Americans want to reduce immigration. Typically, these polls report that Americans believe that immigration in the past was a good thing for the country but not anymore.

The states with the most immigrants have the highest levels of anti-immigrant feeling. Several states have filed suit against the federal government, seeking reimbursement for the services provided to immigrants. Some twenty-two states have made English the official state language. Some states such as Arizona and Alabama have enacted laws that are punitive to recent emigrants. At the federal level, Congress passed a

Some are angry with immigrants, who they feel take their jobs and use state resources for their education and health care.



bill in late 2006 that authorized fencing a third of the border between the United States and Mexico.

Anti-immigration activists are becoming more numerous and vocal. The Southern Poverty Law Center says that tensions over illegal immigration are contributing to a rise in hate groups and hate crimes across the nation (Potok 2011). White supremacy groups are growing. Vigilante groups have organized to watch the borders. What brings the anti-immigration activists together is a generalized belief that immigrants are a threat to their jobs and a drain on society's resources. Are they correct in these assumptions? Let's look at the facts.

**JOBS** Recent immigrants from Mexico can earn five times the wage rate in the United States that they can earn in Mexico. This is the lure. Because many do not speak English and their skills are limited, they tend to work at low-wage occupations such as gardeners, roofers, assemblers, custodians, restaurant help, maids, and migrant farm workers. While immigrants may be overrepresented in low-wage occupations, the perception that all immigrants work in low-wage jobs is inaccurate—46 percent of immigrants work in white-collar jobs (for example, 22 percent of dental, nursing, and health aides and 31 percent of computer software developers are immigrants) (Costa, Cooper, and Shierholz 2014). The evidence indicates that immigrants are part of the top, middle, and bottom of the economic ladder.

According to the Economic Policy Institute, the evidence shows that immigrants *do not* reduce native employment rates and that in the long run, immigration has a small, positive impact on the labor market outcomes of native-born workers, on average (Costa, Cooper, and Shierholz 2014). In terms of wages, evidence shows that the effect of immigration overall on native-born workers' wages is also small and, on average, positive. This would indicate that overall, Americans' fears over immigrants being a threat to native workers' jobs and wages are unfounded. There is some debate, however, among economists about whether certain subgroups are negatively affected, like workers with low levels of education. Research demonstrates that the group most adversely affected by new immigration in terms of jobs and wages is earlier immigrants, not the native-born (most likely due to living in the same places and competing for the same jobs). See "A Closer Look" panel for some positive benefits from undocumented workers.

This problem will increase in the future as the federal and state governments no longer provide welfare benefits to legal immigrants and most nonimmigrant welfare recipients are required to leave welfare and find work, adding several million workers to compete for relatively few jobs at the low end of the occupational scale.

Also pushing wages lower are the shrinking manufacturing sector, the decline in union membership, the outsourcing of jobs, and the Great Recession, which has especially brought high unemployment to the construction industry.

On the positive side, immigrants are more likely than the rest of the population to be self-employed and start their own businesses, which in turn creates jobs and adds strength to local economies. Between 1990 and 2005, immigrants started one-fourth of all venture-backed public companies (Kotkin 2010).

Immigration stimulates economic growth in at least two additional ways. First, the immigrants buy products and services. Second, to the extent that cheap, low-skilled labor helps hold down prices, there is more demand for some services, leading to more economic growth and jobs.

## A CLOSER LOOK

### Some Societal Benefits from Undocumented Workers

The presence of 11 million illegal immigrants is a contentious issue in the United States. Most folks assume these workers have negative consequences for society. Although there are some negative costs from undocumented workers (e.g., some native-borns are hurt by the competition from illegal immigrants who are willing to work cheaply, the cost of educating their children, and the cost of emergency room care for uninsured migrants), they also bring major benefits to the overall economy (Streitland 2006).

- If there were no undocumented workers, a variety of industries would be disrupted. Employers in construction, hospitality, childcare, factories, food preparation, building maintenance, landscaping, and agriculture would have to attract new workers with higher wages. Wages for undereducated workers, retail prices at restaurants, and costs of food, housing, and many other goods and services would soar.
- Most undocumented immigrants contribute to Social Security but do not receive benefits, either because they used false papers to get payroll jobs or they returned to their native country.
- As society ages, there will be a continuous need for more workers, especially service workers. The Department of Labor estimates that in the next decade, we will need 7.7 million more workers. Much of this demand will be for unskilled labor, which has been met by undocumented workers (Zuckerman 2006).
- The 11 million undocumented immigrants are consumers, and although their household income is relatively low, collectively, they have considerable buying power. They pay rent, buy groceries and clothing, and take out loans for furniture, automobiles, and houses. It is estimated that if all unauthorized immigrants were deported from the United States, the country would lose \$551 billion in economic activity, \$245 billion in gross domestic product, and 2.8 million jobs (American Immigration Council 2015).

**SOCIETY'S RESOURCES** Immigrants pay a variety of taxes: income taxes, Social Security and Medicare taxes, and sales taxes. One study estimated that they pay \$162 billion annually in federal, state, and local taxes (reported in West 2010). In the short run, however, immigrants consume more in public services and benefits than they pay in taxes. There are two reasons immigrants require more resources from the state than nonimmigrant families. First, they have relatively large families, and these children go to public schools. Second, they pay less in taxes because they tend to earn low wages and have relatively little discretionary income.

In the long run, however, immigrants are a good investment for society. The Academy of Sciences study (Cassidy 1997) found that by the time a typical immigrant with a family dies, that immigrant and his or her children will have paid \$80,000 more in taxes than they received in government benefits. The evidence is

that immigrants are a fiscal burden for two decades or so, mainly because of educational costs. After that, the society benefits monetarily.

This conclusion fits at the national level: That is, most taxes paid by immigrants and income taxes withheld by the federal government are used in part to provide Social Security and health care benefits to the elderly. However, the state and local taxes paid by immigrants are relatively low, yet the services they consume (in particular, education) are disproportionately funded by state and local taxes. Immigration is a national problem, but one borne by the states. This unbalance is a source of growing hostility, as evidenced by the anti-immigrant legislation in 2010 passed by the Arizona legislature.

There is also a global dimension to the economic benefits derived from immigrants. Most undocumented immigrants (i.e., those who entered the country illegally) are young, male, and Mexican. They leave their families in Mexico and work for months at a time as manual laborers in the United States. Typically, they send some of their earnings back to their families in Mexico—an aggregate \$25 billion annually, according to the World Bank.

### Human agency

People are agents and actors who cope with, adapt to, and change social structures to meet their needs.

### Islamophobia

Anti-Muslim sentiment; a term for prejudice against, hatred toward, or fear of the religion of Islam or Muslims.

## Immigration and Human Agency

Immigration can be forced (e.g., the slave trade) or freely chosen. Immigration in this latter sense is clearly an act of **human agency** (rather than passively accepting structural constraints, people cope with, adapt to, and change their social situations to meet their needs). Most people in developing countries do not move. Others move, breaking with their extended family and leaving neighborhood and community ties, mostly to improve their economic situations or to flee repression.

Typically, new immigrants face hostility from their hosts, who, as we have seen, fear them as competitors or hate them because they are “different” or because they fear that they may be terrorists. In this latter instance, immigrants from Muslim countries have had to confront considerable hostility and suspicion since the terrorist acts

of September 11, 2001, and various polls show that those sentiments are on the rise fourteen years later. The hostility is so prevalent that it has been given a name—**Islamophobia**.

Recent immigrants also face language barriers as they seek jobs. Often, most especially for undocumented immigrants, their initial jobs are demeaning, poorly paid, and without benefits. How do they adapt to these often very difficult circumstances? Most commonly, immigrants move to a destination area where there is already a network of friends and relatives. These networks connect



new immigrants with housing (often doubling up in very crowded but inexpensive conditions), jobs, and an informal welfare system (health care, pooling resources in difficult times). These mutual-aid efforts by immigrant communities have been used by immigrant networks throughout U.S. history, whether by Swedish settlers in Minnesota, Mennonite settlers in Kansas, Irish settlers in Boston, or Mexican or Vietnamese settlers now.

To overcome low wages, all able family members may work in the family enterprise or at different jobs and combine family resources. To overcome various manifestations of hostility by others, the immigrant community may become closer, having as little interaction with outsiders as possible. Some may become involved in gangs for protection. Still others may move to assimilate as quickly as possible.

**Assimilation** is the process by which individuals or groups adopt the culture of another group, losing their original identity. A principal indicator of assimilation is language. Assuming the experience of earlier immigrants to the United States, it is likely that the shift to English usage will take three generations—from almost exclusive use by newcomers of their traditional language, to their children being bilingual, to their children’s children (third-generation immigrants) being monolingual English speakers (Martin and Midgley 1999). According to the Pew Hispanic Center, in 2007, for example, 23 percent of adult first-generation Latinos said they could carry on a conversation very well in English, compared to 88 percent in the second generation and 94 percent in the third (reported in Gorman 2007).

If the past is a guide, the new immigrants will assimilate. But conditions now are different. An argument countering the assumption that the new immigrants will assimilate as did previous generations of immigrants is that the new immigrants are members of racial/ethnic groups, not Whites. The early waves of immigrants were mostly White Europeans. Over time, these groups were absorbed into the “melting pot” of society’s mainstream because jobs were relatively plentiful and they did not face racial antipathy. Today’s immigrants, however, face a different reality. A commonly held assumption is that when new immigrants do not assimilate easily or if they continue to be poor, it is their fault. Thus, blame for many social problems and resistance to assimilation is placed on the immigrants, thereby “ignoring the impact of larger forces, such as racism and the economic order, that limit opportunities for success and present barriers to assimilation” (Pyke 2008:212).

The current political mood is to eliminate affirmative action (as California did in 1997) and to reduce or eliminate social programs that help level the playing field so that minorities would have a fair chance to succeed. Some legislation is especially punitive toward recent immigrants, particularly the undocumented. In reaction, organizations across the United States have formed to fight

### Assimilation

The process by which individuals or groups adopt the culture of another group, losing their original identity.



Mike Keefe/CAGLE CARTOONS



for immigrant rights such as FIRM (Fair Immigration Reform Movement), the New Sanctuary Movement, the Immigrant Solidarity Network, and others.

In sum, the new immigration, occurring at a time of economic uncertainty and reduced governmental services, has resulted in (1) increasing racial diversity as racial/ethnic minorities are growing at a rate faster than Whites and the foreign-born now number more than 43 million; (2) debates over immigration reform; and (3) heightened tensions between the native-born and immigrants due to fears over jobs and society's resources.

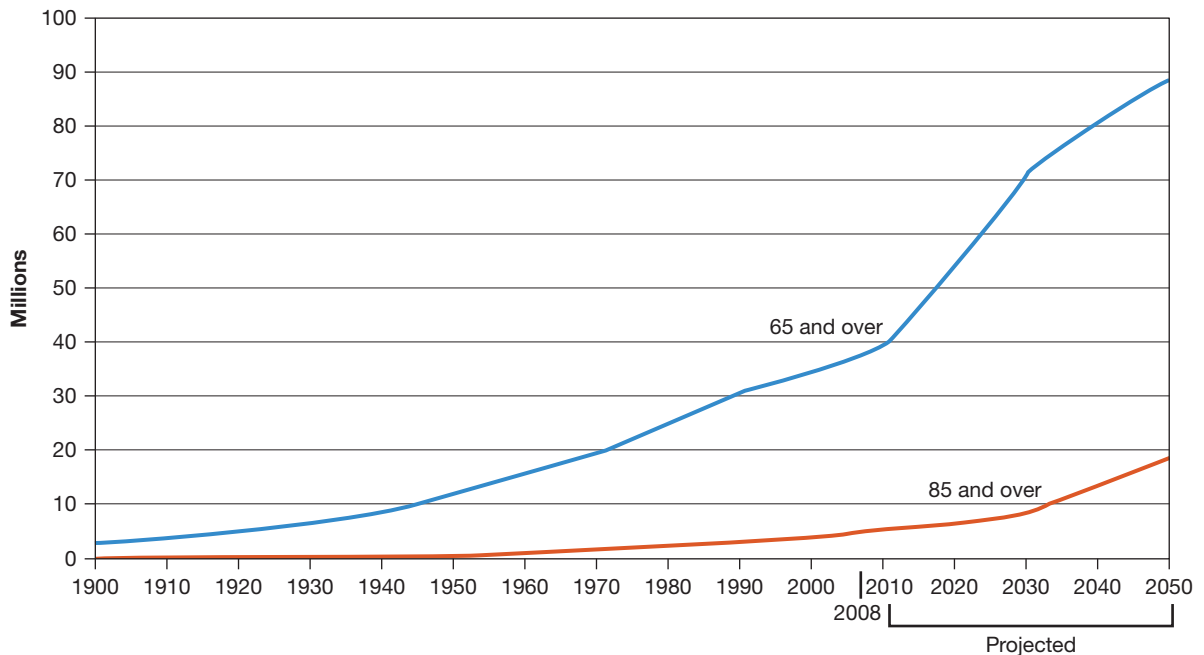
## The Aging Society

### 4.2 Understand the demographic trends on aging in the United States.

The population of the United States is experiencing a pronounced change in its age structure—it has become older and is on the verge of becoming much older. In 1900, about one in twenty-five residents of the United States was 65 years and older. By 1950, it was about one in twelve. In 2000, one in eight was 65 and older, and by 2030, it will likely be around one in five, with more people over 65 than under age 18. In effect, by 2030, when most of today's college students will be between 30 and 40, there will be more grandparents than grandchildren. The Senior Boom is coming, and it will transform society in many ways (see Figure 4.2). Consider, for example,

**Figure 4.2** Population Age 65 and Older and Age 85 and Older Population Projections

**SOURCE:** Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics, *Older Americans 2010*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, July 2010, p. 2. U.S. Bureau of the Census.



NOTE: Data for 2010–2050 are projections of the population.  
Reference population: These data refer to the resident population.

that beginning January 1, 2011, every single day for the next nineteen years, more than 10,000 members of the **baby boom generation** (the bulge in the population born from 1948 to 1964) will reach the age of 65. As a result, the number of senior citizens will increase from 13 percent in 2010 to 20 percent in 2030. This dramatic increase will affect families as more seniors live with their adult children and as more children are parented by their grandparents. And it will affect politics, as the elderly will likely vote as a bloc on issues in their interest such as Medicare and Social Security.

### Baby boom generation

The people born in the fifteen-year period following World War II, when an extraordinary number of babies were born in the United States.

## Demographic Trends

Until the twentieth century, high **fertility** (birth rate) and high **mortality** (death rate) kept the United States a youthful nation. During the last century, however, the birth rate fell (except for during the post–World War II period, which was an anomaly), resulting in fewer children as a proportion of the total population. Most important, greater longevity because of advances in medical technology (everything from beta-blockers for reducing hypertension to organ transplants) has increased the life expectancy of Americans. The average life expectancy in 1900 was 49 years, and in 2012 it was 78.8 (81.2 for women, 76.4 for men).

### Fertility

Birth rate.

### Mortality

Death rate.

So, essentially in 130 years (from 1900 to 2030), people age 65 and older will have shifted from one out of twenty Americans to one in five. The surge in the number of elderly during the next few decades is the consequence of three demographic forces: a continued low fertility rate, ever-greater life expectancy rates, and the baby boom generation (the ~76 million born between 1946 and 1964, representing 70 percent more people than were born during the preceding two decades) reaching old age, beginning in 2011 and ending in 2030. (See Figure 4.3 showing the population pyramids for 2000 and 2050. Each shows the changing age structure as the baby boom group moves toward old age.)

Hidden within these statistics is another important fact about the old—they are getting older. In 1950, there were 600,000 in this category of 85 and older (the “old old”) compared to 5.7 million in 2008, a ninefold increase. In 2030, there will be an estimated 8,500,000 (12 percent of the elderly) age 85 and over. By 2050, this number is expected to be 19.0 million or 23 percent of all elderly Americans. In 1950, there were 2,300 Americans age 100 and older (15 per 1 million population). In 2010, there were about 71,991 (230 per 1 million population, reflecting the continued advances in medicine and nutrition) (Census Bureau, reported in *Janus Report* 2011:4). It is expected that the number of centenarians will increase to about 1 million by the middle of the twenty-first century. Children born today have a fifty-fifty chance of reaching 100 years of age.

## Demographic Portrait of the Current Elderly Population

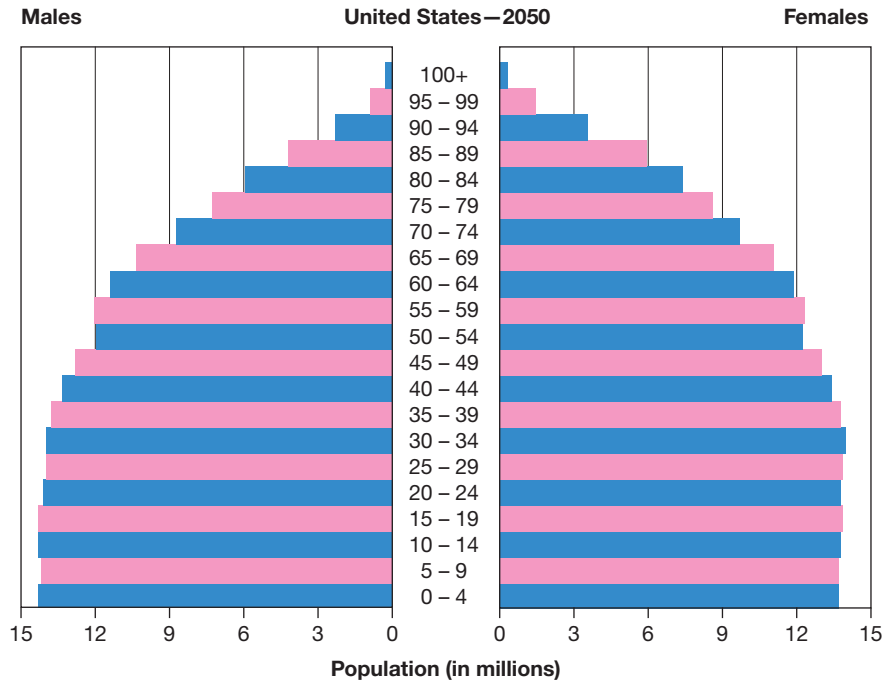
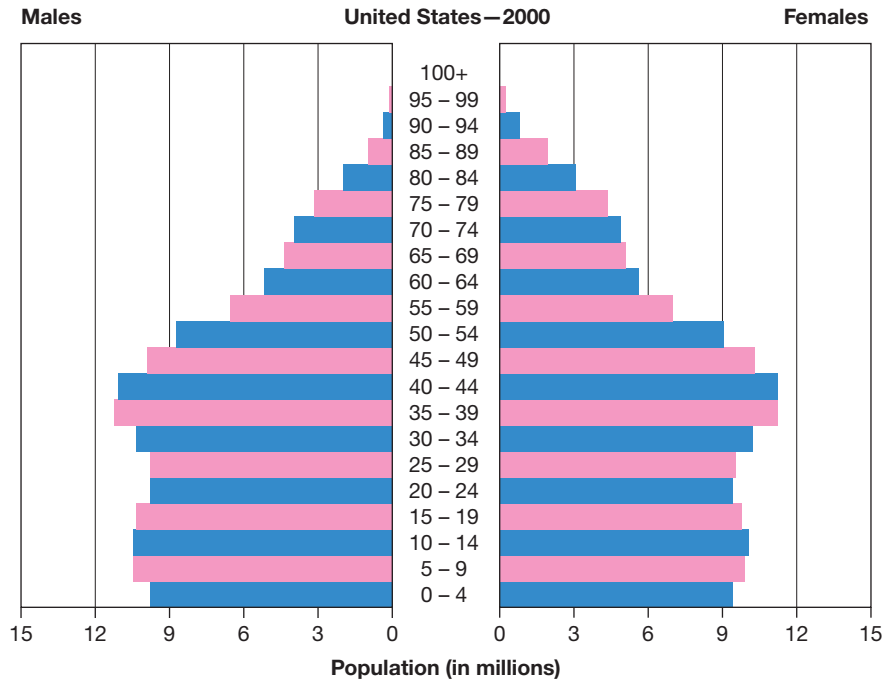
As the numbers indicate, the elderly population is growing and will continue to grow. What does this population look like?

**SEX RATIO** Older women outnumber older men by a ratio of 3 to 2. As age increases, the disparity becomes greater—for those age 85 and older, there are about five women to every two men. By age 100 and older, four in five are women.

Elderly women are thus more likely than men to live alone as widows. This is the result of two factors: the greater longevity of women and the social norm for men to

**Figure 4.3** Age-Sex Structure of the United States in Years 2000 and 2050.

SOURCE: Shrestha, Laura B., and Elayne J. Heisler, 2011. The Changing Demographic Profile of the United States. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 7-5700 (March 31). www.crs.gov.



marry younger women. Thus, to the extent that isolation is a problem of the aged, it is overwhelmingly a problem of elderly women. Because of pensions through work and the traditional bias of Social Security toward women who had not worked outside the home, elderly women are much more likely than elderly men to be poor (11.6 percent poverty rate compared with 6.8 percent for men). African American and Latino elderly women have an even higher probability than their male counterparts of being poor.

**RACIAL/ETHNIC COMPOSITION** Because racial minorities have lower life expectancy than Whites (e.g., African Americans live about four fewer years), they form a smaller proportion of the elderly category than of other age groups. There are several reasons for minorities being underrepresented among the elderly. The gap for Latinos is explained in part by immigration because most Latino immigrants are young adults. But the primary reason for the relatively low proportion of minorities among the elderly, compared to Whites, is that they do not live as long because large numbers do not have health insurance, they receive poor health care, and they often work at physically demanding and sometimes dangerous jobs. Most significant, the elderly who are members of racial/ethnic groups are disproportionately poor.

**LONGEVITY** At the founding of the United States, life expectancy at birth was about 35 years. By 1900, life expectancy had increased to 49 years. In 2010, it was 78.7 years. This average masks some differences: (1) women live longer than men (their life expectancy is 81.2, compared to 76.4 for men), and (2) racial gaps show little sign of closing. For instance, the life expectancy for White females is 81.3 and for White males it is 78.5 years; for Black females, it is 78.0 and for Black males it is 71.8. An interesting anomaly is the so-called “Latino or Hispanic Paradox.” According to the Centers for Disease Control, on average, Latinos outlive Whites by 2 years and have lower mortality rates in seven out of the ten leading causes of death, despite their generally lower incomes and lower probability of having health insurance. There are several possible reasons for this contradiction: (1) the Latino population tends to be younger; (2) Hispanics have lower smoking rates, better diet, and better general health; and (3) Latinos have close-knit families and support systems (Gonzalez 2015).

**GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION** Some states and communities have disproportionately older residents. One-fourth of all elderly Americans live in three states (California, Florida, and New York). Many rural states have a relatively high proportion of elderly as these states experience a large outmigration of young people. Most elderly remain in their communities after retirement (“aging in place”), but those who move tend to migrate to the favorable climate found in the Sun Belt states (Florida, California, Arizona, Nevada, and Texas). Those who migrate are not representative of the elderly. They tend to be younger and more affluent than those who stay in their home communities. Thus, they benefit their new communities by broadening the tax base through home ownership, strong purchasing power, and not burdening the local job market. The communities they left in the Snow Belt are negatively affected. The elderly who remain are disproportionately older and poorer and require more public assistance from a lower community tax base.

**WEALTH, INCOME, AND CUMULATIVE ADVANTAGE OR DISADVANTAGE** For obvious reasons, the wealth accrued over a lifetime of work affects the quality of life during retirement. The economically challenged will continue to struggle with the

exigencies of life after retirement, whereas those with economic advantage retain it in their later years. This changed for the relatively affluent, however, with the bursting of the economic bubble in 2007. Prior to the Great Recession, recent retirees, in general, had personal resources—education, income, and assets—unknown to previous cohorts. They benefited from a sharp rise in the stock market during the 1990s and extraordinary gains in real estate markets in the previous three decades, which ultimately they passed on to their fortunate heirs. Yet, many elderly missed out on the boom. They did not own a home or have enough assets to invest. But the boom did not last, presenting difficulties for many of the previously affluent.

Home equity is most significant in having a reasonable net worth. In this regard, those who are currently in the old category had an advantage because their home purchases in the 1950s and 1960s were much cheaper in interest and mortgage payments relative to wages than were homes bought in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. However, in the three years after the housing bubble burst, homes had lost \$11 trillion in value. Moreover, the stock market lost more than \$7 trillion in value, with mutual funds dropping 38 percent. Investments in retirement savings (401(k)s) lost more than \$1 trillion, and over an eighteen-month period, the investments in public pension plans lost a combined \$1.3 trillion (Byrnes and Palmeri 2009). As a result, many who thought they had more than enough saved for retirement found that they did not. Many had to postpone retirement, remaining in the labor force indefinitely. Of course, although losing money, many of the affluent old remained comfortably affluent.

Elderly married couples tend to have greater net worth than elderly singles. Households maintained by unmarried elderly males have a greater net worth than households maintained by unmarried elderly women. Similarly, White married-couple households with a householder age 65 or older will likely have higher family incomes than racial minority married couples.

Personal income is usually reduced by one-third to one-half after retirement. The important point is that those groups with advantage before becoming old maintain their economic advantage in old age—and the poor get poorer.

Typically, we assume that economic inequality narrows after age 65, when benefit programs replace work as principal income sources. This is not the case, as the inequalities from income and privilege tend to be magnified among elderly people. People who are initially advantaged, for example, are more likely than their less fortunate counterparts to receive good educations and obtain good jobs with better health and pension benefits, which lead to higher savings and better postretirement benefit incomes.

Most noteworthy, the government is partly responsible for these skewed advantages to the affluent. The relatively affluent are encouraged by the government, because of tax incentives, to invest in retirement income programs such as IRAs (individual retirement accounts), Keogh plans, or other tax-deferred programs. Thus, the already advantaged are given preferential tax treatment, which amounts to tax subsidization, thereby increasing their economic advantage over the disadvantaged after age 65.

About 10 percent of people age 65 and older are poor. This proportion is lower than the overall poverty rate because Social Security benefits are indexed for inflation. This poverty rate, below the nation's poverty rate of 15.1 percent, is perceived typically as a success. However, more than 3 million elderly are poor, and more than

that are in the “economically vulnerable” category—that is, they have incomes above the poverty line but below 150 percent of the official poverty rate.

The elderly poor spend about 20 percent of their incomes on energy for heat and electricity, both of which increase with inflation. Those on fixed incomes are likewise negatively affected by inflationary increases in the cost of rents, taxes, and health care. The last is a special burden for the old who are poor. Health costs for the elderly

are almost four times those of elderly poor tend to live in substandard housing, receive inadequate medical care, and have improper diets.

If the poor and the old are doubly cursed, then the elderly poor who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group experience a triple disadvantage. The higher probability of older African Americans being poor is a direct consequence of their cumulative disadvantage throughout life. With average incomes only about 60 percent those of Whites, they have little chance to build a nest egg to supplement their pension incomes. African Americans are also more likely than Whites to have worked at jobs that did not provide retirement benefits and that did not qualify for Social Security (prior to 1974, for example, only 80 percent of elderly Blacks received some Social Security benefits, compared with 90 percent of older Whites). If they have worked at jobs qualifying for Social Security, minority members usually are eligible only for lower benefits because of their lower wages.

These related problems reflect the discrimination in the job market and unfair legislation. Clearly, equity in Social Security benefits will not occur until racial minorities and Whites experience similar work careers and compensation.

## Problems of an Aging Society

### 4.3 Assess the potential problems of the “graying of America.”

Although there are multiple problems brought about by an aging society, we focus on three: (1) inadequate income from pensions or Social Security, (2) the high cost of elderly health care, and (3) abuse of the elderly.

### Social Security

Since the introduction of Social Security in the 1930s, this program has been a significant aid to the elderly. Social Security has reduced poverty significantly among the elderly—from 35.2 percent in 1959 to 9 percent in 2010. Social Security also provides



Roughly 10 percent of people age 65 and older are poor.

life insurance benefits to the survivors in cases of the death of a breadwinner and disability payments when a wage earner is unable to work. Most fundamentally, through Social Security, society takes responsibility for the welfare of its elderly and people with disabilities.

Despite its considerable strengths, the Social Security program has several serious problems that place a disproportionate burden on certain categories of the elderly and on some portions of the workers paying into the program. An immediate problem is that not all workers are covered by Social Security. Some groups of workers are unable to participate because they work for states with alternative retirement programs. Also, legislation has specifically exempted certain occupations (such as agricultural workers) from the Social Security program.

For workers who are eligible for Social Security, there are wide disparities in the benefits received. The amount of benefits depends on the length of time workers have paid into the Social Security program and the amount of wages on which they paid a Social Security tax. In other words, low-paid workers receive low benefits at retirement. Thus, 30 percent of the elderly who depend almost exclusively on Social Security benefits are still below the poverty line despite these benefits. These elderly typically are people who have been relatively poor during their working years or are widows.

On the surface, the Social Security system is gender neutral. Benefits are based purely on employment history, earnings, and family composition. This puts many women at a disadvantage since they are paid less on average and they work fewer years because of staying at home with younger children. Some of the disadvantages for women are:

- Social Security recognizes only paid work. The benefits for spouses (typically wives) who did not work in the labor force are 50 percent of the working spouse's benefits.
- Social Security benefits are based on the number of years worked and the amount earned from wages. Because women are in the workforce fewer years than men (mostly because they take time off to bear and care for children, eleven years on average) and because women generally earn less than men, women will receive smaller retirement benefits than men (Cawthorne and Gross 2008).
- A divorced woman receives half of her former husband's benefit if the couple was married at least ten years. If the divorce occurs before being married ten years, then she receives nothing.
- Where wife and husband are both employed, the wife will receive Social Security benefits for her work only if her benefits exceed those earned by her husband. If she collects a benefit based on her own wages, she loses the 50 percent spouse's payment for which her husband's payroll taxes paid.
- A woman who is widowed will not receive any Social Security benefits until age 60 unless she has a child under 16 or an older disabled child or she herself is disabled.

The Social Security system is financed through taxes on wages and salaries. From a payroll tax of 2 percent on the first \$3,000 of earnings when it began in the 1930s, the rate has increased substantially over the years to 7.65 percent in 2015.

The method of financing Social Security is not equitable because it disproportionately disadvantages lower-income wage earners. In other words, it is a **regressive tax**: It takes a larger percentage from people with the lowest incomes. The Social Security tax has the following negative features:

- It is levied at a constant rate (everyone, rich and poor, pays the same rate).
- It starts with the first dollar of earned income, offering no allowances or exemptions for the very poor.
- It applies only to wages and salaries, thus exempting income typical for the wealthy, such as interest, dividends, rents, and capital gains from the sale of property.
- It is imposed up to a ceiling (\$118,500 in 2015). Thus, in effect, in 2015 a worker making \$118,500 and an executive or a professional athlete making a \$5 million salary paid exactly the same Social Security tax.

An overarching problem faces Social Security—how to finance it in the future. Three demographic factors make financing the program problematic. The first is that more people are living to age 65, and the second is that people live much longer after reaching 65 than in earlier generations. Average life spans are 14 years longer than they were when Social Security was created in 1935. The obvious consequence of this greater longevity is that the Social Security system pays out more and more to an ever-expanding pool of elderly who live longer and longer.

The third demographic factor working against the system is a skewed **dependency ratio** (the proportion of the population who are workers compared to the proportion not working). Social Security is financed by a tax on workers and their employers. Currently, there are nineteen people aged 65 to 84 for every 100 working-age people. That ratio is expected to climb to more than thirty by 2028. Put another way, there will be three working-age people to support each person aged 65 to 84 (Ortman, Velkoff, and Hogan 2014). At present, the Social Security Administration collects more in taxes than it pays out, with the surplus going into a trust fund. But as people live longer and the baby boomers reach retirement, this system will no longer support itself. Estimates vary, but sometime around 2018 the system will begin paying out more than it collects, and after 2042 it will be able to pay out only about 70 cents of each dollar of promised benefits (Zuckerman 2000). See the “Social Problems in Global Perspective” panel for the problems facing the developed nations as they become disproportionately old.

To deal with this pending crisis in funding Social Security, Congress will have to raise Social Security taxes,

#### Regressive tax

Taxing at a set percentage, which takes a larger proportion of the wealth from the poor than from the nonpoor.

#### Dependency ratio

The proportion of the population who work compared to the proportion who do not work.

Aging baby boomers are worried about the future of Social Security.





# Social Problems in Global Perspective

## The Developed World Turns Gray

Over the next several decades, the nations in the developed world will experience an unprecedented growth in the number of their elderly and an unprecedented decline in the number of their youths. Peter Peterson, author of *Gray Dawn: How the Coming Age Wave Will Transform America and the World*, calls this demographic transformation the “Floridization of the Developed World” (Peterson 1999). In effect, today’s Florida with its concentration of seniors (about one in five) is a demographic benchmark that every developed nation will reach and exceed, as did Italy in 2003, Japan in 2005, and Germany in 2006. France and Britain will exceed it in 2016, the United States in 2021, and Canada in 2023. In today’s developed world, the elderly population is 14 percent, but by the year 2030, it will reach 25 percent.

This demographic shift has several consequences. First, as the proportion of the elderly population grows beyond 20 percent in a society, coupled with a corresponding fertility rate that does not replace itself (below 2.11), the working-age population will shrink. Japan, for example, suffered a 25 percent decline in its working-age population from 2000 to 2010.

Second, the shrinking of the working-age population means that productivity will decline and

taxes and/or debts will rise to pay for the enormous burden of pensions and health care for the elderly. Or, alternatively, governments will have to reduce benefits to the elderly significantly, causing political upheavals.

Third, unless their fertility rates turn up, the total populations of Western Europe and Japan will shrink to about one-half of their current size by the end of the twenty-first century. The developing nations will continue to grow rapidly until levelling off around 2050, resulting in an ever-enlarging population gap between the developed and developing worlds and increasing resentment by the latter over the disproportionate resource use by an ever-smaller developed world.

Fourth, worker shortages will increase the demand for immigrant laborers, bringing diversity in religion, language, and customs. This diversity increases the possibility of racial and ethnic conflicts, as we are seeing, for example, in Germany, France, and Norway. Moreover, the increasing inequality gap between the new immigrants who arrive at the bottom of society’s stratification system and those who are privileged will increase the possibility of clashes between the haves and the have-nots.

use other revenues, or cut benefits. Other options include raising the age of eligibility from 65 to 67. Raising the eligibility age is unfair to certain groups: African American males, for example, live nearly eight years less than White males, meaning that relatively few would receive benefits if the retirement age were raised to 70. Blue-collar workers also die earlier than professionals. A lifelong mine worker, for example, has only a fifty-fifty chance of reaching age 65.

Another solution is to raise the ceiling on the amount of income people pay Social Security taxes on (currently capped at \$118,500). Raising the ceiling would mean that higher-income individuals pay their share into the system. Another plan is the reduction or elimination of the cost of living adjustment (COLA), which allows the payments to keep pace with inflation. This proposal hurts the poor most because it is regressive. Another strategy is to tax Social Security benefits as income, which would protect the poor because they pay little, if any, federal income tax. And finally, another solution that is popular with the Republican Party is to privatize Social Security. Generally, this would allow each individual to invest part of his or her Social Security taxes in the stock market. This plan would be beneficial when the stock market goes

up, but it also makes retirement savings vulnerable to stock market declines. Imagine the consequences if Social Security had been privatized prior to the Great Recession.

## Paying for Health Care

Of all age groups, the elderly are the most affected by ill health. Health problems escalate especially from age 75 onward, as the degenerative processes of aging accelerate. Consider the following facts:

- Although the elderly comprise only about 13 percent of the population presently, they consume more than one-third of all health care in the United States.
- Seniors are four times as likely as the nonelderly to be hospitalized. When hospitalized, they stay an average of about three days longer than the nonelderly.
- The medical expenses of the elderly are three times greater than those of middle-aged adults, yet their incomes are typically much less.
- The elderly account for more than one-third of all spending for prescription drugs.
- One in eight who are at least 65 years old has Alzheimer's disease. By 2030, the number will have doubled to one in four due to the aging of the population (Hyman 2008). The incidence of Alzheimer's disease, the leading cause of dementia in old age, rises sharply with advancing age—from one in eight people over the age of 65 to almost a fifty-fifty chance of getting the disease after age 85. Now more than 5.4 million Americans are known to have Alzheimer's.
- Osteoarthritis, the degeneration of protective tissues around the body's joints, afflicts about half of those age 65 and older.
- The cost of long-term care is prohibitive. The average annual cost of a year in a nursing home (semi-private room) in 2014 was \$213 a day or \$77,745 annually (Genworth 2014).

Medicare, begun in 1965, is the federal health insurance program for those 65 and older. Everyone is automatically entitled to hospital insurance, home health care, and hospice care through this program (known as Medicare Part A). The supplemental medical insurance program (known as Medicare Part B) helps pay for doctor bills, outpatient services, diagnostic tests, physical therapy, and medical supplies. People may enroll in this program by paying a relatively modest monthly fee. Overall, Medicare is financed by payroll taxes, premiums paid by recipients, and a government subsidy.

There are three major problems with Medicare. First, it is insufficiently financed by the government. Second, from the perspective of the elderly, only about half of their health care bills are paid through the program, leaving many with substantial costs. The affluent elderly are not hurt because they can purchase supplemental health insurance. The poor are not hurt because they are also covered by Medicaid, a separate program financed by federal and state taxes that pays for the health care of indigent persons. The near poor, however, do not qualify for Medicaid, and they cannot afford additional health insurance.

A third problem with Medicare is that physicians feel the program underpays them for their services. As a result, many physicians limit the number of Medicare patients they will serve, some even refusing to serve any Medicare patients. Thus, some elderly have difficulty finding a physician.

## Elder Abuse

As the elderly population grows, it is important to recognize some of the potential problems for this demographic as they need increasing care from others. Specifically, the potential for elder abuse.

**PROBLEMS OF THE INSTITUTIONALIZED ELDERLY** The data indicate that at any one time, between 4 and 5 percent of people age 65 and older are confined to nursing homes and other extended-care facilities. This low figure is misleading, however. It does not mean that only 4 to 5 percent of the aged ever will be confined to a nursing home. At age 65, a person may have no need for such a facility, but at 85 it may be a necessity.

The residents of nursing homes are typically age 75 and older, female, and White. Conspicuously absent are racial minorities.

The economically advantaged elderly are not as likely as their less wealthy age cohorts to be institutionalized, and if institutionalized, they are apt to be in private nursing homes and to receive better care. The National Council on Aging defines **custodial care** as nonskilled personal care that helps residents with daily activities like bathing and dressing. This is in contrast to facilities that provide **therapeutic care** (skilled personal care focused also on treatment by licensed medical personnel). This distinction is an important difference because custodial residents tend to receive less satisfactory care than therapeutic residents. This has implications for the federal law stating that nursing home residents must use all their savings before receiving Medicaid. Because nursing home care costs are very high, and less than 8 percent of Americans have private insurance for lengthy care, long-term care results in many residents' spending themselves into poverty, at which time Medicaid will take over the financial payments. Previous research indicates that the shift to Medicaid results in a change from therapeutic care to custodial care.

There are two extreme points of view concerning the functions of nursing homes. One view is that such homes are necessary places for the elderly who need extensive health care. Obviously, such facilities are needed for people who have Alzheimer's disease and for people who have been paralyzed by strokes or are bedridden. The opposing view sees nursing homes as dumping grounds or repositories for the elderly, a consequence of **ageism** in society (the devaluing of the elderly). Whatever one's views on these institutions, one fact is pertinent: Although many nursing homes provide good environments for their residents, there are serious problems in others. There are no federal standards that nursing homes must meet for the health and safety of their residents. The standards are left to the individual states, and they vary in their standards and rigor in enforcing them.

Common problems in nursing homes with a custodial style are the overuse and misuse of drugs. Drugs can be used for a host of therapeutic reasons, but one common use is not healthful—drugging an individual to control behavior. The use of tranquilizers, for example, keeps people from complaining and from asking for service. This procedure minimizes disturbances, thereby requiring fewer personnel and thus increasing profits. Of course, the quality of life for the residents is diminished.

The nursing home business is big business. Two factors make the profit potential especially great: (1) As we have seen, the elderly population is growing, and (2) the

### Custodial care

Nonskilled personal care facilities that help residents with daily activities like bathing and dressing.

### Therapeutic care

Skilled personal care focused on treatment by licensed medical personnel.

### Ageism

The devaluation of and the discrimination against the elderly.

federal and state governments pay for much of the care. One consequence of these factors is the proliferation of private nursing homes (about 75 percent are private) organized to generate profits. Many of these facilities provide excellent care for their clients, but others have shown that their interest in profit exceeds their interest in clients.

Not all nursing homes are unnecessary, and not all owners and personnel are greedy and uncaring. Many older people benefit from a sheltered environment, and doubtless many of the 15,000 nursing homes in the United States are resident oriented and provide adequate—perhaps even superior—services to their clients. But we must also acknowledge that widespread abuses exist in U.S. nursing homes. The danger, of course, is the profit motive—the less money that nursing homes spend on care such as living space, staff, food, heat, air conditioning, and recreational equipment, the more profit for the company and its shareholders.

What is the effect of institutionalization on the residents? Obviously, it will vary according to the facilities and treatment philosophy of a particular nursing home. But all care institutions (including prisons, mental hospitals, hospitals, and nursing homes) must be wary of depersonalizing individual clients. In the name of efficiency, people eat the same food at the same time, wear the same type of clothing, perform the same chores in the prescribed manner, watch the movies provided, and live in rooms with identical dimensions and decor. The widespread use of tranquilizers compounds this depersonalization. The result is that docility and similarity abound, which makes management happy but obviously overlooks the individual needs of the elderly residents.

**NONINSTITUTIONALIZED CARE OF THE ELDERLY BY THEIR CHILDREN** Two demographic trends mentioned earlier—the decline in fertility and an increased life expectancy—increase the likelihood of elderly parents living with their adult children. These trends result in a **beanpole family structure**—a vertical, four-generation family structure. There are three tiers of parent–child relations, two sets of grandparent–grandchild ties, and linkage between great-grandparent and grandchild.

A variation of the beanpole family structure is the three-generation household, called the **sandwich family structure**, where parents care for their parents and their children.

Families make the decision for the elderly to live with their children for a variety of reasons. Regardless of the reason, the new living arrangement may be satisfactory or it may be difficult because the elderly or their children or both may resent the lack of privacy and the erosion of independence, or there may be disagreement over disparate lifestyles.

With this trend for more and more children assuming a caretaker role of their elderly parents, the likelihood of elder abuse increases. This abuse can take the following forms:

- *Physical abuse*: hitting, slapping, shoving, and use of physical restraints as well as the withholding of personal care, food, medicine, and adequate medical attention.
- *Psychological abuse*: verbal assaults, threats, fear, and isolation.
- *Drug abuse*: encouragement by doctors and families to take too many drugs, which serves the families by keeping the elderly manageable.

#### Beanpole family structure

A vertical, four-generation family structure that includes three tiers of parent–child relations, two sets of grandparent–grandchild ties, and linkage between great-grandparent and grandchild.

#### Sandwich family structure

Where parents care for both their parents and their children simultaneously.

- *Financial exploitation*: theft or misuse of money and other personal property owned by the elderly.
- *Violation of rights*: forcing a parent into a nursing home, for instance.

For the most part, accurate information on how many elderly people are subjected to these abusive acts is impossible to obtain due to underreporting (it is estimated that only 1 in 14 cases of elder abuse comes to the attention of authorities). Data from Adult Protective Services show an increasing trend in the reporting of elder abuse, and one major study found that 1 in 10 adults had experienced abuse in the previous year (National Center on Elder Abuse 2015). Contributing to underreported elder abuse, many mistreated elders are homebound and isolated, and a national study found that the majority of abusers (90 percent) were family members such as spouses or adult children (National Center on Elder Abuse 2015).

The problem seems to occur in situations in which adult children are overwhelmed by the role of taking care of their parent or parents. The emotional, physical, and financial costs of caregiving can be enormous and may contribute to elder abuse.

## Aging and Human Agency

People at age 65 today have twenty, thirty, or forty years more of life ahead of them. Some are financially secure, and many will be relatively healthy throughout their remaining years. Elderly people who are healthy and financially secure have opportunities to enjoy travel, leisure activities, social involvement, and other pursuits that make their lives full and meaningful.

But being old is a difficult stage in life for many. They are no longer “tethered to society through a series of institutions—school, work, family, church, community—that structured [their] lives, defined [their] place in the world, and gave shape to [their] identity” (Rubin 2006:93). Their lives, once organized around pursuing goals, may seem empty and meaningless. Some will experience debilitating diseases that cause constant pain, restrict their freedom, and rob them of their vitality. Others are isolated in nursing homes or because they lost a spouse and their children live at a distance. Some elderly are poor and have lives of desperation and hopelessness, with inflation eating away their meager resources.

Most elderly people remain active until health problems curtail their mobility. Some 60 percent of people over age 80 continue to live independently (Rubin 2006:90). A striking number of them are becoming more politically active in an attempt to change some of the social conditions especially harmful for them. Senior citizens are more politically active (voting, volunteering) than other age groups in society. Faced with common problems, many join in a collective effort to make a difference. Several national organizations are dedicated to political action that will benefit the elderly, including the American Association for Retired Persons (AARP), which, having more than 40 million members, is the nation’s largest special-interest organization; the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare; the National Council of Senior Citizens; the National Council on Aging (a confederation of approximately 1,400 public and private social welfare agencies); the National Caucus on Black Aged; and the Gerontological Society. Collectively, these organizations have many millions of members. They work through lobbyists, mailing

campaigns, phone banks, advertising, and other processes to improve the lot of the elderly in U.S. society.

Just how effective these organizations are or will be is unknown. But as the elderly continue to increase in proportion, their sphere of influence is also likely to increase. Currently, the elderly account for around 20 percent of the voting public. By 2038, seniors are projected to make up more than one-third of the electorate. Elderly citizens could be a significant voting bloc if they developed an age consciousness and voted alike. Politicians from states with a high concentration of elderly people are increasingly aware of their potential voting power, and legislation more sympathetic to the needs of the elderly may be forthcoming. It is probably only a matter of time before the elderly focus their concerns and become an effective pressure group that demands equity.

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## Chapter Review

### 4.1 Understand the myths and facts about immigration in the United States.

- A major demographic force in U.S. society is massive immigration. This immigration (adding about 1 million immigrants annually) differs from previous waves because the immigrants come primarily from Latin America and Asia rather than Europe (thus, it is called the “new” immigration).
- There are currently 41.3 million foreign-born in the United States; the two fastest-growing minorities are Latinos and Asian Americans.
- The reaction of Americans to the new immigrants is typically negative. This reaction is based on fears that: (a) immigrants take jobs away from those already here, and (b) immigrants are a drain on society’s resources.
- The evidence shows that immigrants do not reduce native employment rates and that in the long run, immigration has a small, positive impact on the labor market outcomes of native-born workers. In terms of wages, evidence shows that the effect of immigration overall on native-born workers’ wages is also small and, on average, positive. There is some debate, however, among economists about whether certain subgroups are negatively affected, like workers with low levels of education. Research demonstrates that the group most adversely affected by new immigration in terms of jobs and wages is earlier immigrants, not the native-born.
- In the short run, immigrants consume more in public services and benefits than they pay in taxes. In the long run, however, immigrants are a good investment for society and pay more in taxes than they receive in benefits.
- The current political mood is to eliminate social programs that help level the playing field so that minorities would have a fair chance to succeed. Some legislation is especially punitive toward recent immigrants, particularly the undocumented. In reaction, organizations across the United States have formed to fight for immigrant rights such as FIRM (Fair Immigration Reform Movement), the New Sanctuary Movement, the Immigrant Solidarity Network, and others.

### 4.2 Understand the demographic trends on aging in the United States.

- The second major demographic shift is toward an aging society (“the graying of America”). By 2030, one in five U.S. residents will be age 65 or older. There is also a growing “old-old” population. Children born today have a 50-50 chance of reaching 100 years of age.
- Of those age 65 and older, women outnumber men and minorities are underrepresented. Although the elderly as a category are not disproportionately poor, the elderly who are women, minorities, or who live alone are disproportionately poor.

- An interesting statistical anomaly is the so-called “Latino or Hispanic Paradox.” On average, Latinos outlive Whites by two years and have lower mortality rates in seven out of the ten leading causes of death, despite their generally lower incomes and lower probability of having health insurance.
- Typically, we assume that economic inequality narrows after age 65, when benefit programs replace work as principal income sources. This is not the case, as the inequalities from income and privilege tend to be magnified among elderly people.
- Medicare is the health insurance program for almost everyone age 65 and older. There are three major problems with Medicare. First, it is insufficiently financed by the government. Second, from the perspective of the elderly, only about half of their health care bills are paid through the program, leaving many with substantial costs. A third problem with Medicare is that physicians feel the program underpays them for their services, so they limit the number of Medicare patients they treat.
- At any one time, 4 to 5 percent of people age 65 and older are confined in nursing homes. These homes have important functions for those needing their services, but abuses are associated with some of these operations: Residents are given custodial (nonskilled) care, drugged, and provided with inadequate nutrition.
- While it is impossible to know exact numbers, a portion of elderly people in the United States are abused (physically, emotionally, financially) by relatives annually.
- Elderly citizens could be a significant voting bloc if they developed an age consciousness and voted alike. Politicians from states with a high concentration of elderly people are increasingly aware of their potential voting power, and legislation more sympathetic to the needs of the elderly may be forthcoming.

#### 4.3 Assess the potential problems of the “graying of America.”

- Since the introduction of Social Security in the 1930s, this program has been a significant aid to the elderly. The Social Security program is biased in several ways: (a) some workers are not included, (b) people with low career earnings receive fewer benefits, (c) women (homemakers, divorced, and widowed) are disadvantaged, and (d) the tax is regressive.
- An overarching problem faces Social Security—how to finance it in the future. With more people living to age 65, and more people living much longer after reaching 65, the Social Security system pays out more and more to an ever-expanding pool of elderly who live longer and longer.

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## Key Terms

**Ageism** The devaluation of and the discrimination against the elderly.

**Assimilation** The process by which individuals or groups adopt the culture of another group, losing their original identity.

**Baby boom generation** The people born in the fifteen-year period following World War II, when an extraordinary number of babies were born in the United States.

**Beanpole family structure** A vertical, four-generation family structure that includes three tiers of parent–child

relations, two sets of grandparent–grandchild ties, and linkage between great-grandparent and grandchild.

**Custodial care** Nonskilled personal care facilities that help residents with daily activities like bathing and dressing.

**Demography** The study of population size, distribution, composition, and changes over time.

**Dependency ratio** The proportion of the population who work compared to the proportion who do not work.

**Fertility** Birth rate.

**Human agency** People are agents and actors who cope with, adapt to, and change social structures to meet their needs.

**Immigration** The movement of people into a destination country to which they are not native or do not possess citizenship.

**Islamophobia** Anti-Muslim sentiment; a term for prejudice against, hatred toward, or fear of the religion of Islam or Muslims.

**Mortality** Death rate.

**Regressive tax** Taxing at a set percentage, which takes a larger proportion of the wealth from the poor than from the nonpoor.

**Sandwich family structure** Where parents care for both their parents and their children simultaneously.

**Therapeutic care** Skilled personal care focused on treatment by licensed medical personnel.



# Chapter 5

## Problems of Place: Urban, Suburban, and Rural



### Learning Objectives

- 5.1** Identify social problems tied to inner cities in the United States.
- 5.2** Explain the causes and consequences of suburban sprawl.
- 5.3** Discuss the social problems tied to rural areas in the United States.

According to the United States Census Bureau, the United States is an urban nation, with 71.2 percent of its people living in urbanized areas (areas with 50,000 or more people), and 9.5 percent in urban clusters (areas with 2,500 to 50,000 people). This means almost 250,000,000 Americans live in urban areas. This chapter examines the social problems of place: the problems unique to urbanized areas, suburbs, and rural areas.

## Urban Problems

### 5.1 Identify social problems tied to inner cities in the United States.

Some observers argue that although American cities in the past had problems, they are on the rebound as neighborhoods are revitalized, formerly abandoned downtowns are rebuilt with financial services and other businesses moving back, and it is becoming fashionable to live in the urban core. But although there are successes, many cities of the United States are struggling. These struggles have been magnified by the Great Recession, which brought declining sales tax revenue, falling real estate values, increased debt, and declining funds for schools, pensions, and repairing the infrastructure (Fineman, 2009:29).

No other industrial nation has allowed the kind of decline and deterioration facing U.S. urban centers. Most of the social and economic problems discussed in this book are primarily concentrated and have their severest consequences in the city, particularly the largest cities—one out of seven Americans lives in the three largest cities: New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago (Badger, 2014). In this locale, more than any other, many of these problems are expanding and intensifying. In this sense, place is crucial to understanding U.S. social problems.

Urban poverty is especially acute and contributes to and is associated with a host of other city problems. These problems include a decaying infrastructure, a shortage of affordable housing, homelessness, inadequate public transit, pollution, failing public school systems, drugs, gangs, and crime.

### Urban Job Loss

About one-third of the jobs in major U.S. metropolitan areas are with corporations that export goods and services outside the metro area. These are the highest paying jobs with the best benefit packages in industries such as aerospace, defense, international trade, oil refining, computer software and hardware development, pharmaceuticals, and entertainment. These export jobs create a second type of employment in metropolitan areas—regional-serving jobs. About a quarter of jobs in most metropolitan areas are regional serving—in finance, real estate, utilities, media, and other professional services. These jobs generally pay less than export jobs but still represent good employment opportunities. The remainder of jobs in metropolitan areas serves the local area. The best of these include schoolteachers, police officers, firefighters, other municipal employees, and neighborhood doctors and lawyers. The worst include low-wage, insecure, temporary, part-time, dead-end work with few or no benefits in retail, clerical, custodial, food service, and private security work. While some companies are locating in the urban core to attract young, educated workers, many of the “good” jobs are locating in the outer fringe or suburb areas.

Race and class, as well as the fear of crime, play into the corporate motivation to move to the fringes of urban areas. The perception of some corporations and their employees is that the central city is unsafe and has a large minority workforce. Sears's relocation from the Sears Tower in downtown Chicago to Hoffman Estates, 37 miles to the northwest, is a prime example of this perception. The move allows Sears to hire more highly educated workers, mostly White, who live near the 1.9-million-square-foot campus-style complex. The state of Illinois used taxpayer dollars to subsidize Sears's relocation with lowered land costs, infrastructure and expressway improvements, and tax abatements.

In addition to the jobs that cities have lost to the suburbs, there has been a net loss of good-paying and well-benefited jobs in the wider U.S. economy. Particularly as the business of the old industrial cities of the northeastern and midwestern United States shifted from manufacturing to legal, financial, real estate, and other service work, the worst of the local-serving jobs, the jobs of low-skill workers, were hit hard. Especially affected were racial and ethnic minorities in the inner city. As a result of the exodus of jobs away from the city and the deindustrialization of the economy, unemployment is high in the central cities.

Add to the loss of urban jobs from the transformation of the economy and through capital flight (companies moving to low-wage locales either within or outside the United States) the economic ravages of the Great Recession, where companies cut payrolls and consumers spent less. As a result, urban areas were especially hard hit. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, at the end of 2009 when the Recession ended, the official U.S. unemployment rate was 10 percent. At this same time, seventeen urban areas recorded jobless rates of at least 15 percent. Of the cities with 1 million or more, Detroit had the highest rate at 15.4 percent (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010).

## Disinvestment

Systematic patterns of investment and disinvestment have hurt U.S. cities. Banks, savings and loans, and insurance companies have redlined cities and metropolitan areas. **Redlining** refers to the practice of not providing loans or insurance in what are deemed undesirable areas—literally drawing red lines on the map and making loans and providing insurance on one side of the line and not on the other. These areas are almost always made up of high concentrations of poor minorities and located in the central cities. They are the communities that suffer the consequences of the disinvestment that denies loans to homebuyers, small-business entrepreneurs, and neighborhood real estate developers.

The patterns of disinvestment and investment that have resulted from redlining in U.S. metropolitan areas have discriminated by both race and place.

**RACE** Studies (of Atlanta, Detroit, Denver, for example) find consistently that African Americans have greater difficulty than Whites in receiving mortgage credit from banks and savings and loans. And, when approved for loans, they tend to pay a higher interest rate than Whites. These predatory lending practices also occur for automobile insurance where higher premiums are charged in low-income, minority neighborhoods, which are located near the downtown, than in middle-income, White neighborhoods away from the central core. Insurance rates are based on accident rates, and these rates are higher downtown than elsewhere—hence, the higher rates

### Redlining

When banks, savings and loans, government agencies, and insurance companies refuse to make home and small-business loans and insure property in poor and minority neighborhoods.

for those living nearby. Most downtown traffic, however, is not by residents but by people who live outside the city but shop or work downtown. The consequence is that the poor pay more.

**PLACE** Patterns of lending also discriminate with regard to location. Suburbs receive a much greater and disproportionate share of loans compared to the central city. This discrimination, of course, is clearly related to the patterns of disinvestment and investment based on race described previously because suburban areas are predominantly White, but inner-city neighborhoods are often African American or Latino.

City dollars, central-city capital, regularly go to the suburbs. Bank deposits made by inner-city residents in city banks are more likely to be used for home and business loans in the suburbs than in the cities, where the need for capital is so apparent.

This sort of redlining, discrimination, and disinvestment ultimately leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy of decline in inner-city neighborhoods. When banks disinvest in a neighborhood, residents and small businesses cannot maintain their homes and property. Without loans, small businesses often fail, and the jobs, goods, and services they provide are lost to the neighborhood. Indeed, often the banks themselves are among the businesses that physically leave the community. Disinvestment by banks, savings and loans, and insurance companies also discourages other private investors and government agencies from investing in poor and minority neighborhoods.

## Federal Abandonment

Over the past three decades, the federal government has also made huge cuts in dollars and services for the central cities. Federal aid to cities has been systematically cut since the Reagan administration. Cuts have been made in the federal revenue sharing program, welfare, medical aid, subsidized housing, and essential social services. Successful urban programs—for public works, economic development, job training, housing, schools, and health and nutrition—have been systematically cut. In addition, most states, because of federal cutbacks, have reduced various forms of public assistance to the poor. Facing their fiscal crisis alone and with a shrinking tax base (because businesses have left), cities have had to cut services or raise taxes, with most doing both. Raising taxes while closing schools, hospitals, and police and fire stations, laying off municipal employees, neglecting health and housing codes, cutting public transit, and postponing infrastructure maintenance and improvements has the effect of encouraging more businesses, industry, jobs, and middle-class residents to leave the city. This movement, of course, only deepens the budgetary crisis of the downward-spiraling cities. And as urban government downsizes, the poor and working-class residents of the city are left to compete for the dwindling resources and services still available.

As the central cities lose population, jobs, and businesses, they also lose political clout in state legislatures, while the suburbs gain power, resulting in policies more favorable to the suburbs than to the central cities, where fewer Americans live and relatively few of them vote. Moreover, central cities, with their relatively high concentrations of racial and ethnic minorities, tend to favor Democrats, whereas people in the suburbs are more likely to be Republicans. Thus, Republicans are not motivated to fund the cities' needs, whereas Democrats are.

## Urban Poverty

Poverty is a problem in many central cities, especially in the nation's largest cities. Within cities, poverty and especially child poverty is concentrated in particular urban neighborhoods. There has been not only an increase in poverty in central cities but also an increase in poverty in **central-city poverty areas** (neighborhoods in which at least one in five households lives below the poverty line are designated by the federal government as poverty areas). There has also been an increase in the poverty concentrated in **high-poverty areas** in U.S. cities—areas where at least two in five households, or 40 percent of households, fall below the official poverty line. Urban public housing developments are most likely to fall into this category.

### Central-city poverty areas

Neighborhoods in which at least one in five households lives below the poverty line.

### High-poverty areas

Neighborhoods where at least two in five households live below the poverty line.

Racial and ethnic minorities are also more likely to be concentrated in poverty areas in the city and much more likely to be among the poorest of the poor. Matching the high rates of Black and Latino central-city poverty are high rates of residential segregation. Actually, even the extremely high levels of segregation reflected in census-tract data underestimate racial separation and isolation. Racial segregation is even more severe when smaller units, such as immediate neighborhoods and blocks, are analyzed. High levels of segregation in housing also lead to segregation in schools, churches, and other neighborhood institutions.

In 2015, *24/7 Wall Street* mapped America's nine most segregated cities. The number one most segregated metropolitan area was Cleveland-Elyria, Ohio (see Figure 5.1) (Kent and Frohlich, 2015).

This means that not only are the urban poor a growing proportion of all poor people in the United States but also that a growing proportion of the urban poor are racially segregated in poverty and high-poverty areas in the central city. Racial segregation contributes to and perpetuates poverty because it isolates poor people from the educational and economic opportunities they need. The schools in racially segregated, poor Black communities in the inner city are separate but not equal. The poor people living in the poorest, racially segregated, central-city neighborhoods are disconnected—both socially and physically—from urban labor markets. As a consequence of this “American apartheid,” urban African Americans and Latinos are disproportionately unemployed and uneducated. Also, as poverty is more concentrated in inner cities, crime and violence proliferate.

## Urban Housing Crisis

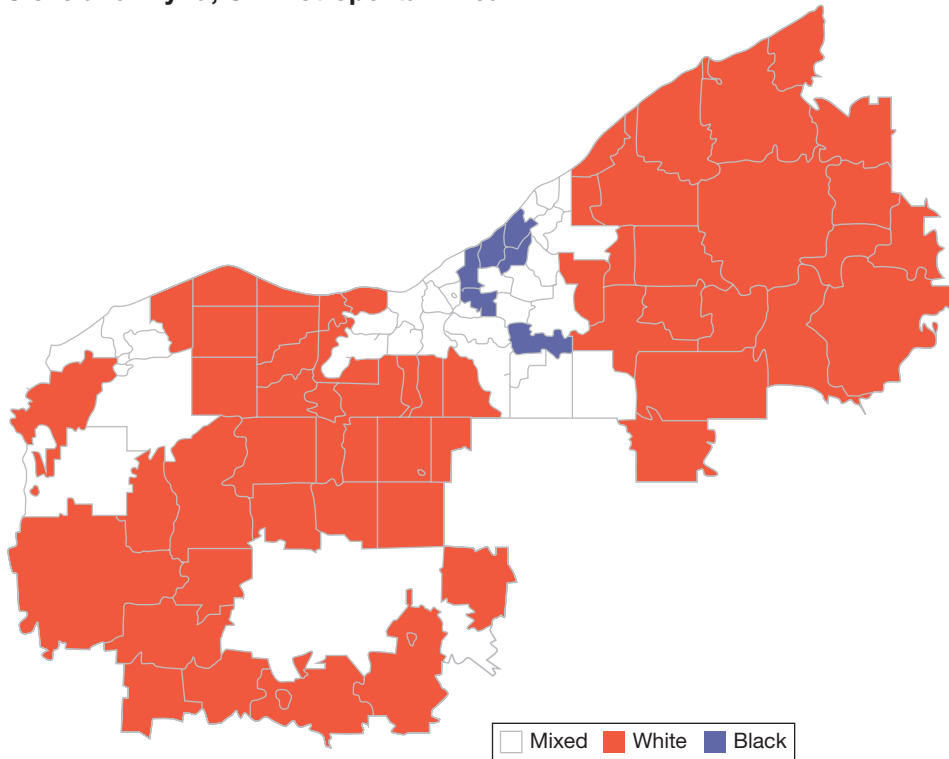
There are two sources of the current urban housing crisis—the lack of decent, affordable housing and the bursting of the housing bubble—leading to the Great Recession.

**THE LACK OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING** The government defines housing as “unaffordable” if it costs more than 30 percent of a family's monthly income. The demand for low-income and affordable housing in U.S. cities far exceeds the supply. For example, in 2011, there were 10.1 million extremely low-income renter households, and just 3 million units were affordable and available to them (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2013). Furthermore, an estimated 12 million renter and homeowner households pay more than 50 percent of their income on housing, and a family with one full-time worker earning the federal minimum wage cannot afford the local fair-market rent for a two-bedroom apartment anywhere in the United States (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2015).

## Figure 5.1 America's Most Segregated City

SOURCE: Kent, Alexander and Thomas C. Frohlich. 2015. "America's Most Segregated Cities," 24/7 Wall Street (August 19). Available online: <http://247wallst.com/special-report/2015/08/19/americas-most-segregated-cities/>.

### Cleveland-Elyria, OH Metropolitan Area



24/7 Wall St. analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data: SpatialTEQ  
24/7 WALL ST.

**Pct. of population living in segregated areas:** 55.1%  
**Black poverty rate:** 33.6%  
**White poverty rate:** 9.3%  
**Black unemployment rate:** 20.2%  
**White unemployment rate:** 5.4%

One factor reducing housing affordability and the supply of low-income housing units in urban areas is that private developers and builders tend to invest only in middle-class and luxury housing, where the market provides the highest profit margins. This private real estate investment includes both condo conversion and gentrification.

Condominium conversion involves taking rental units and turning them into apartments for sale. This process often displaces people who cannot afford a down payment and do not qualify for a home mortgage. **Gentrification** is the redevelopment of poor neighborhoods (run-down properties, warehouses, cheap apartments) into middle-class and upscale condominiums, townhouses, single-family dwellings, lofts, and apartments. Often, the original residents are displaced because they are unable to afford the increased rents, purchase prices, and property taxes based on

#### Gentrification

The redevelopment of poor and working-class urban neighborhoods into middle- and upper-middle-class enclaves; often involves displacement of original residents.

the neighborhoods' rising property values. This displacement thus contributes to the income and racial segregation within urban areas.

The redevelopment of the downtown areas in many U.S. cities during the past two decades has also led to the loss of significant numbers of low-income housing units. As the economy moved from manufacturing to services, many big-city downtowns were remade as financial, real estate, legal, and retail centers. Building often boomed on the fringes of the old downtown areas and in the process destroyed most of the SROs (single-room occupancy hotels) in many cities. SROs had historically provided housing for economically marginal single persons in the city. Although apartments were small, and occupants often had to share a bathroom or a kitchen or both, the units were affordable and available for this part of the urban population. Now the SRO has become a thing of the past.

### Slumlording

Landlords buy properties in poor neighborhoods for rent income. They do not maintain these properties because to do so would lower their profits.

Slumlords have also contributed to the housing shortage in the inner city. **Slumlording** occurs when landlords buy properties in poor neighborhoods and have no intention of investing in their upkeep and maintenance. While neglecting these properties, slumlords collect as much rent as they can from their poor tenants. Or, with gentrification, the slumlords sell their deteriorated dwellings at a profit.

Another urban housing market phenomenon that adds to the housing crisis in some cities is **warehousing**. Here, urban real estate speculators withhold apartments from the housing market. Speculators purchase buildings and gradually empty them by not renewing the rents. They hold the property until developers on the edges of gentrifying areas become interested and purchase them for considerably more than their original cost. Developers are especially attracted to warehoused apartments, which spare them the trouble of getting rid of poor and working-class tenants, who will not be able to afford the newly gentrified property.

All the forces in the urban housing market that have led to the shrinking supply of affordable and low-income housing have been met with, or encouraged by, failing government housing policies.

As early as the 1960s, federally financed urban renewal projects were bulldozing low-income housing in poor and working-class neighborhoods. In theory, federal urban renewal funds were meant for the rehabilitation and redevelopment of decaying urban neighborhoods. In practice, what usually happened was quite different.

Cities applied for the federal funds and, when they received them, used their legal powers of eminent domain and other powers granted them under both federal and state urban renewal legislation to declare an area to be blighted. Once so designated, all structures in the area were eliminated. Often, this was done to facilitate the development of large public projects such as airports, colleges or universities, medical centers, or even private commercial projects on the now available land. The second phase of federal urban renewal was to include replacement housing for people who lost their homes or apartments and neighborhoods. For the

### Warehousing

The withholding of apartments from the housing market by speculators who hope to sell them at a profit to developers.

Slumlords increase the number of rundown properties in poor neighborhoods.



most part, however, funds were never appropriated for this phase, and urban renewal projects reduced the supply of low-income housing. Much of the housing stock lost was in fact blighted, but for many people, it was at least an affordable place to live.

Beginning with the Reagan administration, there have been more than three decades of federal divestment in affordable housing infrastructure and programs. The budget cutbacks during the Reagan and Bush administrations slashed federal housing funds by 70 percent. New construction of low-income housing by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the federal agency responsible for the creation and maintenance of low-income housing in American cities, decreased by 90 percent. Congress and the Clinton administration decreased the HUD budget again in 1995—this time by 25 percent. For the first time in twenty years, funding for the construction of new **public housing** units was cut. For the first time, there was no increase in the number of available **Section 8** housing choice vouchers (vouchers that subsidize low-income individuals, the elderly, or the disabled). Congress and the president also slashed funds for the maintenance and rehabilitation of existing public housing, thereby ensuring its further deterioration. They also repealed the long-standing federal one-for-one replacement rule, which required that a new unit of public housing be built before any old unit could be demolished. The Republican Congress and President Clinton endorsed these changes in public and subsidized housing at a time when the housing needs of the poorest households in U.S. cities were at an all-time high. Under President George W. Bush, HUD reduced the rent subsidies under Section 8. This affected 1.9 million of the most vulnerable urban residents. During the Obama administration, the constraints of budget shortfalls during the Great Recession, an increasing federal debt, and resistance by Tea Party Republicans led Congress to continue slashing the budget for low-income housing. Congress in 2011, for example, slashed the federal housing budget by \$3.8 billion (a 9.2 percent reduction). The programs hit hardest were public housing repair, production of affordable homes, and housing assistance for seniors and people with disabilities.

These recent cutbacks in public housing in the United States come on top of an already meager public housing sector. When compared to the industrial democracies of Europe, for example, U.S. public housing makes up a small share of the total housing stock. In Germany, France, the Netherlands, and the Scandinavian countries, urban public housing often accounts for as much as 40 percent or more of all housing. In the United States, only 1.3 percent of the housing stock is publicly owned. Throughout Europe there has been a more widespread recognition that the private housing market—housing for profit—will not adequately house all parts of the population. Therefore, a larger share of the housing stock, as compared to the United States, has been provided by the not-for-profit or public sector. In European social democracies, public housing has been for middle-class as well as for poor and working-class residents. In U.S. cities, public housing has been the housing of last resort for the poorest of the poor only. And only one-fifth of the poor live in government-subsidized housing of any kind, be it public housing run by local

### Public Housing

Housing funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development that is limited to low-income families and individuals.

### Section 8

Housing assistance for low-income families, the elderly, and the disabled. Families or individuals are issued a housing choice voucher and find their own housing to live in.

More than 70 percent of low-income renter households spend more than one-half of their income on rent.





### Jobs/housing mismatch

The inability of central-city residents most in need of decent jobs to reach them on the urban fringe because (1) they cannot afford to operate a private automobile, and (2) the public transportation system is inadequate; moving to the urban fringe is not an option because of housing costs and racial segregation. To the extent that jobs and job growth occur in one place—affluent and White areas—and poor Blacks or Latinos are restricted to another, this “mismatch” is a form of spatial apartheid.

### Spatial apartheid

The physical separation of Whites and nonwhites with Whites located where jobs and job growth are found and nonwhites located where they are not.

government, privately owned developments subsidized by HUD, or private apartments where tenants pay rent with government vouchers.

U.S. housing policies have also contributed to the **jobs/housing mismatch**. What little affordable low-income housing there is in U.S. metropolitan areas is kept out of the suburbs and urban fringe. The suburbs and edge cities have used legal, political, and economic means to prevent this kind of housing from being built in their communities. The problem with this is that job growth occurs on the remotest edges of metropolitan areas. Thus, people who need the jobs the most, the poor in the central city, are the farthest from them. The jobs are located where the inner-city poor cannot afford to live, or discrimination prevents their living there. The poor are also the least likely to be able to afford to own cars, and public transit systems rarely extend to the urban fringe.

The jobs/housing mismatch is a form of **spatial apartheid**. Jobs and job growth occur in one place, populated by relatively affluent Whites, whereas poor African Americans and Latinos are restricted to another place.

Trends in the urban housing market together with failed housing policies have had, and continue to have, predictable consequences for a growing number of urban households. One consequence is that more and more households are experiencing a rent squeeze. In 2010, 53 percent of *all* tenants paid rents that exceeded the federal government’s definition of affordable housing—not more than 30 percent of household income. More than one-quarter of all renters now devote more than half their income to rent. When the demand for low-cost housing exceeds the supply, the cost of low-cost rents rises, as it also does when gentrification upscales areas that once housed the poor and the near poor. When urban residents, particularly poor urban residents, have to pay more for housing, they have less money available for food, transportation, education, and health care.

**THE BURSTING OF THE HOUSING BUBBLE** The decade prior to 2007 was characterized by a housing frenzy—a housing boom with a surge in home/condominium buying, escalating housing values, and “flipping” (buying a home to be sold quickly for a profit). In the process, people took on mortgages that were too large, making them vulnerable to a downturn in housing values. People on the economic margins wanted in on the action and because of their questionable credit were given subprime loans, which on the surface offered no-money-down loans with what appeared to be low interest rates. These “low” rates were low for a brief time, after which the “adjustable rate clause” (found in the fine print of the loan contract) was enforced. The resulting mortgage payments were beyond the reach for many.

Add to this mix the reckless and irresponsible deal making on Wall Street involving an intricate, intertwined system of loan brokers, mortgage lenders, hedge funds, and other predators. These forces converged in late 2007, creating a “perfect storm” of economic devastation. It began when subprime borrowers began defaulting on their mortgages, sending housing prices tumbling (Gandel and Lim, 2008). Banks and brokerages that had borrowed money to increase their leverage failed or were sold for bargain rates. Credit dried up. Business slowed, causing companies to lay off workers by the tens of thousands. The newly unemployed had difficulty meeting their mortgage payments, causing the rate of foreclosures and bankruptcies to soar. By 2009, 1.5 million homes owned through subprime loans were lost through foreclosures. Many homeowners found they owed more on their

mortgages than what their homes were worth. In 2009 alone, there were 3.5 million foreclosure-related filings, up from 2.3 million in 2008.

## Decaying Infrastructure

The fiscal crisis of the cities has also affected them physically. The urban infrastructure is crumbling. Old water mains regularly erupt in the winter. Streets are marred with potholes. Clogged and overburdened expressways deteriorate. Sewer systems are decaying and overstressed. Public transit stations, subway tunnels, and rail and trolley tracks all make mass transportation less efficient as years go by without needed maintenance. The U.S. Department of Transportation has rated 40 percent of all U.S. bridges, many in the oldest cities, as structurally deficient or functionally obsolete.

Spending on infrastructure is only about 2.5 percent of the federal budget. Governments in countries such as Germany, Japan, and the Netherlands invest public dollars in the urban infrastructure at a rate three to four times that of the United States. As a result of the U.S. government's failure to spend adequately on the infrastructure of the nation's cities, people are increasingly endangered because of inadequate waste treatment, tainted water, leaking gas lines, and structurally unsound bridges.

Many economists now believe investing public dollars in a job creation program to rebuild the nation's infrastructure and a much needed and expanded mass transit system is the best way to spur economic growth and productivity.

## Transportation Problems

In contrast to many European cities, the private automobile dominates the United States' urban transportation system. Since 1970, the number of vehicles has increased more than twice as fast as population growth, with only a slight gain in road capacity. The consequences of this attachment to the automobile are enormous:

- Traffic jams are getting much worse. The annual amount of time the average commuter lost was 34 hours in 2009 because of traffic congestion; in Chicago and Washington, DC, drivers were idle an average of 70 hours a year (White, 2011). In total, Americans waste 1.9 billion gallons of gasoline in traffic on congested roads (Stoller, 2011).
- Automobiles are the single largest source of air pollution in the United States.
- The development of the auto-dependent urban transportation system contributes to the suburbanization and deconcentration of metropolitan areas. Highways, interstates, expressways, and cars helped to gut the central cities, taking away middle-class taxpayers, jobs, business, and retail and commercial activity.

Between 1945 and 1970, cities, states, and the federal government spent \$156 billion constructing hundreds of thousands of miles of roads, but only 16 miles of subway were built in the entire country during the same time period (Liazos, 1982). This subsidization of the automobile by the government continues, as the majority of federal transportation funds go to highways. Similarly, the federal government has subsidized air travel, with the building and expansion of airports, air traffic control, and security. Meanwhile, Amtrak and energy-efficient, city-friendly public transit systems are left behind (Jackson, 2010).

The reliance on the private automobile at the expense of mass public transportation also further disadvantages the urban poor. Unable to afford owning and operating cars, they must rely on an underfunded and often undependable public transit system with limited service. Because most jobs are amid the malls, office parks, and construction in the suburbs, inner-city residents have difficulty finding the transportation to work there.

## Health Problems

### Environmental classism

When the poor in metropolitan areas are disproportionately exposed to toxic wastes.

### Environmental racism

The tendency for minority areas in cities and metropolitan areas to be the targets of a disproportionate share of illegal dumping and the sites where most toxic and hazardous waste is disposed; these communities also suffer, as compared to more affluent White communities, from lax enforcement of environmental regulations and laws.

### Medicaid

The state and federal governments' insurance program for the poor.

### Triage

The practice in understaffed and underfinanced public hospitals of treating the most urgent emergencies first, thereby delaying the treatment of other cases.

Research shows that low-income neighborhoods, especially those populated by racial and ethnic minorities, bear a disproportionate burden of environmental hazards (when the victims are the poor, it is called **environmental classism**; when those exposed to environmental hazards are racial minorities, it is called **environmental racism**). This is largely due to the proximity of low-income neighborhoods to highways or heavy traffic corridors, waste treatment facilities, and manufacturing centers, all of which increase the risk of asthma, allergies, and other health problems.

Infant mortality rates are highest in poor minority neighborhoods in the inner city and are as high as or higher than rates in many developing-world countries. African American infants are four times more likely to die from low birth weight than White infants. Such diseases as measles, tetanus, polio, tuberculosis, diphtheria, and whooping cough threaten many poor inner-city children who survive their first year because they have not received adequate inoculations.

Many poor and working-class central-city residents have seen their small neighborhood or community hospitals close under the pressure of rising costs. In 2010, the number of urban hospitals in 52 large cities was 426, down from 781 in 1970 (Rojas-Burke, 2014). This means that more and more central-city residents are unable to find any medical care in private for-profit or private not-for-profit hospitals and clinics. Increasingly, they have only one alternative—the large, underfunded, understaffed, under-equipped public hospitals that cannot legally deny them care. Because they are unable to afford doctor visits or are unable to find doctors who will accept the lower fees of **Medicaid** (the state and federal governments' insurance program for the poor), patients are going to the emergency room sicker and in need of more costly care. But the urban public hospitals are less and less able to provide adequate care. As a result, urban public hospitals are forced to practice **triage**—treating the most urgent emergencies first. Other patients must wait for treatment, sometimes for days.

Many private hospitals that have remained open have done so by cutting high-cost services for the indigent. Many have closed emergency rooms and trauma units. High-risk obstetrical care, as well as drug and alcohol abuse treatment programs, have also been shut down. As private hospitals in the city abdicate these high-cost services, more of them must be taken over by public hospitals, increasing their burden with more patients and higher costs.

In short, the increasing number of uninsured and underinsured people seeking health care in the emergency rooms of public hospitals, the lack of federal government support for these hospitals, and the inability of city governments caught in a budgetary crisis to fund them, all ensure that without major reforms, urban health and health care will only deteriorate further.

## Urban Schools

Public schools in the United States are separate and unequal. The more affluent middle class has moved to the suburbs, where their children attend virtually all-White schools; or if they have remained in the city and can afford it, they send their children to private schools. The less affluent and racial minorities are left in the city's public schools.

Urban schools are class segregated. With poverty becoming more geographically concentrated, poor children typically go to school with other poor children. Most significant, the amount of money spent on the education of the children attending city schools pales in comparison to what is spent on each student in the more affluent suburbs. This imbalance results from the heavy reliance on local property taxes to finance public schooling in the United States.

As suburbanization robs the city's tax base, the city becomes less able to adequately fund public education. Consequently, suburban schools, when compared to inner-city schools, are more likely to have smaller class sizes, more computers, a better library, special programs for the gifted and the disabled, and state-of-the-art equipment and facilities. Chapter 15 provides the details and the consequences of these severe inequities. As a preview, we note that the results of all of this inequity are predictable: lower standardized test scores and high dropout rates in many urban school districts.

## Crime, Drugs, and Gangs

In the United States, crime has become a euphemism for cities. More specifically, there is a media and popular identification of crime, and the drugs and gangs assumed to be related to it, with the inner city. And because crime is often a code word for race, it comes to be associated in both media and popular accounts primarily with young African American males in the inner city.

Admittedly, the FBI's *Uniform Crime Report* and the U.S. Justice Department's National Crime Survey have shown for some time that poor minority males in the inner city have the highest arrest rates for serious felony offenses and are, along with other members of poor minority inner-city communities, the most likely to be victims of street crimes.

As we have seen, job loss, disinvestment by corporations and banks, and a declining tax base that negatively affects schools and hospitals have gutted many large cities. Cities have increasing concentrations of poverty, rising unemployment and low-wage employment, and a dwindling supply of decent and affordable housing. All these conditions are related to street crime. And because the inner cities, mostly populated by racial and ethnic minorities, are especially vulnerable to these conditions, street crime is concentrated there, especially among inner-city youth and young adults.

While the unemployment rate for all teenagers aged 16–19 is 25.1 percent, the jobless rate for 16- to 19-year-old Black teenagers is 43.1 percent. In fact, nearly half of Black males ages 16–19 are looking for work but unable to find a job (Steinberg, 2013).

These young people are “disconnected youth.” They may engage in an alternate or **informal economy** (alternative economic activities) to ensure their survival. An important part of this informal economy is criminal, much of it involving drugs. Participation in drug rings can spell money, status, and survival. That the socioeconomic conditions in the inner city make it an ideal location for the illegal drug economy has not been lost on the people who control international drug trafficking.

### Informal economy

When opportunities are not present in the regular legal economy, people in poor inner-city neighborhoods often turn to this alternate economic exchange and activity for survival; much of the informal economy is illegal activity involving crime and drug trafficking.

Official U.S. drug policy has deleterious effects on inner-city communities as well. By criminalizing them, the official strategy is to eliminate drugs and their negative consequences by arresting, prosecuting, convicting, and imprisoning drug users, buyers, and sellers. This “war on drugs” actually escalates drug selling, use, and addiction and magnifies the negative consequences that go with them. Criminalization increases drug prices and profits, thus making the drug trade more attractive. Sellers thus work to recruit more users and addicts. Because their drugs are illegal and expensive, users and addicts may have to steal or sell drugs to afford their own habits.

Besides failing as a drug-control strategy, the war on drugs is not being waged fairly. Although the official claim is one of zero tolerance, pursuing all users, buyers, and sellers no matter who or where they are, the war is racist and focused on young African American males in poor inner-city neighborhoods. One in three Black males is now under the supervision of the criminal justice system—on probation or parole, in jail or prison, or under pretrial release (a rate eight times higher than for White men). In many cities, and in many inner-city neighborhoods, this proportion is much higher. This only serves to marginalize further the already highly marginal poor Black inner-city residents, with ripple effects throughout Black families, schools, and communities.

**FEAR OF CRIME IN THE CITY** Fear of crime is often exaggerated in comparison to the reality of, or actual potential for, criminal victimization. Often the fear is not of crime at all. What people identify as a fear of crime is often a fear of people of cultural and racial groups different than their own. Nonetheless, such misdirected fear of crime is often a significant factor in central-city decline. If people, corporations, retailers, and small businesses will not stay in or move to the city because they believe it is not safe, then the process of urban decline cannot be turned around. A self-fulfilling prophecy of central-city decline sets in. Because of the belief that the city is crime-ridden and unsafe, people, businesses, and jobs leave the city, thereby helping make it more crime prone and unsafe and further removing the possibility that the businesses and jobs that could begin to change the socioeconomic conditions that produce crime will go there in the future.

## Suburban Problems

### 5.2 Explain the causes and consequences of suburban sprawl.

For more than fifty years, there has been a dramatic population shift in the United States—people moving from cities to the suburbs. Although this shift had begun in some metropolitan areas at the turn of the century or even earlier, it accelerated and became the dominant demographic trend in almost every major U.S. metropolitan area after 1950.

The form of those suburbs has also changed. Prior to World War II, suburbs were built around train stations, so homes and stores were located close to the station and based on the walking patterns of the people living there. After the war, there was a housing shortage, exacerbated by the GI Bill that provided low-interest, zero-down loans to millions of veterans. At the same time, the automobile industry was booming, so housing developers began to spread out geographically and the modern-day suburbs were born. No longer constrained by public transportation, the suburbs spread

and were no longer designed with pedestrians in mind. Solving the postwar housing shortage thus resulted in isolated, single-class communities with miles of chain stores (Gallagher, 2013).

Although some middle-class Blacks have moved to the suburbs, those who move to the suburbs are predominantly upper-middle-class, middle-class, and, to a lesser extent, working-class Whites. This process of **White flight** continues to increase both class and race segregation. As suburbs grow and become essentially middle class and White, central cities are left with a greater proportion of their remaining population, who are poor and minority, a trend heightened by the huge number of immigrants, mostly Latino and Asian, moving to U.S. cities. The suburbanization of the United States has meant the geographic separation of classes and races, particularly of middle-class Whites from poor African Americans. Today, very high levels of racial segregation persist in most major U.S. metropolitan areas (recall Figure 5.1). Even when Blacks leave the city, they are often resegregated in predominantly Black suburbs or neighborhoods.

Middle-class Whites move to the suburbs for a better place to raise their children, better schools, and less crime, or as Eric Klinenberg has put it, moving to the suburbs was and is motivated often by the “search for sanctuary, security and class segregation” (Klinenberg, 2004: 40). Race plays a part in these motives. “A better place to raise children” often meant a neighborhood with few or no African Americans or Latinos. “Better schools” often meant virtually all-White schools not under court order to desegregate. And “crime” was synonymous with inner-city Blacks for many suburbanites. Those people moving to the suburbs were also attracted to the open space and the prospect of an unattached, single-family dwelling with a yard. This prospect was made more attainable by generally lower real estate costs and lower property tax rates outside the city.

### White flight

The movement of predominantly upper-middle-class, middle-class, and working-class Whites from the central cities to the suburbs.

## Suburban Sprawl

Suburbanization is not a naturally occurring phenomenon. The suburbs were encouraged, supported, and directly subsidized by the federal government, and they profited large developers and corporations. The history of suburbanization in the United States, as Kenneth Jackson (1985), Peter Dreier (2000), and Daniel Lazare (2001) make clear, shows that federal government policies and spending shaped consumer choices that pushed people out of the cities and pulled them into the suburbs. The federal government financed the construction of the interstate highway and expressway system, which opened the suburbs to speculation and development and connected them to the city, where many suburbanites still worked. Housing policies implemented by the FHA (Federal Housing Authority) and VA (Veterans Administration), offering low-cost, government-insured mortgages—reserved, for the most part, for Whites and the suburbs—facilitated the population shift. The government subsidizes home



ownership by permitting taxes and mortgage interest to be tax deductible (a savings to homeowners of about \$131 billion in 2010) (Kocieniewski, 2010). Housing policies that allow local suburban governments to refuse public and subsidized housing in their communities have also encouraged the White middle class to reside where there is less affordable housing and few poor and minority residents. Cheap fossil fuels and low fuel taxes (such taxes are five to ten times higher in Europe than in the United States) have supported both suburbanization and the extreme dependency of American metropolitan areas on automobiles. Also, policies set by Congress earmark these taxes to be spent on road building rather than mass transit. And local governments have set more favorable property tax rates to lure people, businesses, and jobs to the suburbs. Suburban municipalities added to their growth by providing commercial property tax waivers and other inducements to entice business to move there.

More than one-fourth of all cities with a population of between 100,000 and 400,000 are suburbs. The rapid growth of the suburbs has led to a new city form called “boom-burbs.” A **boomburg** is defined as a suburban city that has at least 100,000 people and has experienced double-digit growth every decade since it became defined by the Census Bureau as urban (2,500 or more). These cities have strip malls, office parks, and “big-box” retailers such as Home Depot and Best Buy with large parking lots.

### Boomburg

A suburban city of at least 100,000 that has experienced double-digit growth each decade since it became urban.

The deconcentration of U.S. metropolitan areas is proceeding beyond the suburbs to what are being called “urban villages” or “edge cities” or “exurbs” even more remote from the central cities, sometimes as far as 40 miles from the central business district. These residential areas on the edge of metropolitan areas experienced rapid growth until the Great Recession hit in late 2007. High gas prices discouraging long commutes and the negative effects of the bursting of the housing bubble led many back toward the cities and renting. Thus, some call this the end of the exurban explosion (Yen, 2012).

The addition of new highways and beltways around and through metropolitan areas typically opens up new land for development of tract homes and strip malls at a rate about twice that of population growth. Such **suburban sprawl** (low-density, automobile-dependent development) absorbs more than 2 million acres of open space each year. It also results in slow commutes, traffic congestion, polluted air, overcrowded schools, automobile dependency, and visual blight (a similar look, whether on the outskirts of Phoenix, Omaha, or Detroit, composed of fast-food franchises, Walmarts, drive-through banks, tract housing architecture, and the like). Following are some facts associated with sprawl:

### Suburban sprawl

Low-density, automobile-dependent development outside the central city.

- Farmland around Denver is falling to sprawl at a rate of 90,000 acres a year.
- About 3.3 million Americans commute more than 50 miles each way to work.
- The greater Los Angeles metropolitan area continues to spread, especially 60 to 70 miles east toward the desert.
- Grass (most of it in suburban lawns) is the largest irrigated crop in the United States.

The effects of suburbanization and sprawl are enormous. First, there are environmental effects such as the disruption of wildlife habitats, the altering of rivers and streams, and pollution from the 246 million vehicles on the roads.

A second consequence of suburbanization is, as mentioned earlier, that as the more affluent leave cities for the suburbs, they take their spending and their taxes with them, leaving businesses less profitable and city governments strapped for the

funds to provide adequate services. This stress on the city is exacerbated by concentrating poverty in the cities—the homeless, new immigrants, the working poor, the elderly, and people with disabilities. This is further compounded by the movement of jobs from the cities to the suburbs.

Third, the economic costs of all this suburbanization, deconcentration, and sprawl are extremely high. Each time metropolitan areas spread out, new highways, streets, bridges, sewers, police and fire stations, and schools must be built. Much of this cost is covered by government with the public's tax dollars. Meanwhile, taxpayers in the cities and older suburbs watch their infrastructures, public transit, and schools deteriorate, even though it is almost always less costly to repair and maintain old infrastructure than to build new. See "Looking Toward the Future: Righting the Urban–Suburban Imbalance."

## Looking Toward the Future

### Righting the Urban–Suburban Imbalance

Typically, there are huge disparities between cities and their suburbs. Businesses (and their property taxes) have left cities for the suburbs. People, usually relatively prosperous, have moved their residences (and their property taxes) from the city to the suburbs. Shopping areas have been built in the suburbs, taking customers and their sales taxes from the cities and causing many central-city businesses to close, with the subsequent loss of jobs.

Thus, with a few exceptions, the central cities of the United States have struggled financially, resulting in a decaying infrastructure, a decline in services, and inadequately financed schools. City residents, especially racial/ethnic minorities, have declining job opportunities and deal face-to-face with crime and drugs. But as the central cities decline, the suburbs prosper. The suburbs have incorporated into separate municipalities and school districts. The enlarged tax bases have provided for state-of-the-art schools, fire and police protection, parks, and other amenities. The result is a decaying central city, ringed by a series of growing, prosperous governmental entities separate from the city.

Do the suburbs and their residents owe anything to the central cities and, if so, should there be any redress for the inequities? Many suburbanites work in the central cities, thus depending on the city for adequate streets, subway systems, police

protection, and sanitation but at no cost to them in taxes. Moreover, suburbanites are free riders when they use the amenities of the cities such as parks, zoos, symphony orchestras, museums, professional sports teams, and urban universities. One solution is a commuter tax of, say, 3 percent of income generated in the city. The mayor of New York City, for example, could say "to all those doctors and bankers in Westchester, 'we've given you a beautifully refurbished Grand Central Terminal, and we've given you Broadway and Central Park and subways without graffiti, and we're paying to protect you from terrorists; give us a mite out of your adjusted gross, for God's sake'" (Traub, 2003:18). This idea seems fair enough, but it is almost universally rejected (an exception is Kansas City, Missouri, which taxes workers who commute from Kansas suburbs to work there).

Better yet would be the political integration of cities with their suburbs. Such integration is the only fair way for central cities to have their share of the wealth in metropolitan areas. Moreover, regional governments could better manage regional problems such as pollution control, safe water, police and fire protection, equality of educational opportunity, and efficient public transportation. Will these changes happen? Will the advantaged give up some of their advantages to achieve fairness, or will they continue to abuse this unequal but symbiotic relationship?



Fourth, there are some health concerns. People who live in sprawling suburbs are much more likely to drive to school, work, or the store than people living in densely populated cities and neighborhoods. As a result of less exercise, suburbanites have higher blood pressure and weigh an average of six pounds more than their counterparts in more walkable locales. Research also shows that people making long commutes are at a higher risk for high blood pressure, sleep deprivation, and depression (Longman, 2001). They have more frequent disputes with their coworkers and families. They suffer more frequent and more serious illnesses, and they are more likely to experience premature deaths (Frank, 2001).

Finally, sprawl has an affect on finances. Transportation costs are generally the second biggest household expense after housing costs. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development recommends that households spend no more than 30 percent of their household income on housing and 15 percent of their income on transportation costs (including gasoline, insurance, loans, maintenance, etc.). Obviously, sprawl necessitates automobile use (in many cases, multiple vehicles per household), increasing transportation costs for households.

## Social Isolation in the Suburbs

Moving to the suburbs is a move away from diversity and toward homogenization (Eitzen, 2004). The suburbs are disproportionately White and relatively affluent. Suburbanites leave immigrants, racial minorities, poor people, and the homeless for life near people like themselves. More than 6 million households are situated in gated communities, where the residents are walled off physically and socially.

The physical arrangements of suburbs are especially socially isolating. Rather than walking to the corner grocery or nearby shop and visiting with the clerks and their neighbors, suburbanites drive somewhere away from their immediate neighborhood to shop among strangers. Or they may not leave their home at all, working, shopping, banking, and paying bills by computer. For suburban teenagers and children, almost everything is away—friends, practice fields, music lessons, jobs, schools, and the malls, resulting in a disconnect from those nearby. Suburban neighborhoods in particular are devoid of meeting places. In effect, the suburbs often suffer from a lack of community—and connection.

## Transforming the Suburbs: The End of Sprawl?

The collapse of the housing market brought about by the Great Recession and relatively high gasoline prices have resulted in some changes in the suburbs. More and more people are reconsidering the wisdom of living so far from work in homes they can no longer afford.

With housing values plummeting in the suburbs while neighborhoods close to downtown have held their value, there is a move back closer to the urban core. Homes close to urban centers or that have convenient access to mass transit are especially desirable (Penalver, 2008).

Builders/developers of new suburban areas are changing their philosophy. Instead of isolated bedroom communities, with no core, they are building whole communities. Instead of strip malls and big-box stores that people drive to, there will be community centers with shops, schools, and services nearby. These neighborhoods

promote walking. Instead of building single-family homes exclusively, builders are providing a mix of residential styles (see “Social Policy: The Future”).

These trends have the added benefits of saving energy, reducing traffic congestion, and cutting air pollution.

## Social Policy

### The Future: Return to Urban Density?

Urban sprawl with its attendant dependence on the automobile leads to a series of serious problems, among them: loss of agricultural land, dependence on foreign oil, and environmental crises such as air pollution and climate change. These are problems now. What about in 2050? By 2050, the United States will likely add 100 million people, requiring many millions of houses and many billions of square feet of office and other nonresidential space (Harkinson, 2010). If the United States continues its present patterns, suburbs will replace open space the size of New Mexico by 2050. If we build more freeways and add more cars, by mid-century Americans will drive 7 trillion miles per year—twice the mileage now.

Are there any alternatives? Some plans get at the edge of the problem, such as more fuel-efficient cars, more mass transit, and replacing gasoline with cleaner-burning natural gas for energy. A more focused approach to the “metastasizing, car-dependent sprawl” is urban density (that is, squeezing more people into cities and inner suburbs). High-rise apartments/condominiums are energy efficient, as the layers of

walls, ceilings, and floors provide excellent insulation. Urbanites do not drive much; they rely on mass transit, and much of what they need in goods and services is within walking distance. Travel to work can be by bicycle, bus, subway, or train. Bicycling, by the way, is common in European cities, most notably Amsterdam, and it is on the rise now in U.S. cities (bike use is up 39 percent nationally since 2001) (Adler, 2011).

A second alternative is to redesign urban and suburban communities (a movement called the “New Urbanism”). The new urbanism involves a comprehensive plan based on the old Main Street model, which is a web of pedestrian-friendly streets surrounding a mass-transit-served downtown center. This type of urban space features a diversity of uses such as homes, shops, restaurants, fitness gyms, entertainment centers, libraries, civic buildings, schools, and public spaces such as plazas, greens, parks, and squares closely connected so they are walkable or bikable (Pierce, 2011). The key is to design these communities for people, not cars. In doing so, society saves open space, reduces car dependence and pollution, and strengthens community ties.

## Rural Problems

### 5.3 Discuss the social problems tied to rural areas in the United States.

By **rural**, we refer to the nonmetropolitan population that resides in small towns and the open countryside, an area encompassing 80 percent of the nation’s land area (see Figure 5.2). Much of this country is emptying out, especially the Great Plains and Appalachia, with the share of people in rural areas at 19.3 percent in 2010. In 1910, 72 percent of the population lived in rural America.

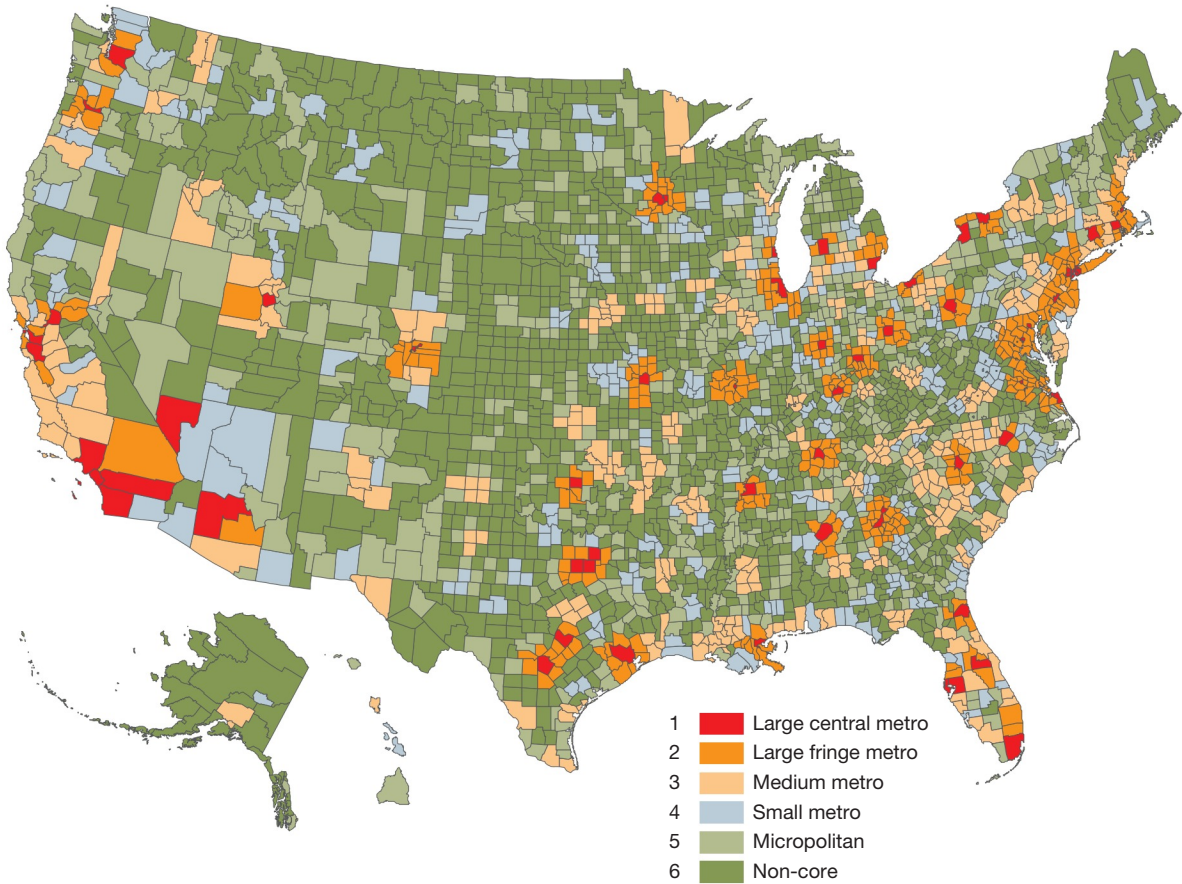
More than one-third of all counties lost population since the 2010 census as jobs dried up and young adults left. Indicative of the rural decline is that the U.S. Postal Service plans to close thousands of branches in rural areas. And Delta Airlines, for

#### Rural

The nonmetropolitan population that resides in small cities and the open countryside.

**Figure 5.2** 2013 Urban–Rural Classification Scheme for Counties

SOURCE: NCHS Urban-Rural Classification Scheme for Counties. From - [http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data\\_access/urban\\_rural.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data_access/urban_rural.htm)



example, ended flight service to twenty-four small airports in 2011 (Yen, 2011). Rural counties growing in population did so because of jobs, such as the boom in natural gas, oil, and coal extraction in North Dakota, Montana, Pennsylvania, and Texas. Growing rural counties were those near metropolitan areas and those popular with retirees because of attractions such as lakes, deserts, and mountains. This section examines a variety of social problems faced by rural communities. But first, let's demythologize rural communities. To begin, contrary to common stereotypes, rural areas are not always alike. Typically, the image of rural areas is of family farms in farming communities in the Midwest, but retirement communities, Native American reservations, resort areas, and natural resource extraction industries are also found in rural areas.

Second, rural communities have changed dramatically in the last fifty years or so. In the past, rural areas were relatively homogeneous and self-sufficient, with a strong sense of common identity. The lives of people centered in their communities: schools, churches, banks, jobs, stores, and services.

But times have changed and, with them, so too the essence of rural life. Automobiles have made it possible to live in one town, work in another, and shop in a third. Schools have consolidated, with children from a wider area and even more than one town attending, lessening the attachment to one's community. Work, once focused on a single activity such as farming, ranching, mining, or lumbering, has broadened to, for example, making furniture, producing mobile homes, factory farming (replacing family farming), and massive food processing. Thus, work roles, once similar throughout the community, have become very different. Many of these communities, once comprising people similar in ethnicity, religion, and culture, have faced the influx of new neighbors, many of whom were recent immigrants, especially Latinos, with different customs and religious beliefs. The effect of these changes has been to lessen the bonds and common identity among rural residents in most contemporary rural communities.

Third, poverty is a problem in rural America. Of the fifty counties with the highest child-poverty rates, forty-eight are in rural America (Pierre, 2004: 30).

## Poverty

The poverty rate is highest in central cities, followed in order by rural and suburban (see Table 5.1). There are important differences between the rural and urban poor. The rural poor have some advantages over the urban poor (low-cost housing, raising their own food) and many disadvantages (low-paid work, higher prices for most products, lack of public transportation, fewer social services, and fewer welfare benefits).

Poverty rates in rural America are higher for racial and ethnic groups than for Whites, reflecting a historical legacy that has left rural areas with concentrated minority populations in certain areas. The highest concentration of U.S. poverty exists in four nonmetropolitan pockets: the Appalachian mountain region, where the poor are predominantly White; the old Southern cotton belt from the Carolinas to the Louisiana Delta, where the poor are mostly African American; the Rio Grande Valley/Texas Gulf Coast, where the poor are largely Latino; and the Southwest and upper Plains states, where Native Americans are concentrated in and around reservations. (See "A Closer Look: The Poorest Communities in the United States.")

## Jobs in Rural Areas

Historically, the work of rural people has centered on the resources of the land, whether through farming, mining, or forestry. These industries experience boom and bust cycles as the costs go up and down, depending on foreign competition, decline in prices because of too much production and discoveries of new deposits, or high prices because of scarcity. New technologies reduce the number of workers required for production. Employment in these activities peaked in the early 1900s, and, except for pockets of activity, has been declining ever since.

Income in rural areas is lower than in metropolitan areas. In 2014, for example, the median household income in rural America was \$45,482, compared to the

**Table 5.1** Poverty Rates by Place 2014

	Poverty Rate
Central Cities	18.9%
Suburbs	11.8%
Nonmetropolitan areas	16.5%

**SOURCE:** DeNavas-Walt, Carmen, and Bernadette D. Proctor, 2015. "Income and Poverty in the United States: 2014." U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Reports*, P60-252 (September), p. 13.

**Colonias**

Substandard housing developments where residents lack basic services such as drinking water, sewage treatment, and paved roads.

## A CLOSER LOOK

**The Poorest Communities in the United States**

There are about 1,450 **colonias** home to an estimated 500,000, located along the Texas–Mexico border in South Texas (South Texas Colonia Initiative, 2010). As described by the Attorney General of Texas, Greg Abbott: “Colonias are substandard housing developments, often found along the Texas–Mexico border, where residents lack basic services such as drinking water, sewage treatment, and paved roads” (Abbott, 2009: para 1). Moreover, “these areas have become a geographic, social and economic state of isolation for thousands of families. There is a daily reminder of the debilitating effects of poverty, lack of education, social isolation and critical need for essential health and human services” (Texas Health and Human Services Commission, 2003). “Red” colonias are those that have no drinkable water or drainage (45,000 people lived in Texas’ red colonias in 2010), and “green” colonias have a basic infrastructure, including sewage systems and paved roads (194,000 lived in Texas’ green colonias in 2010) (*The Economist*, 2011b).

The economy has made the situation worse for the inhabitants of colonias. The drought has meant fewer agricultural jobs. The textile industry that employed many (at relatively low wages) disintegrated as Levi’s, Haggar, and Horace Small factories closed. Meanwhile the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) triggered a population boom, outpacing the supply of affordable housing.

Recently, there have been governmental efforts to fix substandard living conditions. The Texas Legislature has passed laws intended to remedy the conditions in existing colonias and to prevent new colonias (Abbott, 2009). Moreover the legislature has authorized up to \$175 million in state bonds to build or improve roads and drainage. And the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development now offers low-cost financing to build homes. Moreover, developers must provide basic infrastructure (water, sewer, roads, and drainage). Despite the laudable attempts, colonias still remain desperately poor.

median household income in central cities of \$47,850, and \$61,600 in the suburbs (DeNavas-Walt and Proctor, 2015).

**FARMING** Around 1800, 95 percent of Americans made their full-time living from agriculture. A hundred years ago it was 45 percent, and by the turn of the twenty-first century, it was less than 2 percent. The United States still has agriculture, but it is mostly large-scale agribusiness, as 1 percent of farmers account for more than half of all farm income. The demise of the family farm is the result of market forces. Competition from global markets requires producing more per acre. The demands of national retail chains such as Walmart and McDonald’s require standardization and huge outputs.

This is accomplished with the latest and very expensive machinery, the cost of which is justified by farming huge areas, squeezing out the smaller farmers.

Large-scale, homogenized production is profitable. In addition to harvesting crops (corn, soybeans, wheat, potatoes, vegetables, fruit), factory farms produce pigs, cattle, turkeys, chickens, and even catfish. Work is mechanized as much as possible, reducing the number of workers required.

The implications of the demise of small-scale farms are several. The first and obvious consequence is that former farmers must find a new occupation, and the opportunities are few in rural America. Second, many, especially young people, are forced to leave the community for non-agricultural jobs (the average age of farmers was 57 in 2010). For every farmer under the age of 25, there are five who are 75 or older (Bryan, 2012). Third, with the loss of



people and their resources, many local communities decline in importance and function. This decline is exacerbated when the factory farms in a region are owned by outside corporations because the profits leave the area. Fourth, rural communities have become increasingly stratified, with a few large-scale farmers at the top, small farmers barely getting by, and farm workers at the bottom making very meager wages without benefits.

**MANUFACTURING** Contrary to the common assumption, manufacturing in rural areas employs nearly twice as many workers as farming. Some rural areas have industries tied to their agricultural base, such as textile mills and apparel manufacturing near the cotton growing in the South. But these industries have faded dramatically because of global competition. So mills have closed and manufacturers such as Levi's have moved their operations outside the United States to countries where labor and supplies are cheaper.

Other industries have been attracted to rural areas, where land is relatively cheap and there is a supply of nonunionized labor willing to work for wages lower than in urban/suburban areas. So, for example, production of agricultural machinery, recreational vehicles, and parts supplies for the automotive industry has moved into rural areas. The problem is that these industries may leave at any moment because of economic misfortune or in search of workers willing to work for lower wages and benefits.

A particular industrial form—meatpacking—has transformed some rural areas. Corporations such as Tyson, ConAgra, and Cargill have built slaughterhouses in remote towns across the rural Great Plains. In southwestern Kansas, for example, meatpacking operations in places such as Garden City, Dodge City, and Liberal have made these towns rural boomtowns and Kansas the biggest beef-packing state in the United States. The work in these plants is routinized, deskilled, and dangerous. The workers are primarily immigrants from Southeast Asia, Mexico, and Central America, thus transforming the racial/ethnic composition and cultural life of once homogeneous areas.

**EXTRACTION OF NATURAL RESOURCES** Historically, there have been boom and bust cycles for towns and rural areas with lucrative natural resources such as gold, silver, copper, coal, and oil shale were discovered and eventually depleted or the

price no longer made it practical to continue. Today, there is a tremendous oil boom in some rural areas, brought about by the new technologies of horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing. Consider the Bakken oil formation, 640 square miles of oil, holding an estimated 34 billion barrels. The location is mainly in the northwest seventeen counties of North Dakota, small parts of eastern Montana, and Saskatchewan, Canada. Williston, North Dakota, is located in the middle of the Bakken bonanza. Here is what has happened in Williston from the recent boom times (Johnson, 2012). The once-stable population has risen from 12,000 in 2000 to at least 30,000 now. The agricultural base has been superseded by land speculation and oil-dominated activities (e.g., land that recently sold for \$500 an acre now sells for \$200,000 or more an acre). Unemployment is basically nonexistent, as McDonald's pays a minimum of \$15 an hour and jobs in the oil fields may start at more than \$100,000 a year for 80-hour work weeks. As a result, the average household income has increased by 130 percent over the last decade. The boom has increased greatly tax revenues for the local and state coffers.

But while economic opportunities are plentiful, there is also a large downside to this oil boom (the following is from Johnson, 2012; Holeywell, 2011; and Schactman, 2012). Most of the people moving in are men and this has led to a rise in crime (assaults, rape, prostitution). The Williston police department is overwhelmed with the increase in crime, increased traffic accidents, and alcohol/drug-related incidents. The population surge has strained public resources for schools, medical facilities, wastewater treatment, fire fighting equipment, and roads. The cost of living has risen with the higher incomes. The cost of food, lumber, and other goods has soared. Housing, in particular, has skyrocketed. For example, a small one-bedroom apartment, which not long ago rented for less than \$500 a month, now costs \$2,000 (if you can find one).

The dark side of the economic boom is not just the strains on the economics and infrastructure of the communities affected. The bigger issue is the loss felt by locals of their sense of community. The pace and rhythm of an economy based on agriculture has been replaced by rapid changes brought about by easy money, outside corporations, oil rigs, truck traffic, housing construction, an influx of outsiders, and environmental problems.

**TOURISM** Rural areas with natural amenities—mountains, lakes, pleasant climates—have encouraged development and jobs, while the conditions best suited for agriculture—flat terrain and humid summers—have been left out. In some of these areas, mining or timber industries once flourished, then experienced economic decline. But with the coming of tourism, winter and summer resorts, and the building of vacation homes, these areas have been reborn. Jobs have been created in the building trades and in service areas. The jobs in the service sector tend to be lower wage, sometimes part time, with little opportunity for advancement and few benefits. These jobs are highly volatile because of the seasonality of tourism and second-home residency. When amenity-based development occurs, the cost of living increases. Moreover, many low-paid workers cannot afford to live in the amenity-based communities and must commute from more affordable locations, sometimes at considerable distance. Similar to the situation in the slaughterhouse towns, the influx of newcomers and massive development into these once pristine areas often create a culture clash as traditional and newcomer values collide.

## Environment

At least four environmental problems involve rural America. First, there is the continued reduction in the land devoted to farming and ranching. This lost land is covered subsequently with concrete, asphalt, and buildings. Covering the land, and consequently destroying its flora, intensifies global warming.

Second, there are several problems involving water. Most significant, massive irrigation takes water from the underground aquifers much faster than it can be replenished. For example, the Ogallala aquifer provides 30 percent of groundwater used for irrigation in the United States. This aquifer, which stretches 800 miles north to south and 400 miles east to west under the Great Plains, was first tapped in 1912. Its early use was from wells 50 feet deep or less with windmills as the primary mechanism for drawing the water. Now wells are sometimes 500 feet deep with pumps that allow a flow rate of 1,000 gallons a minute. Consequently, the Ogallala aquifer is now only one-third its original capacity. The overuse of water from the Ogallala and other aquifers will result in the loss of land for farming and increased desertification of the land.

Related to the draining of the aquifers by farmers is another problem with the water supply: entrepreneurs buying agricultural land not for farming or ranching but primarily for the water beneath it (Cook, 2002; Hightower, 2002b). For example, Cadiz, Inc., owns 20,000 acres in the Mojave Desert. It proposes to pump some 20 billion gallons of water to cities in Southern California. Similarly, land owned by T. Boone Pickens is above the Ogallala aquifer in the Texas Panhandle. He has been authorized by Texas to pump and sell up to 65 billion gallons of water a year, sending it by pipeline to San Antonio and Dallas. This privatization of water for profit—substituting private interest for public interest—will hasten the loss of water, this most precious of resources, for all of us.

A third environmental problem is a consequence of the use of pesticides, herbicides, and chemical fertilizers to maximize crop production. These chemicals are a serious health danger to agricultural workers. Also, these chemicals drain from the fields into streams, rivers, and lakes, raising the levels of nitrates and other poisons to dangerous levels. So, too, with the chemicals that seep into private and municipal wells destined for human consumption.

Factory farms present serious air and water pollution. A single hog operation may involve as many as 20,000 pigs, which produce an awful stench and problems with waste products from these animals (Johnson and Kuppig, 2004). So, too, with cattle.

There is some evidence that the location of large-scale factory farms involves *environmental racism*. For example, a study found that reductions in community quality of life attributed to large-scale hog operations were more likely to be found in counties that are disproportionately Black than White (Stretesky, Johnston, and Arney, 2003: 231).

## Health Care and Delivery

Residents in rural areas have particular challenges when it comes to health care and delivery (National Rural Health Association, 2015):

- Roughly 10 percent of physicians practice in rural America.
- Hypertension is more common in rural than urban areas.



- Death rates from motor vehicle traffic–related injuries are higher in rural areas.
- Suicide rates for males are higher in rural areas.
- Age-adjusted death rates for heart diseases, strokes, diabetes, nutritional deficiencies, and digestive organ cancers are higher.

Among the reasons for these disparities are the relatively old population in non-metropolitan areas, the dangerous nature of work, the relatively high rate of uninsured, and exposure to pesticides, herbicides, and other dangerous chemicals. Most significant is the lack of medical help available in rural areas.

The medical infrastructure includes hospitals, public health departments, and emergency medical services. In each instance, the medical infrastructure is inadequate or sometimes nonexistent in rural America. Many rural hospitals have closed for financial reasons due to a low tax base and due to the relatively high proportion of Medicare and Medicaid patients that are underfinanced by federal and state governments. As hospitals close, patients must seek help but must travel greater distances for care. With fewer emergency rooms, more accident victims will die for lack of timely treatment.

Added to the weak health care infrastructure in rural areas is the difficulty in recruiting health care professionals. There is also a shortage of dentists, pharmacists, and registered nurses. With low patient volume, relatively low income, and poor access to hospitals and the latest diagnostic tools, most physicians locate in the more lucrative metropolitan areas.

## Small-Town Decline

Traditionally, social life in rural America centered on three local institutions—the town, the school, and the church. Of these, only the church remains. Schools have consolidated into much larger districts, with schools located between towns they represent.

Rural towns once were the commercial and social hubs for the people living in the region. People shopped and banked there. They went there to have their hair cut. They ate at the family-owned restaurants. They went to town on Saturday nights to shop, visit with friends, or engage in some form of recreation. The town gave the people its identity and sense of community. But this dynamic has changed. Large corporations have acquired local banks. Many local residents now work outside the community. They and others now eat in restaurants owned by corporations and do their shopping at the Walmarts, Home Depots, and supermarkets in larger towns. Combined with shopping on the Internet, the competition from these low-cost businesses caused many local businesses to shut down, in effect bringing about the closing of “Main Street” and the sense of community that binds residents in a rural area together.

## Crime and Illicit Drugs

Statistically, rural areas are safer places than metropolitan areas in terms of violent crime.

However, rural dwellers are involved in illicit drugs (consumption, production, and transshipment), just as their counterparts in central cities and suburbs. Rural areas are seeing a surge in heroin use (Elinson and Campo-Flores, 2013). Methamphetamine, in particular, has been a problem in rural communities due to the clandestine laboratories necessary to produce it.

The arrest rate for drug offenses in rural America is lower than found in metropolitan areas. There are several reasons for this anomaly. Rural law enforcement agencies have fewer resources and relatively large areas to patrol. It is easier to hide illegal activities in remote residences than in high-density areas of the city, where neighbors are more likely to detect unusual odors and irregular activities. Covert operations, a common device to break urban drug rings, are difficult in rural areas because everyone knows the local police and is wary of strangers. Finally, because rural inhabitants, including police personnel, know everyone, there is a tendency to handle first offenses informally rather than in the criminal justice system.

The focus of this chapter has been on the social significance of geographical location and the social problems found there, whether in urban centers, bordering these centers in suburbs, or in rural areas. In effect, where one lives affects social behavior—patterns of social interaction, population density, services available, employment opportunities, tax base, public transportation, and ultimately health and well-being.

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## Chapter Review

### 5.1 Identify social problems tied to inner cities in the United States.

- The United States is an urban nation, with 80.7 percent of its residents living in urbanized areas or urban clusters.
- While some inner cities are experiencing revitalization, many urban centers are plagued with problems of job loss, racial and income segregation, and poverty.
- Through the process of suburbanization and metropolitan deconcentration, the central cities have lost people, jobs, industry, business, and their tax base. Central cities have also lost jobs in the transformation from a manufacturing to a service economy.
- Beginning in the 1950s, U.S. business and financial and lending institutions have tended to (a) disinvest in cities and invest in suburbs and (b) disinvest in Black and Latino neighborhoods and invest in White communities. This pattern of disinvestment is directly responsible for urban neighborhood and central-city decline.
- The declining quality of life in U.S. big cities is reflected in increasing and intensifying poverty, the lack of affordable housing, homelessness, decaying infrastructure, transportation problems, pollution, health problems, underfunded and failing schools, high unemployment, crime, drugs, and gangs.
- Urban poverty has been increasing and becoming more concentrated in particular areas in the central city. The poor have also been getting poorer, especially the minority poor. African Americans and Latinos are more likely than Whites in the city to be poor, and Blacks are much more likely to live in highly segregated neighborhoods that are also high-poverty areas.
- Both the urban housing market and government-subsidized and public housing have failed to provide enough decent and affordable shelter in U.S. cities. The results are a dwindling supply of low-income housing and increasing urban homelessness.
- The lack of public investment in the urban infrastructure has begun to significantly limit growth and productivity in the U.S. economy.
- An automobile-dependent transportation system has polluted U.S. cities and promoted urban sprawl.
- Poor and minority communities in the inner city are the site of a disproportionate amount of illegal dumping and toxic and hazardous

waste (environmental classism and environmental racism).

- Because U.S. public education is funded primarily with local property taxes, gross inequalities exist between suburban and city schools.
- When opportunities in the formal and legal economy are not forthcoming, young minority males turn to the informal economy for survival. Much of the informal economy is illegal, involving property crime, drug trafficking, and certain gang activities.

### 5.2 Explain the causes and consequences of suburban sprawl.

- The suburbanization of the United States has meant the geographic separation of classes and races, particularly of middle-class Whites from poor African Americans.
- Suburbs have been encouraged, supported, and directly subsidized by the federal government. Among these federal policies: the interstate highway system with beltways around cities, low-cost mortgages, tax breaks for homeowners, and low fuel taxes.
- Sprawl has numerous consequences for society, such as (a) negative effects on the environment; (b) taking taxes and spending out of the inner cities; (c) costing large amounts of money for infrastructure, schools, roads, and fire and police services; (d) health concerns due to high automobile use; and (e) financial problems for families due to location inaffordability.

### 5.3 Discuss the social problems tied to rural areas in the United States.

- Employment in rural areas was once centered on resources of the land—farming, mining, and forestry. This situation has changed with the demise of small farms, replaced by large enterprises, the shift to factory farm operations. Manufacturing enterprises now employ many rural dwellers but at low pay and with few benefits, and workers live with the fear that businesses might move to other localities where wages are lower.
- There are four environmental problems in rural America: (a) reduction in land devoted to farming and agriculture; (b) irrigation is depleting aquifers faster than they can be recharged; (c) there is massive use of chemicals in farming; and (d) factory farms create serious pollution of the air, land, and water.
- Rural residents have greater health difficulties than their urban counterparts. Two of the reasons for this disparity are a lack of medical personnel and inadequate health facilities.
- Small towns are declining as commercial and social hubs. Many residents now work outside the community. They shop and seek entertainment elsewhere. The cumulative effects are the closing of local businesses and a loss of a sense of community.
- Rural areas are safer than metropolitan areas in terms of violent crime, and the arrest rate for drug offenses is lower (although this is not necessarily a consequence of lower drug use).

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## Key Terms

**Boomburg** A suburban city of at least 100,000 that has experienced double-digit growth each decade since it became urban.

**Central-city poverty areas** Neighborhoods in which at least one in five households lives below the poverty line.

**Colonias** Substandard housing developments where residents lack basic services such as drinking water, sewage treatment, and paved roads.

**Environmental classism** When the poor in metropolitan areas are disproportionately exposed to toxic wastes.

**Environmental racism** The tendency for minority areas in cities and metropolitan areas to be the targets of a disproportionate share of illegal dumping and the sites where most toxic and hazardous waste is disposed; these communities also suffer, as

compared to more affluent White communities, from lax enforcement of environmental regulations and laws.

**Gentrification** The redevelopment of poor and working-class urban neighborhoods into middle- and upper-middle-class enclaves; often involves displacement of original residents.

**High-poverty areas** Neighborhoods where at least two in five households live below the poverty line.

**Informal economy** When opportunities are not present in the regular, legal economy, people in poor inner-city neighborhoods often turn to this alternate economic exchange and activity for survival; much of the informal economy is illegal activity involving crime and drug trafficking.

**Jobs/housing mismatch** The inability of central-city residents most in need of decent jobs to reach them on the urban fringe because (1) they cannot afford to operate a private automobile, and (2) the public transportation system is inadequate; moving to the urban fringe is not an option because of housing costs and racial segregation. To the extent that jobs and job growth occur in one place—affluent and White areas—and poor Blacks or Latinos are restricted to another, this “mismatch” is a form of spatial apartheid.

**Medicaid** The state and federal governments’ insurance program for the poor.

**Public Housing** Housing funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development that is limited to low-income families and individuals.

**Redlining** When banks, savings and loans, government agencies, and insurance companies refuse to make home and small-business loans and insure property in poor and minority neighborhoods.

**Rural** The nonmetropolitan population that resides in small cities and the open countryside.

**Section 8** Housing assistance for low-income families, the elderly, and the disabled. Families or individuals are issued a housing choice voucher and find their own housing to live in.

**Slumlording** Landlords buy properties in poor neighborhoods for rent income. They do not maintain these properties because to do so would lower their profits.

**Spatial apartheid** The physical separation of Whites and nonwhites, with Whites located where jobs and job growth are found and nonwhites located where they are not.

**Suburban sprawl** Low-density, automobile-dependent development outside the central city.

**Triage** The practice in understaffed and underfinanced public hospitals of treating the most urgent emergencies first, thereby delaying the treatment of other cases.

**Warehousing** The withholding of apartments from the housing market by speculators who hope to sell them at a profit to developers.

**White flight** The movement of predominantly upper-middle-class, middle-class, and working-class Whites from the central cities to the suburbs.

# Chapter 6

# Threats to the Environment



## Learning Objectives

- 6.1** Describe the nature and consequences of human-made threats to the environment.
- 6.2** Understand the cultural and structural forces that contribute to environmental problems.
- 6.3** Describe the long-range international implications of alternative solutions to threats to the environment.

Human societies have always altered their physical environments. They have used fire, cleared forests, tilled the soil, terraced hillsides, mined for mineral deposits, dammed rivers, polluted streams, and overgrazed grasslands. Since 1950, the pace and magnitude of the negative environmental impacts of human activities have increased and intensified. Especially significant are the extraordinary use of fossil fuels, the deforestation of the rain forests, the pumping of billions of tons of greenhouse gases into the air, the pollution of water by fertilizers, pesticides, and animal wastes, the emission of toxic chemicals, and the rapid erosion of topsoil. In effect, we are fundamentally changing the planet in ways that are diminishing the planet's ability to sustain life.

As environmental problems are examined in this chapter, the discussion is guided by three facts. First, while some environmental problems are beyond human control (volcanoes, earthquakes, solar flares), *most are social in origin*. As a result, changing human behavior is the key to reducing or eliminating many of these environmental threats.

Second, the magnitude of environmental problems has become so great that the ultimate survival of the human species is in question. Third, although environmental problems may originate within a nation's borders, they usually have global consequences. Thus, this chapter examines human-made environmental problems at both the domestic and international levels. The first section describes the nature of these problems and their consequences. The second section examines the cultural and structural sources of environmental problems. The final section discusses some potential solutions at the local, societal, and global levels.

### Biosphere

The surface layer of the planet and the surrounding atmosphere.

### Ecosystems

The mechanisms (plants, animals, and microorganisms) that supply people with the essentials of life.

## Worldwide Environmental Problems

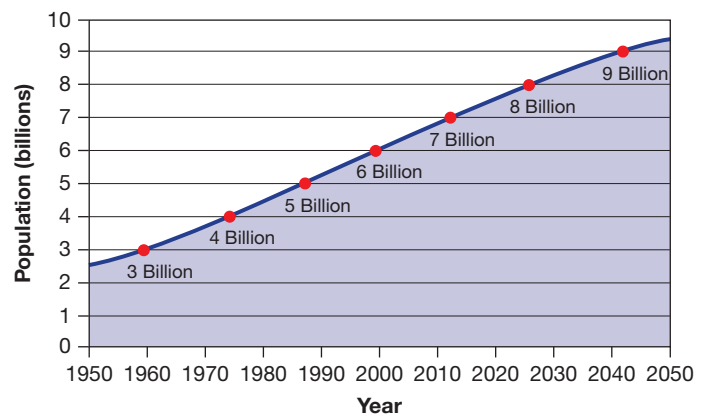
### 6.1 Describe the nature and consequences of human-made threats to the environment.

Earth's **biosphere** (the surface layer of the planet and the surrounding atmosphere) provides the land, air, water, and energy necessary to sustain life. This life-support system is a complex, interdependent one in which energy from the sun is converted into food. Three social forces are disturbing these **ecosystems** profoundly. First, the tremendous increase in population increases the demand for food, energy, minerals, and other products. With the world's population reaching more than 7 billion and increasing by 6 to 7 million each month, the stresses on the environment mount (see Figure 6.1: World Population Estimates).

The second driving force contributing to the pressures on Earth's natural systems is growing inequality in income between the rich and poor (as discussed in Chapter 3). This inequality is a major source of environmental decline. Those

**Figure 6.1** World Population Estimates, 1950-2050

**SOURCE:** U.S. Census Bureau, International Data Base, June 2011 update. Public domain graph found at: [www.census.gov/population/international/data/idb/worldpopgraph.php](http://www.census.gov/population/international/data/idb/worldpopgraph.php).



at the top over-consume energy, raw materials, and manufactured goods, and for survival the poor must cut down trees, grow crops, fish, or graze livestock, often in ways that are harmful to the planet.

Consider the consumption patterns in the United States, with but 4.5 percent of the world's population:

- The United States consumes 25 percent of the world's fossil fuel. It burns 25 percent of the world's coal, 26 percent of the world's oil, and 27 percent of the world's natural gas (WorldWatch Institute, 2012).
- Americans waste more food than most people eat in sub-Saharan Africa. Thirty-five million tons of food suitable for human consumption is wasted each year in the United States (Environmental Protection Agency, 2012).
- The United States consumes more than 19 million barrels of petroleum each day, which is 21.1 percent of the total world consumption (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2015).
- Overall, the United States ranks number two in greenhouse gas emissions (behind China). However, when taking into account the population in each country, the United States emits more CO<sub>2</sub> *per person* than any other industrialized nation (Rogers and Evans, 2011).

The third driving force behind the environmental degradation of the planet is economic growth. This expansion of the global economy, although important for the jobs created and the products produced, has an environmental downside. Economic growth is powered by the accelerated extraction and consumption of fossil fuels, minerals, water, and timber. In turn, environmental damage increases proportionately. In the following sections we examine some of these serious environmental threats.

## Degradation of the Land

Across the planet, a thin, three-foot layer of topsoil provides food crops for more than 7 billion people and grazing for domesticated animals. This nutrient-rich topsoil, the source of food, fiber, and wood, is eroding at a faster rate than it can form. In fact, some experts suggest that at current rates of soil degradation, we may only have 60 years of topsoil left (World Economic Forum, 2012). This topsoil is being depleted or lost because of careless husbandry and urbanization. Farmland is lost because of plowing marginal lands, leading to wind and water erosion. The fertility of farmland is lost because it is exhausted by overuse. It is also lost because of irrigation practices that poison the land with salt, a process called salinization. The overuse of irrigation also drains rivers and depletes aquifers faster than they can be replenished. The use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides kills helpful creatures, taints groundwater, and creates dead zones in the oceans (e.g., where the Mississippi River drains into the Gulf of Mexico).

In 2011, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations published a report that provides a global assessment of the planet's land resources. According to the report, 25 percent of earth's land surfaces are "highly degraded," and another 8 percent are moderately degraded.

## Deforestation

Tropical rain forests cover about 6–7 percent of Earth’s dry land surface (2 percent of the Earth’s total surface) but house about half of all plant and animal species on Earth. About 1.9 billion acres of these forests remain in equatorial countries in the Caribbean, West Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America. These rich forests are rapidly being destroyed through the process of deforestation. For example, it is estimated that the island nation of Comoros (north of Madagascar) lost nearly 60 percent of its forests between 1990 and 2005. In this same period, Brazil led the world in losing 163,543 square miles of forest, which is roughly the size of California (Lindsey, 2007). This massive destruction continues to occur because of economics, from the greed of developers to the desperation of poor peasants. Lumber, petroleum, and mining companies build roads into the jungles to extract their products and transport them to markets. Governments encourage the poor people to settle in these regions by building roads and offering land to settlers, who must clear it for farming. Cattle ranchers require vast expanses for their herds (five acres of pasture for each head). Land speculators clear huge areas for expected profits. The recovered land, however, is fragile, which leads to a cycle of further deforestation.

The sources of deforestation are not just local. The poverty of these nations (often the result of their colonial heritage), their indebtedness to wealthy nations, and the products needed by the wealthy nations are also responsible for the destruction of the tropical forests.

In the Cambodian rain forest, deforestation has occurred due to the demand for sassafras oil that is extracted from the roots of the rare Mreah Prew Phnom tree. While this oil is used to make some cosmetics, it is also a known ingredient in the recreational drug ecstasy. The organization Fauna and Flora International has uncovered illegal distilleries deep in the Cambodian mountains and estimates there were at least seventy-five sassafras oil distilleries operating in 2006 (MacKinnon, 2009).

U.S. corporations are also directly and indirectly involved in various aspects of rain forest destruction. These involve the timber companies such as Georgia-Pacific and Weyerhaeuser; mining companies such as Alcoa and Freeport McMoRan; oil companies such as Arco, Chevron, ExxonMobil, and ConocoPhillips; paper companies such as Kimberly-Clark; and agricultural companies such as Chiquita.

The two major environmental consequences of this deforestation are *climate change* and the *vanishing of species*. The climate is affected in several related ways. As hundreds of thousands of forest acres are destroyed, rain patterns change. Huge areas once covered with plants that give off moisture are replaced by exposed, sandy soils. Also, the massive burning required to clear the land creates clouds of smoke that block the sun and lead to weather change. Thus, lush, green areas often become near deserts. The tropical forest in Brazil (the world’s largest) has so much rainfall that it provides 20 percent of Earth’s freshwater supply. What will be the long-range effects as this water supply dwindles? Just as important, forests absorb huge quantities of carbon dioxide through photosynthesis. Consequently, as forests are diminished so is



The world’s tropical rain forest is losing an area about half the size of Florida each year due to deforestation.



Earth's capacity to absorb the gas most responsible for global warming. This diminished capacity to process carbon dioxide, changing it into oxygen, leads to changes in the climate and to desertification.

The second critical environmental consequence of deforestation is the loss of animal and plant species. Although these tropical forests cover only 6–7 percent of Earth's dry land surface, they are Earth's richest factory of life, containing more than half of the world's species of plants, insects, birds, and other animals. As the forests are cleared and burned, species become extinct.

Humanity benefits from nature's diversity in many ways. One important aspect is that exotic plants and animals are major sources of pharmaceuticals. For example, Squibb used the venom of the Brazilian pit viper to develop Capoten, a drug to lower high blood pressure. The yew, which grows in the Pacific Northwest, produces a potent chemical, taxol, which shows promise for curing certain forms of lung, breast, and ovarian cancer. Biotechnology provides the potential to improve agricultural crops by transferring genes from wild plants to domestic crops so that they can be drought resistant, repel insects, or create their own fertilizers naturally. By destroying the forests, we may be eliminating future solutions to disease and famine.

## Environmental Pollution and Degradation

The following description of the various forms of pollution in industrial societies presents a glimpse of how humanity is fouling its nest.

**CHEMICAL POLLUTION** More than 4 billion pounds of toxic chemicals are released by industry into the nation's environment each year (Scorecard, 2011). These chemicals are found in food, used in detergents, fertilizers, pesticides, plastics, clothing, insulation, and almost everything else. Some 202 of these chemicals, such as lead and mercury, harm children's brains and may be responsible for many developmental disabilities such as autism and attention deficit disorder (Laurance, 2006).

The manufacture of chemicals requires disposing of the waste. Waste disposal, especially safe disposal of toxic chemicals, is a huge problem. These toxic chemicals are released into the air, water, land, underground, and public sewage either by accident or deliberately. Typically, corporations choose the cheapest means of disposal, which is to release the waste products into the air or water and to bury the materials in

A crop duster sprays pesticides on a local farm.



dumpsites. In one infamous instance, over a number of years the Hooker Chemical and Plastics Corporation dumped 43.6 million pounds of eighty-two different chemical substances into Love Canal, New York, near Niagara Falls. Among the chemicals dumped were 200 tons of trichlorophenol, which contained an estimated 130 pounds of one of the most toxic and carcinogenic substances known—dioxin. Three ounces of this substance can kill more than a million people. (A variant of dioxin—Agent Orange—was used in the Vietnam War, with extremely adverse results to vegetation and human life.) As a result of exposure to the various chemicals

dumped at Love Canal, throughout the late 1970s, nearby residents had an unusual number of serious illnesses, a high incidence of miscarriages, and an unusual number of children born with birth defects.

The Love Canal dumpsite is only one of thousands of dangerous locations in the United States. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) places sites that pose the greatest risk to public health and the environment on the Superfund National Priorities List. Hurricane Katrina flooded three Superfund toxic waste sites in and around New Orleans, and this poses serious threats if any of their protective shields have been degraded (Eilperin, 2005). As of June 2015, there are 1,322 sites on the Superfund National Priorities List.

A movement known as **environmental justice** works to improve environments for communities and is especially alert to the injustices that occur when a particular segment of the population, such as the poor or minority groups, bears a disproportionate share of exposure to environmental hazards. This movement is a reaction against the overwhelming likelihood that toxic-producing plants and toxic waste dumps are located where poor people, especially racial and ethnic minorities, live (when this pattern occurs, it is called **environmental racism**). “In Los Angeles more than 71 percent of African Americans live in highly polluted areas, compared to 24 percent of whites. Across the United States, black children are three times more likely to have hazardous levels of lead in their blood as a result of living near hazardous waste sites” (Oliver, 2008: 2). Robert Bullard, an expert on environmental racism, says that “Blacks and other economically disadvantaged groups are often concentrated in areas that expose them to high levels of toxic pollution: namely, urban industrial communities with elevated air and water pollution problems or rural areas with high levels of exposure to farm pesticides” (Bullard, 2000: 6–7).

U.S. corporations are also involved in global chemical pollution. They not only dump wastes into the oceans and the air, which of course can affect the people in other countries, but they also sell to other countries chemicals (such as pesticides) that are illegal to sell here because they are toxic. In addition, U.S. corporations have used other countries as dumpsites for their hazardous substances because the U.S. government outlawed indiscriminate dumping of toxic wastes in this country in 1975.

The nations of Western Europe and North America have relatively strict environmental laws, which is good for their inhabitants. These countries, however, transport roughly 2 million tons of toxic waste annually to poor nations that desperately need the cash.

Toxic wastes are also exported when U.S. multinational corporations move operations to countries with less stringent environmental laws. For example, the 2,000 foreign-owned (mostly by the United States) factories along the United States–Mexico border in Mexico (*maquiladoras*) have created environmental hazards on both sides of the border.

Another problem with toxic wastes is accidental spills from tankers, trucks, and trains as the wastes are transported. These spills number about 400 a year in the United States alone. When these incidents occur, the air, the groundwater, and the oceans may become polluted.

**SOLID WASTE POLLUTION** The United States is the largest producer of solid waste among the industrialized nations, both in absolute and per capita terms. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (2012), in 2012 Americans generated 251 million tons of old food, glass, clothing, electronics, plastics, metals, textiles,

### Environmental justice

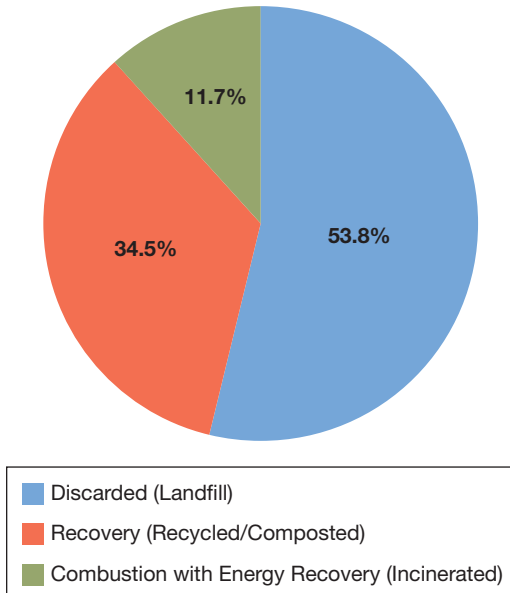
A movement to improve community environments by eliminating toxic hazards.

### Environmental racism

The overwhelming likelihood that toxic-producing plants and toxic waste dumps are located where poor people, especially people of color, live.

**Figure 6.2** Municipal Solid Waste Disposal in the United States, 2012

**SOURCE:** U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (2012). "Municipal Solid Waste Generation, Recycling and Disposal in the United States: Facts and Figures for 2012." [www.epa.gov/osw/nonhaz/municipal/pubs/2012\\_msw\\_fs.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/osw/nonhaz/municipal/pubs/2012_msw_fs.pdf).



rubber, wood, and paper. On average, each American produces 4.38 pounds of solid trash a day (up from 2.7 pounds in 1960). Approximately 34.5 percent of this trash is recycled, and the rest is incinerated or buried in landfills (see Figure 6.2).

The problem of what to do with solid waste is compounded by the increased amounts of waste that are contaminated with compounds and chemicals that do not appear in nature. These wastes pose new and unknown threats to human, animal, and plant life. One such health hazard is toxic sludge, a mix of human and industrial waste produced by wastewater treatment plants. About 4 million tons of sludge is dumped on farmland, golf courses, and parks as a form of fertilizer. Unless sludge is carefully treated and monitored, it can be tainted with *E. coli*, bacteria, viruses, heavy metals, solvents, and any combination of the thousands of chemicals used in U.S. industries. In 2010, a reservoir filled with toxic red sludge ruptured in western Hungary, releasing a 12-foot-high wall of sludge into nearby towns and rivers. The Hungarian government later imposed a fine on the aluminum plant responsible for the accident.

All landfills eventually leak seeping toxic residues into the groundwater. Many communities have contaminated drinking water and crops as a result. With the problem clearly becoming serious, some experimentation

is now being conducted with landfills that have impermeable linings to prevent such pollution (see "A Closer Look: Technology and Toxic Waste").

There are several alternatives to dumping trash in landfills. One option has been to dump trash in the ocean. This practice has polluted beaches, poisoned fish, and hurt fisheries. As a result, international agreements and domestic legislation within various countries have curtailed this alternative. The environmentally preferred solutions are for the trash to be reprocessed to its original uses (paper, glass containers, metals) or converted into new products such as insulation.

The alternative most commonly selected is to incinerate the garbage (which disposes of 11.7 percent of the country's total waste). The burning of trash has two major benefits. It reduces the volume of garbage by almost 90 percent, and it can generate steam and electricity. The downside of burning trash, however, is significant. Incinerating plastics and other garbage releases toxic chemicals, including deadly dioxins and heavy-metal emissions, into the air. The residue (ash) is contaminated with lead and cadmium.

About 34.5 percent of solid waste is currently recycled, a positive environmental step. In fact, that rate has increased from just 10 percent in 1980. Another positive is the transforming of organic waste—paper, food scraps, and lawn clippings—into compost, a product that invigorates agricultural soils. In 2010, more than 19 million tons of yard trimmings were composted, representing almost a five-fold increase since 1990 (Environmental Protection Agency, 2011b).

## A CLOSER LOOK

### Technology and Toxic Waste

The new technology found in most households in the developed world—personal computers, cell phones, televisions, and other electronic equipment—is laden with toxins that when thrown away will leach into groundwater or produce dioxins and other carcinogens when burned. Let's consider computers.

The computer revolution changes quickly, with each new generation having much more memory and being infinitely faster, yet available at a cheaper price than the original. As a result, millions of computers become obsolete every year. Thus, the disposal of personal computers and consumer electronics ("e-waste") is an enormous environmental problem.

- Roughly 142,000 computers are disposed of (trashed or recycled) every day in the United States (Electronics TakeBack Coalition, 2014).
- Printed circuit boards and semiconductors contain cadmium, which is known to cause lung cancer and kidney damage with repeated exposure. In 2005, more than 2 million pounds of cadmium were discarded along with computers.
- The batteries and switches contain mercury. Mercury poisoning is known to cause chronic health problems, from gum problems to nervous system damage; 400,000 pounds of mercury were discarded nationwide in 2005.
- Chromium is used as corrosion protection in computers and can cause respiratory tract irritation. In 2005, there were an estimated 1.2 million pounds of chromium in landfills.
- PVC (polyvinyl chloride) plastics are used on cables and housings, creating a potential waste of 250 million pounds per year.
- With the increased use of flat-panel monitors, an estimated 500 million defunct monitors were discarded by 2007, each of which contains phosphorus and 4 to 8 pounds of lead.

The problem is that only 40 percent of computers are recycled. The rest threaten the environment—here and abroad. Chances are that most of the obsolete computers will end up in the developing world—Africa, India, and China—where the poor, with little or no protection, are hired to extract items of value.

**WATER POLLUTION** The major sources of water pollution are (1) industries, which pour into rivers, lakes, and oceans a vast array of contaminants such as lead, asbestos, detergents, solvents, acid, and ammonia; (2) farmers, whose pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers, and animal wastes drain into streams and lakes; (3) cities, which dispose of their wastes, including sewage, into rivers to end up downstream in another city's drinking water; and (4) oil spills, caused by tanker accidents and leaks in offshore drilling. These are problems throughout the world.

Water pollution is a most immediate problem in the less-developed countries. Contaminated water in poor countries results in high death rates from cholera, typhoid, dysentery, and diarrhea. About 768 million people do not have access to safe



The Hudson River in New York remains one of the most polluted rivers in the United States.

The EPA has a list of large toxic sites to be cleaned up with funds supplied by Congress. The largest of these Superfund sites is a 200-mile stretch of the upper Hudson River, where General Electric dumped 1.3 million pounds of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) into the river over a thirty-year period. PCBs cause cancer in laboratory animals, and they are linked to premature births and developmental disorders. General Electric stopped the practice in 1977 when the federal government banned PCB use. More than three decades later, the New York State Health Department continues to advise women of childbearing age and children under age 15 not to eat any fish from the Hudson River and urges that no one eat any fish from the upper Hudson, where the cancer risk from such consumption is 700 times the EPA protection level. Between May and October 2009, Phase 1 of the Hudson River Dredging Project was completed, and 10 percent of the contaminated sediment was removed. In 2015, the sixth and final phase of Hudson River dredging began. Thousands of pounds of PCBs remain in the sediment of the Hudson and continue to poison fish, wildlife, and humans.

In addition to water pollution, another issue facing many areas is drought. While some cases of drought are not the result of human action, others may be tied to the over-consumption of water. California is currently facing the most severe drought on record. In January 2015, the governor declared a drought state of emergency and ordered state officials to take steps to prepare for severe water shortage. All state residents were mandated to conserve water consumption by 25 percent, a mandate that angers some residents.

Drought is a problem on a global scale, however. For example, Madagascar is experiencing severe crop failure expected to impact more than 200,000 people; Brazil has been experiencing rising Dengue Fever cases tied to drought and water storage containers; and in New South Wales, some areas have gone three years without rain.

**RADIATION POLLUTION** Human beings cannot escape radiation from natural sources such as cosmic rays and radioactive substances in Earth's crust. Technology has added greatly to these natural sources through the extensive use of x-rays for medical and dental uses, fallout from nuclear weapons testing and from nuclear accidents, and the use of nuclear energy as a source of energy.

The dangers of radiation are evidenced to the extreme in the physical effects on the survivors of the atomic bombs at the end of World War II. These victims

drinking water, and more than 3 million die each year of easily preventable waterborne diseases such as diarrhea, dysentery, and cholera.

In the United States, the Mississippi River provides an example of the seriousness of water pollution. Greenpeace USA, an environmental organization, surveyed pollution in the Mississippi River and found that industries and municipalities along the river discharge billions of pounds of heavy metals and toxic chemicals into it. This dumping occurs along the 2,300 miles of the river; the worst pollution is concentrated along 150 miles in Louisiana, where 25 percent of the nation's chemical industry is located.

experienced physical disfigurement, stillbirths, infertility, and extremely high rates of cancer. A government study estimated that the radioactive fallout from Cold War nuclear weapons tests across the Earth probably caused at least 15,000 cancer deaths and 20,000 nonfatal cancers in U.S. residents born after 1951 (reported in Eisler, 2002). In 1986, the most serious nuclear accident to date occurred at Chernobyl in the Soviet Union. The full consequences of this accident will not be known for years, but so far there have been numerous deaths in Russia, a large-scale increase in cancers and other illnesses, and widespread contamination of food and livestock as far away as Scandinavia and Western Europe. The most serious nuclear accident in the United States occurred with the near meltdown in Pennsylvania at Three Mile Island in 1979. Worldwide, the most recent example of a nuclear accident occurred in 2011 when a powerful earthquake and subsequent tsunami in Japan caused radiation leaks at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power station.

Less dramatic than nuclear accidents but lethal just the same have been the exposures to radiation of workers in nuclear plants and those living nearby. Sixty-one utility companies across the United States operate 99 commercial nuclear reactors, providing about 20 percent of the nation's electricity (second only to coal). Unlike coal, the electricity generated by nuclear energy does not produce carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. The problem involves the safe storage of nuclear waste. The generation of nuclear power creates radioactive by-products such as uranium mill tailings, used reactors, and the atomic waste itself. The safe storage of these materials is an enormous and perhaps impossible task because some remain radioactive for as long as 250,000 years. Neither the nuclear industry nor the government has a long-term solution for safe nuclear waste disposal.

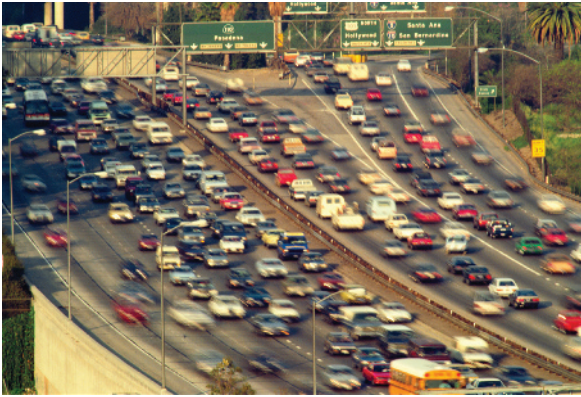
The Hanford nuclear weapons plant in Washington State provides an example. For more than forty years, the U.S. government ran this facility, monitoring nuclear emissions but not notifying the workers or the 270,000 residents in the surrounding area of the dangers. It has now been revealed that the Hanford plant released more than 400,000 units of radioactive iodine into the atmosphere (a substance known to cause cancer). Similar situations have occurred at the weapons factories at Rocky Flats near Denver, Fernald near Cincinnati, and Savannah River in South Carolina, and at the testing sites for weapons in Nevada and other areas in the Southwest.

In 2012, U.S. federal regulators, signaling a renewed effort to use nuclear energy to cut the nation's reliance on fossil fuels, approved the first new nuclear plant in thirty years. It remains to be seen whether this will spark a renewed interest in expanding nuclear power in the United States.

**AIR POLLUTION** According to the World Health Organization (2011), outdoor air pollution causes 1.3 million deaths per year worldwide. It is a major source of health problems such as respiratory ailments (asthma, bronchitis, and emphysema), cancer, impaired central nervous functioning, and cirrhosis of the liver. These problems are especially acute among people who work in or live near industrial plants in which waste chemicals



Hanford was the world's first full-scale nuclear reactor, built to produce plutonium for an atomic bomb during World War II.



The United States is the world's number one consumer of oil products.

## Fossil Fuel Dependence

The Industrial Revolution involved, most fundamentally, the replacement of human and animal muscle by engines driven by fossil fuels. These fuels (coal, oil, natural gas) are also used for heating, cooking, and lighting. Considering just oil, the world consumes approximately 90 million barrels of oil a day. The United States is the greatest consumer of oil products, using approximately 19 million barrels of oil a day (21.1 percent of the world's daily consumption). The European Union is second at 12.7 million barrels, followed by China, Japan, and India (Central Intelligence Agency, 2013). Carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuels, the main villain among the greenhouse gases, have gone from almost nothing a hundred years ago to more than 4 metric tons of carbon per person each year. Each person in the United States, by the way, produces over 17 tons per year (Rogers and Evans, 2011).

The worldwide demand for energy will rise sharply as the developing nations, where 99 percent of the world's population growth is taking place, industrialize and urbanize. People in the developing countries will be replacing traditional fuels such as wood and other organic wastes with electricity, coal, and oil. This likely trend has important consequences for the world and its inhabitants. First, the demand for fossil fuels has given extraordinary wealth to the elites in the nations of the Persian Gulf area, where most of the world's estimated petroleum reserves are located. Stability in this region is vital to U.S. interests because interruption in the flow of Persian Gulf oil will cause shortages and the price of other oil imports to rise dramatically, devastating the U.S. economy. In short, the maldistribution of the world's energy supply heightens world tensions.

Second, because most nations need to import oil, vast amounts are carried across the world's oceans in about 2,600 tankers. Along with offshore drilling, these voyages increase the probability of accidents that damage aquatic life, birds, and coastal habitats. Four examples of large-scale spills are the wreck of the *Amoco Cadiz* off the coast of France in 1978, spilling 68 million gallons of crude oil; the blowout of the Ixtoc I oil well, which poured 140 million gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico in 1979; the grounding of the *Exxon Valdez* in Alaska's Prince William Sound in 1989, which released 11 million gallons of crude oil into an ecologically sensitive region, contaminating 1,000 miles of coastline and destroying extraordinary amounts of fish and wildlife; and the April 2010 explosion of the Deepwater Horizon oil rig, operated by British Petroleum (BP). The BP oil spill killed eleven workers and leaked

are released into the air and among people who live in metropolitan areas where conditions such as temperature and topography tend to trap the pollutants near the ground (e.g., cities such as Mexico City, Los Angeles, and Denver).

In addition to air pollution from industry, automobiles emit five gases that have extremely serious consequences for the environment: carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide, chlorofluorocarbons, and ozone smog. The resulting greenhouse effect and the loss of ozone protection are topics discussed in the later section on climate change.

185–205 million gallons of crude oil into the Gulf of Mexico. The oil slick killed marine life and devastated the coastal lands of Louisiana and the livelihoods of people who fish and shrimp in the Gulf (Ritchie, Gill, and Picou, 2011).

Finally, and most important, the combustion of fossil fuels results in the emission of carbon dioxide, which appears to be related to climate change. The consequences of the present level of carbon dioxide emissions, plus the expected increase in the near future, may have disastrous consequences for Earth in the form of global warming.

## Climate Change

Before the Industrial Revolution, forest fires, plant decomposition, and ordinary evaporation released carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, but in small enough amounts to be absorbed by growing plants and by the oceans without noticeable environmental effect. But in the past century or so, human activities—especially the reliance on fossil fuels, the use of chlorofluorocarbons to make plastic foam and as coolants in refrigerators and air conditioners, the destruction of the tropical rain forests—have increased the prevalence of dangerous gases beyond Earth’s capacity to absorb them. The **greenhouse effect** occurs when these harmful gases accumulate in the atmosphere and act like the glass roof of a greenhouse. Sunlight reaches Earth’s surface, and the gases trap the heat radiating from the ground. The results, according to the theory, are a warming of Earth, the melting of the polar ice caps, a significant changing of climate, droughts and megastorms, and the rapid spread of tropical diseases such as malaria, dengue fever, cholera, and encephalitis. Consider the following facts:

- The earth has warmed by 2 degrees Fahrenheit in the last century (Begley, 2011)
- 2015 was the hottest year on earth since record-keeping began in 1880. The ten warmest years on record have all occurred since 1997, with the three warmest in 2015, 2014, and 2010 (Gillis, 2016).
- In the United States alone, nearly 1,000 tornadoes caused \$9 billion in damage in 2010 (Begley, 2011).
- A 2010 heat wave in Russia killed an estimated 15,000 people, while flooding in Australia and Pakistan killed more than 2,000 people (Begley, 2011).

The issue of global warming and climate change is controversial, resulting in a divide between Democrats and Republicans. Seventy to seventy-five percent of self-identified Democrats believe humans are changing the climate, while the majority of Republicans (particularly Tea Party members) reject the scientific consensus (Klein, 2011).

Scientists, on the other hand, do not debate that Earth is warmer or that carbon dioxide is emitted into the air in ever-increasing amounts, but they do differ on the relationship between the two facts. Some scientists are cautious, arguing that recent



New technology has brought us cars powered by electricity rather than fuel.

### Greenhouse effect

When gases accumulate in Earth’s atmosphere and act like the glass roof of a greenhouse, allowing sunlight in but trapping the heat that is generated.



warming and dramatic climatic events are random and part of the natural year-to-year variations in weather. Their skepticism is fueled by a scandal in the scientific community. In late 2009, an anonymous computer hacker made public e-mails sent among climate scientists that seemed to indicate that data regarding global warming had been fabricated. Dubbed “Climategate” by the media, it fueled the debate over the extent and cause of global warming (see “A Closer Look: Climategate”).

#### A CLOSER LOOK

##### **Climategate**

In 2007, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change produced a report that claimed:

- Eleven of the previous twelve years (1995–2006) rank among the twelve warmest years on record since 1850.
- Sea levels are rising.
- Snow and ice are decreasing.
- Over the past fifty years, cold days, cold nights, and frosts have become less frequent.

Using data from a number of sources, the IPCC concluded that warming of the climate system is “unequivocal.”

The issue of global warming has many critics, however. For example, meteorologist Mark Johnson writes, “I talk to many groups, large and small, about how AGW [Anthropogenic Global Warming] is just bad science. I tell them that study results are hand-picked and modified to fit a pre-determined conclusion” (Johnson, 2009:1). Critics of global warming theory have become even more outspoken since the incident in October 2009 dubbed “Climategate.” A computer hacker posted more than a thousand e-mails from scientists at the Hadley Climatic Research Unit at Britain’s University of East Anglia. The e-mails contain details regarding data gathering, and skeptics claim they are evidence of scientific fraud and misconduct. One particular e-mail cited most often refers to using a statistical “trick” to “hide the decline” in global temperatures. According to Jess Henig at Factcheck.org (Henig, 2009:1):

- The messages, which span thirteen years, show a few scientists in a bad light. An investigation is underway, but there is still plenty of evidence that the earth is getting warmer and that humans are largely responsible.
- Some critics say the e-mails negate the conclusions of the 2007 report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, but the IPCC report relied on data from a large number of sources, of which CRU was only one.
- E-mails being cited as “smoking guns” have been misrepresented. For instance, one e-mail that refers to “hiding the decline” isn’t talking about a decline in actual temperature as measured at weather stations. These have continued to rise (and as we have seen, 2014 was the warmest year on record). The “decline” actually refers to a problem with recent data from tree rings.

Climategate seems to have had little influence on the world's understanding of global warming, as the U.N. Climate Change Conference proceeded as planned in December 2009. In advance of the conference, "the national academies of thirteen nations issued a joint statement of their recommendations for combating climate change, in which they discussed the 'human forcing' of global warming and said that the need for action was 'indisputable'" (Henig, 2009:4). As discussed in the conclusion to this chapter, 195 world leaders have now committed to reducing their greenhouse gas emissions in order to reduce global warming.

On the other side of the debate, the majority of scientists are convinced that the magnitude of the greenhouse effect is great and accelerating and the cause is *human behavior*. According to 2011 data, China and the United States currently emit approximately 43 percent of the world's greenhouse gases. China's emissions are the highest in the world, but the United States still leads in carbon dioxide emissions per person. The average American is responsible for 17.67 tons per year, while the average Chinese is responsible for 5.83 tons (Rogers and Evans, 2011).

## Sources of U.S. Environmental Problems

### 6.2 Understand the cultural and structural forces that contribute to environmental problems.

The United States has been blessed with an abundance of rich and varied resources (land, minerals, and water). Until recently, people in the United States were unconcerned with conservation because there seemed to be so vast a storehouse of resources that waste was not considered a problem. As a result, Americans have disproportionately consumed the world's resources.

Although the perception of abundance may explain a tendency to be wasteful, it is only a partial and superficial answer. The underlying sources of our present environmental problems can be found in the culture and structure of U.S. society.

### Cultural Sources

**Culture** refers to the knowledge that the members of a social organization—in this case, a society—share. Shared ideas, values, beliefs, norms, and understandings shape the behaviors, perceptions, and interpretations of the members of society. Although the United States is a multicultural society filled with diversity, some of the dominant ideologies of U.S. society have tended to legitimize or at least account for the wastefulness of Americans and their acceptance of pollution.

#### Culture

The knowledge (ideas, values, norms, beliefs) that the members of a social organization share.

**CORNUCOPIA VIEW OF NATURE** Many Americans conceive of nature as a vast storehouse waiting only to be used by people. They regard the natural world as a bountiful preserve available to serve human needs. In this view, nature is something to be conquered and used; it is free and inexhaustible. This cornucopia view of nature is widespread and will likely persist as a justification for continuing abuse of the

environment, even in an age of ecological consciousness. This view is complemented by an abundant faith in science and technology.

**FAITH IN TECHNOLOGY** Americans have historically sought to change and conquer nature. Damming rivers, cutting down timber, digging tunnels, plowing land, conquering space, and seeding clouds with silver nitrate are a few examples of this orientation to overcoming nature's obstacles rather than acquiescing to them.

From this logic proceeds a faith in technology; a proper application of scientific knowledge can meet any challenge. If the air and water are polluted and if we are rapidly running out of petroleum, science will save us. We will find a substitute for the internal combustion engine, create plants that will "scrub" the air by using carbon dioxide as food, find new sources of energy, develop new methods of extracting minerals, or create new synthetics. Although this faith may yet be vindicated, we are beginning to realize that technology may not be the solution and may even be the source of the problem.

Scientific breakthroughs and new technology have solved some problems and do aid in saving labor. But often, new technology creates unanticipated problems. Automobiles, for example, provide numerous benefits, but they also pollute the air and kill more than 30,000 Americans each year. It is difficult to imagine life without electricity, but the generation of electricity pollutes the air (more than half of the carbon emissions in the United States come from coal-burning electrical plants) and causes the thermal pollution of rivers. Insecticides and chemical fertilizers have performed miracles in agriculture but have polluted food and streams. Jet planes, while helping us in many ways, cause air pollution (one jet taking off emits the same amount of hydrocarbon as the exhausts from 10,000 automobiles). So our faith in science and technology has actually resulted in many environmental problems, yet ironically we must turn to science and new technologies to solve those same problems.

**GROWTH ETHIC** Many Americans place a premium on progress and believe that something better is always attainable. This desire (which is encouraged by corporations and their advertisers) causes people to discard items that are still usable and to purchase new things. Thus, industry continues to turn out more products and to use up natural resources.

The presumed value of progress has had a negative effect on contemporary U.S. life. Progress is typically defined to mean either growth or new technology. Community leaders typically want their cities to grow. Chambers of commerce want more industry and more people (and, incidentally, more consumers). For all these things to grow as people wish, there must be a concomitant increase in population, products (and use of natural resources), electricity, highways, and waste. Continued growth will inevitably throw the tight ecological system out of balance, for there are limited supplies of air, water, and places to dump waste materials, and these supplies diminish as the population increases.

**MATERIALISM** The U.S. belief in progress is translated at the individual level into consumption of material things as evidence of one's success. The U.S. economic system is predicated on the growth of private enterprises, which depend on increased demand for their products. If the population is more or less stable, then individuals can accomplish growth only through increased consumption. The function of the

advertising industry is to create a need in individuals to buy a product that they would not buy otherwise. Consumption is also increased if products must be thrown away (such as nonreturnable bottles) or if they do not last very long. The policy of **planned obsolescence** (manufacturing and selling goods designed to wear out or to become out of fashion) by many U.S. companies accomplishes this goal of consumption very well, but it overlooks the problems of disposal as well as the unnecessary waste of materials.

**BELIEF IN INDIVIDUALISM** Most people in the United States place great stress on personal achievement. They believe hard work and initiative will bring individual success. The self-orientation (as opposed to collective-orientation) is, of course, related to capitalism. Through personal efforts, business acumen, and luck, the individual can (if successful) own property and see multiplying profits. Most Americans share this goal of great monetary success—the “American dream”—and believe anyone can make it if he or she works hard enough. Curiously, people who are not successful commonly do not reject capitalism. Instead, they wait in the hope that their lot will improve or that their children will prosper under the system.

As long as people hold a narrow self-orientation rather than a group orientation, this crisis will steadily worsen. The use people make of their land, the water running through it, and the air above it has traditionally been theirs to decide because of the belief in the sanctity of private property. This belief has meant, in effect, that individuals have had the right to pave a pasture for a parking lot, to tear up land for a housing development, to put down artificial turf for a football field, and to dump waste products into the ground, air, and water.

In terms of solving environmental problems (especially climate change), a self-orientation is at odds with any lasting, sustainable solutions. Asking individuals to reduce their carbon footprint not for themselves, but for generations to come is contrary to the values of individualism.

In summary, traditional values of U.S. citizens lie at the heart of environmental problems. Americans want to conquer nature. They want to use nature for the good life, and this endeavor is never satisfied. Moreover, they want the freedom to do as they please and expect science and technology to solve any problems that arise.

## Structural Sources

In addition to our cultural values, the structural arrangements in U.S. society reinforce the misuse of resources and abuses of the ecosystem.

**CAPITALIST ECONOMY** The U.S. economic system of capitalism depends on profits. The quest for profits is never satisfied: Companies must grow; more assets and more sales translate into more profits. To maximize profits, owners must minimize costs. Among other things, this search for profits results in abusing the environment, resisting government efforts to curb such abuse, using corporate and advertising skills to increase the consumption of products (including built-in obsolescence), and even denigrating the notion of global warming. For instance, according to the Union of Concerned Scientists, ExxonMobil, the world’s largest oil company, funded forty-three ideological organizations nearly \$16 million between 1998 and 2005 in an effort to mislead the public by discrediting the science behind global warming (2007).

### Planned obsolescence

The manufacture of consumer goods designed to wear out. Or existing products are given superficial changes and marketed as new, making the previous products outdated.

This last point needs elaboration. Profits require consumers; growing profits require overconsumption. Corporations use several mechanisms to generate the desire to purchase unnecessary products. Advertising generates hyper-consumerism by creating demand for products that potential consumers did not know they needed. Innovative packaging designs also help to sell products; the size, shape, and colors of the package and its display affect choices. Another common tactic is product differentiation whereby existing products (such as an automobile) are given cosmetic changes and presented to consumers as new. This planned obsolescence creates consumer demand as purchasers trade or throw away the “old” product for the “new.”

The increased production that results from greater levels of consumption has three detrimental consequences for the environment: more pollution of air and water, depletion of resources, and a swelling of waste products (sewage, scrap, and junk).

Because the profit motive supersedes the concern for the environment, corporations are unwilling to comply with government regulations and to pay damages for ecological disasters such as oil spills. In addition, the possibility of solving environmental problems is further minimized under a capitalist system because jobs depend on business profits. Economic prosperity and growth mean jobs. Thus, most observers see only a narrow alternative between a safe environment and relatively full employment. The fate of many workers depends on whether companies are profitable. Solving environmental problems appears to be incompatible with capitalism unless ecological disasters occur.

**POLITY** As discussed in Chapter 2, powerful interest groups fundamentally influence political decisions. This bias of the political system is readily seen in what has been government’s relatively cozy relationship with large polluters: corporations. According to a 2015 report by Environment America, some of America’s biggest corporate polluters use large sums of money to influence public policy (Fields, 2015). In fact, the ten parent companies that reported the most industrial dumping spent more than \$53 million on lobbying in 2014 (see Table 6.1). Typically, government

**Table 6.1** Top Parent Companies by Total Pounds of Toxics Released, Paired with Spending on Lobbying in 2014

Rank	Parent Company	Total pounds released	Lobbying spending, 2014
1	AK Steel Holding Corp	19,088,128	\$739,752
2	Tyson Foods Inc	18,556,479	\$1,163,838
3	US Dept of Defense	10,868,190	\$0
4	Cargill Inc	10,619,393	\$1,300,000
5	Perdue Farms Inc	7,472,092	\$40,000
6	Koch Industries	6,657,138	\$13,880,000
7	Pilgrims Pride Corp	6,558,172	\$0
8	E I DuPont De Nemours & Co	5,518,146	\$9,278,950
9	US Steel Corp	5,248,392	\$1,800,000
10	Phillips 66 Co	5,233,947	\$3,710,000

**SOURCE:** Found in: Fields, Ally. 2015. “Polluting Politics: Political Spending by Companies Dumping Toxics Into Our Waters.” Environment America. (February). Online: <http://www.environmentamerica.org/sites/environment/files/reports/Polluting%20Politics%20AME%202.pdf>, page 4

intervention has had the effect of administering a symbolic slap on the wrist, and pollution of the environment has continued virtually unabated. The government has been ineffective in pushing the largest and most powerful corporations to do something unprofitable. For example, in 2011 President Obama overruled a proposed law by the Environmental Protection Agency that would have imposed stricter smog standards on corporations. The law was heavily opposed by business interests and is an example of how powerful interest groups can influence the system in their favor.



Large cities like Los Angeles frequently have problems with air pollution.

**DEMOGRAPHIC PATTERNS** The population of the United States is generally concentrated in large metropolitan areas. Wherever people are concentrated, the problems of pollution are increased through the concentration of wastes. Where people are centralized, so too will be the emission of automobile exhausts, the effluence of factories, and the dumps for garbage and other human refuse.

The location of cities is another source of environmental problems. Typically, cities have evolved where commerce would benefit the most. Because industry needs plentiful water for production and waste disposal, cities tend to be located along lakes, rivers, and ocean bays. Industry's long-established pattern of using available water to dispose of its waste materials has caused rivers, such as the Missouri, Mississippi, and Ohio; lakes, such as Erie and Michigan; and bays like Chesapeake and New York to be badly polluted.

The ready availability of the automobile and the interstate highway system resulted in the development of suburbs and urban sprawl. The growth of suburbs not only strained already burdened sewage facilities but also increased air pollution through increased use of the automobile. In essence, sprawl forces people to have long commutes to work, increases traffic congestion, and creates communities designed for automobiles rather than pedestrians.

**SYSTEM OF STRATIFICATION** One major focus of this book (and of Chapter 7, in particular) is how U.S. society victimizes the poor. Poor people and racial minorities are disproportionately exposed to the dangers of pollution, whether it takes the form of excessive noise, foul air, or toxic chemicals such as lead poisoning. These probabilities are called **environmental classism** and environmental racism. Another inequity is that the poor will have to pay disproportionately for efforts to eliminate pollution. That is, their jobs may be eliminated, their neighborhoods abandoned, and a greater proportion of their taxes required (through regressive taxes) to pay for environmental cleanups.

The bitter irony of the poor having to sacrifice the most to abate environmental problems is that it is the affluent who drive excessively, travel in jet planes, have large air-conditioned homes, consume large quantities of resources (conspicuous consumption), and have the most waste to dispose. Their demand increases economic demand and, concomitantly, industrial pollution.

This system of stratification also extends globally to the differences between countries, with the world's poorest people having the lowest carbon footprint, but suffering the most from climate change.

### Environmental classism

The poor, because of dangerous jobs and residential segregation, are more exposed than the more well-to-do to environmental dangers.

In summary, environmental problems in the United States stem from both cultural and structural sources. Thus, any proposed environmental solutions must take into account a multitude of factors.

## Solutions to the Environmental Crises

### 6.3 Describe the long-range international implications of and alternative solutions to threats to the environment.

What can be done to change some of our most pressing environmental problems? In the 1970s, the public began to demand that something be done to address the fact that big cars, big cities, and big factories were harming our environment (Ruckelshaus, 2010). As a result, on April 22, 1970, we celebrated the first Earth Day, and President Nixon created the Environmental Protection Agency to pass laws to clean up the air and water. Considerable progress has been made due to these early laws; however, some of the changes we face now require more than laws but a change in the public's mentality: a sense of responsibility for the entire planet (Ruckelshaus, 2010).

#### Individual/Local Solutions

The needs of the group, community, society, and even the world must take precedence over those of the individual. The values people in the United States hold dear—such as growth and progress, capitalism, individualism, and the conquest of nature—will no longer be salient in a world of less space, endangered ecology, energy shortages, water shortages, and hunger. On an individual level, families can engage in behaviors such as recycling, composting, water-harvesting, reducing energy use, and limiting their dependence on automobiles by choosing public transit (if available). While these individual actions are necessary and important, they are one small step in a much larger social problem. According to writer Joel Bleifuss, what is needed is a political movement that challenges the status quo by mobilizing large groups to use the ballot box to elect leaders who will change laws (2007). Thus, we turn to broader societal-level solutions.

#### Societal-Level Solutions

At the societal level, the government must continue to enact comprehensive laws carrying severe criminal and civil penalties for harming the environment. At the corporate level, it means rigorous inspections of companies and prosecution of violators. Moreover, if penalized, these companies must not be allowed to pass the fines on to consumers through higher prices.

One obstacle to a comprehensive plan to curb pollution is our federal system of government, in which states and communities are free to set their own standards. In principle, this system makes sense because the people in an area should be the most knowledgeable about their situation. However, mining operations along Lake Superior cannot be allowed to dump tailings in the lake on the rationale that having to pay for recycling would reduce local employment levels. Similarly, air pollution is never limited to one locality; wind currents carry the pollutants beyond local borders and add to the cumulative effect on an entire region. Therefore, it seems imperative that the federal

government establishes and enforces minimum standards for the entire country. In 2014, the Environmental Protection Agency proposed a plan to cut carbon pollution from power plants, setting standards and measures for the country; however, the plan still allows individual states to decide when individual power plants must make reductions.

A rational plan to conserve energy, for example, could include government insistence on universal daylight saving time (it could even be extended to a two-hour difference, rather than one); strict enforcement of a relatively low speed limit (the 55 mph speed limit in 1983 saved an estimated 2.5 billion gallons of gasoline and diesel fuel [Mouawad and Romero, 2005]); the use of governors on automobiles and thermostats; banning neon signs and other energy used in advertising; minimal use of outdoor lighting; and a reversal of the current policy that reduces rates for electricity and natural gas as the volume increases. For example, in 2011, President Obama set new fuel efficiency standards for 2017–2025 model cars and trucks. The new standard requires all new models to reach 54.5 miles per gallon, saving consumers money, reducing greenhouse gas pollution, and reducing America's need for oil.

Conserving energy will require not only individual alterations of lifestyles but also changes in the economic system. Under the current private enterprise system based on profits, corporations seek the profitable alternative rather than the conserving one. In the search for greater profits, we have shifted from railroads and mass transit (the most energy-efficient means of moving people and freight on land) to energy-inefficient cars, trucks, and planes. On the positive side, some U.S. city governments and planners have started to rethink how communities can be changed from communities based on urban sprawl and car dependence to connected, walkable, bikable, public-transit-centered sustainable communities (see "Looking Toward the Future: Transit-Oriented Development").

Some U.S. corporations are also leading the way in promoting conservation efforts. Thanks to "green" ideology becoming mainstream in the media (Davis Guggenheim's documentary of Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* won an Academy Award and was one of the highest grossing documentaries of all time), numerous companies are making a concentrated effort to "go green." In 2014, *Newsweek* magazine ranked the 500 largest U.S. companies based on their environmental impact, their green policies, and their reputation among their peers and environmental experts. Allergan, a pharmaceutical company, earned the title of the "greenest company in America"—thanks to its progressive environmental policies.

Can the United States continue to operate on an economic system that allows decisions about what to produce and how to produce it to be governed by profit rather than the common good? The heart of the capitalists' argument, going back to Adam Smith more than 200 years ago, is that decisions made on the basis of the entrepreneur's self-interest will also accomplish the needs of society most efficiently. This fundamental precept of capitalism is now challenged by the environmental crisis, the energy crisis, and the problems related to them. Can capitalism be amended to incorporate central planning regarding societal needs of a safe environment and plentiful resources? Perhaps it can. In the case of Hewlett-Packard, the company's recycling program has allowed HP to reclaim 1.7 billion pounds of e-waste over the past decade, including gold and copper, which it resells. In addition, reducing packaging material has paid off in reduced shipping costs (McGinn, 2009). This shows that going green can result in company benefits.



## Looking Toward the Future

# Transit-Oriented Development

In the last few years, rising transportation costs, long commutes, congested roadways, and increasing pollution have led to a growing demand for public transportation options and cleaner, more walkable communities (Smith and Anderson, 2010). In cities across the country, there has been an unprecedented effort toward transit-oriented development to support this growing demand. Transit-oriented development (TOD) is defined as compact/dense development within walking distance (approximately ½-mile) of public transportation. This development contains a mix of uses: housing types, jobs, shops, restaurants, and entertainment. The goal of transit-oriented development is walkable, sustainable communities for all ages and income levels. Some of the benefits of transit-oriented development include:

- Efficient use of land, energy, and resources
- Lower transportation costs for families
- Reduced dependence on foreign oil
- Less pollution
- Less traffic congestion

- Fewer car accidents
- Increased activity levels: walking/biking
- Increased property values
- Increased customers for local businesses
- Less crime: more “eyes on the streets”

As gas prices fluctuate, the demand for TOD accelerates. According to the Center for Neighborhood Technology (2015), less than one in three American communities (28 percent) is affordable for typical regional households when transportation costs are considered along with housing costs (“affordable” means that housing and transportation costs consume no more than 45 percent of income). The statistics are increasingly difficult to ignore: On average, households in auto-dependent neighborhoods spend 25 percent of their income on transportation, whereas households in walkable neighborhoods with good transit access and a mix of housing, jobs, and shops spend just 9 percent (Center for Transit-Oriented Development, 2009).

## Global-Level Solutions

Environmental problems are not confined within political borders. The world’s inhabitants share the oceans, rivers, lakes, and air. If a corporation or a nation pollutes, the world’s citizens are the victims. If the tropical forests are destroyed, we are all affected. If a country wastes finite resources or uses more than its proportionate share, the other nations are short-changed.

What should the nations of the world do about environmental crises? In 2014, world leaders met in Lima, Peru, for the United Nations Climate Change Conference (called COP 20). The leaders meet annually to discuss reduction in their greenhouse gas emissions and efforts to hold the increase in global temperature below 2 degrees Celsius. To date, 195 countries have signed commitments to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.

The dangers posed by the future require solutions at many levels. Individuals can work within their own homes to reduce their carbon footprint, but that is simply not enough. Global efforts must be directed to finding new sources of energy, methods to increase the amount of arable land, new types of food, better contraceptives, and relatively inexpensive ways to desalt seawater. New forms of social organization, such as regional councils and world bodies, may be required to deal with social upheavals, economic dislocations, resource allocation, and pollution on a global scale. These new organizations will require great innovative thinking to solve the problems of an over-populated planet with finite resources.

## Chapter Review

### 6.1 Describe the nature and consequences of human-made threats to the environment.

- Three social forces disturb Earth's biosphere profoundly: population growth (the world's population now stands at more than 7 billion people), the overconsumption of energy and raw materials by rich countries, and global economic growth.
- Although population growth (which occurs mostly in the developing countries) has adverse effects on the environment, the populations of rich countries are much more wasteful of Earth's resources and generate much more pollution.
- The earth is losing productive land through degradation, erosion, and the growth of cities and urban sprawl.
- Two major environmental consequences of deforestation are climate change and the vanishing of species.
- Chemicals, solid waste disposal, and radiation pollute the land, water, and air. More than 4 billion pounds of chemicals are released by industry into the nation's environment each year.
- The United States is the largest producer of solid waste of all industrialized nations. This creates problems related to waste disposal.
- Millions of people across the world do not have access to safe drinking water, and more than 3 million people die each year due to waterborne diseases. Other problems tied to water are areas that face extreme drought, like California.
- The United States is the greatest consumer of oil products and produces more carbon dioxide per person than any other country.

- The earth has warmed by 2 degrees Fahrenheit in the last century. The hottest year on record was 2014.

### 6.2 Understand the cultural and structural forces that contribute to environmental problems.

- The cultural bases of the wasteful and environmentally destructive U.S. society are the dominant ideologies of (a) the cornucopia view of nature, (b) faith in technology, (c) the growth ethic, (d) materialism, and (e) the belief in individualism.
- The structural bases for the misuse and abuse of the U.S. environment and resources are (a) the capitalist economy, (b) polity, (c) demographic patterns, and (d) the system of stratification.

### 6.3 Describe the long-range international implications of and alternative solutions to threats to the environment.

- Solutions to the environmental crisis must start with the individual, but progress into an energized political movement.
- The government must play an active role and enact laws carrying criminal and civil penalties for harming the environment.
- Some corporations are leading the way through progressive environmental policies.
- As of 2015, 195 countries have committed to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.
- The dangers posed by these critical environmental problems require solutions at many levels.

## Key Terms

**Biosphere** The surface layer of the planet and the surrounding atmosphere.

**Culture** The knowledge (ideas, values, norms, beliefs) that the members of a social organization share.

**Ecosystems** The mechanisms (plants, animals, and microorganisms) that supply people with the essentials of life.

**Environmental classism** The poor, because of dangerous jobs and residential segregation, are more exposed than the more well-to-do to environmental dangers.

**Environmental justice** A movement to improve community environments by eliminating toxic hazards.

**Environmental racism** The overwhelming likelihood that toxic-producing plants and toxic waste dumps are located where poor people, especially people of color, live.

**Greenhouse effect** When gases accumulate in Earth's atmosphere and act like the glass roof of a greenhouse, allowing sunlight in but trapping the heat that is generated.

**Planned obsolescence** The manufacture of consumer goods designed to wear out. Or existing products are given superficial changes and marketed as new, making the previous products outdated.

# Chapter 7

# Poverty



## Learning Objectives

- 7.1** Understand the extent of poverty in America.
- 7.2** Explain the myths and misperceptions about poor people.
- 7.3** Compare/contrast the various explanations for poverty: individual, cultural, and structural.
- 7.4** Explain the costs to society of having a significant portion of the population living in poverty.

**Poverty**

Standard of living below the minimum needed for the maintenance of adequate diet, health, and shelter.

Many people in the world envy the United States. It is blessed with great natural resources, the most advanced technology known, and a very high standard of living. Despite these advantages, a significant portion of U.S. residents lives in a condition of **poverty** (with a standard of living below the minimum needed for the maintenance of adequate diet, health, and shelter). In fact, compared to other advanced, industrialized nations, the United States has one of the highest rates of poverty. Many millions are ill fed, ill clothed, and ill housed. These same millions are discriminated against in schools, courts, and the job market, and discrimination has the effect of trapping many of the poor in that condition. The so-called American dream is just that for millions of people—a dream that will not be realized.

This chapter is descriptive, theoretical, and practical. On the descriptive level, we examine the facts of poverty—how many poor there are in the United States, where the poor are located, and what it means to be poor. Theoretically, we look at the various explanations for poverty—individual, cultural, and structural. On the practical level, we explore what might be done to eliminate extreme poverty.

There are two underlying themes in this chapter. The first theme is that most of the poor are impoverished for structural reasons, not personal ones, as is commonly believed. That is, the essence of poverty is inequality—in money and in opportunity. The second theme is important when we take up the possible solutions to this social problem: The United States has the resources to eliminate poverty if it would make that problem a high enough priority.

## Extent of Poverty

### 7.1 Understand the extent of poverty in America.

What separates the poor from the nonpoor? In a continuum, there is no absolute standard for poverty. The line separating the poor from the nonpoor is necessarily arbitrary. Originally developed in the 1960s by the Social Security Administration (SSA), the **official poverty line**, or **poverty threshold**, is based on the minimal amount of money required for a subsistence level of life. To determine the poverty line, the SSA computed the cost of a basic, nutritionally adequate diet and multiplied that figure by three. This multiplier is based on a government research finding that in 1955, poor people spent one-third of their income on food. Since then, the poverty level has been readjusted annually by the Consumer Price Index to account for inflation. Using this official standard (the weighted average poverty thresholds are \$12,071 for one person, \$18,850 for a family of three, and \$24,230 for a family of four), 14.8 percent of Americans (46.7 million) were poor in 2014 (DeNavas-Walt and Proctor, 2015). See Figure 7.1 for poverty trends over time.

#### Official poverty line, or poverty threshold

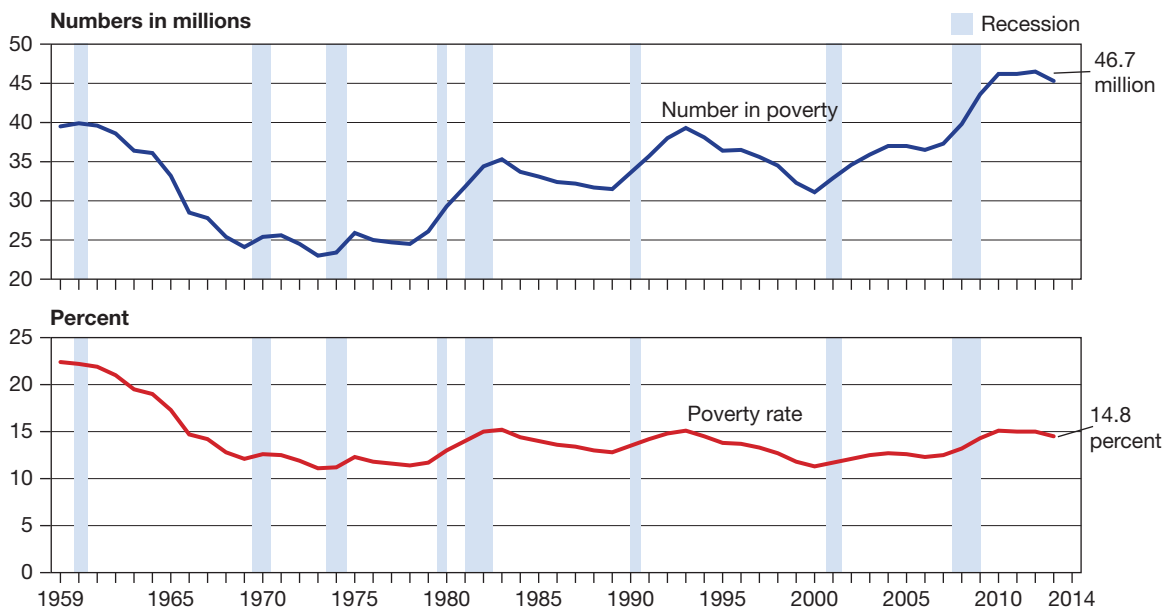
The federal definition of poverty—an arbitrary line computed by multiplying the cost of a basic nutritionally adequate diet by three and adjusted for inflation.

The official poverty line is not only arbitrary, but it also minimizes the extent of poverty in the United States. Critics point out that the government measure does not keep up with inflation, housing costs now take up a much larger portion of the family budget than food, and the poverty line ignores differences in health insurance coverage and the medical care needs of individual families.

Furthermore, a “one-size-fits-all” standard is not an adequate measure of poverty because there is a wide variation in the cost of living by locality. For example, in 2015, the hourly wage a household had to earn in order to afford rent on a two-bedroom

**Figure 7.1** Number in Poverty and Poverty Rate: 1959 to 2014

**SOURCE:** DeNavas-Walt, Carmen, and Bernadette D. Proctor. 2015. "Income and Poverty in the United States: 2014." U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports P60-252. Available online: <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2015/demo/p60-252.pdf>.



**NOTE:** The 2013 data reflect the implementation of the redesigned income questions. The data points are placed at the midpoints of the respective years.

apartment was \$28.04 in Washington, D.C., and \$12.95 in Arkansas (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2015). Obviously, these figures are far above the federal minimum hourly wage of \$7.25.

In 2010, in order to address these issues, an Interagency Technical Working Group began developing suggestions and guidelines for a Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM). The SPM is a more complicated measure of poverty that takes into account expenses such as food, clothing, shelter, and utilities. The SPM is not intended to replace the official poverty measure, but instead it supplements the measure and is published yearly by the Census Bureau to provide a more complete picture of poverty in the United States. Recall that, according to the official poverty measure, in 2014, 46.7 million (14.8 percent) of the U.S. population was poor. Using the SPM, this number increases to 48.4 million, or 15.3 percent (Short, 2015).

Exact figures on the number of poor are difficult to determine. A major difficulty is that the poor are most likely

Workers are fighting for a higher minimum wage.



to be missed by the U.S. census. People most likely overlooked in the census live in high-density urban areas, where several families may be crowded into one apartment, or in rural areas, where some homes are inaccessible and where some workers have no permanent home. Transients of any kind may be missed by the census. Also, there are several million immigrants in this country illegally who avoid the census. The inescapable conclusion is that the proportion of the poor in the United States is underestimated because the poor tend to be invisible, even to the government. The Census Bureau estimated, for example, that it missed 1.1 percent of renters, 2.1 percent of the Black population, and 1.5 percent of the Hispanic population in the 2010 census.

Despite these difficulties and underestimates of the poverty population, the official government data are the best available to provide information about the poor. In the following sections, we examine the facts of poverty using the official poverty measure. The statistics for the following sections are taken from DeNavas-Walt and Proctor (2015) unless otherwise noted (the most recent available at the time of this writing).

## Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Income in the United States is unequally distributed by race and ethnicity (for data on race and other social characteristics, see Table 7.1). In 2014, the U.S. Census Bureau found that the median income for Asian American households was \$74,297, compared with \$60,256 for non-Hispanic White households; \$42,491 for Hispanic households; and \$35,398 for Black households. Not surprisingly, then, 10.1 percent of non-Hispanic Whites were officially poor, compared with 26.2 percent of Blacks.

**Table 7.1** Selected Demographics of the Poverty Population, 2014

	Number in Poverty	Percent in Poverty
All people	46.7 million	14.8%
Race/Ethnicity		
White, not Hispanic	19.6 million	10.1%
Black	10.7 million	26.2%
Asian	2.1 million	12.0%
Hispanic	13.1 million	23.6%
Age		
Under 18	15.5 million	21.1%
Over 65	4.6 million	10.0%
Nativity		
Native born	38.8 million	14.2%
Foreign born	7.8 million	18.5%
Type of Family		
Married-couple	3.7 million	6.2%
Female-householder, no husband present	4.7 million	30.6%
Male-householder, no wife present	969,000	15.7%

**SOURCE:** DeNavas-Walt, Carmen, and Bernadette D. Proctor. 2015. "Income and Poverty in the United States: 2014." U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, P60-252. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., Tables 3 and 4, pages 13 and 16.

These summary statistics mask the differences within each racial/ethnic category. For example, Americans of Cuban descent have relatively low poverty rates, whereas Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and Central Americans have disproportionately high poverty rates. Similarly, Japanese Americans are much less likely to be poor than Asians from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam.

In 2014, 7.8 million of the foreign-born individuals in the United States (18.5 percent of the foreign-born) were poor. Within the foreign-born population, 46.8 percent were naturalized citizens and the remaining were noncitizens. Their poverty rates of 11.9 and 24.2 percent, respectively, indicate that those individuals who became citizens had significantly lower rates of poverty. These official statistics do not include the 6 to 10 million undocumented workers and their families who enter the United States illegally.

## Gender

Women are more likely than men to be poor. This is a consequence of the prevailing institutional sexism in society. There is a dual labor market, with women found disproportionately in lower-paying jobs with fewer benefits. Thus, the female-to-male earnings ratio was 0.79 in 2014 (i.e., women earned 79 cents for every dollar earned by men). A lifetime of lower earnings is reflected in the different poverty rates after age 65. The poverty rate for women 65 and older was 12.1 percent, compared to 7.4 percent for men over 65.

The relatively high frequency of divorce and the large number of never-married women with children, coupled with the cost of childcare, housing, and medical care, have resulted in high numbers of female-headed families (with no husband present) being poor (30.6 percent, compared to 6.2 percent for married-couple families and 15.7 percent for male-headed families with no wife present). Race, ethnicity, and gender also combine to increase the probability of poverty. In 2014, 40.2 percent of Black female-headed households lived in poverty compared to 40.4 percent of Hispanic female-headed households, 18.2 percent of Asian female-headed households, and 24.4 percent of White female-headed households.

## Age

The nation's poverty rate was 14.8 percent in 2014, but the rate was 21.1 percent for children under age 18 (see Table 7.1). The younger the child, the greater the probability of living in poverty, with the rate being 23.5 percent for children under age 6. Children living in families with a female head of household, no husband present had a poverty rate of 46.5 percent, a rate more than four times that for their counterparts in married-couple families (10.6 percent). Compared to other industrialized nations, the United States has one of the highest rates of childhood poverty.

## Place

Poverty is not randomly distributed geographically; it tends to cluster in certain places. Regionally, the area with the highest poverty in 2014 was the South (16.5 percent).

There are 386 counties in the United States where more than 20 percent of the people live below the poverty line, called **persistent poverty counties** (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2012). These counties are overwhelmingly rural, with especially high numbers in counties such as Shannon in South Dakota, where the Pine Ridge reservation is located, and Starr in Texas, which is predominantly Hispanic (see Figure 7.2).

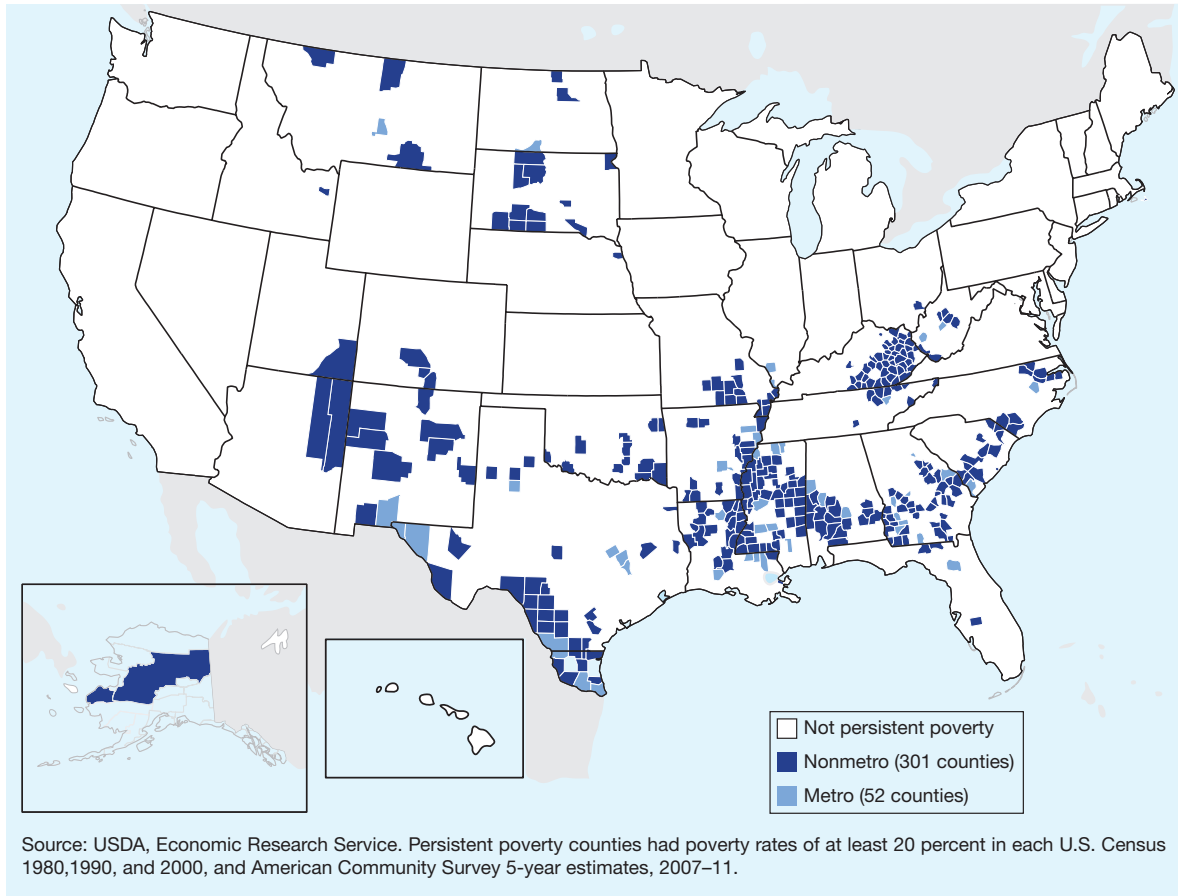
### Persistent poverty counties

Counties in the United States where more than 20 percent of the people live below the poverty line.



## Figure 7.2 Persistent Poverty Counties

SOURCE: Geography of Poverty, US Department of Agriculture <http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/rural-economy-population/rural-poverty-well-being/geography-of-poverty.aspx>



### Extreme-poverty neighborhoods

Areas in the United States where more than 40 percent of the people live below the poverty line.

In addition to persistent poverty counties, the population in **extreme-poverty neighborhoods** is on the rise (areas where 40 percent of individuals live below the poverty line). It is interesting to note that compared to 2000, residents of extreme-poverty neighborhoods in 2005–2009 were more likely to be White, native-born, homeowners, and high school or college graduates (Kneebone et al., 2011). This spatial concentration of poverty has multiple implications:

1. Limited educational opportunities: Neighborhood schools with a high concentration of poor students means a lower tax base to support local schools, fewer resources, lower retention rates, and greater risk of failure as measured by standardized tests (Kneebone et al., 2011).
2. A reduction in services and elimination of local jobs as businesses relocate to areas where residents have more discretionary income.
3. Increased burden on local police, hospitals, and other services.

4. Declining neighborhood conditions results in a lowering of home values and lowered asset building for residents.
5. A higher incidence of poor physical health and mental health outcomes.

Poverty is greatest among those who do not have an established residence. People in this classification are typically the homeless and migrant workers. In 2012, the Department of Housing and Urban Development reported there were approximately 636,000 homeless people across the country. The 2007–2009 economic recession has also resulted in an increase in the “doubled up” population (people who live with friends, family, or other nonrelatives for economic reasons). This population increased by more than 50 percent from 2005 to 2010 (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2012).

The other category, migrant workers, is believed to comprise about 3 million adults and children who are seasonal farm laborers working for low wages and no benefits. It is estimated that more than half of all farm workers live below the official poverty line and that this percentage has not changed since the 1960s. Hispanics are overrepresented in this occupation.

## The Severely Poor

Use of the official poverty line designates all people below it as poor, whether they are a few dollars short or far below that threshold. In reality, most impoverished individuals and families have incomes considerably below the poverty threshold. In 2014, for example, the average dollar amount needed to raise a poor family out of poverty was \$10,137 (i.e., the average family needed \$10,137 *additional* income just to reach the poverty threshold).

In 2014, 6.6 percent of the population (20.8 million Americans) was **severely poor** (i.e., living at or below half the poverty line). The number of severely poor has significantly increased since 1979. This upsurge in the truly destitute occurred because (1) many of the severely poor live in rural areas that have prospered less than other regions; (2) a decline in marriage resulted in a substantial increase in single mothers; and (3) public assistance benefits, especially in the South, have steadily declined since 1980. We return to the explanations for poverty later in this chapter.

**Severely poor**  
People whose cash incomes are at half the poverty line or less.

## Myths about Poverty

### 7.2 Explain the myths and misperceptions about poor people.

What should be the government’s role in caring for its less fortunate citizens? Much of the debate on this important issue among politicians and citizens is based on erroneous assumptions and misperceptions.

### Just “Get a Job”

A job is not necessarily the ticket out of poverty for many people: 10.1 million poor people worked in 2014, and 3 million of them worked full time but were still under the poverty threshold. They hold menial, dead-end jobs that have no benefits and pay the minimum wage (many actually less than the minimum wage). Today, a full-time minimum-wage worker earns roughly 74 percent of the poverty level for a family of three (in 1968, a family of three with one minimum-wage earner had a standard of



Neighborhoods like this one in Detroit, Michigan, have been hard-hit by the economic recession.

living 17 percent *above* the poverty line). The main increase in the number of poor since 1979 has been among the working poor. This increase is the result of declining wages, higher numbers of working women who head households, a low federal minimum hourly wage, and an increase in housing costs. (See “A Closer Look: The Housing and Transportation Affordability Index” for a review of the two biggest household expenses for families.)

According to a 2015 report by the National Low Income Housing Coalition, there is not a single state in the country where it is possible to

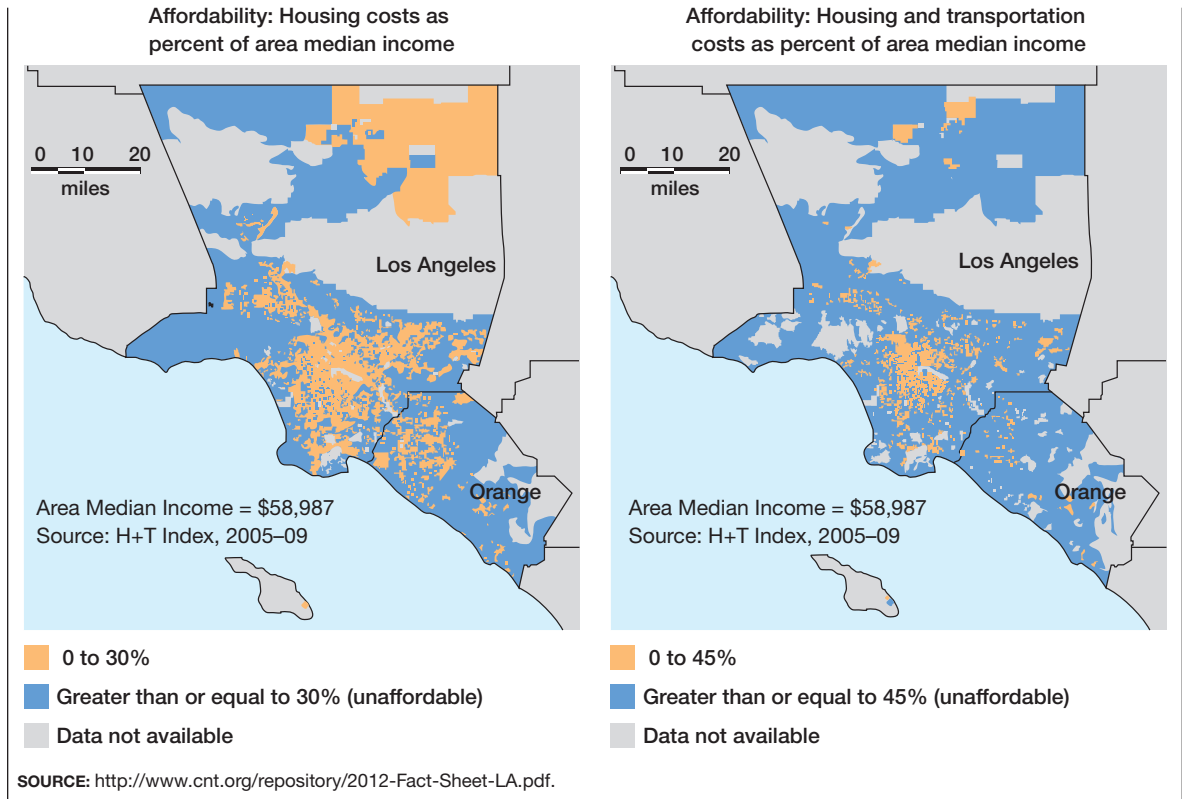
## A CLOSER LOOK

### The Housing and Transportation Affordability Index

Housing costs factored as a percent of income has widely been utilized as a measure of affordability. Traditionally, a home is considered affordable when the costs consume no more than 30 percent of household income. In 2006, the Center for Neighborhood Technology and its partner, the Center for Transit Oriented Development, developed what they call the “Housing and Transportation Affordability Index” to measure home affordability in conjunction with transportation, as these two factors together make up the largest expenses for most households.

According to the Center for Neighborhood Technology, less than one in three American communities (26 percent) is affordable when transportation costs are considered along with housing costs (“affordable” means housing and transportation costs consume no more than 45 percent of income) (2015). Rising gas prices, insurance costs, and car maintenance result in ever-increasing burdens on families, especially those who are already “house poor,” spending a significant portion of their income on housing.

As of 2015, the Housing and Transportation Index includes data for 917 metropolitan and micropolitan areas, covering 94 percent of the U.S. population, and can be accessed at <http://htaindex.cnt.org>. On the site, individuals can check whether their area is affordable. The Index shows the impact that transportation costs in different locations have on a household’s economic bottom line. For example, in 2012 in Los Angeles, California, 46 percent of neighborhoods were considered “affordable” using the conventional measure of affordability (this means that in 54 percent of neighborhoods, housing costs are more than 30 percent of household income). When taking transportation into account, 21 percent of neighborhoods in the Los Angeles metro area are unaffordable (see maps below).



work forty hours per week at minimum wage and afford a two-bedroom apartment at Fair Market Rent. Figure 7.3 demonstrates the hourly wage needed by state to afford a two-bedroom unit.

## Welfare Dependency

In 1996, Congress passed the **Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA)** that reformed the welfare system (formally known as Aid to Families with Dependent Children, or AFDC). This new law encompassed the following:

- It shifted welfare programs from the federal government to the states.
- It mandated that welfare recipients find work within two years.
- It limited welfare assistance to five years.
- It cut various federal assistance programs targeted for the poor by \$54.5 billion over six years.

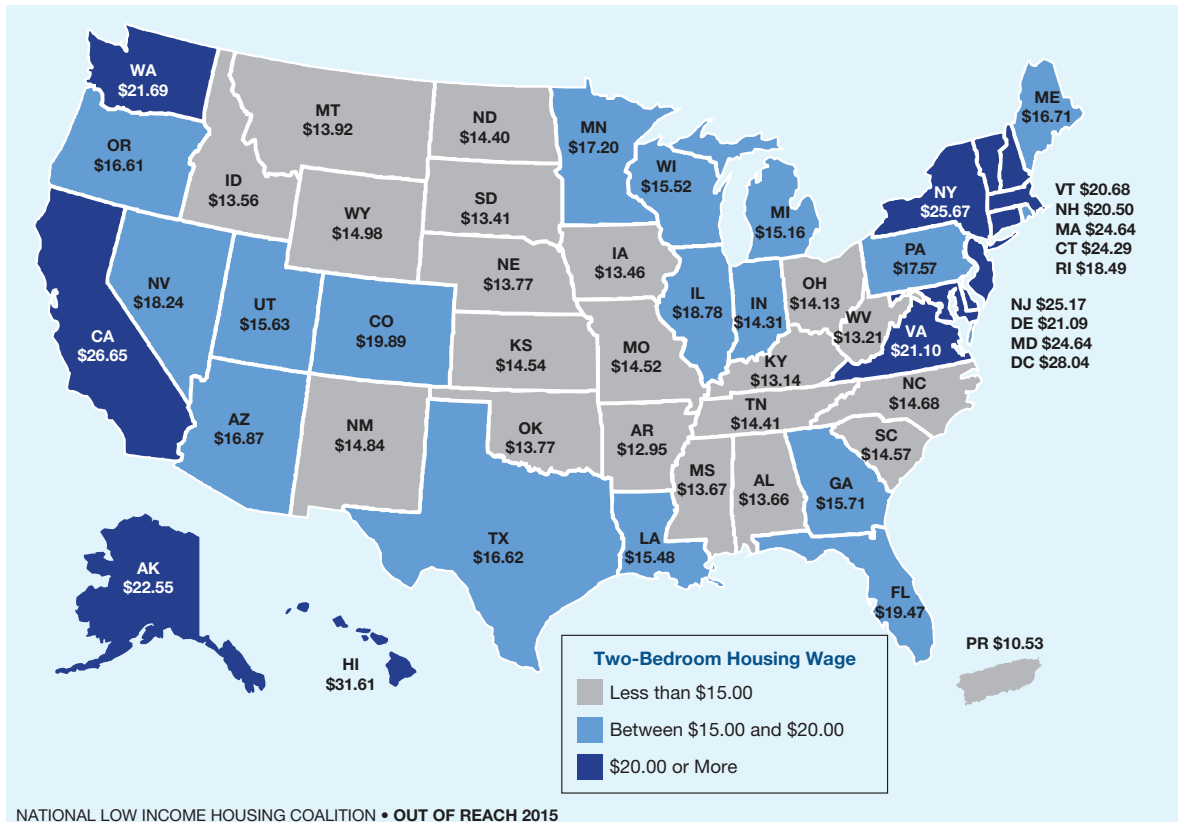
Thus, this law made assistance to the poor temporary (the new name, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), reflects this) and cut monies to supplemental programs such as food assistance and child nutrition. The assumption by policymakers was that welfare was too generous, making it easier to stay on welfare than to work (creating a cycle of dependency), and welfare was believed to encourage unmarried women to have children.

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**Figure 7.3** 2015 Two-Bedroom Housing Wage

**SOURCE:** "Out of Reach: 2015." Available online: [http://nlhc.org/sites/default/files/oor/OOR\\_2015\\_FULL.pdf](http://nlhc.org/sites/default/files/oor/OOR_2015_FULL.pdf). Page 12. Copyright © 2015 by National Low Income Housing Coalition. Reprinted by permission.



We should recognize some facts about government welfare *before* the 1996 welfare reform (O'Hare, 1996: 11). First, welfare accounted for about one-fourth of the income of poor adults; nearly half of the income received by poor adults came from some form of work activity. Second, about three-fourths of the poor received some form of noncash benefit (Medicaid, food stamps, or housing assistance), but only about 40 percent received cash welfare payments. Third, the welfare population changes—that is, people move in and out of poverty every year (Rodgers, 2006). Fourth, although the pre-reform welfare system was much more generous than now, it was inadequate to meet the needs of the poor. The average poor family of three on welfare had an annual income much below the poverty line. For example, in 1995, the *maximum* monthly cash benefit for a family of three under the old welfare system ranged from \$120 in Mississippi to \$712 in Hawaii, a level far below the poverty threshold (Rodgers, 2006).

The new TANF system was put into place to promote employment over cash assistance to the poor and get people (i.e., single mothers) off welfare. Proponents of the system say it has worked because the welfare rolls have decreased significantly. For example, in 1996, the last year under the old AFDC welfare system, 4.43 million families received

assistance nationwide. In 2010, the TANF caseload was 1.86 million (Albelda, 2012). The problem is, of course, how do you measure success? According to Randy Albelda, a decrease in the welfare rolls does not mean that the system is working. In fact, a comparison of poor families in 1996 to families in 2006 shows that while they are relying more on earnings than in the past, their average earnings have not increased much while government support has dropped off, leaving them with fewer resources and struggling to make it (2012).

Concerning the larger picture about government welfare programs, there is a fundamental misunderstanding by the U.S. public about where most governmental benefits are directed. We tend to assume that government monies and services go mostly to the poor (**welfare**), when in fact the greatest amount of government aid goes to the nonpoor (**wealthfare**). In 2012, just 12 percent of the federal budget went to safety net programs for individuals and families facing hardship (unemployment, food stamps, etc.). Thus, the majority of the federal outlays for human resources go to the nonpoor, such as to all children in public education programs and to most of the elderly through Social Security Retirement and Medicare.

The upside-down welfare system, with aid mainly helping the already affluent, is also accomplished by two hidden welfare systems. The first is through tax loopholes (called tax expenditures). Through these legal mechanisms, the government officially permits certain individuals and corporations to pay lower taxes or no taxes at all. For illustration, one of the biggest tax expenditure programs is the money that homeowners deduct from their taxes for real estate taxes and interest on their mortgages (mortgage interest is deductible on mortgages up to \$1 million). Ironically, although less than one-fourth of low-income Americans receive federal housing subsidies, more than three-quarters of Americans, many living in mansions, get housing aid from Washington.

The second hidden welfare system to the nonpoor is in the form of direct subsidies and credit to assist corporations, banks, agribusiness, and defense industries. Some examples include the savings and loan bailout, agribusiness subsidies, media subsidies, timber subsidies, aviation subsidies, mining subsidies, and tax avoidance by transnational corporations. These subsidy programs to wealthy and corporate interests amount to many times more than welfare assistance to the poor. Ironically, when Congress passed the sweeping welfare reforms of 1996, it did not consider the welfare programs for the nonpoor.

## The Poor Get Special Advantages

The common belief is that the poor get a number of handouts for which other Americans have to work—food stamps, Medicaid, and housing subsidies. As we have seen, these subsidies amount to much less than the more affluent receive, and recent legislation has reduced them even more. Most significant, the *poor pay more than the nonpoor for many services*. This, along with earning low wages and paying a large



"I would share my cookies, but I'm afraid I'll set up a cycle of dependency."

Barbara Smaller/The New Yorker Collection/www.cartoonbank.com

### **Welfare**

Government monies and services provided to the poor.

### **Wealthfare**

Government subsidies to the nonpoor.

proportion of their income for housing, helps to explain why some have such difficulty getting out of poverty.

The urban poor find that their money does not go as far in the inner city. Food and commodities, for example, cost more because supermarkets, discount stores, outlet malls, and warehouse clubs have bypassed inner-city neighborhoods. Because many inner-city residents do not have transportation to get to the supermarkets and warehouse stores, they must buy from nearby stores, giving those businesses monopoly powers (a similar situation to those poor in rural communities). In this and other ways, the poor pay more. Consider the following:

- Hospitals routinely charge more (sometimes twice as much or more) for services to patients without health insurance compared to those covered by a health plan.
- Check-cashing centers, largely located in poor neighborhoods, prey on customers without bank accounts. They often charge 10 percent of the check's value, so a person cashing a \$300 check will leave with only \$270 (Ehrenreich, 2006).
- There are some WIC (women, infants, and children)-only grocery stores that cater to low-income families. These stores are for participants of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, and they accept only WIC vouchers as payment, not cash. State officials show prices are 10 to 20 percent higher in the WIC-only stores.
- The “payday loan” industry offers an advance on a person’s paycheck at high interest rates, a devastating financial obligation for those strapped for cash. Nationwide, the number of payday lending outlets has risen 11,000 percent since 1990 (Jeffery, 2006). Initially, the payday loan industry was able to impose interest rates as high as 400 percent, a practice that has been somewhat curtailed as some states have stepped in and passed interest rate caps on the industry. These caps, however, still allow the payday loan industry to take advantage of those desperate for cash at interest rates anywhere from 17 to 60 percent. For those states without regulation, interest rates are much higher.
- Women, minorities, and lower-income borrowers are more likely than others to take out high-cost, subprime mortgages (Kirchhoff, 2005).

### Regressive tax

Tax rate that remains the same for all people, rich or poor. The result is that poor people pay a larger proportion of their wealth than affluent people.

The conclusion is obvious: Rather than receiving special advantages, the poor pay more for commodities and services in absolute terms, and they pay a much larger proportion of their incomes than the nonpoor for comparable items. Similarly, when the poor pay sales taxes on the items they purchase, the tax takes more of their resources than it does from the nonpoor, making it a **regressive tax**. Thus, efforts to move federal programs to the states will cost the poor more because state and local taxes tend to be regressive.

## Causes of Poverty

### 7.3 Compare/contrast the various explanations for poverty: individual, cultural, and structural.

Everyone in the United States has heard of the “American dream,” the dream of upward mobility and economic success available to all. Yet, the statistics reveal that for the majority, upward mobility really is just a dream. According to the Pew

Charitable Trusts (2012), 43 percent of Americans raised in the bottom income quintile remain stuck there as adults, and 70 percent remain below the middle. The same is true for those raised at the top of the wealth ladder; the majority will stay there. In fact, only 4 percent of those born in the bottom fifth income tier end up in the top tier. Who or what is to blame for poverty and lack of upward mobility? There are two very different answers to this question. One is that the poor are in that condition because of some deficiency: Either they are biologically inferior or their culture fails them by promoting character traits that impede their progress in society. The other response places the blame on the structure of society: Some people are poor because society has failed to provide equality in educational opportunity because institutions discriminate against minorities, private industry has failed to provide enough jobs, automation has made some jobs obsolete, and so forth. In this view, society has worked in such a way as to trap certain people and their offspring in a condition of poverty.

## Deficiency Theories

Deficiency theories view the causes of poverty as the result of individual characteristics and behaviors. Individuals are seen as inferior or flawed in some way.

**INNATE INFERIORITY** In 1882, the British philosopher and sociologist Herbert Spencer came to the United States to promote a theory later known as **Social Darwinism**. He argued that the poor were poor because they were unfit. Spencer believed that as societies evolve, the strong will flourish and the weak will eventually die out. He felt that the government should stay out of the way of this progression and even went so far as to say that the government should not help the poor in any way, as that would impede the natural progression of evolution. Any type of government aid would just encourage laziness and slow down the elimination process.

Social Darwinism has generally lacked support in the scientific community, yet it has continued to provide a rationale for the thinking of many individuals. In the last forty years, the concept has resurfaced in the work of three scientists. They suggest that the poor are in that condition because they do not measure up in intellectual endowment.

The late Arthur Jensen, professor emeritus of educational psychology at the University of California, argued that there is a strong possibility that African Americans are less well endowed mentally than Whites. From his review of the research on IQ, he found that approximately 80 percent of IQ is inherited, and the remaining 20 percent is attributable to environment. Because African Americans differ significantly from Whites in achievement on IQ tests and in school, Jensen claimed it is reasonable to hypothesize that the sources of these differences are genetic as well as environmental (Jensen, 1969, 1980).

The late Richard Herrnstein, a Harvard psychologist, agreed with Jensen that intelligence is largely inherited. He went one step further, positing the formation of hereditary castes based on intelligence (Herrnstein, 1971, 1973). For Herrnstein, social stratification by inborn differences occurs because (1) mental ability is inherited and (2) success (prestige of job and earnings) depends on mental ability. Thus, a **meritocracy** (social classification by ability) develops through the sorting process. This reasoning assumes that people who are close in mental ability are more likely to marry and reproduce, thereby ensuring castes by level of intelligence. According to this thesis, “in times to come, as technology advances, the tendency to be unemployed may run in the genes of a family about as certainly as bad teeth do now”

### Social Darwinism

The belief that the place of people in the social stratification system is a function of their ability and effort.

### Meritocracy

Social classification based on ability.



(Herrnstein, 1971:63). This is another way of saying that the bright people are in the upper classes and the dregs are at the bottom. The social Darwinists justify inequality just as it was years ago.

Charles Murray, along with Herrnstein, wrote *The Bell Curve* (Herrnstein and Murray, 1994), the latest major revival of Social Darwinism. Using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Youth, they argued that wealth and other positive social outcomes are increasingly distributed across society according to intelligence (as measured by IQ tests), rather than social background. Although their work has come under fire in the scientific community, arguments regarding the role of biological inferiority continue to surface. For example, in 2005 Lawrence Summers (president of Harvard University at the time) made a speech regarding the underrepresentation of women in science. In his speech, he claimed that girls are less likely than boys to get the highest scores on standardized math and science tests and that a possible explanation is genetic differences between the sexes (Davidson, 2005). Notwithstanding the flaws in the logic and in the evidence used by biological deficiency theorists (for excellent critiques of the Herrnstein and Murray work, see Gould, 1994; Herman, 1994; Reed, 1994; and *Contemporary Sociology*, 1995), we must consider the implications of their biological determinism for dealing with the problem of poverty.

### Blaming the victim

The belief that some individuals are poor, criminals, or school dropouts because they have a flaw within them, which ignores the social factors affecting their behaviors.

First, biological determinism is a classic example of **blaming the victim**. The individual poor person is blamed instead of inferior schools, culturally biased IQ tests, low wages, corporate downsizing, or social barriers of race, religion, or nationality. By blaming the victim, this thesis claims a relationship between lack of success and lack of intelligence. This relationship is spurious because it ignores the advantages and disadvantages of ascribed status.

The Jensen-Herrnstein-Murray thesis divides people in the United States by appealing to bigots. It provides “scientific justification” for their beliefs in the racial superiority of some groups and the inferiority of others. By implication, it legitimates segregation and unequal treatment of so-called inferiors. The goal of integration and the fragile principle of egalitarianism are seriously threatened to the degree that members of the scientific community give this thesis credence or prominence.

Another serious implication of the biological determinism argument is the explicit validation of the IQ test as a legitimate measure of intelligence. The IQ test attempts to measure innate potential, but this measurement is impossible because the testing process must inevitably reflect some of the skills that develop during the individual’s lifetime. For the most part, intelligence tests measure educability—that is, the prediction of conventional school achievement. Achievement in school is, of course, also associated with a cluster of other factors, most notably socioeconomic status.

Thus, the Jensen-Herrnstein-Murray thesis overlooks the important contribution of social class to achievement on IQ tests. This oversight is crucial because most social scientists feel these tests are biased in favor of those who have had a middle- and upper-class environment and experience. IQ tests discriminate against the poor in many ways. They discriminate obviously in the language used, in the instructions given, and in the experiences they assume the subjects have had. The discrimination can also be more subtle. For minorities, the race of the person administering the test influences the results. Another less well-known fact about IQ tests is that in many cases they provide a **self-fulfilling prophecy**. IQ scores on the low or high end of the spectrum can influence the way a child is treated from that moment on. If a child

### Self-fulfilling prophecy

An event that occurs because it is predicted. That is, the prophecy is fulfilled because people alter their behavior to conform to the prediction.

is seen as “bright” or “slow,” the child will be treated as such by his or her teachers. The kind of education the child receives as a result of that testing thus influences his or her future IQ.

Another implication is the belief that poverty is inevitable. The survival-of-the-fittest capitalist ideology is reinforced, justifying discrimination against the poor and continued privilege for the advantaged. Inequality is rationalized so that little will be done to aid its victims. Herrnstein and Murray in *The Bell Curve* argue that public policies to ameliorate poverty are a waste of time and resources. “Programs designed to alter the natural dominance of the ‘cognitive elite’ are useless, the book argues, because the genes of the subordinate castes invariably doom them to failure” (Muwakkil, 1994:22). The acceptance of this thesis, then, has obvious consequences for what policy decisions will be made or not made in dealing with poverty. If their view prevails, then welfare programs will be abolished, as will programs such as Head Start.

This raises the serious question: Is intelligence immutable, or is there the possibility of boosting cognitive development? A number of studies have shown that programs such as Head Start raise scores among poor children by as much as nine points. These results, however, fade out entirely by the sixth grade. Heckman (2006) argued that critics of Head Start are missing the larger picture. In other studies of early preschool intervention programs (similar to Head Start), participants have other successful outcomes, such as higher high school graduation rates, higher percentages of home ownership, lower rates of receipt of welfare assistance as adults, and fewer out-of-wedlock births. Consider the following examples:

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- The Abecedarian Project conducted at the University of North Carolina studied high-risk children from 111 families. The study followed these families and children up to age 21 and found that those high-risk children who received high-quality, intense preschooling earned significantly higher scores on intellectual and academic measures as young adults, attained more years of total education, were more likely to attend a four-year college, and showed a reduction in teen pregnancy. They conclude “the positive findings from this study have important policy implications. They show that a high-quality child care program can have a lasting impact on the academic performance of children from poverty backgrounds” (Campbell et al., 2002:55).
- In Ypsilanti, Michigan, high-risk African American children were randomly divided into two groups. Similar to the Abecedarian Project, one group received a high-quality, active-learning program as 3- and 4-year-olds. The other group received no preschool education. The two groups were compared when they were age 27, with these results:

By age 27, those who had received the preschool education had half as many arrests as the comparison group. Four times as many were earning \$2,000 or more a month. Three times as many owned their own homes. One-third more



Programs targeting poor children such as Head Start claim to result in numerous positive outcomes like higher graduation rates and lower rates of delinquency.

had graduated from high school on schedule. One-fourth fewer of them needed welfare as adults. And they had one-third fewer children born out of wedlock. (Beck, 1995:7B)

- Researchers at the University of Wisconsin studied 989 poor children, all born in 1980, who enrolled in the Chicago Child Parent Center Program no later than age 4 and were taught an average of 2.5 hours a day for eighteen months (reported in Steinberg, 2001). The students were tracked until age 20. Comparing these students with 550 other poor children from the same neighborhoods, few of whom attended any preschool, researchers found that (1) fewer graduates of the Chicago program had been arrested for juvenile crimes, (2) more graduates of the program also graduated from high school, and (3) the Chicago program children were much less likely to be assigned to special education classes or to repeat a grade.

Recall that Herrnstein and Murray in *The Bell Curve* (1994) argued that public policies to ameliorate poverty are a waste of time and resources because of the biological inferiority of the poor. These examples indicate otherwise.

### Culture-of-poverty hypothesis

The view that the poor are qualitatively different in values and lifestyles from the rest of society and that these cultural differences explain continued poverty.

**CULTURAL INFERIORITY** One prominent explanation of poverty, called the **culture-of-poverty hypothesis**, contends that the poor are qualitatively different in values and lifestyles from the rest of society and that these cultural differences explain continued poverty. In other words, the poor, in adapting to their deprived condition, are found to be more permissive in raising their children, less verbal, more fatalistic, less likely to defer gratification, and less likely to be interested in formal education than the well-to-do. Most important is the contention that this deviant cultural pattern is transmitted from generation to generation. Thus, there is a strong implication that poverty is perpetuated by defects in the lifestyle of the poor. These ideas were behind the welfare reform of 1996. Welfare recipients were seen as individuals who needed to learn to value work, stop being “dependent,” and stop transmitting deviant values to their children. From this view, the poor have a subculture with values that differ radically from values of the other social classes.

Edward Banfield, an eminent political scientist, has argued that the difference between the poor and the nonpoor is cultural—the poor have a present-time orientation, whereas the nonpoor have a future-time orientation (Banfield, 1977). He does not see the present-time orientation of the poor as an adaptation to the hopelessness of their situation. If poverty itself was to be eliminated, the former poor would probably continue to prefer instant gratification, be immoral by middle-class standards, and so on.

A modern example of the culture-of-poverty position can be found in comments made by Lieutenant Governor Andre Bauer, who was running for governor of South Carolina in 2010. In a town hall meeting with state lawmakers and residents, he compared government assistance to feeding stray animals. He said:

My grandmother was not a highly educated woman but she told me as a small child to quit feeding stray animals. You know why? Because they breed. You’re facilitating the problem if you give an animal or a person ample food supply. They will reproduce, especially ones that don’t think too much further than that. And so what you’ve got to do is you’ve got to curtail that type of behavior. They don’t know any better. (Quoted in Cary, 2010:1)

Bauer went on to say that the government is rewarding bad behavior by giving money to people who don't have to do anything for it (as previously mentioned, opinions similar to this were the driving force behind the welfare reform of 1996).

Critics of the culture-of-poverty hypothesis argue that this hypothesis is just another way of blaming the victim rather than focusing on the structural conditions that foster certain behaviors. Furthermore, research shows that the poor do not abandon the dominant values of the society but rather retain them while simultaneously holding an alternative set of values focused on day-to-day survival. This alternative set is a result of *adaptation* to the conditions of their environment. In other words, poverty is the cause of certain behaviors rather than vice versa.

Most Americans believe poverty is a combination of biological and cultural factors. Judith Chafel reviewed a number of studies on the beliefs of Americans and found that they “view economic privation as a self-inflicted condition, emanating more from personal factors (e.g., effort, ability) than external-structural ones (e.g., an unfavorable labor market, racism). Poverty is seen as inevitable, necessary, and just” (Chafel, 1997:434). A 2005 study by Adeola confirms these findings: Even though Americans seem to perceive that the government spends too little on the poor, they also tend to blame poverty on the poor themselves. However, the 2007–2009 economic recession may have had an effect on people’s attitudes toward poverty as more and more people find themselves vulnerable in a struggling economy. In this case, individuals might turn to structural theories to explain poverty.

## Structural Theories

In contrast to blaming the biological or cultural deficiencies of the poor, the structural theory states that how society is organized creates poverty and makes certain kinds of people especially vulnerable to being poor.

**INSTITUTIONAL DISCRIMINATION** Michael Harrington, whose book *The Other America* was instrumental in sparking the federal government’s war on poverty, has said, “The real explanation of why the poor are where they are is that they made the mistake of being born to the wrong parents, in the wrong section of the country, in the wrong industry, or in the wrong racial or ethnic groups” (Harrington, 1963:21). This is another way of saying that the structural conditions of society are to blame for poverty, not the poor. When discrimination has been incorporated into the structures, processes, and procedures of an organization or social institution, it is called **institutional discrimination**. Let us look at several examples of how the poor are trapped by this type of discrimination.

Most good jobs require a college degree, but the poor cannot afford to send their children to college. Scholarships go to the best-performing students. Children of the poor often do not perform well in school. This underperformance by poor children results from the lack of enriched preschool programs for them and low expectations for them among teachers and administrators. This attitude is reflected in the system of tracking by ability as measured on class-biased examinations. Problems in learning and test taking may also arise because English is their second language. Because poverty is often concentrated geographically and schools are funded primarily by the wealth of their district, children of the poor typically attend inadequately financed schools. All these acts result in a self-fulfilling prophecy—the poor are not expected to

### Institutional discrimination

When discrimination has been incorporated into the structures, processes, and procedures of an organization or social institution.

do well in school, and they do not. Because they are failures as measured by objective indicators (such as the disproportionately high number of dropouts and discipline problems and the small proportion who desire to go to college), the school feels justified in its discrimination toward the children of the poor.

Another job-related trap for the poor is the way low-end jobs are paid. As previously mentioned, if working full time at the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour, you will not be able to afford a two-bedroom apartment at Fair Market Rent in any state in the country (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2015).

The poor are also trapped because they get sick more often and stay sick longer than the more affluent. The reasons, of course, are that they cannot afford preventive medicine, proper diets, and proper medical attention when ill. The high incidence of sickness among the poor means either that they will be fired from their jobs or that they will not receive money for the days missed from work (unlike the more affluent, who usually have jobs with such fringe benefits as sick leave and paid medical insurance). Not receiving a paycheck for extended periods means that the poor will have even less money for proper health care, thereby ensuring an even higher incidence of sickness. Thus, there is a vicious cycle of poverty. The poor tend to remain poor, and their children tend to perpetuate the cycle.

The traditional organization of schools and jobs in U.S. society has limited the opportunities of racial minorities and women. The next two chapters describe at length how these two groups are systematically disadvantaged by the prevailing laws, customs, and expectations of society, so we will only summarize the structural barriers that they face. Racial minorities are deprived of equal opportunities for education, jobs, and income. As a result, Blacks, for example, are half as likely to be wealthy and twice as likely to be poor as Whites. They are also twice as likely as Whites to be unemployed. Structuralists argue that these differences are not the result of flaws in Blacks but rather of historical and current discrimination in communities, schools, banks, and the work world. Similarly, women typically work at less prestigious jobs than men and, when working at equal-status jobs, receive less pay and have fewer chances for advancement. These differences are not the result of innate gender differences but of personal, social, and societal barriers to equality based on gender.

The Occupy Wall Street Movement opposes wealth and power disparity.



**POLITICAL ECONOMY OF SOCIETY** The basic tenet of capitalism—who gets what is determined by private profit rather than collective need—explains the persistence of poverty. The primacy of maximizing profit works to promote poverty in several ways. First, employers are constrained to pay their workers the least amount possible in wages and benefits. Only a portion of the wealth created by the laborers is distributed to them; the rest goes to the owners for investment and profit. Therefore, employers must keep wages low. The millions of people who worked full time but were below the poverty line demonstrate that employers are successful.

A second way that the primacy of profit promotes poverty is by maintaining a surplus of undereducated and desperate laborers who will

work for very low wages. A large supply of these marginal people (such as minorities, women, and undocumented workers) aids the ownership class by depressing the wages for all workers in good times and provides the obvious category of people to be laid off from work in economic downturns.

A third impact of the primacy of profits in capitalism is that employers make investment decisions without regard for their employees (potential or actual). If costs can be reduced, employers will purchase new technologies to replace workers (such as robots to replace assembly line workers). Similarly, owners may shut down a plant and shift their operations to a foreign country where wages are significantly lower.

In sum, the fundamental assumption of capitalism is individual gain without regard for what the resulting behaviors may mean for other people. The capitalist system, then, should not be accepted as a neutral framework within which goods are produced and distributed but rather as an economic system that perpetuates inequality. This is the basic tenet of the Occupy Wall Street movement, whose protesters embraced the slogan “We are the 99 percent.” The implication is that the capitalist system in the United States has resulted in the country being controlled by a 1 percent elite group with enormous political and economic power. The system does not allow for equal opportunity, but instead is characterized by wealth disparity and limited social mobility for the vast majority of citizens.

A number of political factors complement the workings of the economy to perpetuate poverty. Political decisions made to fight inflation with high interest rates, for example, hurt several industries, particularly automobiles and home construction, causing high unemployment.

The powerful in society also use their political clout to keep society unequal. For example, they resist efforts to raise the minimum wage, and they seek to reduce or eliminate government programs to help the poor. Clearly, the affluent in a capitalist society will resist efforts to redistribute their wealth to the disadvantaged. Their political efforts are, rather, to increase their benefits at the expense of the poor and the powerless.

In summary, the structural explanation of poverty rests on the assumption that the way society is organized perpetuates poverty, not the characteristics of poor people. The reality is that the causes of poverty are very complicated, as is evident by the diversity of the poverty population. In his ethnography of the working poor, David Shipler noted,

In reality, people do not fit easily into myths or anti-myths, of course. The working individuals in this book are neither helpless nor omnipotent, but stand on various points along the spectrum between polar opposites of personal and societal responsibility. Each person’s life is the mixed product of bad choices and bad fortune, of roads not taken and roads cut off by the accident of birth or circumstance. It is difficult to find someone whose poverty is not somehow related to his or her unwise behavior—to drop out of school, to have a baby out of wedlock, to do drugs, to be chronically late to work. And it is difficult to find behavior that is not somehow related to the inherited conditions of being poorly parented, poorly educated, poorly housed in neighborhoods from which no distant horizon of possibility can be seen. (2004: 6–7)

Whether the causes of poverty are personal, structural, or a combination of both, 46.7 million individuals live below the federal poverty threshold, and the costs to society are enormous.

## Consequences and Solutions

### 7.4 Explain the costs to society of having a significant portion of the population living in poverty.

The concentration of poverty in certain areas has been linked to important outcomes such as crime and delinquency, educational problems, psychological distress, and health problems (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2012). The poor and those just above the poverty line generally receive inferior educations, live in substandard housing, are disproportionately exposed to toxic chemicals, are malnourished, and have health problems (see “A Closer Look: It’s a Disaster for the Poor”). Let’s further examine some of the consequences and economic costs of poverty.

#### A CLOSER LOOK

##### **It’s a Disaster for the Poor**

##### Poverty and Vulnerability

Most people are aware of some of the effects of poverty, like the poor are less likely to have health care and more likely to suffer from illness. What is less obvious are the other vulnerabilities that result from being poor. The following examples demonstrate that socioeconomic status can make a real life-and-death difference:

- When the *Titanic* was rammed by an iceberg in 1912, 3 percent of female first-class passengers were killed; 16 percent of female second-class passengers were killed; and 45 percent of female third-class passengers were killed. In this case, the higher the economic status of the individual, the greater the probability of survival.
- The United Nations has determined a “disaster risk index” for countries that shows a direct correlation between vulnerability and poverty. Being poor greatly affects the risk of being a victim in an earthquake, a tropical cyclone, and a flood. This relationship appears to be largely the effect of the quality and structural soundness of housing. Obviously, housing that is the least expensive may also be the least structurally sound and most vulnerable.
- In August 2005, Hurricane Katrina devastated the city of New Orleans. A close look at the numbers indicates that New Orleans was in trouble long before the hurricane. The Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans was one of the most heavily damaged areas of the city. The residents of the Ninth Ward were 99 percent Black, with a median household income of \$19,918. Most important, 32 percent of residents in the Lower Ninth Ward had no vehicle in which to evacuate (Wagner and Edwards, 2007).
- An Associated Press analysis of government data on industrial air pollution shows that Black Americans are 79 percent more likely than Whites to live in neighborhoods where industrial pollution is suspected of posing the greatest health danger. Residents in neighborhoods with the highest pollution scores also tend to be poorer, less educated, and more often unemployed (Pace, 2005).

- Research has shown that lower socioeconomic status is correlated with unsafe conditions that make the poor vulnerable to death by fire. These conditions may include absent or defective smoke detectors, use of space heaters, overcrowding, less fire-resistant housing, and electrical or heating malfunction in poor households. Analyzing data from all large U.S. metropolitan counties, Hannon and Shai (2003) found that a high proportion of African Americans combined with low income appears to be associated with extremely high fire-death rates. They concluded: “It appears that the disadvantages associated with institutional racism (physical segregation and social isolation) exacerbate the problems of low income in relation to fire deaths” (2003: 134).
- In July 1995, Chicago suffered a weeklong heat wave; temperatures soared, and 739 people died. In *Heat Wave*, sociologist Eric Klinenberg demonstrated how the patterns of mortality from this disaster reflect the inequalities that divide Chicago. Most of those who died were elderly, and most lived alone. In addition, most of the Blacks who died lived in severely impoverished conditions in areas with high population decline and abandoned housing stock.

## Family Problems

Poverty damages families. Poor couples are twice as likely to divorce as more affluent couples. Jobless people are three to four times less likely to marry than those with jobs. Two-thirds of teenagers who give birth come from poor or low-income families, and their children are more likely to be poor (Zimmerman, 2008).

## Health Problems

In spite of the Affordable Care Act, which provides Medicaid health insurance coverage to very low-income individuals, 32 million Americans were still uninsured in 2014 (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2015). “When uninsured people get sick, they are less likely to seek medical attention until they are really sick and it is more expensive to treat them. Then, if they were not poor already, medical bills can push them into poverty. So poverty helps make people sick, and being sick helps make people poor” (Oppenheim and MacGregor, 2006:2). Further, the uninsured may use emergency medical services in place of a regular doctor, as hospitals are required to render treatment regardless of insurance or ability to pay.

The infant mortality rate in some poor urban neighborhoods exceeds the rate in developing countries. The United States has a higher infant mortality rate than most other industrialized countries. Reflecting the disproportionate number of African Americans in poverty, infants born to African American mothers are twice as likely to die before their first birthday than infants of White mothers (Children’s Defense Fund, 2012).

## Problems in School

In addition to health problems, children in the poorest families are six times as likely as their affluent counterparts to drop out of high school. Poor children experience less qualified teachers, fewer school resources and inadequate education facilities.



Living in a neighborhood with a high poverty rate translates to graduation rates as much as 20 percentage points lower than those in more advantaged communities (Children’s Defense Fund, 2012). Marian Wright Edelman, president and founder of the Children’s Defense Fund, aptly stated,

Forty years after President Johnson declared a War on Poverty and signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 into law, 50 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, 108 years after *Plessy v. Ferguson*, and 141 years after President Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation, a Black child still lacks a fair chance to live, learn, thrive, and contribute in America. Our nation’s doors of economic and educational opportunity still have not opened to all of God’s children who are Black, Brown, White, Native and Asian American, and poor. (Children’s Defense Fund, 2004:1)

## Economic Costs

What are the consequences for society if a significant proportion of the populace is poor? In economic terms, the cost is very high. Holzer and colleagues (2007) examined these economic costs in detail and estimated that the costs to the United States associated with childhood poverty total about \$500 billion per year. These costs are the inevitable consequence of reduced productivity and economic output by the poor, increased criminal behavior, and poor health.

Most arguments for reducing poverty in the U.S., especially among children, rest on a moral case for doing so—one that emphasizes the unfairness of child poverty, and how it runs counter to our national creed of equal opportunity for all. But there is also an economic case for reducing child poverty. When children grow up in poverty, they are somewhat more likely than non-poor children to have low earnings as adults, which in turn reflects lower workforce productivity. They are also somewhat more likely to engage in crime (though that’s not the case for the vast majority) and to have poor health later in life. Their reduced productive activity generates a direct loss of goods and services to the U.S. economy. (Holzer et al., 2007:1)

If poverty were eliminated through jobs that pay a living wage and adequate monetary assistance to the permanently disabled or elderly, the entire society would prosper from the increased purchasing power and the larger tax base. But economic considerations, though important, are not as crucial as humanitarian ones. A nation that can afford it must, if it calls itself civilized, eliminate the physical and psychological misery associated with poverty.

## Potential Solutions

Must some portion of U.S. society live in poverty? Is there a way to get everyone below the poverty level to a level at which they are not deprived of the basics of adequate nutrition, health care, and housing? The remainder of this chapter enumerates some assumptions that appear basic to achieving such a goal.

**Assumption 1:** *Poverty can be eliminated in the United States.* The United States could reduce its defense budget (\$585 billion for fiscal year 2016) by many billions of dollars without threatening national security. The United States spends as much as the next nine biggest defense spenders combined, most of whom are U.S. allies

(see Figure 7.4). In fact, the United States accounts for 34 percent of the world's total military spending, followed distantly by China (12 percent of the world's spending). We could spend \$200 billion less a year and still be number one militarily. The resulting savings, called the Peace Dividend, could be committed to bringing people in the United States above the poverty line.

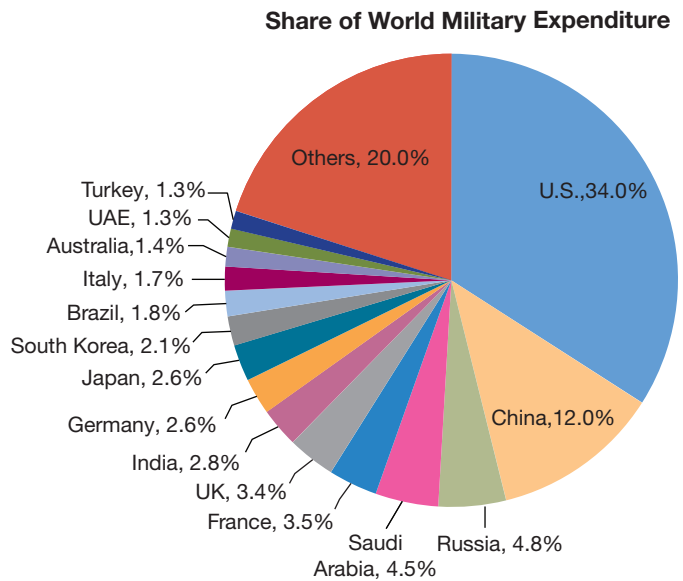
**Assumption 2:** *Poverty is caused by a lack of resources, not a deviant value system.* Basic to a program designed to eliminate poverty is the identification of what keeps some people in a condition of poverty. Is it lack of money and power or the maintenance of deviant values and lifestyles? This question is fundamental because the answer determines the method for eliminating poverty. The culture-of-poverty proponents would address non-middle-class traits. The target would be the poor themselves, and the goal would be to make them more socially acceptable (for example, the welfare reform of 1996). Developing the social competence of the poor—not changing the system—would bring an end to poverty. This approach treats the symptom, not the disease. Only attacking its sources within the society—the structural arrangements that maintain inequality—can cure the disease.

**Assumption 3:** *Poverty cannot be eliminated by the private sector of the economy.* Assuming that private enterprises will not engage in unprofitable activities, we can assume also that private enterprise efforts will never by themselves eliminate poverty. In other words, private profit will tend to subvert the human needs that are of public concern; businesses will not provide jobs that they consider unnecessary or not immediately profitable, nor will they voluntarily stop activities that are profitable (e.g., renting deteriorated housing because the unimproved land may increase in value, or charging exorbitant interest rates to the poor, or lobbying to keep certain occupational categories outside minimum-wage restrictions, or moving their operations to another state or nation where wages are lower).

Conventional wisdom, however, suggests that private business is the answer because it will generate new and better-paying jobs. This solution simply will not work because the new poor differ dramatically from the old poor. Some of the new poor are workers who have been displaced by robots, computers, and other labor-saving devices. The jobs of others have moved—from the urban core to the suburbs, to other regions of the country, or to other countries, or have been lost due to the recession. The jobs were lost because of rational business decisions.

**Figure 7.4** Top 15 Share of World Military Expenditure: 2014

**SOURCE:** Data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Military Expenditure Database. [http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/milex/milex\\_database](http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/milex/milex_database).



In short, the private sector, with its emphasis on profit (and therefore efficiency), will not generate the new jobs needed to eliminate poverty.

**Assumption 4:** *Poverty will not be eliminated by a rising economy.* A common assumption is that a growing economy will help everyone—“a rising tide lifts all boats.” This assumption has some validity, as evidenced by the very robust economy of the late 1990s, when unemployment dipped to 4 percent, jobs were plentiful, and wages for the bottom segment of the population shifted upward. But even in this untroubled economic time period, the lot of the poor did not improve much. Actually, affordable housing became even more of a problem because much low-cost housing was gentrified (refurbished for upscale renters) or demolished for office buildings or other uses irrelevant to the poor. Even in the best of times, the conditions of poverty limit and deny. Cities with low tax bases do not provide the needed social services such as pre- and postnatal health care and good schools. During the boom times of the 1990s, the federal government cut programs for the poor such as Head Start, Food Stamps, and Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). Employers do not have jobs with decent wages and benefits, even in good times, for those with inadequate education and training.

**Assumption 5:** *Volunteer help from well-meaning individuals, groups, and organizations will not eliminate poverty.* In 1988, presidential candidate George H. W. Bush called for “a thousand points of light” as the solution to social problems such as poverty. Bush meant that charities and volunteers are the answers, not big government. At one level, this makes good sense. That is, churches and private organizations can and do provide food for the hungry, shelters for the homeless, and emergency care for the victims of natural disasters.

There are two problems with leaving poverty to charities. The first is that since 1980, the money received by charities and the number of adults volunteering their services to charities have declined. These declines occurred at a time of increasing need by the poor. The second problem is that because this plan is voluntary, the poor in many communities will be denied adequate food, clothing, health care, and shelter. Only a national program will ensure that the needs of every poor person are met.

In 2001, President George W. Bush proposed a variation on his father’s “thousand points of light.” This was for the federal government to provide funds to religious organizations that help the needy (“faith-based initiative”). In effect, the plan proposed to allow religious charities that serve the poor to compete for \$8 billion annually in government funds (Benedetto, 2001). Although laudable in many respects, given the important contributions by religious charities such as Catholic Charities and the Salvation Army, there are several problems with the plan. First, there is the danger that the churches will use federal resources to try to win converts to their religion, clearly an unconstitutional activity. Second, the government may bypass religious organizations that are not Christian or otherwise mainstream (e.g., Muslims, Buddhists, Scientologists), thereby missing important clusters of poor people. A third objection is that the White House might funnel funds on a political basis rather than according to need, such as to Catholic organizations to win the Catholic vote. Finally, this plan misses the essence of a federal plan to solve the poverty crisis across the United States (J. Jackson, 2001).

**Assumption 6:** *Poverty is a national problem and must be attacked with massive, nationwide programs financed largely and organized by the federal government.* Poverty must be addressed at the federal level to ensure that the poor throughout the nation will receive equal benefits and services. Poverty must be attacked nationally to deal with the structural problems that cause poverty (e.g., the changing economy that results in too few jobs, declining real wages for all but the top 20 percent, uneven resources for education, and a health care delivery system that misses or overlooks so many). Because many politicians believe that relatively high welfare benefits attract poor people from other states and because many states are in a fiscal crisis, there is a current trend to reduce welfare benefits at the state level. This is why poverty must be handled at the national level to ensure that the programs are funded uniformly.

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## Chapter Review

### 7.1 Understand the extent of poverty in America.

- Compared to other industrialized nations, the United States has one of the highest rates of poverty.
- According to the government's arbitrary dividing line (which minimizes the actual extent of poverty), 14.8 percent of the U.S. population (46.7 million people) was officially poor in 2014. Disproportionately represented in this category are Blacks, Hispanics, children, and women (especially female-headed households).
- There are 386 counties in the United States where more than 20 percent of the people live below the poverty line. 20.8 million Americans are severely poor (living at or below half the poverty threshold).

### 7.2 Explain the myths and misperceptions about poor people.

- In 2014, 10.1 million poor people worked but remained under the poverty threshold. There is not a single state in the country where it is possible to work forty hours per week at minimum wage and afford a two-bedroom apartment.
- In 1996, the federal welfare program was reformed. Assistance programs for the poor were drastically cut, time limits were set for welfare recipients, and recipients were required to find work within two years.

- Families under the new welfare system (TANF) have fewer resources and struggle to make it, even though most are working.
- Most governmental assistance is targeted to the affluent rather than the poor. Tax expenditures and other subsidies provide enormous benefits to the already affluent, which further redistributes the nation's wealth upward.
- Rather than the poor receiving special advantages, research shows that the poor pay more than the nonpoor for many services.

### 7.3 Compare/contrast the various explanations for poverty: individual, cultural, and structural.

- One explanation for poverty is that the poor themselves are in some way deficient. The innate inferiority hypothesis, for example, is a variant of Social Darwinism promoted by Arthur Jensen and Richard Herrnstein. This hypothesis states that certain categories of people are disadvantaged because they are less well-endowed mentally.
- Another position that blames the poor for their condition is the culture-of-poverty hypothesis. This hypothesis contends that the poor are qualitatively different in values and lifestyles from the affluent and that these differences explain their poverty and the poverty of their children.

- Critics of the culture-of-poverty and the innate inferiority hypotheses charge that in blaming the victim, both theories ignore how social conditions trap individuals and groups in poverty.
- In contrast to blaming biological or cultural deficiencies of the poor, structural theories focus on how society is organized in a way that creates poverty and makes certain people vulnerable to being poor.

#### 7.4 Explain the costs to society of having a significant portion of the population living in poverty.

- Poverty is correlated with crime, teenage pregnancy, divorce, poor health, and a host of societal

problems. For society as a whole, the economic costs of poverty reach the billions.

- The elimination of poverty requires (a) a commitment to accomplish that goal; (b) a program based on the assumption that poverty results from a lack of resources rather than from a deviant value system; (c) recognition that poverty cannot be eliminated by the private sector of the economy, by a rising economy alone, or by charitable individuals or groups; and (d) recognition that poverty is a national problem and must be attacked by massive, nationwide programs largely financed and organized by the federal government.

## Key Terms

**Blaming the victim** The belief that some individuals are poor, criminals, or school dropouts because they have a flaw within them, which ignores the social factors affecting their behaviors.

**Culture-of-poverty hypothesis** The view that the poor are qualitatively different in values and lifestyles from the rest of society and that these cultural differences explain continued poverty.

**Extreme-poverty neighborhoods** Areas in the United States where more than 40 percent of the people live below the poverty line.

**Institutional discrimination** When discrimination has been incorporated into the structures, processes, and procedures of an organization or social institution.

**Meritocracy** Social classification based on ability.

**Official poverty line, or poverty threshold** The federal definition of poverty—an arbitrary line computed by multiplying the cost of a basic nutritionally adequate diet by three and adjusted for inflation.

**Persistent poverty counties** Counties in the United States where more than 20 percent of the people live below the poverty line.

**Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA)** In 1996, Congress passed this act, which reformed the welfare system.

PRWORA shifted welfare programs from the federal government to the states; mandated that welfare recipients find work within two years; limited welfare assistance to five years; and cut various federal assistance programs targeted for the poor by \$54.5 billion over six years.

**Poverty** Standard of living below the minimum needed for the maintenance of adequate diet, health, and shelter.

**Regressive tax** Tax rate that remains the same for all people, rich or poor. The result is that poor people pay a larger proportion of their wealth than affluent people.

**Self-fulfilling prophecy** An event that occurs because it is predicted. That is, the prophecy is fulfilled because people alter their behavior to conform to the prediction.

**Severely poor** People whose cash incomes are at half the poverty line or less.

**Social Darwinism** The belief that the place of people in the social stratification system is a function of their ability and effort.

**Wealthfare** Government subsidies to the nonpoor.

**Welfare** Government monies and services provided to the poor.

# Chapter 8

## Racial and Ethnic Inequality



### Learning Objectives

- 8.1** Understand the concepts of race and ethnicity.
- 8.2** Discuss and give examples of racial-ethnic inequality in the United States.
- 8.3** Explain racial inequality from different theoretical perspectives: deficiency theories, bias theories, and structural discrimination theories.
- 8.4** Discuss and give examples of the growing racial strife in the United States.

Since its beginning, the United States has been a nation with a “race problem.” Today, racial divisions are changing, but they are not disappearing. Three milestones reveal the extent of population change in the nation: (1) By 2001, more than half of the largest cities had more Blacks, Latinos, Asian Americans, and other minorities than Whites (Camarillo, 2010). (2) In 2012, for the first time in history, more than half of newborn children belonged to a racial or ethnic minority group. (3) Today, one in three U.S. residents is a minority. The United States is moving from being predominantly White to being a global society of diverse racial and ethnic peoples. As this occurs, blatant forms of racism from the past have given way to new, more subtle practices. With the growth of racially defined minority groups, racial disparities persist even though they are sometimes hidden from view (Higginbotham and Andersen, 2012; Lewis et al., 2004).

The theme of the chapter is that racial problems have structural foundations. Many people think race no longer matters in the way it once did. After all, President Barack Obama, a multiracial man, holds the nation’s highest office, and racial and ethnic minorities are visible in numerous public positions. While these changes are important, they do not signal a post-racial society. Our society remains structured along the lines of race, ethnicity, and color. In this chapter, we show that race is a powerful force in shaping our institutions. This means that minority groups lack the same opportunities as everyone else. Keep in mind that minorities are not to blame for the race problem. Instead, the cause lies in our race-based system of social rights and resources. Also keep in mind that our emphasis on racial inequality does not mean that minorities are passive victims of **oppression**. Their histories are filled with human agency and for centuries, racial minorities in the United States have fought against oppression, both as individuals and in groups.

This chapter examines racial inequality from several vantage points. First, we outline the important features of racial and ethnic groups. We then profile four racial-ethnic groups in the United States and highlight the persistence of inequalities based on race and ethnicity. Next, we examine explanations of racial inequality, followed by a look at contemporary trends in racial and ethnic relations.

### Oppression

Unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power.

## Defining Race and Ethnicity

### 8.1 Understand the concepts of race and ethnicity.

Sociologists agree that *race is socially constructed*. This means that some groups are racially defined, even though races per se, do not exist. What does exist is the *idea* that races are distinct biological categories. Races are thought to be physically distinguishable populations that share a common ancestry. But despite the common belief, social scientists now reject the biological concept of race. Scientific examination of the human genome finds no genetic differences between the so-called races. Fossil and DNA evidence show that humans are all one race, evolved in the last 100,000 years from the same small number of tribes that migrated from Africa and colonized the world (American Sociological Association, 2003; Angier, 2000; Bean et al., 2004; Feldman, 2010; Mukhopadhyay and Henze, 2003). Although there is no such thing as biological race, races are real insofar as they are *socially defined*. In other words, racial categories *operate* as if they are real. Racial categories are a mechanism for sorting people in society. They structure and segregate our neighborhoods, our schools, our churches, and our relationships (Higginbotham and Andersen, 2012).

## The Changing Social Definitions of Race

Racial classification in the United States is based on a Black–White dichotomy—that is, the construction of two opposing categories into which all people fit. However, social definitions of race have changed throughout the nation’s history. At different points in the past, “race has taken on different meanings. Many of the people considered White and thought of as the majority group are descendants of immigrants who at one time were believed to be racially distinct from native-born White Americans, the majority of whom were Protestants” (Higginbotham and Andersen, 2009:41). Racial categories vary in different parts of the country and around the world. Someone classified as “Black” in the United States might be considered “White” in Brazil and “Colored” (a category distinguished from both Black and White) in South Africa (Bamshad and Olson, 2003:80). In the United States, a Black–White color line has always been complicated by regional racial divides. Today, the rapidly growing presence of Latino/a and Asian immigrants and the resurgence of Native American identification have changed the meaning and boundaries of racial categories. Their non-White status marks them as “other” and denies them many opportunities (Lewis, Kryson, and Harris, 2004: 5; Pyke, 2004:55). Skin color complicates racial differences because it is a basis of ranking that favors lighter skin over darker skin. Both within and across racial and ethnic groups, lighter-skinned people have more advantages than those with darker skin (Burton et al., 2010). Global events also complicate the color lines. Before the events of 9/11, Middle Easterners and Muslim Americans were relatively invisible. The post–9/11 backlash created a new minority group. Arabs and Muslims are grouped together even though not all Muslims are Arabs and not all Arabs are Muslims. Nevertheless, many Americans have imagined that the United States is engaged with a Muslim or Arab enemy who is fundamentally different and dangerous (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr, 2011; Bein, 2010).

Currently immigration from Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean is also changing the character of race and ethnic relations. Sociologists use the term **racial formation** to mean that society is continually creating and transforming racial categories (Omi and Winant, 1994:55). For example, groups once self-defined by their ethnic backgrounds (such as Mexican Americans and Japanese Americans) are racialized as “Hispanics” and “Asian Americans.” Middle Easterners coming from such countries as Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, and Iran are commonly grouped together and called “Arabs.” See Figure 8.1 for the racial-ethnic population projections through 2060.

The U.S. government has changed its racial categories over time. For the first time in census 2000, people were allowed to record themselves in more than one racial category and this continued with the 2010 census. About 3 percent of people identify themselves as mixed-race (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). We can expect that the use of the mixed-race or multiracial option will grow, especially among the younger population. Marrying across racial lines is on the increase, as attitudes toward interracial unions become more tolerant. One in 10 married couples is interracial, a 28 percent increase since 2000 (Jayson, 2012). Already, children are much more likely than adults to identify themselves as multiracial.

While the Census Bureau has begun to capture the complex mix of racial groups present in the United States, it uses a confusing classification for Hispanics (see Table 8.1). According to the 2000 U.S. guidelines, Hispanics were considered to be an ethnic group, not a race. People who identified their ethnicity as Hispanic could also indicate a racial background by choosing “some other race.” The Census Bureau

### Racial formation

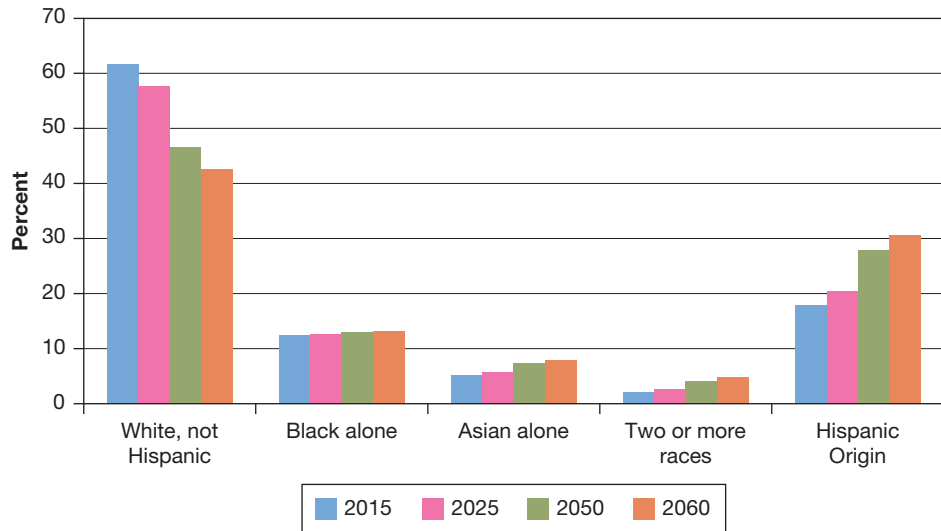
Sociohistorical process by which races are continually being shaped and transformed.



**Figure 8.1** U.S. Racial-Ethnic Population Projections 2015, 2025, 2050, 2060

NOTE: Not all racial groups included.

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division. 2012. Projections of the Population by Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin for the United States: 2015 to 2060 (NP2012-T4).



acknowledges that the distinction between race and ethnicity is flawed. The 2010 census changed the Hispanic origin question to more clearly distinguish Hispanics by adding the sentence “For this census, Hispanic origins are not races” (Humes, Jones, and Ramirez, 2011: 12). In reality, Hispanics *are racialized* in the United States. Although classified as an ethnic group, “Hispanic” encompasses a range of ethnic groups. At the same time, although Hispanics are not officially defined as a race, they are *socially defined* in racial terms. In other words, the dominant society treats them as racially inferior. When any group comes to be thought of as a race, this means the group has become racialized (Taylor, 2009: 4). Hispanics are treated as a racial group, and many identify themselves as belonging to a distinctive racial category.

Despite the past and present racialization of people of color, common thinking about race is flawed. We tend to see race through a Black and White lens, thereby neglecting other rapidly growing racial groups. At the same time, we think of Whites, the dominant group, as raceless, or having no race at all (McIntosh, 1992: 79). In this view, Whiteness is the natural or normal condition. It is racially unmarked and immune to investigation. This is a false picture of race. In reality, the racial order shapes the lives of all people, even Whites who are advantaged by the system (see “Speaking to Students: Got Privilege? Studying What It Means to Be White”). Just as social classes exist in relation to each other, “races” are labeled and judged *in relation to other races*. The categories “Black” and “Hispanic” are meaningful only insofar as they are set apart from, and in distinction to, “White.” This point is particularly obvious when people are referred to as “non-White,” a word that ignores the differences in experiences among people of color (Lucal, 1996: 246). Race is not simply a matter of two opposite categories but of power relations between dominant and subordinate groups (Weber, 2010).

**Table 8.1** 2010 U.S. Census Hispanic Classifications

Subject	Number	Percentage
HISPANIC OR LATINO		
Total population	308,745,538 <sup>a</sup>	100.0
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	50,477,594	16.3
Mexican	31,798,258	10.3
Puerto Rican	4,623,716	1.5
Cuban	1,785,547	0.6
Other Hispanic or Latino [5]	12,270,073	4.0
Not Hispanic or Latino	258,267,944	83.7
HISPANIC OR LATINO AND RACE		
Total population	308,745,538 <sup>a</sup>	100.0
Hispanic or Latino	50,477,594	16.3
White alone	26,735,713	8.7
Black or African American alone	1,243,471	0.4
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	685,150	0.2
Asian alone	209,128	0.1
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	58,437	0.0
Some Other Race alone	18,503,103	6.0
Two or More Races	3,042,592	1.0
Not Hispanic or Latino	258,267,944	83.7
White alone	196,817,552	63.7
Black or African American alone	37,685,848	12.2
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	2,247,098	0.7
Asian alone	14,465,124	4.7
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	481,576	0.2
Some Other Race alone	604,265	0.2
Two or More Races	5,966,481	1.9

**NOTE:** <sup>a</sup>This count has been revised as of 1/31/2014 to be 308,746,065.

**SOURCE:** U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census.

## Speaking to Students

# Got Privilege? Studying What It Means to Be White

What does it mean to be “White”? Surprisingly, the answer to this question is not as simple as it may seem. Whiteness is not biological, nor is it determined solely by skin color or other physical attributes. Instead, whiteness is socially constructed, a product of micro and macro social forces and interactions across time. These forces work together to create the boundaries for the unique racial location we call White. Although all of those who identify or are identified as

White live within the boundaries of this racial location, the concept of Whiteness does not imply that everyone who is White will have identical experiences. Historical and demographic location, class, gender and sexuality, among other things, shape what it means to be White.

Over the past thirty years, a new field has begun to emerge that studies the social constructions and boundaries of Whiteness, which is called “Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS).” This field has begun to piece together historical and contemporary data and narratives to determine who was considered to be “White” at different historical periods and why. In addition, CWS examines how these racial determinations granted individuals privilege based on whether they were perceived to be White.

One of clearest texts in showing how White privilege operates is Peggy McIntosh’s “Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” (1992). By privilege, she means “an invisible package of unearned assets that [Whites] can count on cashing in each day, but about which [Whites were] ‘meant,’ to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack.”\* Some examples of invisible White privilege include being able to buy books, dolls, and toys featuring White people; turning on the television and seeing other White people; not being harassed or followed while shopping; and not being pulled over by the police because of skin color.

At the heart of her argument is a focus on Whiteness as a system, not an individual identification. What this means is that White people reap certain benefits based on the fact that the system is set up to accommodate them, regardless of whether they themselves directly support racist practices or ideologies. These privileges allow Whites as a whole greater access to society’s resources than people of color and leave less than an equal share of resources for those who are not similarly privileged.

As a student, you may be asking yourself “What, if anything, does this have to do with me?” If you are White, you may feel that you did not receive any special treatment just because of your skin color. You may have had to overcome obstacles that were placed in your path due to your class, gender, or sexuality. It may be especially difficult for you to accept your privilege in comparison with other people of color who you perceive as not having had to overcome such obstacles. Recognizing White privilege does not mean that across the board, in every scenario, Whites always have it better than people of color. Just as there is White privilege, there are also privileges that come with being from the upper class, or possessing masculinity and/or heterosexuality. What it does mean is that you have been privileged in the area of race.

David Roediger’s *Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (1991) is a great example of how White working class men, although not having access to the privileges of the upper class, utilized White privilege to their benefit. In this work, Roediger argues that constructions of Whiteness were at the heart of the establishment of the working class. White workers used race to separate themselves from workers of color and to rally other White workers, including White ethnics.

\* Working Paper 189, “White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences through Work in Women’s Studies” (1988), by Peggy McIntosh.

This gave them enough power to receive certain benefits as a group, including higher wages and better jobs that were not accessible to other workers.

Another book that highlights the interplay between different categories of social location is Ruth Frankenburg's *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (1993). The primary focus of this book is to show how Whiteness is constructed via gender and sexuality. Frankenburg provides numerous examples to detail how White women's experience of race differs from White men's, especially within sexual relationships. For example, she shows how White women who were in relationships with men of color were often seen as "supersexual" beings in ways they would not have been if they were a White man choosing to date a woman of color. Although White women have to overcome barriers created by their gender and sexuality, Frankenburg notes it is still important to recognize the fact that they are at the same time able to maintain their racial privilege.

Fortunately, there is a growing movement to examine White privilege. There are small steps we all can take to assist in this process. Becoming aware of the different ways "Whiteness" affects you and those around you is the first step toward fighting against White privilege and for racial equality. If you are White, another step you can take is to attempt to forego the benefits heaped upon you by Whiteness. This will be difficult, especially in the beginning, since you may be unaware of many of these benefits. Tim Wise, in his book *White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son*, outlines a number of practical strategies that can be used to help tear down White privilege. These include "refus[ing] to shop at institutions with a pattern or history of discrimination," and "refer[ing] to white people with a racial designation when discussing them so as to stop normalizing whites as synonymous with human beings, people, or Americans."\*\*

SOURCE: Miller, Paula, Dr. "Got Privilege? Studying What It Means to Be White." Copyright © 2010. Used with permission.

\*\* Wise, Tim. 2008. *White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son*. Brooklyn, NY: Soft Skull Press, p. 118.

## Ethnic Groups and Their Differences

How is race different from ethnicity? Whereas race is used for socially marking groups on the basis of presumed physical differences, ethnicity allows for a broader range of affiliation. **Ethnic groups** are distinctive on the basis of national origin, language, religion, and culture.

Ethnic groups have long been present in the United States. Since colonial times, Germans, Italians, Poles, Irish, and other groups have arrived with their own languages, religions, and culture. Both race and ethnicity are historical bases for inequality in that they are constructed in a hierarchy from "superior" to "inferior." In the United States, some immigrants were viewed as belonging to an inferior race. For example, Jews were once racialized and later reconstructed as White (Brodtkin, 2009). Nevertheless, race and ethnicity have differed in how they incorporated groups into society. Race was the social construction setting people of color apart from European immigrant groups (Takaki, 1993: 10). Groups identified as races came into contact with the dominant majority through force and state-sanctioned discrimination in work that was unfree and offered little opportunity for upward mobility. In contrast, European

### Ethnic groups

Groups characterized by culturally distinctive characteristics based on language, religion, culture, or national origin.

ethnics migrated to the United States voluntarily to enhance their status or to market their skills in a land of opportunity. They came with hope and sometimes with resources to provide a foundation for their upward mobility. Unlike racial groups, most had the option of returning if they found the conditions here unsatisfactory. The voluntary immigrants came to the United States and suffered discrimination in employment, housing, and other areas. Clashes between Germans, Irish, Italians, Poles, and other European groups during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are well documented. But most European immigrants and their descendants—who accounted for four-fifths of the U.S. population in 1900—eventually achieved full participation in U.S. society (Pollard and O’Hare, 1999: 5).

Today, globalization and transnational migration are changing the landscape of countries throughout the world. In the United States, some groups have given up their ethnic customs, while others remain distinctive. Expanded communications networks and the increased social interaction that have resulted from immigration have not suppressed ethnic conflicts. Ethnic and religious differences have led to massacres of ethnic Tutsis by Hutus in Rwanda; full-scale war involving Serb, Bosnian, Albanian, and other ethnic groups in the Balkans; violence against ethnic Chinese in Indonesia; and violent conflicts between religious and ethnic sects in the Middle East. According to a 2014 Pew Research poll, people in the Middle East see religious and ethnic hatred as the top threat facing the world today (Welsh, 2014).

In sum, social definitions of race and ethnicity continue to shift over time. More importantly, the power differences that go along with those social definitions have important consequences for all dominant and subordinate groups.

## Racial and Ethnic Groups in the United States and Inequality

### 8.2 Discuss and give examples of racial-ethnic inequality in the United States.

In the United States, race and ethnicity both serve to mark groups as different. Groups labeled as *races* by the wider society are bound together by their common social and economic conditions. As a result, they develop distinctive cultural or ethnic characteristics. Today, we often refer to them as **racial-ethnic groups** (or racially defined ethnic groups). The term *racial-ethnic group* refers to groups that are socially subordinated and remain culturally distinct within U.S. society. It is meant to include (1) the systematic discrimination of socially constructed racial groups and (2) their distinctive cultural arrangements. The categories of *African American*, *Latino/a*, *Asian American*, and *Native American* have been constructed as both racially and culturally distinct.

Terms of reference are also changing, and the changes are contested both within groups as well as between them. For example, *Blacks* continue to debate the merits of the term *African American*, whereas *Latinos* disagree on the label *Hispanic*. In this chapter, we use such terms interchangeably because they are currently used in both popular and scholarly discourse.

### Racial and Ethnic Groups in the United States

We begin with a brief examination of four racial and ethnic groups in the United States.

#### Racial-ethnic group

Group labeled as a “race” by the wider society and bound together by members’ common social and economic conditions, resulting in distinctive cultural and ethnic characteristics.

**AFRICAN AMERICANS** In 2013, African Americans comprised 13.8 percent of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Before 1990, virtually all African Americans descended from people who were brought involuntarily to the United States before the slave trade ended in the nineteenth century. Whites brought Africans to the southern states to provide free labor to plantations, and as late as 1890, 90 percent of all Blacks lived in the South, 80 percent as rural dwellers. In the South, they endured harsh and violent conditions under slavery, an institution that would have consequences for centuries to come. During the nineteenth century, the political storm over slavery almost destroyed the nation. Although Blacks left the South in large numbers after 1890, within northern cities they also encountered prejudice, discrimination, and segregation that exposed them to unusually high concentrations of poverty and other social problems.

In the past two decades, the Black population in the United States has changed due to immigration from Africa and the Caribbean. In fact, more Blacks are coming from Africa than during the slave trade. About 50,000 legal immigrants arrive annually, and more have migrated here than in nearly the entire preceding centuries (Roberts, 2005:A1, 2010). Black immigration from Africa and the Caribbean is making the population more diverse and posing unique challenges to today's Black immigrants (Shaw-Taylor, 2009). Black immigration is also changing what it means to be Black. It has sparked a new debate about the "African American" label. It ignores the enormous linguistic, physical, and cultural diversity of the peoples of Africa. The term *Black* is also problematic in that it risks conflating people of African descent who were brought here as slaves with recent immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean (Mukhopadhyay and Henze, 2003:675). In fact, the experiences of today's immigrants are markedly different from those who have descended as slaves.

**LATINOS** The U.S. Latino/a population has now surpassed the African American population to become the nation's largest minority. In many respects, the Latino/a population is the driving force of this society's racial and ethnic transformation (Saenz, 2004:29). In 2013, Hispanics or Latinos made up 17.1 percent of the total U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Although Hispanics are the largest minority, they are a varied collection of ethnic groups. Almost two-thirds (64.1 percent) of all Hispanic Americans are Chicanos or Mexican Americans, 9.5 percent are Puerto Ricans, 3.7 percent are Cubans, and 22.7 percent are "other Hispanic or Latino" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

The *Hispanic* category was created by federal statisticians to provide data on people of Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, and other Hispanic origins in the United States. The term was chosen as a label that could be applied to all people from the Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America and from Spain. Because the population is so diverse, there is no precise definition of group membership. Even the term *Latino/a*, which many prefer, is a new invention. Latinos tend to view themselves more by their ethnicity, meaning their national origins, language, and customs (Navarro, 2012). While Latinos are often viewed as immigrants, the majority (61 percent) of the population was born in the United States. The rapid growth of the Hispanic population in recent years came from births, not immigration (Roberts, 2010; Saenz, 2010).

Hispanics are found in many legal and social statuses—from fifth-generation Americans to new immigrants, from affluent and well educated to poor and unschooled. Such diversity means there is no "Hispanic" population in the sense that there is a Black population. Hispanics do not have a common history. They do not compose a single community. Rather, they are collections of groups with different national

origins, languages, racial identifications, and socioeconomic statuses. Saying someone is Hispanic or Latino/a reveals little about attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, race, religion, class, or legal situation in the United States.

Despite these differences, Latinos in the United States have a long history of discrimination by governments controlled by non-Hispanic Whites. Mexican Americans in the Southwest lost property and political rights as Anglos moved into the region in the 1800s. As late as the 1940s, local ordinances in some Texas cities blocked Mexican Americans from owning real estate or voting. Also, Mexican Americans were required to attend segregated public schools in many jurisdictions before 1950 (Pollard and O'Hare, 1999:6).

**ASIAN AMERICANS** Asian Americans are another rapidly growing minority group in the country. In 2013, Asian Americans made up 6.0 percent of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Asians are now the largest group of new immigrants in the United States. In 2012, 36 percent of new immigrants were Asian (Semple, 2012).

Like the Hispanic population, the Asian population in the United States is extremely diverse, giving rise to the term *Pan-Asian*, which encompasses immigrants from Asian and Pacific Island countries and native-born citizens descended from those ethnic groups (Lott and Felt, 1991: 6). Until recently, immigrants who arrived in the United States from Asian countries did not think of themselves as Asians, or even as Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and so forth, but rather as people from Toisan, Hoeping, or some other district in Guangdong Province in China or from Hiroshima, Yamaguchik, or some other locale. It was not until the late 1960s, with the advent of the Asian American movement, that a Pan-Asian consciousness was formed (Espiritu, 1996:51).

The characteristics of Asians vary according to their national origins and time of entry into the United States. Most come from recent immigrant families, but many Asian Americans can trace their family's American history back more than 150 years. From the earliest days of their arrival, dominant attitudes emphasized their "racial foreignness" (Chang, 2010). Discrimination and anti-Asian laws prevented them from becoming genuine U.S. citizens. For example, the 1879 California Constitution barred the hiring of Chinese workers, and the federal Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 halted the entry of most Chinese immigrants until 1943. Americans of Japanese ancestry were interned in camps during World War II by an executive order signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Not until 1952 were Japanese immigrants granted the right to become naturalized U.S. citizens (Pollard and O'Hare, 1999:6–7).

Whereas most of the pre-World War II Asian immigrants were peasants, recent immigrants vary considerably by education and social class. On the one hand, many arrived as educated middle-class professionals with highly valued skills and some knowledge of English. Others, such as the Indochinese, arrived as uneducated, impoverished refugees. These differences are reflected in the variances in income and poverty level by ethnic category. Asian Americans taken together have higher average incomes than other groups in the United States. Although a large segment of this population is financially well off, many are poor. Asian Americans are seen as "the model minority," a well-educated and upwardly mobile group. But this stereotype is misleading. Not only is it used to blame other racial minorities for their own inequality, but it also ignores both the history of discrimination against Asians and their wide differences. Even the term *Asian American* masks great diversity.

**NATIVE AMERICANS** Once thought to be destined for extinction, today the Native American or American Indian population is larger than it has been since the 1800s, now at 1.7 percent of the total U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

The tribes located in North America are extremely heterogeneous, with major differences in physical characteristics, language, and social organization. As many as 7 million indigenous people lived in North America when the Europeans arrived. The conquest made them “Indians.” By 1890, they were reduced to less than 250,000 by disease, warfare, and, in some cases, genocide (by comparison, their number now total more than 5 million). In the first half of the nineteenth century, the U.S. government forced Native Americans from their homelands. Those forced migrations accelerated after President Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act of 1830. Many tribes then lived on marginal land reserved for them.

The current political and economic status of Native Americans is the result of the process that forced them into U.S. society. Many factors led to the disparities we now observe between Native Americans and others, including the appropriation of Indian land for the gain of White settlers, the mismanagement by the Bureau of Indian Affairs of resources found on native lands, and the underinvestment by the general government in Native American education and health care (Adamson, 2009).

Important changes have occurred in the social and economic well-being of the Native American population from 1960 to the present. At the time of the 1970 census, Native Americans were the poorest group in the United States, with incomes well below those of the Black population. By 1980, despite poverty rates as high as 60 percent on many Indian reservations, poverty among Native Americans had declined. At the end of the twentieth century, Native Americans were better off than they were in the 1900s. Over the past few decades, Native Americans have made important gains in cutting poverty rates and increasing their educational levels. Yet even with these gains, Native Americans are nowhere near parity with White Americans. Today, Native Americans have a poverty rate of almost 27 percent, twice the White poverty rate and the highest of all racial-ethnic groups. Native peoples rank at the bottom of most U.S. socioeconomic indicators, with the lowest levels of life expectancy, per capita income, employment, and education (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

## Racial-Ethnic Inequality

We have seen that there is great diversity within each racial-ethnic group. We now turn to a closer examination of the inequalities that exist between racial-ethnic groups in terms of income, education, employment, and health.

**INCOME** The average income for White families and households is greater than the average income for those of Blacks and Hispanics. Racial income disparities have remained unchanged over time. In 2013, the median income of Black households was about \$34,598, the median income of White households was about \$58,270, and the median income of Hispanic households was about \$40,963 (Denavas-Walt and Proctor, 2015). Even though the median household income for Blacks is still below that of Hispanics, per-person income for Hispanics is actually lower because Hispanics tend to have larger households (see Figure 8.2).

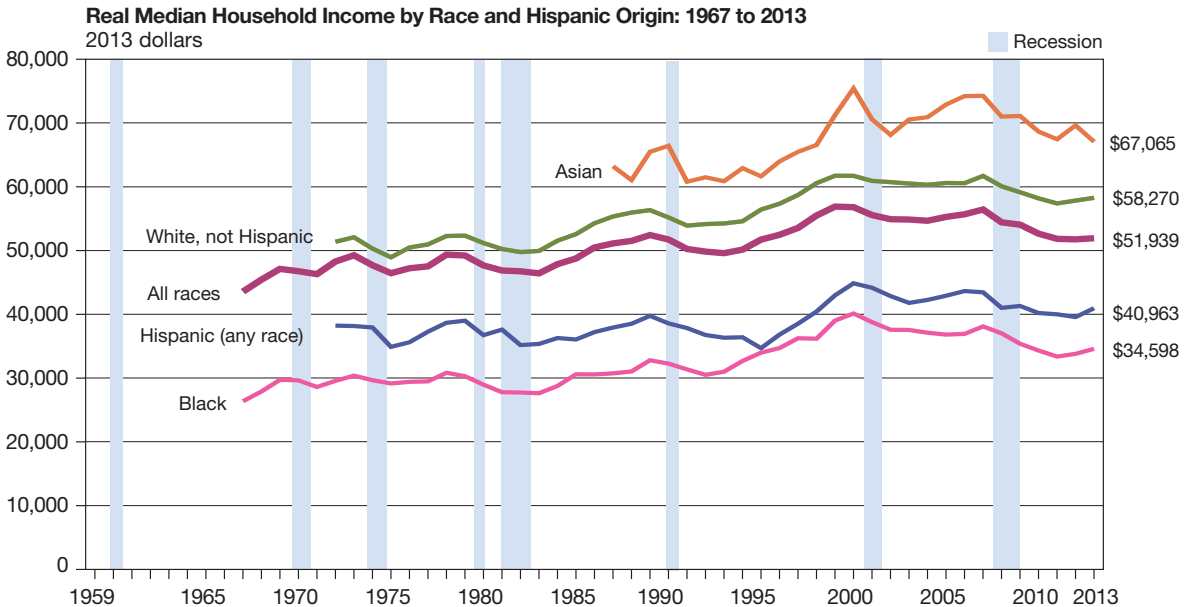
Although the racial income gap is wide, the racial *wealth gap* is even wider. It is the sum of important assets a family owns and includes home ownership, pension



**Figure 8.2** Real Median Household Income by Race and Hispanic Origin: 1967–2013

**NOTE:** Median household income data are not available prior to 1967.

**SOURCE:** Carmen DeNavas-Walt and Bernadette D. Proctor. 2014. U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, P60-249, *Income and Poverty in the United States: 2013*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, p. 5. <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2014/demo/p60-249.pdf>



funds, savings accounts, and investments. Many of these resources are inherited across generations. White families generally have greater resources for their children and bequeath them as assets at death. Sociologists call this “the cost of being Black” (Oliver and Shapiro, 1995). The wealth gaps between Whites and minorities have grown to their widest levels in a quarter of a century. The recession and uneven recovery have erased decades of minority gains, leaving Whites with twenty times the net worth of Black households and eighteen times that of Hispanic households (National Latino Congress, 2011; Pew Research Center, 2011).

One important indicator of a family’s wealth is home ownership. Paying off a home mortgage is the way most people build net worth over their lifetimes. But because racial minorities encounter discrimination in their efforts to buy, finance, or insure a home, a great race gap remains (Farley and Squires, 2012:360). Fewer than half of Blacks and Latinos and fewer than 60 percent of Asian Americans and Native Americans own their own homes, compared to three-quarters of Whites. Rampant racial discrimination prevails in the housing market, even after forty years of federal housing laws (Turner et al., 2013; Briggs, 2005; Leondar-Wright et al., 2005: 11).

Many factors explain the difference in White and minority incomes. Racial-ethnic groups are concentrated in the South and Southwest, where incomes are lower for everyone. Another part of the explanation is the differing age structure of minorities. They are younger, on average, than the White population. A group with a higher proportion of young people of working age will have a lower average earning level,

higher rates of unemployment, and lower rates of labor force participation. These explanations leave a substantial amount of inequality unexplained. The fact remains that minorities at all levels of employment and education still earn less than Whites.

**EDUCATION** In 1954, the Supreme Court outlawed segregation in the schools. Yet the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling did not end segregation. In fact, U.S. schools are now more racially segregated than ever before. Since the decades of the 1980s and 1990s, school resegregation has continued to grow in all parts of the country. More than a third of African Americans and Hispanics attend schools with a minority enrollment of 90 to 100 percent (Darling-Hammond, 2010). This is class as well as race segregation, both from Whites and from middle-class students (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Orfield and Lee, 2012:331).

The 2010 high school graduation rate for Whites was 87 percent compared with 85 percent for Asian Americans, 81 percent for African Americans, and 62 percent for Hispanics (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). This is a growing problem because today, 70 percent of jobs are knowledge-work jobs requiring high levels of literacy and specialized skills beyond high school (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Minority participation in higher education has risen since the 1960s. College campuses are far more diverse than they were a century ago (Rothstein, 2007:129). Nevertheless, there are large racial gaps in college enrollment and earned bachelor's degrees. Although many colleges actively recruit students of color, many factors contribute to low retention rates. Even when they reach college, students of color often confront a range of discriminatory barriers. Studies have consistently found that they are more alienated than White students and drop out more often than White students.

All these disparities translate into economic inequalities. Yet education alone is not the answer. Even with a college degree, African Americans and Latinos have higher unemployment rates than their White counterparts. This is compounded by the reality that education does not pay equally. Minority membership, regardless of the level of education, is underpaid compared with Whites of similar education. A highly educated White man still makes more money than anyone else.

**EMPLOYMENT** African Americans and Latinos have always been an important component of the U.S. labor force. However, their job prospects are different from those of other people in the United States. Although no longer barred from particular occupations, as they were in the past, many occupations remain largely segregated by race and ethnicity (Moya and Marcus, 2010:64). Minorities are more likely to work in low-skilled occupations and less likely to work in managerial or professional occupations (see Table 8.2). Black and Latino/a workers are more likely to be in jobs with pay too low to lift a family of four above the poverty line (Leondar-Wright et al., 2005:9). Sociological research shows that race is related to workplace recruitment, hiring, firing, job levels, pay scales, promotion, and degree of autonomy on the job. Seemingly neutral practices can advantage some groups and adversely affect others (American Sociological Association, 2003; Shulman, 2007).

Immigrants generally work in the lowest rungs of the low-wage workforce. They are more likely than natives to be food-preparation workers, sewing machine operators, parking lot attendants, housekeepers, waiters, private household cleaners, food-processing workers, agricultural workers, elevator operators, janitors, operators, fabricators, and laborers (Shulman, 2007:101). Although Blacks, Hispanics, and Native

**Table 8.2** Selected Labor Force Characteristics by Sex, Race, and Ethnicity (2011)

		Total %	Black %	Hispanic %	Asian %	White %
In civilian labor force	Men	70.5	64.2	76.5	73.2	71.3
	Women	58.1	59.1	55.9	56.8	58
Unemployed	Men	9.4	17.8	11.2	6.8	8.3
	Women	8.5	14.1	11.8	7.3	7.5
Occupations						
Management and professional	Men	34.4	23.5	15.6	49.1	34.9
	Women	41.5	34.1	25.2	44.4	42.3
Sales and service	Men	31.5	40.3	36.5	31.3	30.4
	Women	52.5	58.8	63	48.1	51.7
Skilled and unskilled manual	Men	34.1	36.2	47.9	19.6	34.7
	Women	6	7.1	11.8	7.5	6

**SOURCE:** Bureau of Labor Statistics (2011). "Current Population Survey, Household Data Annual Averages," Tables 4, 5, and 10. Can be accessed from <http://www.bls.gov/cps/tables.htm>.

Americans are in the least rewarding jobs, and many face discrimination in hiring and promotion, the occupational status of minorities improved slowly during the last decade. Still, huge gaps remain.

Globalization and shifts in the U.S. economy have diminished work opportunities across the land. The nation's job crisis has been catastrophic for racial and ethnic minorities. In 2009, joblessness for 16- to 24-year-old Black men reached Great Depression proportions, with a rate of 34 percent—more than three times the rate for the general U.S. population (Ehrenreich and Muhammad, 2009; Haynes, 2009).

Because African Americans and Latinos established successful niches in civil service, they are also being replaced by government downsizing. The new economy will be increasingly made up of people of color. If they continue to be denied equal access to higher-paying jobs, the entire society will be at risk for poverty and other problems associated with economic inequality.

**HEALTH** We have seen that non-Asian minorities in the United States occupy lower rungs than Whites in the workforce, have high rates of unemployment, and less wealth. These conditions translate into limited access to health care, greater stress, shorter life spans, and higher rates of disease for minorities (Moya and Marcus, 2010:70). Hispanics are the most likely to be without health coverage, and Hispanics born outside the United States were almost twice as likely to lack health insurance as their U.S.-born counterparts. Many are unfamiliar with the U.S. health care system, and a few are illegal immigrants who are afraid to seek medical assistance.

Racial discrimination affects health in other ways as well. For example, chemical plants and toxic waste dumps are often located in or near minority communities. **Environmental racism** is the disproportionate exposure of some racial groups to environmental toxic substances. Race is the strongest predictor of hazardous waste facility location in the country. Even before Hurricane Katrina struck in 2005, New Orleans was already struggling with environmental assaults that ranged from floodwaters

### Environmental racism

The disproportionate exposure of some racial groups to toxic substances.

to toxic debris. People of color were most vulnerable to these assaults. Katrina was among the deadliest and most devastating disasters in U.S. history. Although public attention has focused on rebuilding the Gulf Coast, a lesser known crisis of lethal debris lingers, left over from hurricane damage (Bullard and Wright, 2009). Nationally, three out of five African Americans and Latinos live in communities with abandoned toxic waste sites because of land use, housing patterns, and infrastructure development (Bullard, 2007:87).

The health disadvantages of living in impoverished neighborhoods cannot be overstated. Those living in “high-opportunity” neighborhoods, which are typically White, can expect to live up to twenty years longer than residents of a “low-opportunity” neighborhood in the same city. Researchers at the Health Policy Institute of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies in Washington, DC, claim that ZIP code is more important than genetic code in determining a person’s health (Coffey, 2011:A2).

On virtually every measure of health, non-Asian racial and ethnic minorities are disadvantaged, as revealed in the following facts:

- Compared to the general population, Blacks and Hispanics are less likely to have a consistent source of medical care and more likely to use emergency rooms as a primary source of care.
- Native American women are 1.9 times as likely to die from cervical cancer compared to White women, and African Americans are 1.5 times as likely as Whites to have high blood pressure (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2009).
- Diabetes prevalence is highest among Blacks, Hispanics, and the poor (Centers for Disease Control, 2013).
- HIV/AIDS has had a devastating impact on minorities in the United States. Racial-ethnic minorities accounted for almost 71 percent of newly diagnosed cases of HIV infection in 2010. More than 80 percent of children born with HIV infection belong to minority groups (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012).

## Explanations of Racial and Ethnic Inequality

### 8.3 Explain racial inequality from different theoretical perspectives: deficiency theories, bias theories, and structural discrimination theories.

Why have some racial and ethnic groups been consistently disadvantaged? Three types of theories have been used to explain why some groups are treated differently: deficiency theories, bias theories, and structural discrimination theories.

### Deficiency Theories

A number of analysts have argued that some groups are disadvantaged because they *are* inferior. That is, when compared with the majority, they are deficient in some important way. There are two variations of **deficiency theories**: biological and cultural.

**BIOLOGICAL DEFICIENCY** This classical explanation for racial inferiority maintains that group inferiority is the result of flawed genetic—and therefore hereditary—traits. This is the position of Arthur Jensen, Richard Herrnstein, and Charles Murray (as discussed in Chapter 7). *The Bell Curve* (Herrnstein and Murray, 1994) is the latest in a

#### Deficiency theories

Explanations that view the secondary status of minorities as the result of their own behaviors and cultural traits.

long series of works claiming that Blacks are genetically inferior to Whites and that this inferiority explains differences in the social success of racial groups. Despite the media attention given the work of these and other theorists, there is no definitive evidence for the thesis that racial groups differ in intelligence. Biological deficiency theories are generally not accepted in the scientific community.

**CULTURAL DEFICIENCY** Many explanations of racial subordination center on group-specific cultural traits handed down from generation to generation. According to this explanation, the cultures and behaviors of minority groups are dysfunctional when compared to those of the dominant group. In addition, these groups remain at the bottom because they fail to take advantage of the opportunities in society (Brown and Wellman, 2005:188). From this perspective, minorities are disadvantaged because of their group-specific heritage and customs. Cultural deficiency was the basis of Daniel Patrick Moynihan's famous 1967 report, which charged that the "tangle of pathology" within Black ghettos was rooted in the deterioration of the Negro family (U.S. Department of Labor, 1965). High rates of divorce, female-headed households, out-of-wedlock births, and welfare dependency were said to be the residues of slavery and discrimination, a complex web of pathological patterns passed down through the generations. The Moynihan report was widely criticized for being a classic case of "blaming the victim." It finds the problem within Blacks, not in the structure of society.

For more than four decades, many social scientists strongly opposed cultural explanations. However, the culture of poverty is now back on the sociological agenda, this time using new definitions of culture and arguing that culture and social conditions work together to produce poverty and racial inequality (Small, Harding, and Lamont, 2010; Wilson, 2010). Still, the old cultural approach dominates in popular thought. Today, much of the public discussion about race and poverty rests on false assumptions about deficient minorities. Family "breakdown" is still used to explain African American problems, whereas a backward culture is said to produce Latino/a problems. Today's immigrant debates use culture to generate fear. For example, in his book, *Who Are We? The Challenges to American Identity* (Huntington, 2004), Samuel P. Huntington argues that a culture alien to Anglo-Saxon ways makes unchecked Latino/a immigration a threat to U.S. society.

### Bias theories

Explanations that blame the prejudiced attitudes of majority members for the secondary status of minorities.

### Laissez-faire racism

A subtle racist ideology that blames the cultural norms of African Americans for their social and economic position

## Bias Theories

The deficiency theories blame minorities for their plight. **Bias theories**, on the other hand, blame the members of the dominant group. They blame individuals who hold *prejudiced attitudes* toward minorities, thus resulting in discrimination in housing, employment, and the criminal justice system. Research by Lawrence Bobo (Bobo, 2009) shows that although outright prejudice has declined, most White Americans are still unwilling to support social practices and policies to address racial inequalities. Unbiased people fight to preserve the status quo by favoring, for example, the seniority system in occupations, or they oppose affirmative action, quota systems, busing to achieve racial balance, and open enrollment in higher education. Bobo calls this **laissez-faire racism**, a subtle racist ideology that blames the cultural norms of African Americans for their social and economic position (Bobo, 2011).

Today, we live in an era when laws to protect citizens from racial discrimination are firmly in place. The determining feature of dominant-minority relations is not

necessarily outright prejudice but differential systems of privilege and disadvantage. Even if active dislike of minorities ceases, “persistent social patterns can endure over time, affecting whom we marry, where we live, what we believe and do, and so forth” (Elliot and Pais, 2006: 300).

Thus, institutional and individual racism generate privilege for Whites. Discrimination provides the privileged with disproportionate advantages in the social, economic, and political spheres. Racist acts, in this view, not only are based on hatred, stereotyped conceptions, or prejudgment but also are rational responses to the struggle over scarce resources by individuals acting to preserve their own advantage.

## Structural Discrimination Theories

Deficiency and bias theories focus, incorrectly, on individuals: the first on minority flaws and the second on the flawed attitudes of the majority. Both kinds of theory ignore the social system that oppresses minorities. The alternative view is that racial inequality is not fundamentally a matter of what is in people’s heads, not a matter of their private individual intentions, but rather a matter of public institutions and practices that create racism or keep it alive. **Structural discrimination theories** move away from thinking about “racism-in-the-head” toward understanding “racism-in-the-world” (Lichtenberg, 1992: 5).

Many sociologists have examined race as a structural force that permeates every aspect of life. Those who use this framework make a distinction between individual racism and institutional racism. Individual racism is related to prejudice. It consists of individual behavior that harms other individuals or their property. **Institutional racism** is structural. It comprises more than attitudes or behavior. It is structural, that is, *a complex pattern of racial advantage built into the structure of society*—a system of power and privilege that advantages some groups over others (Higginbotham and Andersen, 2009: 78). Because institutional racism views inequality as part of society’s structure, individuals and groups discriminate, regardless of whether they are bigots. These individuals and groups operate within a social milieu that ensures racial dominance. The social milieu includes laws, customs, religious beliefs, and the stable arrangements and practices through which things get done in society.

Institutional or structural racism is not about beliefs. It is not only about actions directed at those considered racially different (meaning those not considered White). According to Howard Winant:

... structural racism is about the accretion of inequality and injustice in practice; it’s about the way things work, regardless of the reasons why, it’s about outcomes, not intentions or beliefs. So, if vast inequalities in wealth persist across racial lines, for example, they may persist not because White people presently intend to impoverish Black or Brown people; they may persist because of years and years of some people doing better than others do. Inequality accumulates; injustice becomes normal; they come to be taken for granted. (2009: 58)

While there are different structural theories of racial inequality, they all agree on the following points. First, *history is important in determining present conditions and affecting resistance to change*. Historically, institutions defined and enforced norms and role relationships that were racially distinct. The United States was founded and its

### Structural discrimination theories

Explanations that focus on the institutionalized patterns of discrimination as the sources of the secondary status of minorities.

### Institutional racism

A complex pattern of racial advantage/disadvantage built into the structure and institutions of society.

institutions established when Blacks were slaves, uneducated, and different culturally from the dominant Whites (Patterson, 2007: 58). From the beginning, Blacks were considered inferior (the original Constitution, for example, counted a slave as three-fifths of a person). Religious beliefs buttressed this notion of the inferiority of Blacks and justified the differential allocation of privileges and sanctions in society.

Second, *discrimination can occur without conscious bigotry*. Everyday practices reinforce racial discrimination and deprivation. Although the actions of individual bigots are unmistakably racist, many other actions (choosing to live in a suburban neighborhood, sending one's children to a private school, or opposing government intervention in hiring policies) also maintain racial dominance (Bonilla-Silva, 1996:475). With or without malicious intent, racial discrimination is the "normal" outcome of the system. Even if racism-in-the-head disappeared, racism-in-the-world would not, because it is the *system* that disadvantages (Lichtenberg, 1992).

Finally, *institutional discrimination is reinforced because institutions are interrelated*. The exclusion of minorities from the upper levels of education, for example, is likely to affect their opportunities in other institutions (type of job, level of remuneration). Similarly, poor children will probably receive an inferior education, be less likely to own property, suffer from bad health, and be treated unjustly by the criminal justice system. These inequities are cumulative.

Institutional derogation occurs when minority groups and their members are made to seem inferior or to possess negative stereotypes through legitimate means by the powerful in society. The portrayal of minority group members in the media (movies, television, newspapers, and magazines) is often derogatory. For example, many movies depict Black men disproportionately as drug users, criminals, lower class, and "pathological." The media also provide us with explanations and interpretations intended to help us make sense of our society, including its multiracial composition. The ideas that pervade today's mass media obscure pervasive racial inequality. Instead, we are bombarded by depictions of race relations that suggest discriminatory racial barriers have been dismantled and that the United States has become a truly color-blind nation (Gallagher, 2010; Weber, 2010).

Why is U.S. society organized along racial lines? Sociologists have a long-standing debate over the relative importance of race and class in shaping systems

of racial inequality. Those emphasizing class contend that the economy and class system are what produce racial inequality. Some scholars argue that modern race relations are produced by world capitalism. Using the labor of non-White peoples began as a means for White owners to accumulate profits. This perspective contends that capitalism as a system of class exploitation has shaped race and racism in the United States and the world (Bonacich, 1992).

Other structural theories point to race itself as a primary shaper of inequality. For example, racial-formation theory

Typical roles for Black males in movies or on television are often the Black sidekick to the White main character, the comedic relief, the athlete, the token Black person, or the violent Black man as a criminal or gangster.



explains the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created. This theory proposes that the United States is organized along racial lines from top to bottom—a racial state composed of institutions and policies to support and justify racial stratification (Omi and Winant, 1986; Omi and Winant, 1994). Another theory, called *systemic racism*, also argues that race itself explains racial inequality. Systemic racism includes a diverse assortment of racism practices: the unjustly gained economic and political power of Whites, the continuing resource inequalities, and the White-racism ideologies, attitudes, and institutions created to preserve White advantages and power. Systemic racism is both structural and interpersonal. “At the macrolevel, large-scale institutions . . . routinely perpetuate racial subordination and inequalities. These institutions are created and re-created by routine actions at the microlevel by individuals” (Feagin, 2000: 16). Systemic racism is far more than a matter of individual bigotry, for it has been from the beginning a mental, social, and ideological reality (Feagin, 2006: xiii).

## Contemporary Trends and Issues in U.S. Racial and Ethnic Relations

### 8.4 Discuss and give examples of the growing racial strife in the United States.

By the middle of the twenty-first century, racial and ethnic minorities will comprise nearly one-half of the U.S. population. Racial diversity presents new social conditions that reflect differences in group power and access to social resources. Three major trends reveal old and new forms of racial inequality: growing racial conflict, economic polarization of minorities, and a national shift in U.S. racial policies. These trends are occurring in a global context, closely associated with macro social forces around the world.

### Growing Racial Conflict

Although the social dynamics of race are changing, the United States is still plagued by racial divisions. The growing immigrant and minority presence together with the nation’s economic crisis are adding *new* tensions in society.

Racial conflict became very public when on August 9, 2014, a White police officer shot and killed an unarmed Black teenager in Ferguson, Missouri (a mostly Black suburb of St. Louis). The shooting set off weeks of protests, looting, vandalism, and clashes between mainly Black protestors and the overwhelmingly White police force. According to analysts, the eruption in Ferguson is no surprise given the poverty, alienation, and racial inequality historically present in the area (Conason, 2014).

A month after a jury acquitted the officer involved in the Ferguson case, a grand jury also failed to indict a New York White police officer on the chokehold death of a 43-year-old Black man. As a result of these and other cases, protests against police brutality and racial discrimination ensued across the United States.

Anti-Hispanic sentiments have also increased steadily during the last two decades, producing restrictive immigration laws and policies such as Arizona’s 2010 legislation requiring immigrants to carry proof of their legal status and to show IDs to police officers who suspect they may be illegally in the United States (Martin and Midgley, 2010; Navarro, 2011). Alabama, too, has enacted new legislation governing





Protests against police brutality and racial discrimination are on the rise in the United States.

the treatment of illegal immigrants. Among other provisions, the law requires schools to determine students' immigration status (Reeves, 2011).

Anti-immigration movements often translate into hate-related activities. Another effect of the increasing anti-immigration sentiment in the nation is the surge in incidents of vigilantism—unauthorized attempts by ordinary citizens to enforce immigration laws. Some private citizens are increasingly taking the law into their own hands to stem the perceived “flood” of illegal immigrants into the country (Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), 2006, 2007). We now see new expressions of anti-Muslim/anti-Arab racism. Like old-fashioned forms of bigotry and hate crimes, this racism is also fueled by misbeliefs about minorities (Blauner, 2001: 191).

Racial conflict is often associated with uncertain economic conditions. Lack of jobs, housing, and other resources can add to fear and minority scapegoating on the part of Whites. In Florida and many parts of the West and Southwest, perceptions that Cubans, Mexicans, and other Hispanics are taking jobs from Anglos have touched off racial tensions. Racial tensions often erupt in violence between Whites and minorities and among minorities themselves as individuals compete for a shrinking number of jobs and other opportunities.

Instead of moving society “beyond race,” the historic election of the first mixed-race president has thrust some incidents of racial conflict onto center stage. Prominent Democrats such as former President Carter have publicly speculated that race—and by implication racism—is behind some of the attacks on President Obama at venues ranging from town hall meetings to the floor of Congress as well as the “birther” movement’s rumors about the president’s birthplace.

**MORE RACIALLY BASED GROUPS AND ACTIVITIES** The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) documented 1,000 hate groups in forty-eight states and the District of Columbia in 2010, a number that has swelled by 66 percent since 2000 (Potok, 2011). Hate groups include White supremacist groups with such diverse elements as the Ku Klux Klan, neo-Confederate groups (those describing Southern culture as fundamentally White), Nazi-identified parties, and skinheads. Many groups use the Internet to spread their literature to young people. As a result, more than half of all hate crimes are now committed by young people ages 15 to 24. In addition to racist websites, cyber extremism flourishes in e-mail and in discussion groups and chat rooms. Racism is also fueled by the proliferation of cable TV hosts who spread and legitimize extremist propaganda. The country’s changing racial composition and economic difficulties drive the rise in racial extremism.

**PROFILING AND MALTREATMENT** Racial disparities in the criminal justice system have drawn scrutiny in recent years as the number of people in prison has increased fivefold since 1980. Most of those incarcerated are Black and Latino men (Ledger,

2009:51; Moya and Marcus, 2010:71). Racial minority individuals in lower-class communities are more likely to be stopped, interrogated, arrested, and prosecuted (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Warren et al., 2006). The past three decades have seen “numerous cases of race-related police brutality and misconduct, and official acknowledgements of systematic racial profiling” (Lewis et al., 2004:95). **Racial profiling** is the use of race and ethnicity as clues to criminality and potential terrorism. According to the Federal Bureau of Justice Statistics, in 2005 Black drivers were twice as likely to be arrested during traffic stops, whereas Latino drivers were more likely than Black or White drivers to receive a ticket (Robinson, 2007). Racial profiling on the highways has become so prevalent that a term has emerged to explain it: “DWB—driving while Black” (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Since September 11, Arab Americans, Muslims, and other Middle Easterners have been the targets of threats, gunshots, firebombs, and other forms of vigilante violence (Fahim, 2003). Fear of terrorism has provoked a rash of hate crimes and a national debate about the official use of profiling—that is, the use of race and ethnicity as clues to criminality and potential terrorism.

### Racial profiling

The discriminatory practice by law enforcement officials of targeting individuals for suspicion of crime based on race, ethnicity, religion, or national origin.

**CAMPUS RACIAL TENSIONS** Recent headlines about racism on college campuses have surprised many people because educational institutions are formally integrated. Yet campus racism is very much alive. Over the past few years, students of color have reported a dramatic increase in acts of racial discrimination, intolerance, hate crimes, and insensitivity among different cultures at institutions of higher education. Hateful and racially insensitive incidents have occurred on some of the most prestigious campuses in the country (NAACP, 2009). According to the U.S. Department of Education and watchdog and advocacy groups, every year more than half a million college students are targets of bias-driven slurs or physical assaults. Every day, at least one hate crime occurs on a college campus, and every minute, a college student somewhere sees or hears racist, sexist, homophobic, or otherwise biased words or images. These problems are not isolated or unusual events. Instead, they reflect trends in the wider society. Some of these racist acts have come to public light due to social media (see *Speaking to Students: Racists Acts on Campus*).

## Social and Economic Isolation in U.S. Inner Cities

Today, U.S. neighborhoods remain segregated. Although residential segregation is declining, it is not disappearing. Despite some progress toward integration in the last decades of the twentieth century, neighborhood segregation is a key feature of the U.S. social landscape. African Americans, in particular, continue to live in segregated neighborhoods in exceptionally high numbers (Farley, and Squires, 2012:315). Levels of Hispanic segregation have been rising, with dark-skinned Hispanics having higher levels of segregation than their lighter-skinned counterparts (Rugh and Massey, 2010).

The consequences of this type of residential segregation became very clear in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. For days, the world watched as federal officials moved slowly to assist those stranded and dying in flooded houses and overcrowded shelters in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast areas. What was exposed was not just a broken levee but race and class divides—both familiar and yet new. Even media commentators raised the reasonable question of whether the fact that a majority of those hardest hit in New Orleans—low-income Black residents—had affected the slowness of the federal government response (De Parle, 2007:163; Feagin, 2006:xv).

## Speaking to Students

### Racist Acts on Campus

Racism and racist acts against minorities on college campuses show us that we truly do not live in a color-blind society. With the prevalence of cell phones capturing racist public behavior, colleges across the country are expelling students and suspending fraternities as a result. Consider the following examples (Associated Press, 2015):

- In 2015, at the University of Oklahoma, a video was leaked showing the Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity chanting a song that referred to lynching and niggers.
- In 2014, at the University of Mississippi, Sigma Phi Epsilon was shut down after three members draped a Confederate flag and placed a noose around the statue of the school's first Black student.
- In 2013, Kappa Sigma suspended its Duke University chapter after students held a party mocking Asian students. In 2015, pictures of a noose hanging from a tree on Duke's campus went viral.
- In 2015, University of Missouri's student government President sparked a student protest movement after documenting racial slurs against him on social media. The protest escalated when Missouri football players threatened to boycott all games until University President Tim Wolfe resigned because he had not done enough to deal with racist incidents on campus. Tim Wolfe resigned in November 2015.

These are just a few of the incidents from across the country that indicate we do not live in a post-racial society.

Disparities between Blacks and Whites are not unique to New Orleans. In large cities across the nation, African Americans are much more likely than Whites to live in communities that are geographically and economically isolated from the economic opportunities, services, and institutions that families need to succeed. Without jobs, cars, or phones, inner-city residents are utterly vulnerable to urban disaster (see "Social Policy: Reducing the Risk of Future Disasters for Urban African Americans"). This social entrapment can be explained *structurally*. In his classic studies of African American poverty at the end of the twentieth century, sociologist William J. Wilson found that the problems of the inner city are due to transformations of the larger economy and to the class structure of ghetto neighborhoods (Wilson, 1987; Wilson, 1996). The movement of middle-class Black professionals from the inner city has left behind a concentration of the most disadvantaged segments of the Black urban population. Wilson's research reveals how crime, family dissolution, and welfare are connected to the structural removal of work from the inner city. The Black inner city is not destroying itself by its own culture; rather, economic forces are destroying it.

Rising poverty rates among Latinos have led many policymakers and media analysts to conclude that Latinos have joined inner-city African Americans to form a hopeless underclass. This view of minority impoverishment is inaccurate. Although

## Social Policy

### Reducing the Risk of Future Disasters for Urban African Americans

African Americans not only have one of the highest levels of poverty in the country, but they are also the group most residentially segregated from and least likely to intermarry with Whites. Surveys also continue to reveal that many non-Black Americans express high levels of social distance (the degree to which people desire close or remote social relations with members of other groups) from African Americans. Given their limited social and economic resources, along with their geographic isolation, poor urban African Americans—especially children and the elderly—are disproportionately vulnerable to being left behind during a crisis situation.

What measures need to be taken to improve the social and economic position of African Americans and to avoid future disasters such as Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans?

- Skills development, employment, and health-maintenance programs need to be targeted to and strengthened for African Americans.
- Funding and access to education—including Head Start—should be increased for African Americans

to bolster their social and economic well-being and competitiveness in the labor market.

- Additional policies, resources, and investment are needed to promote the development and relocation of businesses (and thus jobs) to African American urban neighborhoods.
- Government agencies responsible for responding to natural disasters need to factor into their planning the economic and geographic isolation of African Americans—especially the African American urban poor.

Aggressive actions are needed to erase the marginalization of African Americans that Hurricane Katrina exposed. The failure to take such actions will have enormous economic and social costs—not just for African Americans, but for a society living with a disjuncture between its ideals and the reality of continued stratification along the color line.

**SOURCE:** Rogelio Saenz, “The Social and Economic Isolation of Urban African Americans.” Population Reference Bureau (Population Reference Bureau 2007):3–4. Reprinted with permission from the Population Reference Bureau.

changes in the U.S. economy have hit Latinos hard because of their low educational attainment and their labor market position, structural unemployment has different effects on the many diverse Latino barrios across the nation. The loss of jobs in Rust Belt cities has left many Puerto Ricans living in a bleak ghetto economy. Mexicans living in the Southwest, where low-paying jobs remain, have not suffered the same degree of economic dislocation.

A structural analysis of concentrated poverty does not deny that inner cities are beset with a disproportionate share of social problems. As poverty is more concentrated in inner cities, crime and violence proliferate. The poor may adopt violence as a survival strategy. As Wilson explains, “... Structural conditions provide the context within which cultural responses to chronic economic and racial subordination are developed” (Wilson, 2010:61). A structural analysis focuses on social conditions, not immoral people.

## Racial Policies in the New Century

The 1960s civil rights movement legalized race-specific remedies to end racial bias. Government policies based on race overturned segregation laws, opened voting booths, created new job opportunities, and brought hopes of racial justice for people of color. As long as it appeared that conditions were improving, government policies to end racial injustice remained in place.

But by the 1980s, the United States had become a very different society from the one in which civil rights legislation was enacted. Economic restructuring brought new dislocations to both Whites and minorities. As racial minorities became an ever, larger share of the U.S. population, racial matters grew more politicized. Many Whites began to feel uncomfortable with race-conscious policies in schools and the workplace. The social climate fostered an imaginary White disadvantage, said to be caused by affirmative action and multiculturalism. Although there is no empirical evidence for White disadvantage, a powerful conservative movement is producing new debates about the fairness of racial policies. A new form of racism has emerged. **Color-blind racism** is the belief that race no longer matters in people's experiences (Gallagher, 2012).

### Color-blind racism

Idea that race no longer matters in explaining inequality or in policymaking because racism has been overcome.

Color-blindness is the basis for the current downsizing of policies related to affirmative action, school desegregation, and voting rights. Growing racial populations are controlled through many different forms of discrimination, including employment practices, neighborhood and school segregation, and other inequalities discussed in this chapter. In addition, the demise of the welfare state and the retreat from health care and other forms of social responsibility have caused minorities to lose ground. Finally, international systems of dominance (global capitalism and geopolitical relations) are producing still more racial inequalities in the United States (Allen and Chung, 2000:802; Barlow, 2008). Despite claims of color-blindness, race remains a building-block of U.S. society, a marker of difference, and a rationale for stratification (Kaplan, 2011).

While racism is a tool for exclusion, it is also the basis for political mobilization. Since the country was founded, people of color have struggled for social change. All racially defined groups have rich histories of resistance, community building, and social protest. Racial projects are organized efforts to distribute social and economic resources along racial lines (Omi and Winant, 1994). Through social movements, groups organize and act to bring about social change. Despite the new racial climate, the struggle against racism continues. Multiracial organizations composed of racial ethnic *and* White antiracist activists continue to work at national and local levels to fight and eradicate racist prejudices and institutional racism.

## Chapter Review

### 8.1 Understand the concepts of race and ethnicity.

- The United States is moving from being predominantly White to a global society of diverse racial and ethnic peoples.
- The concept of race is a social invention. Although there is no such thing as biological

race, racial groups are set apart and singled out for unequal treatment.

- Racial classification in the United States is based on a Black–White dichotomy; however, social definitions of race have changed throughout the nation's history. While the Census Bureau has begun to capture the complex mix of racial

groups present in the United States, it uses a confusing classification for Hispanics. Hispanics are considered an ethnic group, not a race.

- An ethnic group is culturally distinct in religion, language, culture, or national origin. Some ethnic groups such as Jews, Poles, and Italians have distinguishing cultural characteristics that stem from religion and national origin. Because racial groups also have distinctive cultural characteristics, they are referred to as *racial-ethnic* groups.

### 8.2 Discuss and give examples of racial-ethnic inequality in the United States.

- Minority racial and ethnic groups are systematically disadvantaged by society's institutions. Both race and ethnicity are traditional bases for social inequality, although there are historical and contemporary differences in the societal placement of racial-ethnic groups and White ethnic groups in this society.
- With the exception of Asian American households, racial-ethnic minorities have lower median household incomes, lower participation rates in higher education, higher unemployment rates, and higher rates of certain health problems like diabetes and HIV infection.

### 8.3 Explain racial inequality from different theoretical perspectives: deficiency theories, bias theories, and structural discrimination theories.

- Deficiency theories view minority group members as unequal because they lack some important feature common among the majority.

These deficiencies may be biological (such as low intelligence) or cultural (such as the culture of poverty).

- Bias theories place the blame for inequality on the prejudiced attitudes of the members of the dominant group, which are aimed at preserving privilege.
- Structural theories argue that inequality is the result of external constraints in society rather than cultural features of minority groups. There are four main features of institutional discrimination: (a) forces of history shape present conditions; (b) discrimination can occur without conscious bigotry; (c) institutional discrimination is less visible than individual acts of discrimination; and (d) discrimination is reinforced by the interrelationships among the institutions of society.

### 8.4 Discuss and give examples of the growing racial strife in the United States.

- The racial demography of the United States is changing dramatically. Immigration and high birth rates among minorities are making the United States a multiracial, multicultural society. These trends are also creating racial anxiety and racial conflict.
- Increasing numbers of hate groups and racist acts on college campuses point to a society that is not "post-racial."
- Public policy has shifted from race-conscious remedies to a color-blind climate that is dismantling historic civil rights reforms.

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## Key Terms

**Bias theories** Explanations that blame the prejudiced attitudes of majority members for the secondary status of minorities.

**Color-blind racism** Idea that race no longer matters in explaining inequality or in policymaking because racism has been overcome.

**Deficiency theories** Explanations that view the secondary status of minorities as the result of their own behaviors and cultural traits.

**Environmental racism** The disproportionate exposure of some racial groups to toxic substances.

**Ethnic groups** Groups characterized by culturally distinctive characteristics based on language, religion, culture, or national origin.

**Institutional racism** A complex pattern of racial advantage/disadvantage built into the structure and institutions of society.

**Laissez-faire racism** A subtle racist ideology that blames the cultural norms of African Americans for their social and economic position

**Oppression** Unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power.

**Racial-ethnic group** Group labeled as a “race” by the wider society and bound together by

members’ common social and economic conditions, resulting in distinctive cultural and ethnic characteristics.

**Racial formation** Sociohistorical process by which races are continually being shaped and transformed.

**Racial profiling** The discriminatory practice by law enforcement officials of targeting individuals for suspicion of crime based on race, ethnicity, religion, or national origin.

**Structural discrimination theories** Explanations that focus on the institutionalized patterns of discrimination as the sources of the secondary status of minorities.

# Chapter 9

# Gender Inequality



## Learning Objectives

- 9.1** Compare the nature versus nurture arguments regarding gender differences in behavior.
- 9.2** Understand how you are actively engaged in “doing gender.”
- 9.3** Explain how institutions reinforce gender inequality.
- 9.4** Compare/contrast the various explanations for gender inequality in the workplace.



Every society treats women and men differently. According to the World Economic Forum, in the last nine years there has been only a small improvement in equality for women in the workplace, and the gender gap in political empowerment remains even wider than the economic gap (World Economic Forum, 2014). Despite massive political changes and economic progress in countries throughout the world, women continue to be the victims of abuse and discrimination. Even where women have made important strides in politics and the professions, women's overall progress remains uneven.

This chapter examines the social basis of gender inequality. We show how gender disparity and its problems are built into the larger world we inhabit. From the macro level of the global economy, through the institutions of society, to interpersonal relations, gender is the basis for dividing labor, assigning roles, and allocating social rewards. This chapter is divided into four sections: First, we introduce the concepts of sex and gender and nature versus nurture arguments. Next, we explain the process of learning and enacting gender roles. We end the chapter with two sections focused on structured gender inequality in societal institutions.

### Sex

Biological differences between females and males determined by chromosomes, hormones, and external and internal anatomy.

### Gender

Social and cultural roles, behaviors, and activities attached to women and men (often referred to as masculinity or femininity).

### Transgender

An individual with a gender identity that differs from their assigned, biological sex.

### Intersex

An individual born with external genitalia, internal reproductive organs, and/or endocrine systems that do not fit the typical biological definitions of female and male.

## The Difference Between Sex and Gender

### 9.1 Compare the nature versus nurture arguments regarding gender differences in behavior.

Everyone agrees that men and women are different. Until recently, these differences seemed natural. However, new research shows that gender is not natural at all. Instead, “women” and “men” are social creations. To emphasize this point, sociologists distinguish between *sex* and *gender*. **Sex** refers to the biological differences between females and males determined by chromosomes, hormones, and external and internal anatomy. **Gender** refers to the social and cultural roles, behaviors, and activities attached to women and men (often referred to as masculinity or femininity). To highlight the difference between the two terms, individuals who are **transgender** have a gender identity that is different from their assigned, biological sex. While transgender individuals have always been present in society, the issue has garnered significant media attention since the public announcement that Olympian Bruce Jenner is transgender. Since his 2015 interview with Diane Sawyer on ABC's *20/20*, he has changed his name to Caitlin Jenner and is living life openly as a woman (his true gender identity), and she has received the Arthur Ashe 2015 Courage Award.

In contrast to transgender, individuals who are **intersex** are born with external genitalia, internal reproductive organs, and/or endocrine systems that do not fit the typical biological definitions of female or male. For example, they may have external genitalia consistent with male and internal reproductive organs consistent with female. Because our society does not recognize a third sex category, intersex individuals have typically been assigned a sex (and adopted the corresponding gender role) and treated medically.

Gender is not only about women. Men often think of themselves as “genderless,” as if gender did not matter in the daily experience of their lives. Yet, from birth through old age, men are also gendered. This “gendering process, the

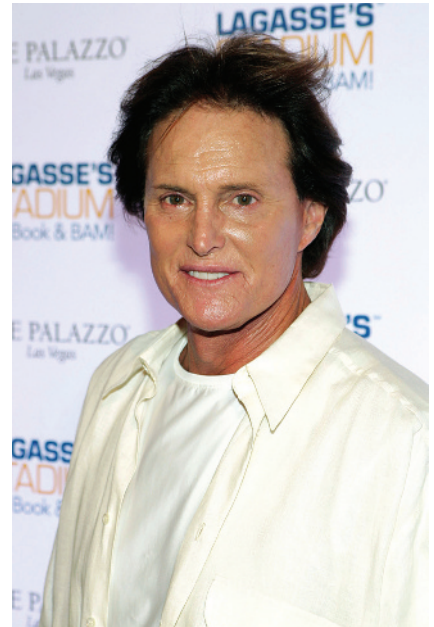
transformation of biological males into socially interacting men, is a central experience for men” (Kimmel and Messner, 2007:xvi). In the big picture, gender divisions make women and men unequal. But we cannot understand the gender system, or women’s and men’s experiences, by looking at gender alone; gender operates together with other power systems such as race, class, and sexual orientation. These overlapping categories produce different gender experiences for women and men of different races and classes. Nevertheless, the gender system denies women and men the full range of human and social possibilities.

## Is Gender Biological or Social?

We know there *are* biological differences between the two sexes. Debates about gender differences often fall back on “nature vs. nurture” arguments. The nurture camp argues that most differences are socially constructed. The opposing camp claims that differences between women and men are rooted in evolution. In 2005, Larry Summers, then president of Harvard University, caused a storm by suggesting that innate ability could be a reason there were so few women in the top positions in mathematics, engineering, and the physical sciences. Biological explanations are persistent in some fields of science (Lorber, 2011) and in the media (Barnett and Rivers, 2004). Is the popular biological explanation correct? Are men “hardwired” to dominate women? To answer this question, let us first review the evidence for each position.

**BIOLOGICAL BASES FOR GENDER ROLES** Males and females are different from the moment of conception. Chromosomal and reproductive differences make males and females physically different. Hormonal differences in the sexes are also significant. The male hormones (androgens) and female hormones (estrogens) direct the process of sex differentiation from about six weeks after conception throughout life. They make males taller, heavier, and more muscular. At puberty, they trigger the production of secondary sexual characteristics. In males, these include body and facial hair, a deeper voice, broader shoulders, and a muscular body. In females, puberty brings pubic hair, menstruation, the ability to lactate, prominent breasts, and relatively broad hips. Actually, males and females have both sets of hormones. The relative proportion of androgens and estrogens gives a person masculine or feminine physical traits.

Hormones are often blamed for aggressive traits in males; however, it is important to remember that although there are only slight differences in the level of hormones between girls and boys before puberty, researchers continue to find differences



Transgender issues received much media attention when Olympian Bruce Jenner, above, announced that he was changing his name to Caitlin Jenner and was going to live life openly as a woman, his true gender identity, below.



in aggression between young girls and boys. In 2008, researchers analyzed 148 studies of almost 74,000 children to determine if there are gender differences in both direct (physical) and indirect (social) aggression (Card et al., 2008). Their findings indicate that on average boys engage in hitting and punching more than girls, and both boys and girls are equally likely to use social aggression (gossip, rumors, or rejection). Because pre-pubescent girls and boys are similar in terms of hormones, how do we explain the difference in physical aggression?

Biological differences between women and men are only averages. They are often influenced by other factors. For example, although men are on the average larger than women, body size is influenced by diet and physical activity, which in turn may be influenced by culture, class, and race. The all-or-none categorizing of gender traits is misleading because there is considerable overlap in the distribution of traits possessed by women and men. Although most men are stronger than most women, many women are stronger than many men. And although males are on the average more aggressive than females, greater differences may be found among males than between males and females (Barnett and Rivers, 2004).

**SOCIAL BASES FOR GENDER ROLES** Cross-cultural evidence shows a wide variation of behaviors for the sexes. Furthermore, gender is constantly changing. Femininity and masculinity are not uniformly shaped from genetic makeup. Instead, they are molded differently (1) from one culture to another, (2) within any one culture over time, (3) over the course of all women's and men's lives, and (4) between and among different groups of women and men, depending on class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality (Kimmel, 1992:166)

Despite the widespread cultural variation in women's and men's activities, every known society makes gender a major category for organizing social life. This is the social construction of gender. It is a sociological perspective that calls on social rather than biological differences to show how all societies transform biological females and males into socially interacting women and men (Andersen, 2011).

## Intersections of Gender, Race, Class, and Sexuality

Like race and class, "gender is a multilevel system of differences and disadvantages that includes socioeconomic arrangements and widely held cultural beliefs at the macro level, ways of behaving in relation to others at the interactional level, and acquired traits and identities at the individual level" (Ridgeway, 1997:219). Gender inequality is tied to other inequalities such as race, class, and sexuality to sort women and men differently. These inequalities also work together to produce differences *among women* and differences *among men*. Some women derive benefits from their race, class, or sexuality while they are simultaneously restricted by gender. Such women are subordinated by patriarchy, yet race, class, and sexuality intersect to create privileged opportunities and ways of living (Baca Zinn, Hondagneu-Sotelo, and Messner, 2010). For example, men are encouraged to behave in a "masculine" fashion to prove they are not gay (Connell, 1992). In defining masculinity as the negation of homosexuality, **compulsory heterosexuality** is an important component of the gender system. Compulsory heterosexuality inflicts negative sanctions on those who are homosexual or bisexual. This system of sexuality shapes the gender system by

### Compulsory heterosexuality

The system of sexuality that imposes negative sanctions on those who are homosexual or bisexual.

discouraging attachment with members of the same sex. This enforces the dichotomy of “opposite” sexes. Sexuality is also a form of inequality in its own right because it grants privileges to those in heterosexual relationships. Like race, class, and gender, sexual identities are socially constructed categories. Sexuality is a way of organizing the social world on the basis of sexual identity and is a key linking process in the matrix of domination structured along the lines of race, class, and gender (Messner, 1996:223).

## Learning and “Doing Gender”

### 9.2 Understand how you are actively engaged in “doing gender.”

The most complex, demanding, and all-involving role a member of society must learn to play is that of female or male. “Casting” for one’s gender role takes place immediately at birth after a quick biological inspection and the role of “female” or “male” is assigned. It is an assignment that will last one’s entire lifetime and affect virtually everything one ever does. A large part of the next twenty years or so will be spent gradually learning and perfecting one’s assigned sex role (David and Brannon, 1980:117).

Sociologists use the term *gender socialization* to describe how we learn gender. Understanding socialization is important not only to explaining gender, but to explain gender inequality (Martin, 2005:457). From infancy through early childhood and beyond, children learn what is expected of boys and girls, and they learn to behave according to those expectations. Sociologists call this behavior “doing gender” (West and Zimmerman, 1987).

The traits associated with conventional gender roles are those valued by the dominant society. Keep in mind that gender is not the same in all classes and races. However, most research on gender socialization reflects primarily the experience of White middle-class people—those who are most often the research subjects of these studies. How gender is learned depends on a variety of social conditions affecting the socialization practices of girls and boys. Still, society molds boys and girls along different lines.

### Learning Gender at Home

Girls and boys are perceived and treated differently from the moment of birth. Their access to clothes, toys, books, playmates, and expressions of emotion are severely limited by gender (Martin, 2005:457). Parents and “congratulations” greeting cards describe newborn daughters as “sweet,” whereas boys are immediately described as “strong” and “hardy.” Cards sent to parents depict ribbons, hearts, and flowers for girls—but mobiles, sports equipment, and vehicles for boys. Newborn greeting cards thus project an early gender scheme that introduces two “classes” of babies: one decorative, the other physically active (Valian, 1998:19–20).

Children learn at a very early age what it means to be a boy or girl in our society. One of the strongest influences on gender role development in children occurs within the family setting, with parents passing on both overtly and covertly their own beliefs about gender. From the time their children are babies, parents treat sons and daughters differently, dressing infants in gender-specific colors and giving them

gender-differentiated toys. Color-coded differences reveal a relentless gender segregation with “little girls becoming adamantly attached to pink” (Sandler, 2009). Parents expect different behaviors from boys and girls (Thorne, 1993; Witt, 1997). Although both mothers and fathers contribute to the gender stereotyping of their children, fathers have been found to reinforce gender stereotyping more often than mothers (Campenni, 1999; Idle, Wood, and Desmarais, 1993; Valian, 1998; Witt, 1997).

### Androgyny

The integration of traditional feminine and masculine characteristics in the same individual.

Gendered socialization is found even where gender roles are changing and socialization is becoming more flexible or androgynous. **Androgyny** refers to the combination of feminine and masculine characteristics in the same individual. Are girls more androgynous than boys? If so, what explains the difference? And what difference does androgyny make in an individual’s overall well-being? Research has found that fathers who display the most traditional attitudes about gender transmit their ideas onto their sons more so than onto their daughters, whereas mothers who tend to have more liberal attitudes do not transmit their attitudes onto their daughters more than their sons. Consequently, “when the sons establish their own families, they will be more likely than the daughters to transmit traditional attitudes to their own sons” (Kulik, 2002: 456). Other researchers have also found that whereas adolescent girls tend to be more supportive of egalitarian gender roles than their parents (especially their fathers), adolescent boys follow their fathers’ resistance to changes in traditional male roles. Therefore, it is predictable that males would be less likely than females to develop androgynous characteristics (Burt and Scott, 2002). In a study of childcare books and parenting websites, sociologist Karen Martin found some evidence of gender-neutral childrearing. But she also found that children’s nonconformity to gender roles is still viewed as problematic by the larger society because it is often linked with homosexuality (Martin, 2005).

## Learning Gender Through Play

Children teach each other to behave according to cultural expectations. Barrie Thorne’s (Thorne, 1993) study of gender play in multiracial school settings found that boys control more space, more often violate girls’ activities, and treat girls as contaminating. According to Thorne, these common ritualized interactions reflect larger structures of male dominance. In reality, the fun and games of everyday schoolchildren are *power play*, a complex social process involving both gender separation and togetherness. Children’s power play changes with age, ethnicity, race, class, and social context. In her analysis of how children construct gender in their daily play, Thorne shifted the focus from individual to *social relations*:

The social construction of gender is an active and ongoing process.... Gender categories, gender identities, gender divisions, and gender-based groups, gender meanings—all are produced actively and collaboratively, in everyday life. When kids maneuver to form same-gender groups on the playground or organize a kickball game as “boys-against-the-girls,” they produce a sense of gender as dichotomy and opposition. And when girls and boys work cooperatively on a classroom project, they actively undermine a sense of gender as opposition. This emphasis on action and activity, and on everyday social interactions that are sometimes contradictory, provides an antidote to the view of children as passively socialized. Gender is not something one passively “is” or “has.” (1993:4–5)

Subsequent research on fourth-grade children in schoolyards supports Thorne's conclusions about gendered interaction in schoolyards. Boyle and her colleagues (Boyle, Marshall, and Robeson, 2003) found a great deal of intragender variation in the schoolyard, with girls in particular engaging in many different activities. They also found that boys are more easily accepted into play with girls than when girls try to play with a group of boys and that boys tend to use more space in the schoolyard and are more likely to violate girls' space and games than the reverse.

**CHILDREN'S BOOKS** In addition to the parents' active role in reinforcing society's gender demands, a subtler message is emitted from picture books for preschool children. A classic sociological study of award-winning children's books conducted more than forty years ago found the following characteristics (Weitzman et al., 1972):

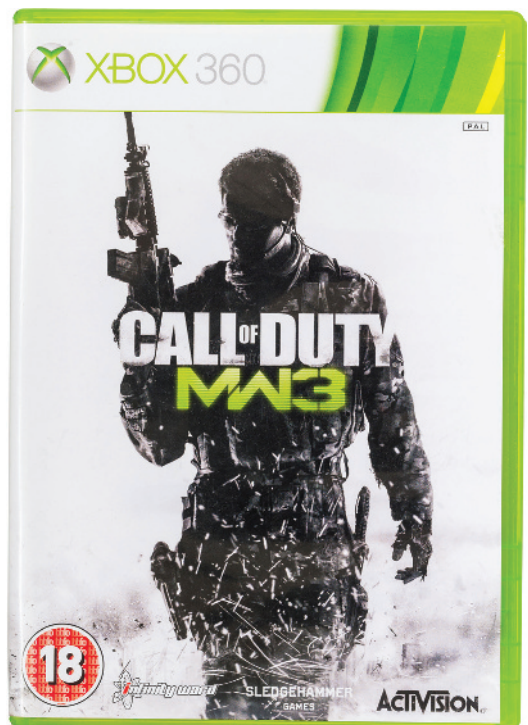
- Females were virtually invisible. The ratio of male pictures to female pictures was 11:1. The ratio of male to female animals was 95:1.
- The activities of boys and girls varied greatly. Boys were active in outdoor activities, whereas girls were passive and most often found indoors. The activity of the girls typically was that of some service for boys.
- Adult men and women (role models) were very different. Men led, women followed. Females were passive and males active. Not one woman in these books had a job or profession; they were always mothers and wives.

We have seen improvements in how girls and women are portrayed. Females are no longer invisible, they are as likely as males to be included in the books, and they have roles beyond their family roles. In many respects, however, gendered messages in children's books still exist (McCabe et al., 2011). Subsequent studies have found that despite some improvement, women and girls are still underrepresented in book titles and as central characters (Nilges and Spencer, 2002; McCabe et al., 2011). A 2013 study of 300 children's picture books found that the stereotype of mother as homemaker/caregiver and father as breadwinner/provider is still a prevalent theme (DeWitt, Cready, and Seward, 2013).

**TOYS** Toys play a major part in gender socialization. Toys entertain children; they also teach them particular skills and encourage them to explore a variety of roles they may one day occupy as adults. Like clothing, kids' toy stores and departments are sharply divided into girls' and boys' sections. Toys for boys tend to encourage exploration, manipulation, invention, construction, competition, and aggression. In contrast, girls' toys typically rate high on manipulability, creativity, nurturance, and attractiveness. Playing with gendered toys may encourage different skills in girls and boys (Renzetti and Curran, 2003: 89–92).

Girls are often involved in cross-gender or neutral toy behavior. Girls are often encouraged by both parents to branch out and play with neutral toys

The top video games for boys often emphasize violence and aggression.



some of the time, but boys tend not to be given this same encouragement (England, 2010). While we may be seeing some changes in play and socialization of girls, the same does not appear true for boys. Studies have also found that messages transmitted to children from advertisements affect their toy use and that the effects are different for boys and girls. Research finds that the messages in commercials have stronger effects on boys than on girls (Pike and Jennings, 2005).

**VIDEO GAMES** Although girls are now encouraged to engage in activities such as playing video games, traditional gender stereotypes still underlie this pastime. Feminine games are certainly not out—in fact, these pink- and purple-gendered games are doing quite well with little girls all over the world. Google’s “top video games for girls” lists include Barbie Dreamhouse Party, Frozen, and Petz; top games for boys include sports video games and violent war games.

Dichotomous gender experiences may be more characteristic of White middle-class children than children of other races. Recent studies examining whether or not the socialization of Black children is more gender-neutral than that in other groups are inconsistent. Most scholars now say there is too much variation in any group to make generalizations (Hill and Sprague, 1999; M. Smith, 2001).

## Learning Gender Through Language

Language perpetuates male dominance by ignoring, trivializing, and sexualizing women. Use of the pronoun *he* (when the sex of the person is unspecified) and the generic term *mankind* to refer to humanity in general are obvious examples of how the English language ignores women. Common sayings such as “that’s women’s work” (as opposed to “that’s men’s work”), jokes about female drivers, and phrases such as *women and children first* are trivializing. Women, more than men, are commonly referred to in terms that have sexual connotations. Terms referring to men (*studs, jocks*) that do have sexual meanings imply power and success, whereas terms applied to women (*chicks, bimbos, hos*) imply promiscuity or subordination. In fact, the term *promiscuous* is usually applied only to women, although its literal meaning applies to either sex (Richmond-Abbott, 1992:93). Research shows that there are many derogatory terms for women, but there are few for men generically (Sapiro, 1999:329). Not only are there fewer derogatory terms that refer to men, but often such terms are considered derogatory because they invoke images of women. “Some of the more common derogatory terms applied to men such as *bastard, motherfucker, and son of a bitch* actually degrade women in their role as mothers” (Romaine, 1999:99) (see “A Closer Look: ‘Bitches,’ ‘Bunnies,’ and ‘Biddies’” on the use of animal terms to denigrate women).

## Doing Gender: Interpersonal Behavior

Gender inequality is different than other forms of inequality because individuals on both sides of the power divide (that is, women and men) interact very frequently (in the home, in the workplace, and in other role relations). Consequently, gender inequalities can be reproduced and resisted in everyday interactions (Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin, 1999:191).

Sociologists have done extensive research on the ways in which women and men interact, with particular attention paid to communication styles. This research has found that in mixed-sex groups, men talk more, show more visual dominance, and

## A CLOSER LOOK

**“Bitches,” “Bunnies,” and “Biddies”****How Animal Metaphors Degrade, Sexualize, and Denigrate Women**

Many of the most derogatory words used to refer to women in our society share something in common: They use animal imagery to degrade women. For instance, women are frequently ridiculed as “bitches” and “shrews.” Examining the definitions of these words makes their deeper meanings clear: The word *bitch* is defined as “the female of the dog, wolf, fox, etc.” and second as “a lewd, or promiscuous woman” (*Webster’s New World Dictionary*, 1991:143), and a *shrew* is defined as “a scolding, nagging, evil-tempered woman” (*Webster’s New World Dictionary*, 1991:1243).

Why have such words that originally referred to animals come to be used as common slurs against women? To answer this question, we must address the positioning of animals in our society. In brief, humans are perceived as being distinct from and superior to other animals. This belief has left animals vulnerable to widespread abuse at human hands. This widespread abuse is possible because animals are considered property and are generally treated as commodities. Equating women (and other marginalized groups) with animals through language simultaneously degrades them as “less-than-human” (read as “less-than-men”) and reinforces our society’s devaluation of their lives.

Animal metaphors are also used to refer to privileged groups of men, but such references are certainly fewer in number (as are derogatory terms toward men in general) and tend to invoke the image of strong, virile, and more revered animals such as tigers and bulls. In contrast, women are compared to smaller, domesticated/dominated animals (such as cats or “chicks”), or to animals that are hunted as prey (such as foxes; Romaine, 1999:101; Weatherall, 2002:26). The use of specific animal metaphors therefore both illustrates and reinforces the power differentials between men and women in society. As Lakoff explained,

English (like other languages) has many words describing women who are interested in power, presupposing the inappropriateness of that attitude. *Shrew* and *bitch* are among the more polite. There are no equivalents for men. There are words presupposing negative connotations for men who do not dominate “their” women, *henpecked* and *pussy-whipped* among them. There is no female equivalent. (2003:162; emphasis in original)

Not only are women who seek power commonly vilified as animals, but also the terms used to refer to men who fail to invoke their power against women likewise appeal to images of women as animals. Women are said to “henpeck,” “pussywhip,” and consequently emasculate and thus dehumanize men.

These animal metaphors not only serve to degrade individuals, but some also objectify and sexualize women: referring to a woman as a “pussy” or a “piece of tail” are clear illustrations. Often this sexualization is intertwined with the imagery of the hunt, whereby the (heterosexual) man is viewed as the predator and the woman/animal his prey. Is it a coincidence that the most infamous corporate symbol of the sexualization of women—the Playboy bunny—is an



animal, and a popularly hunted animal at that? The reverse is also true: Hunted animals are frequently referred to in ways that conjure up sexualized images of women. For instance, a study of sport hunting magazines details instances where bird decoys were referred to as “Barbie hens,” deer antlers were referred to as “big ‘uns,” and the use of the feminine pronoun “she” to refer to hunted animals was commonplace (Kalof, Fitzgerald, and Baralt, 2004).

In addition to the use of animal metaphors to degrade and sexualize women, animals and women who do not conform to society’s demands and standards are also referred to using the same terms. For instance, the term *maiden* refers to a horse who has not won a race, but it is also used to refer to an unmarried woman (Romaine, 1999: 92). Animals and women who are perceived as being “past their prime” and whose bodies no longer neatly conform to the needs of society are referred to using the same terms, such as “biddy”: “The hen (‘biddy’) who offers neither desirable flesh nor continued profitable egg production is regarded as ‘spent’—and discarded. No longer sexually attractive or able to reproduce, the human ‘old biddy’ too has outlived her usefulness” (Dunayer, 1995: 13).

At first glance, these linguistic metaphors may appear to be harmless. However, they not only reflect the current place of women and animals in society relative to men, but they also serve to subtly reinforce it. Therefore, these metaphors, and what they represent, warrant further examination and critique.

**SOURCE:** Fitzgerald, Amy, “‘BITCHES,’ ‘BUNNIES,’ AND ‘BIDDIES’: How Animal Metaphors Degrade, Sexualize, and Denigrate Women.” Copyright © 2004. Used with permission.

interrupt more, whereas women display more tentative and polite speech patterns (Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin, 1999).

Various forms of nonverbal communication also sustain male dominance. Men take up more space than women and touch women without permission more than women touch men. Women, on the other hand, engage in more eye contact, smile more, and generally exhibit behavior associated with low status. These behaviors show how gender is continually created in various kinds of social interaction. Gender is something we create in interaction, not something we are (Risman, 1998:6).

Producing gender through interaction is becoming a lively sociological topic. Instead of treating gender only as identity, or a socialization, or stratification, this perspective emphasizes gender as dynamic *practices*—what people say and do as they engage in social interaction (Martin, 2003; Ridgeway, 1997). In this view, gender is a system of action in which gendered practices are learned and enacted in all social settings throughout an individual’s life. Gender is enacted in school, families, workplaces, houses of worship, and social movements. “In time, like riding a bicycle, gendering practices become almost automatic” (Martin, 2003:325).

### Gender roles approach

Males and females differ because of socialization. The assumption is that males and females learn to be different.

## Socialization versus Structure: Two Approaches to Gender Inequality

The discussion so far demonstrates that gender differences are learned. This **gender roles approach** emphasizes traits that individuals acquire during the course of socialization, such as independent or dependent behaviors and ways of relating. The

**gender structure approach**, on the other hand, emphasizes factors that are external to individuals, such as the social structures and social interactions that reward women and men differently. These approaches differ in how they view the sexes, in how they explain the causes and effects of sexism, and in the solutions they suggest for ending inequality. Understanding sexism requires both individual and structural approaches. Although gender roles are learned by individuals and produce differences in the personalities and behaviors of women and men, societal forces maintain **gender stratification**. Thus, we next examine how gender inequality is perpetuated at the structural level.

### Gender structure approach

Males and females differ because of factors external to them, such as the social structures and institutions that reward men and women differently.

### Gender stratification

Differential ranking and rewarding of women's and men's roles.

### Gendered institutions

All social institutions are organized by gender.

### Male dominance

Beliefs, meanings, and placement that value men over women and that institutionalize male control of socially valued resources.

## Reinforcing Gender Inequality Through Institutions

### 9.3 Explain how institutions reinforce gender inequality.

The term **gendered institutions** means that entire institutions are patterned by gender (Acker, 1992; Lorber, 2005). Everywhere we look—the global economy, politics, religion, education, and family life—men are in power. But men are not uniformly dominant. Some men have great power over other men, and others feel powerless to change their situation or role. Nevertheless, socially defined differences between women and men legitimate **male dominance**, which refers to the beliefs and placement that value men over women and that institutionalize male control of socially valued resources. In this section, we examine some of the major institutions in society and how they contribute to gender inequality.

### Formal Education

In 1972, Congress outlawed gender discrimination in public schools through Title IX of the Educational Amendments Act. Studies by the American Association of University Women have offered compelling evidence that four decades after the passage of Title IX, girls and boys are not receiving the same education.

**CURRICULUM** Schools are charged with the responsibility of equipping students to study subjects (e.g., reading, writing, mathematics, and history) known collectively as the formal curriculum. But schools also teach students particular social, political, and economic values that constitute the so-called hidden curriculum operating alongside the more formal one. Both formal and informal curricula are powerful shapers of gender (Booher-Jennings, 2008; Renzetti and Curran, 2003:109).

Numerous studies find gender differences in the curriculum students are exposed to. For example, girls are more likely to participate in biological sciences and boys in the physical sciences (Adamuti-Trache and Andres, 2008; Sadker, 2002). In math, although girls and boys tend to take the same number of math courses, there are differences in what courses they take. Girls are more likely to end their math courses after a second algebra course; in fact, girls now outnumber boys in taking algebra and geometry. But boys are more likely to take trigonometry and calculus, which give them an advantage in higher-level math skills (AAUW, 1999; Andersen, 2011).

Although girls on average receive higher grades in high school than boys, they tend to score lower on some standardized tests, which are particularly important because such tests' scores are used to make decisions on the awarding of college

scholarships and admissions. Schools ignore topics that matter in students' lives. The "evaded curriculum" is a term coined in the AAUW Report to refer to matters central to the lives of students that are touched on only briefly, if at all, in most schools. Students receive inadequate education on sexuality, teen pregnancy, the AIDS crisis, and the increase of sexually transmitted diseases among adolescents. According to the AAUW report, gender bias also affects males. Three out of four boys currently report that they were the targets of sexual harassment in schools—usually of taunts challenging their masculinity. In addition, although girls receive lower test grades, boys often receive lower overall course grades.

**TEACHER-STUDENT INTERACTIONS** Since the 1980s, educational reforms have been in place to foster gender equity in the schools. Teachers are advised to encourage cooperative cross-sex learning and to monitor their own (teacher) behavior to be sure they reward male and female students equally.

Despite the fact that many teachers are trying to interact with their students in non-gendered ways, studies show that they nonetheless continue to do so. In her study of third-grade classes, Garrahy (Garrahy, 2001) found that although the teachers were claiming to be gender neutral, they often interacted differently with boys in the classroom. Spencer and Toleman (Spencer and Toleman, 2003) found that the teachers spent more time with male students when they were working independently and in small groups; perhaps most troubling, the students normalized and naturalized these gender differences. Unfortunately, despite the increasing awareness of gender inequality within schools, new teachers are not adequately taught about gender equity issues.

**FEMALE ROLE MODELS** The work that women and men do in the schools supports gender inequality. The pattern is the familiar one found in hospitals, business offices, and throughout the work world: Women occupy the bottom rungs while men have the more powerful positions. Women make up a large percentage of the nation's classroom teachers but a much smaller percentage of school district superintendents. In 2012, women comprised 76.3 percent of all elementary and secondary schoolteachers and 52 percent of all school administrators (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013).

Women are more likely to enroll in college than men. Since 1996, women have earned more bachelor's degrees than men. But women are far from equal in faculty and administrative ranks (Malveaux, 2011). As the level of education increases, the proportion of women teachers declines. Even after four decades of attention to gender equity, women have not achieved the same status as men. Women are less likely than men to be employed as full-time tenure track faculty members, less likely to hold tenured or full professor positions, and comprise about a quarter of all college and university presidents (Curtis, 2011).

In the 2010 academic year (more than twenty years after the Office of Civil Rights issued guidelines spelling out the obligations of colleges and universities in the development of affirmative action programs), women represented only 42 percent of full-time faculty. Furthermore, they remained overwhelmingly in the lower faculty ranks, where faculty are much less likely to hold tenure. In 2010, women comprised 30 percent of full professors, 41 percent of associate professors, 48 percent of assistant professors, and 54 percent of instructors/lecturers. Twenty-six percent of college presidents are women (Cook and Kim, 2012; National Center for Education Statistics, 2010).

**SPORTS** Sports in U.S. high schools and colleges have historically been almost exclusively a male preserve (this section is dependent on Sage and Eitzen, 2013). The truth of this observation is clearly evident if one compares by sex the number of participants, facilities, support of school administrations, and financial support.

Such disparities have been based on the traditional assumptions that competitive sport is basically a masculine activity and that the proper roles of girls and women are as spectators and cheerleaders. What is the impact on a society that encourages its boys and young men to participate in sports while expecting its girls and young women to be spectators and cheerleaders? Sports reinforce societal expectations for males and females. Males are to be dominant and aggressive—the doers—while females are expected to be passive supporters of men, attaining status through the efforts of their menfolk.

An important consequence of this traditional view is that approximately half of the population has been denied access to all that sport has to offer (physical conditioning, enjoyment, teamwork, goal attainment, ego enhancement, social status, and competitiveness). School administrators, school boards, and citizens of local communities have long assumed that sports participation has general educational value. If so, then girls and women should also be allowed to receive the benefits.

In 1972, passage of Title IX of the Educational Amendments Act required that schools receiving federal funds must provide equal opportunities for males and females. Despite considerable opposition by school administrators, athletic directors, and school boards, major changes occurred over time because of this federal legislation. More monies were spent on women's sports, better facilities and equipment were provided, and women were gradually accepted as athletes. The most significant result was an increase in female participation. The number of high school girls participating in interscholastic sports increased from 300,000 in 1971 to 3.173 million in 2011. By the 2014 school year, 42.1 percent of the 7.7 million high school participants were female, and the number of sports available to them was more than double the number in 1970. Similar growth patterns occurred in colleges and universities (Acosta and Carpenter, 2012).

At the intercollegiate level, on the positive side, budgets for women's sports improved dramatically, from less than 1 percent of the men's budgets and no athletic scholarships in 1970 to 38 percent of the men's budgets and 33 percent of the scholarship budgets in 2008. Despite this marked improvement, women athletes remain underfunded. In Division 1 colleges and universities, women account for 53 percent of the college student population. But female athletes receive only 45 percent of participation opportunities, 34 percent of total money spent on total athletic scholarship dollars, and 32 percent of recruiting dollars. This inequality is reinforced by unequal media attention, the scheduling of games (men's games are commonly the featured games), and the increasing lack of women in positions of power. One ironic consequence of Title IX has been that as

Because of Title IX, female participation in sports has significantly increased.



opportunities for female athletes increased and programs expanded, the opportunities for women as coaches and administrators diminished. In the early 1970s, most coaches of women's intercollegiate teams were women. By 2008, 46 percent of women's team coaches were women (Lopiano, 2008). Females who aspire to coaching and athletic administration have fewer opportunities than males, and girls see fewer women as role models in such positions. Thus, even with federal legislation mandating gender equality, male dominance is maintained.

## Mass Media

Much of the information we receive about the world around us comes not from direct experience but from the mass media—radio, television, newspapers, magazines, and the Internet. Although media are often blamed for the problems of modern society, they are not monolithic and do not present us with a simple message. The media have tremendous power. They can distort women's images and they can also bring about change.

The Women's Media Center (Women's Media Center, 2014) reviewed 27,000 pieces of content produced from October 1 through December 31, 2013, at the nation's top twenty television networks, newspapers, online news sites, and news wire services. They conclude:

- 36.1 percent of bylines and on-camera appearances are women.
- Women are more likely to cover health and lifestyle news and less likely to cover crime, justice, and world politics.
- Women are underrepresented among newsroom staff, men are quoted more often in newspapers, and male opinion-page writers outnumber women 4-to-1.
- In sports news, editors are 90 percent male and 90 percent White.
- In radio, only two women are among the 183 sports talk radio hosts "Heavy Hundred" list.
- In the top 100 films in 2012, women had fewer speaking roles than in any year since 2007 (28.4 percent).

Images of women on entertainment television have changed greatly in recent decades. A report by the National Commission on Working Women found increasing diversity of characters portraying working women as television's most significant improvement. In many serials, women do play strong and intelligent roles, but in just as many shows, men are still the major characters and women are cast as glamorous objects, scheming villains, or servants. And for every contemporary show that includes positive images of women, there are numerous other shows in which women are sidekicks to men, sexual objects, or helpless imbeciles (Andersen, 2011:62).

Television commercials have long presented the sexes in stereotyped ways. Women appear less frequently in ads than men, are much more likely to be seen in the home than in work settings, and are much more likely to appear in ads for food, home, and beauty/clothing products. Men are less likely to be shown cooking, cleaning, shopping, or washing dishes. When men are shown in the context of family life, they are usually engaged in activities stereotypically associated with men—in cars or mowing the lawn. Or, if doing domestic chores typically associated with women, they are generally shown messing it up. Moreover, they are usually seen with boys, not girls, and rarely with infants (Andersen, 2011:621). In the past

decades, however, the potential buying power of working women has caused the advertising industry to modify women's image. Working women have become targets of advertising campaigns. But most advertising aimed at career women sends the message that they should be superwomen—managing multiple roles of wife, mother, and career woman, and being glamorous as well. Such multifarious expectations are not imposed on men.

The advertising aimed at “the new woman” places additional stresses on women and at the same time upholds male privilege. Television commercials that show women breezing in from their jobs to sort the laundry or pop dinner in the oven reinforce the notion that it is all right for a woman to pursue a career as long as she can still handle the housework.

## Religion

Despite important differences in religious doctrines, there are common views about gender. Among these are the beliefs that (1) women and men have different missions and different standards of behavior and (2) although women and men are equal in the eyes of the deity, women are to some degree subordinated to men (Thomas, 2007). Limiting discussion to the Judeo-Christian heritage, let us examine some teachings from the Old and New Testaments regarding the place of women. The Old Testament established male supremacy in many ways. Images of God are male. Females were second to males because Eve was created from Adam's rib. According to the scriptures, only a male could divorce a spouse. A woman who was not a virgin at marriage could be stoned to death. Girls could be purchased for marriage, and employers were enjoined to pay women only three-fifths the wages of men.

The New Testament retained the tradition of male dominance. Jesus was the son of a male God, not of Mary, who remained a virgin. All the disciples were male. The great leader of the early church, the Apostle Paul, was especially adamant in arguing for the primacy of males over females. According to Paul, “the husband is supreme over his wife,” “woman was created for man's sake,” and “women should not teach nor usurp authority over the man, but to be silent.” Contemporary religious thought reflects this heritage. In 1998, the Southern Baptist Convention, the nation's biggest Protestant denomination, amended its statement of beliefs to include a declaration that “a woman shall submit herself graciously to her husband's leadership and a husband should provide for, protect and lead his family.” Some denominations limit or even forbid women from decision making. Others allow women to vote but limit their participation in leadership roles.

There are, however, many indications of change. Throughout the West, women are more involved in churches and religious life (Thomas, 2007; Van Biema, 2004). The National Council of Churches seeks to end sexist language and to use “inclusive language” in the Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Terms such as *man*, *mankind*, *brothers*, *sons*, *churchmen*, and *laymen* would be replaced by neutral terms that include reference to female gender. But these terms, although helpful, do not address a fundamental theological cause: “When God is perceived as a male, then expecting a male voice interpreting the word of God naturally follows” (Zelizer, 2004: 11A).

The percentage of female seminary students has exploded in the past few decades. Yet women make up only 17 percent of the nation's clergy (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012b). Across the United States, women clergy are struggling for equal rights, bumping up against what many call a "stained glass ceiling." Today, half of all religious denominations in the United States ordain women. At the same time, the formal rules and practices discriminate against women. In denominations that ordain women and those that do not, women often fill the same jobs: leading small churches, directing special church programs, preaching, and evangelizing (Van Biema, 2004). Despite the opposition of organized religion, many women are making advances within established churches and leaving their mark on the ministerial profession.

## The Law

That the law has been discriminatory against women is beyond dispute. We need only recall that women were denied the right to vote prior to the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment.

During the past four decades, legal reforms and public policy changes have attempted to place women and men on more equal footing. Some laws that focus on employment include the 1963 Equal Pay Act, Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and the 1978 Pregnancy Discrimination Act. The 1972 Educational Amendments Act calls for gender equality in education. Other reforms have provided the framework for important institutional changes. For example, sexist discrimination in the granting of credit has been ruled illegal, and the law now prohibits discrimination against pregnant women in the workforce. Affirmative action (which is now under assault) remedied some kinds of gender discrimination in employment. Sexist discrimination in housing is prohibited, and the gendered requirements in the airline industry have been eliminated. Such laws now provide a basis for the equal treatment of women and men. But the force of these new laws depends on how well they are enforced and how they are interpreted in the courts when they are disputed.

The United States lags behind other countries in the number of female elected officials.



Today, many legal reforms are threatened by recent Supreme Court decisions in the areas of abortion and affirmative action. For example, the right to abortion became the law of the land in the *Roe v. Wade* decision of 1973. *Roe* was a major breakthrough for women, giving them the choice to control their bodies. But in 1989 and 1992, the Supreme Court narrowed women's rights by imposing restrictions on abortion. *Roe* is still on the books, but the Supreme Court has returned the nation to a pre-*Roe v. Wade* patchwork of state regulations. Forty-nine states now have restrictions that make it more difficult for women to obtain abortions and exercise their right to choose.

## Politics

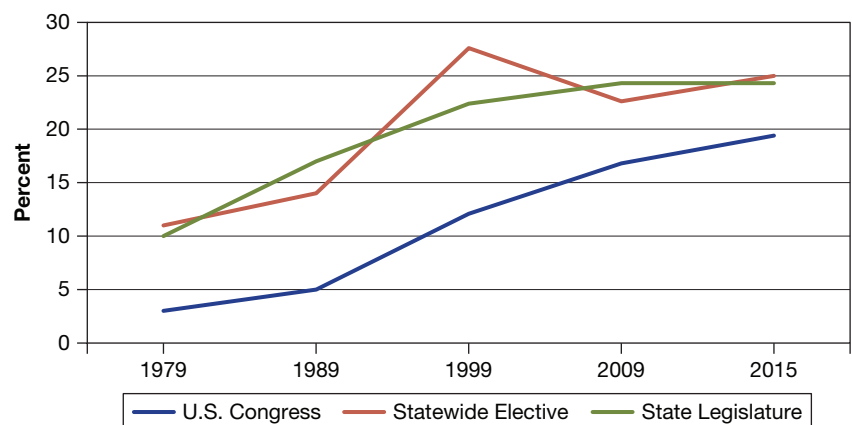
Women's political participation has always been different from that of men. Women received the right to vote in 1920, when the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified. Although women make up a very small percentage of officeholders, 1992 was a turning point for women in politics. Controversies such as Anita Hill's harassment allegations, the abortion rights battle, and the lack of representation at all levels of politics propelled women into the political arena. In 1992, Congress experienced its biggest influx of women (and minorities) in history. Subsequent elections have increased the number of women in our national legislature; however, "at the current rate of progress, it will take nearly 500 years for women to reach fair representation in government" (quoted in Hill, 2014:1). Ninety years after the first woman was elected to congress, women still hold less than a fifth of all national seats. As of 2014, women hold 100 (18.7 percent) of the 535 seats in Congress, 20 (20 percent) of the 100 seats in the Senate, and 80 (18.4 percent) of the 435 seats in the House of Representatives (Center for American Women and Politics, 2014). (See Figure 9.1 for the percentages of U.S. women in elective office over time.)

The gender gap in our nation's capital is scandalous. In Washington, DC's less visible workforce of professional staff employees, women hold 60 percent of the jobs, but they are nowhere equal to men. Congress has two classes of personal staff employees: highly paid men who hold most of the power and lower-paid women relegated to clerical and support staff. Many answer the phones and write letters to constituents— invisible labor that is crucial to their boss's reelection.

Women had a major place in the 2008 presidential election, with Hillary Clinton in the Democratic primary and Sarah Palin as the Republican nominee for vice president. And, in July 2016, Hillary Clinton became the first woman in U.S. history to become the presidential nominee of a major political party. In spite of this progress, America ranks 98th in the world for percentage of women in its national legislature (notably behind Kenya and Indonesia) (Hill, 2014). Women have served as heads of state in nations such as Canada, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Turkey, Pakistan, Chile, South Korea, and Liberia (Falk, 2008). In the 200-year history of the United States, there has never been a female president or vice president (although, for the first time in America's history, this could change with the November 2016 Presidential election). Today, there are only three female justices on the U.S. Supreme Court. These numbers are difficult to justify in a country where half the population is female.

**Figure 9.1** Percentages of Women in Elective Offices

SOURCE: Data from the Center for American Women in Politics. <http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/>





## Structured Gender Inequality in the Workplace

### 9.4 Compare/contrast the various explanations for gender inequality in the workplace.

In this section, we focus on the contemporary workplace, which has one of the highest levels of workplace gender inequality in the industrial world (Kimmel, 2004: 186). The workplace distributes women and men in different settings, assigns them different duties, and rewards them unequally.

### Occupational Distribution

Women's labor force participation rates have grown at a faster pace than men's in recent decades. Between 1970 and the early 1990s, women's numbers in the labor force increased twice as fast as those of men. (See the labor force participation rates for men and women in Figure 9.2.) At present, women's rate of labor force participation is holding steadily, while men's is declining. In 2013, 57.2 percent of women over 16 were in the labor force, compared with 69.7 percent of men. Today, as in the past, women's employment rates vary by race. African American women have had a long history of high workforce participation rates. In 2012, they participated in the labor force at a rate of 59.2 percent, compared with 56.9 percent of White women and 55.7 percent of Hispanic women (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013).

The increase in women's participation in the U.S. labor force is one of the most important social trends of the past century. Today's working woman may be any age. She may be any race. She may be a nurse or a secretary or a factory worker or a department store clerk or a public school teacher. Or she may be—although it is much less

common—a physician or the president of a corporation or the head of a school system. Hers may be the familiar face seen daily behind the counter at the neighborhood coffee shop, or she may work virtually unseen, mopping floors at midnight in an empty office building.

Although the increase in women's labor force participation rates has been a social revolution, women have not achieved equality in the workplace. **Occupational sex segregation** (or **gender segregation**) refers to the pattern whereby women and men are situated in different jobs throughout the labor force (Andersen, 2011:128). The overall degree of gender segregation has not changed much since 1900. Women and men are still concentrated in different occupations (Charles and Grusky, 2005; England, 2010).

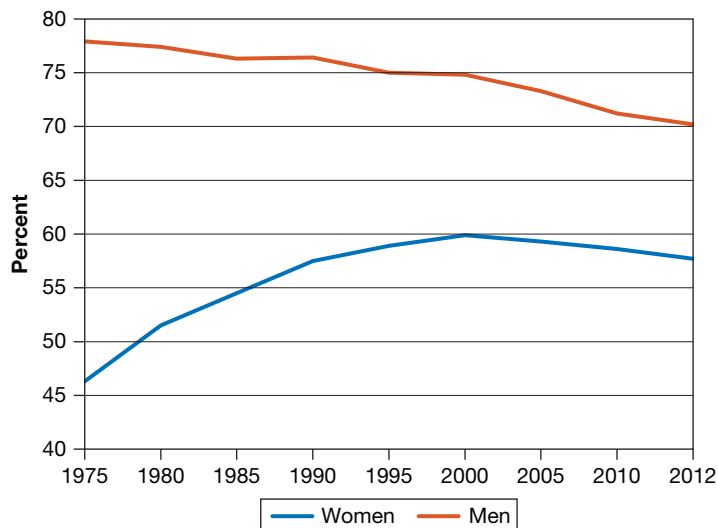
The typical female worker is a wage earner in clerical, service, manufacturing, or some technical job that

#### Occupational sex segregation

Pattern whereby women and men are situated in different jobs throughout the labor force.

**Figure 9.2** Labor Force Participation Rates by Sex, 1975–2012

**SOURCE:** Data from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. BLS Reports 2014. Women in the Labor Force: A Databook." Report 1049. Available Online: <http://www.bls.gov/cps/wlf-databook-2013.pdf>.



pays poorly and gives her little control over her work. The largest share of women work in “service” and “sales and office” jobs. In fact, the most common job for women is the same as it was 60 years ago—between 2006 and 2010, about 4 million people worked as secretaries and administrative assistants (96 percent of them were women) (Huffington, 2013). (See Table 9.1 for a listing of the twenty leading occupations for women.)

**Table 9.1** Twenty Leading Occupations of Employed Women 2010 Annual Averages (employment in thousands)

Occupation	Total Employed Women	Total Employed (Men and Women)	Percent Women	Women's Median Weekly Earnings
Total, 16 years and older (all employed women)	65,638	139,064	47.2%	\$669
Secretaries and administrative assistants	2,962	3,082	96.1	657
Registered nurses	2,590	2,843	91.1	1,039
Elementary and middle school teachers	2,301	2,813	81.8	931
Cashiers	2,291	3,109	73.7	366
Retail salespersons	1,705	3,286	51.9	421
Nursing, psychiatric, and home health aides	1,700	1,928	88.2	427
Waiters and waitresses	1,470	2,067	71.1	381
First-line supervisors/managers of retail sales workers	1,375	3,132	43.9	578
Customer service representatives	1,263	1,896	66.6	586
Maids and housekeeping cleaners	1,252	1,407	89.0	376
Receptionists and information clerks	1,187	1,281	92.7	529
Childcare workers	1,181	1,247	94.7	398
Bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks	1,179	1,297	90.9	628
First-line supervisors/managers of office and administrative support	1,035	1,507	68.7	726
Managers, all others	1,014	2,898	35.0	1,045
Accountants and auditors	989	1,646	60.1	953
Teacher assistants	893	966	92.4	485
Personal and home care aides	838	973	86.1	405
Office clerks, general	837	994	84.2	597
Cooks	790	1,951	40.5	381

**SOURCE:** Department of Labor. 2011. “20 Leading Occupations of Employed Women” (<http://www.dol.gov/wb/factsheets/20lead2010.htm>)

Since 1980, women have taken 80 percent of the new jobs created in the economy. Economic restructuring has altered the gender distribution of the labor force through changes in demands for jobs that women and men typically fill. For example, declines in manufacturing employment as well as automation and information technology have reduced the demands for jobs filled by men. Women, on the other hand, are overrepresented in economic sectors such as education and health care. The two occupations projected to grow most rapidly between now and 2018—registered nurses and home health aides—are typically filled by women (Folbre, 2010).

Media reports of women's gains in traditionally male jobs are often misleading. In blue-collar work, for example, gains look dramatic at first glance, with the number of women in blue-collar jobs rising by 80 percent in the 1970s. But the increase was so high because women had been virtually excluded from these occupations until then. Women's entry into skilled blue-collar work such as construction and automaking was limited by the very slow growth in those jobs (Amott, 1993:76). In 2010, only 1.8 percent of automotive service technicians and mechanics, 2 percent of construction workers, and 0.8 percent of tool and die makers were women. The years from 1970 to 1990 found more women in the fields of law, medicine, journalism, and higher education. Today, women fill 51 percent of all management positions (up from 19 percent in 1972). Still, there are fewer women than men in prestigious jobs. In 2010, only 32 percent of lawyers and 35 percent of physicians and surgeons were women (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012b).

Although women have made inroads in the high-paying and high-prestige professions, not all have fared equally. White women were the major beneficiaries of the new opportunities. There has been an occupational "trickle down" effect, as White women improved their occupational status by moving into male-dominated professions such as law and medicine, and African American women moved into the female-dominated jobs, such as social work and teaching, vacated by White women.

## The Earnings Gap

Although women's labor force participation rates have risen, the gap between women's and men's earnings has remained relatively constant for three decades. Women workers earn less than men—even when they work in similar occupations and have the same levels of education.

The pay gap between women and men hovered between 70 and 74 percent throughout the 1990s. In 2010, women earned 81 cents for every dollar men earned. Today, women who work year-round and full time earn 78 cents for every dollar men earn (DeNavas-Walt and Proctor, 2014). Closing the wage gap has been slow, amounting to less than half a cent per year. "At this rate, 87 more years could go by before women and men reach parity" (Sklar, 2004).

For women of color, women's incomes are lower than men's in every racial group. Among women and men working year-round and full time in 2013, White women earned 78 percent of White men's earnings; Black women earned 91 percent of Black men's earnings; and Hispanic women earned 90 percent of Hispanic men's earnings (AAUW, 2014; see Figure 9.3).

The earnings gap persists for several reasons:

- Women are concentrated in lower-paying occupations.
- Women enter the labor force at different and lower-paying levels than men.

- Women tend to work less overtime than men.
- Women tend to take more time off than men due to caregiving obligations.

These conditions explain only part of the earnings gap between women and men. They do not explain why female workers earn less than male workers with the same educational level, work histories, skills, and work experience. The unexplained part of the wage gap is caused by sex discrimination in the labor market that blocks women's access to better-paying jobs through hiring or promotion or simply paying women less than men in any job. For example, a 2007 study found that when comparing equally qualified female job candidates, women who were

mothers were perceived as less competent and recommended for lower starting salaries than the non-mothers (called the "motherhood penalty"). The effects for fathers were exactly the opposite—fathers were recommended for higher pay and perceived as more committed than non-fathers (Correll, Benard, and Paik, 2007).

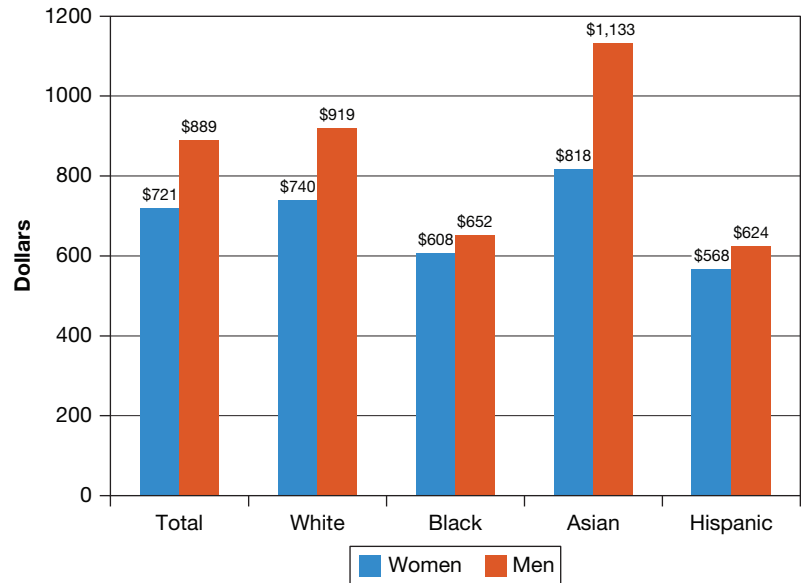
## Intersection of Race and Gender in the Workplace

There are important racial differences in the occupational concentration of women and men. Women of color make up more than 14 percent of the U.S. workforce (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012b). They are the most segregated group in the workplace—concentrated at the bottom of the work hierarchy, in low-paying jobs with few fringe benefits, poor working conditions, high turnover, and little chance of advancement. Mexican American women, for example, are concentrated in secretarial, cashier, and janitorial jobs; Central American women in jobs as household cleaners, janitors, and textile machine operators; Filipinas as nurses, nurses' aides, and cashiers; and Black women as nurses' aides, cashiers, and secretaries (Andersen, 2011; Reskin, 1999). White women are a privileged group in the workplace compared with women of color. A much larger share of White women (41 percent) than Black women (33 percent) or Latinas (24 percent) held managerial and professional specialty jobs (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012b).

Workplace inequality, then, is patterned by both gender and race—and by social class and other group characteristics. Earnings for all workers are lowest in those areas of the labor market where women of color predominate.

**Figure 9.3** Median Usual Weekly Earnings of Full-Time Wage and Salary Workers, by Sex, Race, and Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity, 2015

**SOURCE:** Data from U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/wkyeng.t03.htm>



## How Workplace Inequality Operates

Why are women unequal in the workplace? Several theories are used to explain job segregation and ongoing wage inequality. Some focus on individuals, others focus on structural conditions, and others call on interactional processes to explain women's disadvantages in the workplace.

Popular explanations for gender differentials claim that women's socialization, their education, and the "choices" they make to take time out of the workforce to have children produce different work experiences for men and women. *Human capital theory*, for example, rests on the individual characteristics that workers bring to their jobs. In other words, individuals invest (or don't invest) in their human capital in terms of education, training, etc. Of course, time in the workplace, education, and experience all play a part. But the reality is far more complex. Research finds that women's individual characteristics, or their human capital, explain only a small part of employment inequality (Ridgeway, 1997:224). Research shows that ideas and practices about gender are embedded in workplace structures. Let us examine how the organization of the labor force disadvantages women and advantages men.

*Dual labor market theory* centers on the labor market itself. The labor market is divided into two separate segments, with different characteristics, different roles, and different rewards. The primary segment is characterized by stability, high wages, promotion ladders, opportunities for advancement, good working conditions, and provisions for job security. The secondary market is characterized by low wages, fewer or no promotion ladders, poor working conditions, and little provision for job security. Women's work tends to fall in the secondary segment. For example, clerical work, one of the largest occupational categories for women, has many of the characteristics associated with the secondary segment.

Many features of work itself block women's advancement. For example, some structural explanations call on gender segregation, per se, in which women and men are concentrated in occupational categories based on gender. Much research in this tradition has explained why job segregation and wage inequality persist even as women have flooded the workforce and moved into "male" jobs. Sociologists Barbara Reskin and Patricia Roos (Reskin and Roos, 1990) studied eleven once-male-dominated fields that had become integrated between 1979 and 1988: book editing, pharmacy, public relations, bank management, systems analysis, insurance sales, real-estate sales, insurance adjusting and examining, bartending, baking, and typesetting and composition. Reskin and Roos found that women gained entry into these fields only *after* earnings and upward mobility in each of these fields declined; that is, salaries had gone down, prestige had diminished, or the work had become more like "women's work" (Kroeger, 1994:50). Furthermore, in each of these occupations, women specialized in lower-status specialties, in different and less desirable work settings, and in lower-paid industries. Reskin and Roos call this process *ghettoization*.

Many fields that have opened up to women no longer have the economic or social status they once possessed. Their structures now have two tiers: (1) higher-paying, higher-ranking jobs with more authority and (2) lower-paying, more routinized jobs with less authority. Women are concentrated in the new, more routinized sectors of professional employment, but the upper tier of relatively autonomous work continues to be male dominated. For example, women's entry into three prestige professions—medicine, college teaching, and law—has been accompanied by

organizational changes. In medicine, hospital-based practice has grown as more women have entered the profession. Women doctors are more likely than men to be found in hospital-based practice, which provides less autonomy than the more traditional office-based practice. In college teaching, many women are employed in two-year colleges, where heavy teaching loads leave little time or energy for writing and publishing—the keys to academic career advancement. And in law, women’s advancement to prestigious positions is being eroded by the growth of the legal clinic, where much legal work is routinized.

Many organizational features block women’s advancement. In the white-collar workforce, the well-documented phenomenon of women going just so far—and no further—in their occupations and professions is called the **glass ceiling**. This refers to the invisible barriers that limit women’s mobility despite their motivation and capacity for positions of power and prestige (Lorber, 1994:227). In contrast, men who enter female-dominated professions generally encounter *structural advantages*, a “glass escalator,” which tends to enhance their careers (Williams, 1992).

### Glass ceiling

An invisible barrier that limits women’s upward occupational mobility.

Many of the old discriminatory patterns are difficult to change. In the professions, for example, sponsor–protégé systems and informal interactions among colleagues limit women’s mobility. Sponsorship is important in training personnel and ensuring leadership continuity. Women are less likely to be acceptable as protégés. Furthermore, their sex status limits or excludes their involvement in the buddy system or the old-boy network. Such informal interactions continually re-create gender inequality. *Interactional theories* also explain why gender is such a major force in the labor process. Taken-for-granted interactions block women’s progress even in new work settings with no prior history of gender differences. Women’s inequality occurs as people use common sense ideas about gender in relating to others. According to Ridgeway, the gendered structures of work that are responsible for women’s and men’s outcomes are enacted and maintained through an interlocking web of *social relations* among workers, all of whom draw on gender to guide their workplace interactions (Ridgeway, 2011:119).

Individual, structural, and interactional explanations of women’s workplace inequality rest on *social processes* rather than outright discrimination. But it is important to recognize that outright discrimination can be found in the workplace. For example, sexual harassment affects women in all types of jobs. Sexual harassment can include unwanted leers, comments, suggestions, or physical contact of a sexual nature as well as unwelcome requests for sexual favors. Some research finds that sexual harassment is particularly prevalent in male-dominated jobs in which women are new hires because it is a way for male workers to dominate and control women who should be their equals.

## Gender in the Global Economy

Gender relations in the United States and the world are linked to the global economy. Private businesses make investment decisions that affect the lives of women and men all around the world. In their search for profit, transnational corporations turn to developing nations, where women and children prove a cheap workforce. The demand for less expensive labor has produced a global system of production with a strong gendered component. The international division of labor affects both men and women. As manufacturing jobs switch to low-wage economies, men are often

displaced. The *global assembly line* uses the labor of women, many of them young, single, and from poor rural areas. Women workers of particular classes/castes and races from poor countries provide a cheap labor supply for the manufacture of commodities distributed in the richer industrial nations.

The global economy is altering gender relations around the world by bringing women into the public sphere (Walby, 2000). While this presents new opportunities for women, the disruption of male dominance can also result in the reaffirmation of local gender hierarchies through right-wing militia movements, religious revivalism, and other forms of masculine fundamentalism (Connell, 1998). In addition, old forms of women's exploitation and abuse are being replaced by new forms of control. For example, women's work in the sex industry is now an important part of globalization. The worldwide expansion of the sex club industry is closely linked to organized crime and the trafficking of women and girls across national boundaries (Jeffries, 2008).

## Fighting Structured Gender Inequality

Gender inequality in this society has led to feminist social movements. Three stages of feminism have been aimed at overcoming sex discrimination. The first stage grew from the abolition movement of the 1830s. Working to abolish slavery, women found that they could not function as equals with their male abolitionist friends. They became convinced that women's freedom was as important as freedom from slavery. In July 1848, the first convention in history devoted to issues of women's position and rights was held at Seneca Falls, New York. Participants in the Seneca Falls convention approved a declaration of independence, asserting that men and women are created equal and that they are endowed with certain inalienable rights.

During the Civil War, feminists for the most part turned their attention to the emancipation of Blacks. After the war and the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery, feminists were divided between those seeking far-ranging economic, religious, and social reforms and those seeking voting rights for women. The second stage of feminism gave priority to women's suffrage. The women's suffrage amendment, introduced into every session of Congress from 1878 on, was ratified on August 26, 1920—nearly three-quarters of a century after the demand for women's suffrage had been made at the Seneca Falls convention. From 1920 until the 1960s, feminism was dormant.

Feminism was reawakened in the 1960s. Social movements aimed at inequalities gave rise to an important branch of contemporary feminism. The civil rights movement and other protest movements of the 1960s spread the ideology of equality. But like the early feminists, women involved in political protest movements found that male dominance characterized even movements seeking social equality. Finding injustice in freedom movements, they broadened their protest to such far-reaching concerns as health care, family life, and relationships between the sexes. Another strand of contemporary feminism emerged among professional women who discovered sex discrimination in earnings and advancement. Formal organizations such as the National Organization for Women evolved, seeking legislation to overcome sex discrimination.

These two branches of contemporary feminism gave rise to a feminist consciousness among millions of U.S. women. As a consequence, during the 1960s and early 1970s, many changes occurred in the roles of women and men. However, periods of recession, high unemployment, and inflation in the late 1970s fed a backlash against

feminism. The contemporary women's movement may be the first in U.S. history to face the opposition of an organized antifeminist social movement. From the mid-1970s, a coalition of groups calling themselves pro-family and pro-life emerged. These groups, drawn from right-wing political organizations and religious organizations, oppose feminist gains in reproductive, family, and antidiscrimination policies. In addition, opposition to affirmative action programs and other equal rights policies has set many gains back. Political, legal, and media opposition to feminism continues to undermine women's equality.

The women's movement is not over. Quite the contrary, the women's movement remains one of the most influential sources of social change, even though there is not a unified organization that represents feminism (Andersen, 2011: 354). Not only do mainstream feminist organizations persist, but also the struggles for women's rights continue. Today, many feminist activities occur at the grassroots level, where issues of race, class, and sexuality are important. In communities across the country, women and men fight

against the abuse of women, against corporate poisoning of their neighborhoods, against homophobia and racism, and for people-centered economic development, immigrants' rights, educational equity, and adequate wages. Many have been engaged in such struggles for most of their lives and continue despite the decline in the wider society's support for a progressive social agenda. (Naples, 1998: 1)

Regardless of whether they call themselves feminists, activists across the country and around the world are using their community-based organizing to fight for social justice. Instead of responding passively to the outside world, women are forging new agendas and strategies to benefit women.

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## Chapter Review

### 9.1 Compare the nature versus nurture arguments regarding gender differences in behavior.

- U.S. society, like other societies, ranks and rewards women and men unequally.
- Sex refers to the biological differences between females and males determined by chromosomes, hormones, and external and internal anatomy. Gender refers to the social and cultural roles, behaviors, and activities attached to women and men (sometimes referred to as masculinity or femininity). Individuals who are transgender have a gender identity that is different from their assigned, biological sex. Individuals who are intersex are born with external genitalia, internal reproductive organs, and/or endocrine systems that do not fit the typical biological definitions of female or male.

- Debates about gender differences often fall back on "nature vs. nurture" arguments.
- Every known society makes gender a major category for organizing social life. Gender works with the inequalities of race, class, and sexuality to produce different experiences for all women and men.

### 9.2 Understand how you are actively engaged in "doing gender."

- Gender socialization is a lifelong process. Children learn gender expectations from their parents and peers and through language and interactions.
- Girls and boys are perceived and treated differently from the moment of birth. Children's books, toys, and video games reinforce gender differences.



- Many sociologists have viewed gender inequality as the consequences of learned behavior. More recently, sociologists have moved from studying gender as the individual traits of women and men to studying gender as social structure and social interaction.

### 9.3 Explain how institutions reinforce gender inequality.

- Gender inequality is reinforced through education, mass media, religion, the law, and politics.
- In spite of the passage of Title IX (which outlaws gender discrimination in public schools), girls and boys are still treated differently within the school system.

### 9.4 Compare/contrast the various explanations for gender inequality in the workplace.

- Women, even with the same amount of education and when doing the same work, earn less than men in all occupations.

- Occupational sex segregation is the basic source of women's inequality in the workforce. Work opportunities for women tend to concentrate in a secondary market that has few advancement opportunities, fewer job benefits, and lower pay.
- The combined effects of gender and racial segregation in the labor force keep women of color at the bottom of the work hierarchy, where working conditions are harsh and earnings are low.
- The global economy is strongly gendered. Around the world, women's labor is the key to global development strategies.
- Feminist movements aimed at eliminating inequality have created significant changes at all levels of society. Despite a backlash against feminism, women and men across the country and around the world continue to work for women's rights.

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## Key Terms

**Androgyny** The integration of traditional feminine and masculine characteristics in the same individual.

**Compulsory heterosexuality** The system of sexuality that imposes negative sanctions on those who are homosexual or bisexual.

**Gender** Social and cultural roles, behaviors, and activities attached to women and men (often referred to as masculinity or femininity).

**Gender roles approach** Males and females differ because of socialization. The assumption is that males and females learn to be different.

**Gender stratification** Differential ranking and rewarding of women's and men's roles.

**Gender structure approach** Males and females differ because of factors external to them, such as the social structures and institutions that reward men and women differently.

**Gendered institutions** All social institutions are organized by gender.

**Glass ceiling** An invisible barrier that limits women's upward occupational mobility.

**Intersex** An individual born with external genitalia, internal reproductive organs, and/or endocrine systems that do not fit the typical biological definitions of female and male.

**Male dominance** Beliefs, meanings, and placement that value men over women and that institutionalize male control of socially valued resources.

**Occupational sex segregation** Pattern whereby women and men are situated in different jobs throughout the labor force.

**Sex** Biological differences between females and males determined by chromosomes, hormones, and external and internal anatomy.

**Transgender** An individual with a gender identity that differs from their assigned, biological sex.

# Chapter 10

# Disability and Ableism



## Learning Objectives

- 10.1** Understand the difference between the individual (medical) model of disability and the social model of disability.
- 10.2** Explain what constitutes a minority group.
- 10.3** Demonstrate how those with disabilities do not conform to traditional gender expectations.
- 10.4** Describe the disability rights movement and the effects of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

This part of the book is devoted to various forms of inequality, examining categories of people experiencing discrimination, negative stereotypes, and powerlessness because of their being different from the dominant category in economic resources, racial classification, and/or gender. This chapter turns our attention to another category of people defined as different and who constitute a minority group—those with physical, sensory, or cognitive impairments. This category is the *largest minority group* in the United States, and many of us will eventually be included in it because of an accident, genetic heritage, illness, or degenerative disease.

## Definitions and Models of Disability

### 10.1 Understand the difference between the individual (medical) model of disability and the social model of disability.

According to U.S. Census data (Stoddard, 2014):

- Almost one in five U.S. residents has some form of impairment. This means that more than 56 million Americans live with at least one disability condition. (See Table 10.1 for a look at the numbers by disability condition).
- Five percent of children ages 5 to 17 have disabilities.
- Ten percent of adults ages 18 to 64 have disabilities.
- Thirty-six percent of adults age 65 and older have disabilities. This proportion increases rapidly with age, as almost 75 percent of those 80 years and older have a disability.
- About 15 percent of people with a disability were born with it; 85 percent will experience a disabling condition in the course of their lives, usually from accidents, disease, environmental hazards, or criminal victimization.

Social scientists, until recently, have largely ignored people with disabilities because their impairments were considered physical and psychic shortcomings having little to do with the social. That assumption is false. The very definition of who is able and who is disabled is a social construction; the stereotypes and fears about people with disabilities are social constructions; and society creates financial, physical, and discriminatory barriers for people with disabilities.

#### Individual model of disability

(also known as the medical model). Disability is defined in terms of some physiological impairment because of genetics, accident, or disease.

**Table 10.1** U.S. Adults Age 18 and Older with Selected Disability, 2013

	#	%
Hearing Trouble	37.6 million	16%
Vision Trouble	20.6 million	8.8%
Unable to walk ¼ mile	17.2 million	7.3%
Any Physical Functioning Difficulty	35.2 million	15%
At Least One Basic Action Difficulty or Complex Activity Limitation	75.4 million	32.9%

**SOURCE:** Centers for Disease Control/National Center for Health Statistics, 2013. <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/disability.htm>

### Individual Model of Disability

The **individual model of disability** (also known as the *medical model of disability*) defines disability in terms of some physiological impairment due to genetic heritage, accident, or disease. The commonly held view is that since the focus of disability is on physical, behavioral, psychological, cognitive, and sensory tragedy, the problem is situated within the individual with

a disability (Gilson and Depoy, 2000:208). The federal government, for example, defines *disability* as any physical or mental condition that substantially limits one or more major life activities and *disabled* as anyone who is regarded as having such an impairment. A person with disabilities might have difficulty performing activities such as personal care, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, learning, or working. The problem with focusing on physical or mental impairments is that individuals are defined as deficient because they do not conform to what the majority in society defines as “normal.” Although some people with disabilities internalize these negative attitudes about themselves, others reject being defined as abnormal and thus dismiss the medical model as the dominant model of disability (Llewellyn and Hogan, 2000).

Because the focus is on the individual, the goal of rehabilitation is for health practitioners to overcome, or at least minimize, the negative consequences of an individual’s disability by addressing the person’s special needs and personal difficulties. If possible, these health professionals would like to return disabled individuals to the “normal” condition of being able bodied. Although these goals seem appropriate, they make people with disabilities dependent on a vast army of allied professionals who dominate their lives (Barnes, Mercer, and Shakespeare, 1999:25). Moreover, adaptation to the environment—rather than changing the social arrangements that make life difficult for people with disabilities—is stressed during rehabilitation. The concentration on the biology of disability also defines people by only one dimension, ignoring their other qualities. To counteract this problem, we use the phrase “person with a disability” rather than “a disabled person,” thereby reorienting our social construction so that it puts the human being first and the impairment second, rather than making the impairment the defining characteristic (Linton, 1998:13).\*

Finally, a note of caution. People with disabilities are a heterogeneous category. Although most have visible impairments, others have invisible disabilities such as chronic pain or dyslexia. Those who cannot hear face different societally induced problems than those who cannot see or those people who must use wheelchairs. Thus, as we discuss people with disabilities, we must remember that the people involved are



The probability of disability increases with age, with almost 75 percent of those 80 years and older having a disability.

\* The naming of people with disabilities is a complicated issue. On the one hand, many people with disabilities have wanted to keep disability as a characteristic of the individual as opposed to the defining characteristic. Yet beginning in the early 1990s, the term “disabled people” became popular among disability rights activists. Rather than keeping disability as a secondary characteristic, *disabled* became a marker of identity that they wanted to highlight as they protested for social change (Linton, 1998:13).

complex, varying by type of disability and their other social locations (e.g., gender, race, social class, sexual orientation).

## Social Model of Disability

### Social model of disability

The real problem with physical and mental impairment is not physical but social—the way people with able bodies view people with disabilities and the institutionalization of these views in limited physical access and other social barriers that interfere with the potential of people with disabilities.

The **social model of disability**, while acknowledging the biological conditions of disability, challenges the notion that disability is primarily a medical category. From this perspective, the real problem with physical and mental impairment is not physical but social: The way people with able bodies view people with disabilities and the institutionalization of these views are the genuine “handicaps” (Moynes, 2012). For adherents of the social model, the consequence of the power to define the identity of the disabled by professionals results in the disempowerment, marginalization, and dependency of people with disabilities. The limited physical access, limited access to resources, and negative attitudes create barriers that interfere with the potential of people with disabilities to actualize their desired roles (Gilson and Depoy, 2000). Furthermore, it is the way that people with disabilities are oppressed by societal views of normality. In effect, then, society disables people.

The social model thus focuses on the experience of disability. It considers a wide range of social, economic, and political factors and conditions such as family circumstances, financial support, education, employment, housing, transportation, the built environment, disabling barriers and attitudes in society, and the impact of government policies and welfare support systems (Barnes, Mercer, and Shakespeare, 1999:31).

Adherents of the social model see the goal of rehabilitation as being much different from the individual model. Rather than changing a person with a disability, a social model removes the social and environmental barriers to full participation (Gilson and Depoy, 2000:208).

An academic offshoot of the social model is the area of “disability studies” (see Campbell, 2009). This interdisciplinary concentration does not view disability as something inherently wrong but rather recasts disability as a difference that should be valued (Gray, 2011:694).

## Toward a More Complete Definition of Disability

### Impairment

The state of being mentally or physically challenged.

### Disability

Reduced ability to perform tasks one would normally do at a given stage of life that is exacerbated by the individual and institutional discrimination encountered.

### Ontological truth

Universal and undeniable reality.

The focus of the medical model is on **impairment** (the state of being mentally or physically challenged) and **disability**. The social model, in contrast, concentrates on the social impediments experienced by those with disabilities. The assumptions of both the medical and social models of disability are contradictory. Taken alone, each of these perspectives fosters a one-sided and therefore incomplete and faulty perception and interpretation of disability and people with disabilities (Shakespeare, 2006). A synthesis that combines the best of each model will aid our understanding and allow for an acceptable definition.

The individual (medical) model is correct in that there is an **ontological truth** (a universal and undeniable reality) to the claim that disabilities result from some physiological or mental impairment. It follows, then, that disabled people do need medical support at specific points in their lives (Barton, 1996:9). But this emphasis on locating problems and solutions within the disabled person is only half of the equation because it overlooks the role of society in defining and creating barriers for people with disabilities. The social model points to the very real (ontological) social barriers for most people with disabilities.

The definition of disability that we use combines the insights of the individual and social models: Disability, then, refers to a reduced ability to perform tasks one would normally do at a given stage of life that are exacerbated by the individual and institutional discrimination that people with disabilities encounter.

## People with Disabilities as a Minority Group

### 10.2 Explain what constitutes a minority group.

Disability shares a number of characteristics common to the social constructions of race, sex and gender, and sexual orientation, thus making it a minority group as they are.\* These characteristics are (1) being defined as different; (2) derogatory names; (3) their “differentness” as a master status; (4) categorization, stigma, and stereotypes; (5) exclusion and segregations; (6) the matrix of domination; and (7) discrimination.

### Defined as Different

Minority groups are socially constructed categories. Which categories have minority status varies among societies and over time within a society. Society assigns some categories of people—in the United States, these categories are races other than Caucasian, certain ethnic groups, women, alternative sexual identities to the norm of heterosexuality, and people with disabilities—to minority status. The minority is composed of people with similar characteristics that are defined as significantly different from the dominant group. These characteristics are salient: They are visible, although not necessarily physical, and they make a difference in terms of power and resources.

Protesters say the group Autism Speaks portrays autism as a frightening disease that will ruin families.

### Derogatory Naming

Naming is not a neutral process; the names given to the members of minority groups by the majority have enormous symbolic significance that contributes to and perpetuates the dominance of the majority (Eitzen and Baca Zinn, 1989; Hall, 1985). These pejorative names belittle, trivialize, exclude, diminish, deprecate, and demean. In essence, pejorative names not only put the minority “down” but also separate and segregate.

Consider the implications of names for people with disabilities, such as “invalid,” “cripple,” “freak,” “gimp,” “dumb,” “deformed,” “handicapped,” and



\* There are several ways to view people with disabilities. We use the minority groups model because of its (1) emphasis on social and economic discrimination; (2) consistency with our structural emphasis that explains systematic exclusion on the basis of gender, class, race, and sexual orientation; and (3) emphasis on social factors rather than biological and cultural ones (Block, Balcazar, and Keys, 2001).

“retarded.” These labels imply not only impairment but also a lack of worth. Disability advocates argue that the use of the word “retard” is a form of hate speech and should be abolished from use in jokes or everyday speech.

## Minority as a Master Status

### Master status

Status that has exceptional importance for social identity, overshadowing other statuses. Being defined as a member of a minority group is a master status.

Although people have many statuses simultaneously, typically, one status is dominant. This is known as a **master status**. Others may impose the master status, or the individual may internalize it with exceptional significance for social identity. The master status of minority group members is the characteristic (or set of characteristics) that distinguishes them from the majority. That is, African Americans or gays or the homeless are known and identified by others foremost by their race, sexual orientation, or impoverishment. Disability can be and often is a master status, as people frequently perceive those with disabilities first in terms of their disability and only second as individuals. That is, impairment such as blindness or using a wheelchair is seen as the most salient part of a person’s identity and therefore trumps all other statuses such as occupation, educational attainment, and income level.

## Categorization, Stigma, and Stereotypes

Not only are minority members singled out by their master status, but they also encounter the negative stereotypes and beliefs that accompany their defining characteristics. In other words, being a minority is not only a master status, but it is also a master status with a stigma. The stigma originates in the portrayals of people with disabilities in literature, movies, and television. Consider, for example, the people portrayed in the movies *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *The King’s Speech*, or *My Left Foot*. In this last example, Daniel Day-Lewis won an Academy Award for his portrayal of the Irish writer Christy Brown, who overcame his cerebral palsy to write and paint with his foot. These portrayals of people with disabilities raise two issues. First, should a nondisabled actor be given such a part rather than a person with cerebral palsy? Second, is Hollywood sensitive to people with disabilities and not given to treating them in terms of stereotypes? In an enlightened version, the character with a disability would be depicted as a human with a disability and not as a victim of a disability (Rundle, 2011).

### Stigma

Attribute that is socially devalued and disgraced.

A **stigma** is an attribute that is socially devalued and disgraced. The late sociologist Erving Goffman described stigma as a spoiled identity with negative consequences. Stigma implies being tainted with a shortcoming, or a failing, or a handicap. Because these individuals are defined as undesirable, they are subject to discrimination, including avoidance. Moreover, we tend to impute a wide range of undesirable attributes on the basis of the original stigma.

Some disabilities engender more stigma than others. In general, people with physical disabilities are less likely to be stigmatized than those with mental disabilities. Consider, for example, the difference between an older person with a broken hip compared to one with Alzheimer’s disease.

Minority group members are stigmatized. The majority defines certain characteristics as different and abnormal and then discriminates against those in the category defined as inferior. Thus, some people are “in,” whereas others are defined as “out,” or they are either “us” or “them.” In effect, the minority is defined as “other” because the members have characteristics that differ from the majority. The definition is simplified

by making the distinctions binary. “‘Race’ becomes Black or White, ‘gender’ becomes male or female, ‘sexual orientation’ becomes gay or straight, and people are either disabled or normal” (Gordon and Rosenblum et al., 2001: 12). In each instance, the side defined as “other” is considered not only different but also deficient.

The disabled confront the dichotomous comparison with the able bodied, where they always come up short in one of two ways. Many internalize the inadequacy society regularly ascribes to them, thinking of themselves as incomplete or broken. Others reject the dichotomy dictated by society.

The dominant members of society perceive disability as a medical matter, associating disability with physiological, anatomical, or mental “defects.” Viewed in this way, those with physical and mental impairments seem not only different but also lacking the “normal” interests and concerns that occupy others of their social class, race, gender, age, and sexual orientation. In short, their “otherness” moves them to the margins of society as “inferiors.”

The disabled, therefore, confront not only the challenges of living with their conditions but also the challenges of inequality characterized by ableism. The short definition of **ableism** is discrimination in favor of the able bodied (Tulloch, 1993). Implicit in the ideology of ableism that permeates U.S. society is the belief that disability is an individual problem, susceptible to individual solutions. This frees the nondisabled to ignore or minimize social issues of accessibility, accommodation, and personhood (Duncan, 2001).

### Ableism

Discrimination in favor of the able bodied.

## Exclusion and Segregation

Stigmatized race, sex/gender, and sexual orientation categories have traditionally been excluded from full participation in society by institutional barriers or custom. Historically, racial minorities have been excluded through Jim Crow segregation, Supreme Court rulings (e.g., *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which gave “separate but equal” facilities legal authority), and legislation that denied voting and other civil rights. Although recent laws have outlawed blatant discrimination by race, *de facto* segregation still exists in residential housing, in schools, and in private clubs. Women were once property of their husbands. Women today are underrepresented in the professions and in leadership positions in government, business, and religious organizations. Gays are not allowed as leaders in the Boy Scouts, and the right of gays and lesbians to adopt is difficult and in some states impossible because of legal barriers.

Historically, people with disabilities were often separated by segregated housing, sheltered workshops, and occasionally, in attics and basements to hide a family’s shame. They have also been separated in nursing homes, asylums, and hospitals for “incurables.” In the past, children with disabilities were separated from their “able” classmates in separate, “special education” classrooms. However, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), originally passed as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975, now requires that children be educated in the “least restrictive environment.” This requirement generally has been interpreted to mean that children with disabilities should be “mainstreamed” in classrooms with typically developing children. Although law requires inclusion, many children continue to be segregated in special education classes. Sometimes, of course, “special education” is reasonable, allowing educators to be more responsive to the special needs of children who cannot see, hear, think, or move as well as others. There are drawbacks, however, as those segregated as “different” are sometimes objects of abuse by other



students. “Special education” teachers may be either more attentive to the conditions of their students than to their scholarship and/or they may have reduced expectations for these students, resulting in a negative self-fulfilling prophecy. The evidence is that children with disabilities who have been in segregated schooling are, in general, less well prepared than other children to exercise the skills and knowledge in the basic subjects of English, math, and science.

Despite the Americans with Disabilities Act, which requires the elimination of architectural barriers, many still remain. Thus, people with disabilities are often separated from mainstream society by the lack of access to public transportation or by architectural barriers.

It does not matter if policymakers intend their policies to discriminate—what matters are the consequences of their actions. “Stairs, curbs, or small-print signs hung over doorways make admission nearly impossible. They may lack discriminatory intent, but they have the effect nonetheless” (Gordon and Rosenblum, 2001: 12).

## Matrix of Domination

The hierarchies of stratification—class, race, gender, and sexual orientation—place socially constructed groups, and the individuals and families assigned to those groups, in different social locations (Baca Zinn, Eitzen, and Wells, 2011). Placement in these hierarchies determines to what extent one will have or not have the rewards and resources of society. These are also systems of power and domination, as those from dominant race, class, gender, and sexuality groups play a part in and benefit from the oppression of subordinates.

These stratification hierarchies are interrelated. Racial minorities and women, for example, have fewer occupational choices than White males. Racial minorities and women typically earn less income for the work they do, resulting in an advantage for White males. Thus, these systems of inequality intersect to form a **matrix of domination** in which each of us exists (Collins, 1990). These intersections of oppression have important implications.

### Matrix of domination

Intersections of the hierarchies of class, race, gender, sexuality, and disability in which each of us exists.

First, people experience race, class, gender, and sexuality differently depending on their social location in these structures of inequality. For example, people of the same race will experience race differently depending on their location in the class structure as poor, working class, professional/managerial class, or unemployed and their location in the gender structure as male or female and in the sexuality system as heterosexual or homosexual.

Second, class, race, and gender are components of both social structure and social interaction. As a result, individuals because of their social locations experience different forms of privilege and subordination. In short, these intersecting forms of inequality produce both oppression and opportunity.

A third implication of the inequality matrix has to do with the relational nature of dominance and subordination. Power is embedded in each system of stratification, determining whether one is dominant or subordinate. The intersectional nature of hierarchies means that power differentials are linked in systematic ways, reinforcing power differentials across hierarchies. (Eitzen and Baca Zinn, 2001: 238–239)

An important insight from this matrix of domination approach is that discrimination is more than additive. To be an African American lesbian with a disability, for example, is to be marginalized and experience discrimination in simultaneous and multiple ways. As one woman put it, “As a black disabled woman, I cannot compartmentalize or separate aspects of my identity in this way. The collective experience of my race, disability and gender are what shape and inform my life” (Hill, 1994:7).

Thus, we cannot study classism, racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, or any other oppression in isolation from each other (Block, Balcazar, and Keys, 2001; Oliver, 1996:37).

## Discrimination

By definition, minority group members experience discrimination. They are the last to be hired and the first to be fired (e.g., the unemployment rate for African Americans is typically twice that for Whites). Racial minorities experience problems involving fairness in the criminal justice system, in obtaining loans, in housing, in schools, and in other institutions. So, too, do people with disabilities find discrimination throughout their lives. Some examples follow (Stoddard, 2014):

- Almost 30 percent of working-age people with disabilities live below the poverty level, compared to 13.6 percent of working-age people without disabilities.
- Sixty-six percent of working-age people with disabilities are unemployed, compared to 25.8 percent of people without disabilities.
- In 2013, the median annual earnings of working-age people with disabilities was \$20,785, compared to \$30,728 for people without disabilities.

Under federal labor law, employers can pay people with disabilities less than the minimum wage, if they can show that the workers’ disability makes them less productive than able workers. This has led to exploitation, with some workers with disabilities receiving just 45 cents an hour (Ervin, 2011). This is known as “sheltered workshops,” and the practice is receiving criticism by disability advocates and by the Obama administration (Diament, 2015).

The discrimination that people with disabilities experience is related to how they are perceived by the rest of society. If society is convinced that disabled people cannot have good, productive lives, then there is no reason to invest in equal education, equal access, and equal opportunity for them (see “Voices: Your Fears, My Realities”).

## Voices

### Your Fears, My Realities

Most of us are morally certain that we’re not prejudiced against people with disabilities. Didn’t we root for Christopher Reeve and Jerry’s Kids with our hearts and minds and checkbooks? (Many people with disabilities think we shouldn’t, but that’s another matter.)

Didn’t we cheer for Jeannie VanVelkinburgh when she was shot and paralyzed by Nathan Thill? Aren’t we genuine admirers of Stephen Hawking and Muhammad Ali? How could we discriminate?

To understand disability discrimination, look close to home. Its most transparent feature is that it is caused

by fear. We are the living proof that minds and bodies can go haywire and that it can happen to anyone at any time. Some people aren't ready for that news, so they react to us with overt anxiety or hostility.

But it's more subtle forms of discrimination that harm us the most. To cite one ubiquitous example, every family newspaper in the country runs occasional profiles of people with disabilities. They're usually found in the Living section, and they're usually fawning.

They marvel that we can keep our faith in the face of adversity, graduate from college, raise kids, or maintain a generous attitude. If we appear to overcome our disabilities—something that's not really feasible for most of us—so much the better. Then we're brave, we're true, we inspire.

The trouble with these feel-good stories is that they become archetypal. By celebrating a single achiever as newsworthy and remarkable, they confirm society's low expectations for all other people with disabilities. Doesn't the exception prove the rule? And aren't we brave because we live lives that readers think they couldn't or wouldn't live themselves? Don't we inspire because we make them feel grateful that they're not like us?

The reading public loves our imagined triumphs of mind over matter, but not our real issues.

It loves us when we're docile, asexual, and childlike, but not when we vent our anger that the deck is stacked against us. It loved VanVelkinburgh's courage at the crime scene and her readiness to move on with her life, but loved her less after a court appearance when she proved herself to be a real, mercurial person rather than patience on a monument. Real people are harder to deal with than idealized fictions.

After my injury in 1968, my business partner told me he would have killed himself under similar circumstances. Even my mother briefly toyed with the idea that I might be better off dead than disabled. "If I were paralyzed," people still tell me, "I couldn't handle it."

"Nonsense," I say, "you'd cope with it fine." But you seldom believe me. You think I'm still being brave, painting a happy face on the unspeakable. Disability discrimination is about your fears, not my realities.

Discrimination deepens when an entire nation takes this view of disability. If society is convinced that we can't have good lives, it's slow to invest in equal education, equal access, and equal opportunity. And even though most people know at heart that sooner or later they're likely to become disabled themselves, they're slow to act on readily achievable solutions because they're scared to death of disability's stigma. This is disability discrimination, and it's largely unconscious.

The result of this attitude—as successive Harris polls since the early 1980s have consistently shown—is that people with disabilities are the poorest minority in America. We have less money, less employment, less education, less transportation, less recreation, less of almost anything you can think of. We're the have-nots of this country.

It's not because people hate us. It's because they assume that our lives are so terrible that any effort to level the playing field is futile. And it's not because disability is so tough. It's because our cultural bias perpetuates the inequities.

**SOURCE:** Barry Corbet. 2000. "Your Fears, My Realities." *Denver Post* (August 23): 11B. Copyright © the Estate of Barry Corbet.

## Issues of Gender, Sexual Behavior, and Abuse

### 10.3 Demonstrate how those with disabilities do not conform to traditional gender expectations.

Although people with disabilities deal with a number of social barriers, our discussion here is limited to sexual relationships and related issues. We focus on sexuality because it demonstrates so clearly how social factors often negatively affect people with disabilities.

## Gender Stereotyping

The foregoing section showed that people with disabilities are marginalized and stigmatized in U.S. society. This occurs, in part, because women and men with disabilities do not measure up to the cultural beliefs for each gender. For the physically disabled, their bodies do not measure up to the cultural standards. The bodies of physically disabled men do not allow them to demonstrate the socially valuable characteristics of toughness, competitiveness, and ability (Messner, 1992).

**Hegemonic** (of the dominant belief system) masculinity privileges men who are strong, aggressive, independent, and self-reliant. But men who are physically disabled are perceived to have polar opposite traits; they are treated as weak, passive, and dependent. Men with physical disabilities may cope with the fundamental incongruity by constructing their own sense of masculinity (Gerschick and Miller, 2001). They may do all they can to meet society's definition of masculinity by becoming as athletic and competitive as possible (e.g., lifting weights, playing wheelchair basketball, participating in the paralympics). Others may redefine masculinity to fit their own unique characteristics (e.g., achieving a sense of independence by controlling those around them; redefining gender in terms of emotional relations rather than the emphasis on the physical). Still others may reject society's standards by either denying masculinity's importance in their life or by creating alternative masculine identities and subcultures that provide them with a supportive environment.

Women with physical disabilities, similar to men, do not measure up to the cultural ideals of what it is to be a woman. Consequently, many think of themselves as asexual or unattractive. Many of these women feel undermined by a society that defines a woman's sexual attractiveness in terms of physical fitness and physical beauty, characteristics that are impossible for many of them to reach. Nancy Mairs writes about her physicality in this light:

My shoulders droop and my pelvis thrusts forward as I try to balance myself upright, throwing my frame into a bony S. As a result of contractures, one shoulder is higher than the other and I carry one arm bent in front of me, the fingers curled into a claw. My left arm and leg have wasted into pipe stems, and I try always to keep them covered. When I think about how my body must look to others, especially to men, to whom I have been trained to display myself, I feel ludicrous, even loathsome. (1992:63)

Women with disabilities are disadvantaged over men with impairments when it comes to occupying traditional roles. Men with disabilities are more likely to be



### Hegemonic

Of the dominant belief system, which privileges the group in power.

employed than women with disabilities, even filling socially powerful male roles, as did President Franklin D. Roosevelt (who used a wheelchair and crutches because of polio) or Representative James Langevin of Rhode Island, who in 2000 became the first quadriplegic elected to Congress, or former Senator Max Cleland of Georgia, who is missing both legs and an arm. Disabled women, on the other hand, are often even denied access to traditional female roles, as ableist and sexist stereotypes combine in much of the public, making it difficult even for the friends and relatives of disabled women to envision them as functional wives and mothers.

## Sexual Relationships

Increasingly, people with disabilities have positive and fulfilled sexual lives. Many form strong and happy relationships with other people with disabilities or with non-disabled partners. The growing disability rights movement, with its emphases on removing social barriers and social oppression, is important in this regard because it has helped provide people with disabilities a positive identity by working together to achieve common goals. The resulting activism has opened many possibilities as people with disabilities end their isolation, engage in political acts, and make friends with others in the movement. But sexual problems remain, not because of individual incapacity but because of prejudice, discrimination, and structural barriers (this section is taken primarily from Shakespeare, 1996: 192–209).

**ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES** Among the beliefs of nondisabled people about people with disabilities are a number that center on sexual difference:

That we are asexual, or at best inadequate.

That we cannot ovulate, menstruate, conceive or give birth; have orgasms, erections, [or] ejaculations; or impregnate.

That if we are not married or in a long-term relationship, it is because no one wants us and not through our personal choice to remain single or live alone.

That if we do not have a child, it must be the cause of abject sorrow to us and likewise never through choice.

That any able-bodied person who marries us must have done so for one of the following suspicious motives and never through love: desire to hide his/her own inadequacies in the disabled partner's obvious ones; an altruistic and saintly desire to sacrifice their lives to our care; neurosis of some sort; or plain old-fashioned fortune-hunting.

That if we have a partner who is also disabled, we chose each other for no other reason, and not for any other qualities we might possess. When we choose "our own kind" in this way, the able-bodied world feels relieved, until of course we wish to have children; then we're seen as irresponsible. (Morris, 1991: 20ff)

Add to this list the assumptions discussed earlier that disabled people do not meet the societal standards for beauty and physical attractiveness. Also, "just as public displays of same-sex love are strongly discouraged, so two disabled people being intimate in public will experience social disapproval" (Shakespeare, 1996: 193).

**DIFFICULTY IN FINDING PARTNERS** People with disabilities often face barriers to access the environments where nondisabled people make contacts that lead to sexual encounters or romantic relationships. They may be blocked by inaccessible public

transport, inadequate income, and physically inaccessible bars and clubs, making it difficult to interact with potential partners. The workplace is a likely place for such encounters, but many lack access to paid employment. People with disabilities may also find churches, another common place for meeting potential partners, inaccessible because of physical or attitudinal barriers.

Computer chat rooms or online dating services provide an option to those with physical mobility difficulties. But these options are not usually accessible to people with visual impairments (the exception is software that “talks”). Moreover, the language used in these venues emphasizes one’s physical attractiveness, thus disqualifying people with disabilities if they are honest about their impairments.

People who become disabled later in life often find that impairment interrupts their social networks and personal relationships, leaving them isolated. This is more likely for women with disabilities than for men with disabilities.

## Physical and Sexual Abuse

Statistics indicate that people with disabilities, both children and adults, are more likely to be abused physically and sexually than those without disabilities (Smith and Harrell, 2013).

Those most vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse are deaf people who cannot speak and people with learning difficulties who may be lured into situations without understanding the consequences (for a chilling account of sexual assault of a girl with learning difficulties by athletes from her high school, see Lefkowitz, 1998). The abuse may occur in institutional settings where staff members or other patients may take advantage of the vulnerable. In these settings, patients lack communication with the outside world, and the youngest or the most impaired are the most likely victims of those who have institutional power or personal power over them. Abuse can take other forms in institutions that are more like warehouses than welcoming environments. In such instances, the goal of profit surpasses patient care, resulting in savings through such activities as the overuse of drugs to control patients, inadequate health care, thermostats set too low in the winter and too high in the summer, cheap food, and other forms of neglect (Press and Washburn, 2000; K. Thomas, 2001).

## Agency

### 10.4 Describe the disability rights movement and the effects of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

People with disabilities have always had to acclimate to environments and social settings designed for the able bodied. As we have seen, they experience discrimination in housing, education, and work. Equal access is frequently denied because of transportation and architectural barriers in streets and buildings. Added to these structural barriers to equality are the stings of widespread stereotypes that demean them as inferior, unattractive, asexual, and pitiful. Their frustration with unequal access and discrimination has led many people with disabilities to become active in the disability rights movement. In joining with others, their feelings of isolation become feelings of a common bond and empowerment. This section focuses on their collective efforts and the results.

## Disability Rights Movement

### Social movement

A group that develops and organization and tactics to promote or resist a social change.

A **social movement** is a group that develops an organization and tactics to promote or resist social change. Its members share a belief system that defines common grievances and goals and group identity. The disability rights movement comprises a wide variety of individuals as well as local and national organizations with a common goal—equal rights for people who are disabled. It is a loose structure of organizations because many focus exclusively on people with particular disabilities (e.g., the National Federation of the Blind, the Disabled American Veterans, the National Association of the Deaf). But this network, although seemingly lacking unity, is united by the overarching objectives of empowerment and collective rights—human, civil, and legal—for people with disabilities.

Social movements capture the imagination of potential adherents when social conditions are right. Such was the case for people with disabilities when they observed the successes of other social protest movements such as civil rights in the 1950s and 1960s, the antiwar movement of the 1960s, and various oppressed groups such as women and gays/lesbians. People who once were resigned to living their lives in isolation came to believe that in joining with others they could make a difference as they saw protests and heard leaders argue that disability was not their fault but rather the failure of the political system to acknowledge their rights as human beings and to equality in society.

The disability rights movement began in the late 1960s with local organizing by Ed Roberts at the University of California at Berkeley and Judy Heumann in New York City, both post-polio quadriplegics. Roberts was instrumental in getting the Berkeley campus to provide students with disabilities peer counseling and support to gain access to university programs and housing (for a history of the fight for disabled rights, see Switzer, 2003). By 1972, Roberts and others founded the Berkeley Center for Independent Living, in an apartment, which was the forerunner to the independent living movement, and its unofficial newspaper for the disability rights movement—the *Disability Rag* (now called *Ragged Edge*). Meanwhile, Judy Heumann filed a lawsuit when she was denied teaching certification because of her disability. Beginning with this action, others joined to form an

People with disabilities have organized successful protests to make their case to the public and policymakers.



organization called Disabled in Action (DIA), which had the goal to break down barriers to full societal participation of people with disabilities. In 1972, DIA, with 1,500 members, organized protests targeted at inaccessible public buildings, the Jerry Lewis telethon (which they believed perpetuated demeaning stereotypes of people with disabilities), and media organizations that either neglected or provided prejudicial coverage of disability issues. This group also blocked traffic in front of Richard Nixon's 1972 New York campaign headquarters to protest his veto of the Rehabilitation Act.

Congruent with the politics of the times (e.g., the war on poverty, passage of the voting rights act), policymakers became more receptive to the civil rights of people with disabilities. Congress, for example, passed

the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which prohibited government agencies and contractors from discriminating against people with disabilities. In 1975, Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (legislation that Judy Heumann had worked on as a legislative intern), which required a free and appropriate public education and related services to all children with disabilities. Also, the Developmental Disabilities Amendments of 1975 expanded services for people with such impairments as mental disability and cerebral palsy and mandated a network of state protection agencies to monitor and protect their rights. In 1977, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) issued regulations that required all recipients of HHS funds to provide equal access (through ramps and elevators) to employment or services or lose their subsidies. Note that HHS made these progressive changes only after sit-ins occurred in federal offices across the United States to protest the inaction by HHS on these issues.

Following the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, the political climate changed for disability rights activists. The 1980s were characterized, in general, by weakened federal requirements, reduced budgets, deregulation, and judicial decisions that threatened previously established guarantees for the disabled. There were occasional victories such as success in organizing opposition to the Reagan administration's attempts to weaken several previously passed laws, including the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. They were defeated, however, when Reagan rescinded a Carter administration requirement that all new transit systems and newly acquired buses be wheelchair accessible. An organization within the disability rights movement, American Disabled for Accessible Public Transit (ADAPT), organized demonstrations in a number of cities to publicize the lack of access for many people with disabilities, but with only limited success during the chilly, politically conservative climate of the 1980s. Despite these setbacks, major progressive legislation was about to be enacted: the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

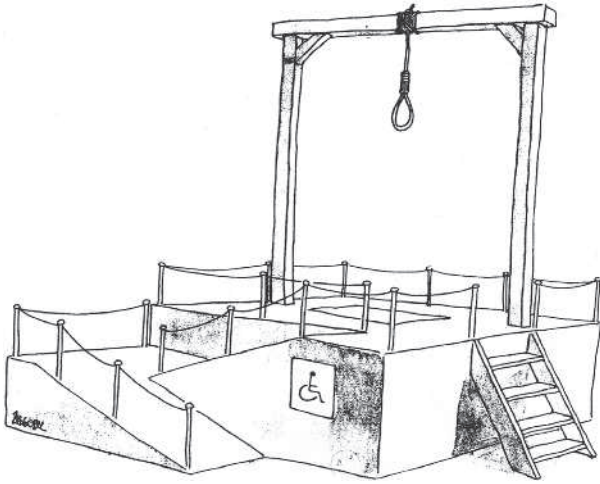
## Americans with Disabilities Act

When President George H. W. Bush signed the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), it was called by some the most far-reaching civil rights legislation since the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The ADA was intended to eradicate discrimination against people with disabilities:

- The ADA prohibits discrimination in employment against qualified individuals. This means that people with disabilities can participate with equal opportunity in the application process, have an equal chance to perform essential functions, be provided with reasonable accommodations because of disability, and have equal benefits and privileges of employment. This law applies to all employers with fifteen or more employees.
- The ADA prohibits discrimination in programs run by public entities such as state and local governments, including public transportation.
- The ADA mandates that private businesses open to the public must make sure that all buildings, new and existing, are accessible to individuals with disabilities.
- The ADA requires telephone companies to make relay services available for hearing- and speech-impaired people.

Put more simply, because of this landmark legislation, accessibility is now commonplace: Parking lots reserve parking spaces for people with disabilities, bathrooms are equipped for wheelchair access, ramps and elevators provide access to public buildings, and elevators feature Braille floor numbers or audio assistance. These major





Jack Ziegler/  
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changes represented in the provisions of the ADA did not occur because it was the right thing to do. The battle was won despite the opposition of the National Association of Manufacturers, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the National Federation of Businesses. Despite the resistance of big business, the progressive legislation was passed because people with disabilities and their compatriots had organized rallies to publicize their grievances and used tactics of civil disobedience, such as disrupting public transportation and blocking access to city halls, to make their lack of civil rights more visible. Some policymakers were persuaded by the message and logic of the protesters, others by the potential political power of people, realizing that about one-fifth of Americans have disabilities. There were also the growing ranks of people with disabilities, including the aged, who, growing in numbers, are disproportionately affected by disabilities, and the increasing proportion of the population with HIV/AIDS. To the degree that people with disabilities act as a cohesive group, they have considerable political clout. Their growing sense of shared grievances and a common identity have made their voting as a bloc on certain issues more likely than ever. The result of this social movement has been legislation guaranteeing their civil rights and greater opportunities.

But there have been political setbacks to attempts to rectify inequities for people with disabilities:

- The media tend to treat the ADA as mainly a regulatory issue affecting private businesses rather than as a human rights issue facing society as a whole. Typically, the theme of their stories is the complaint that the ADA “goes too far” in forcing businesses to provide access and jobs (Jackson, 2000).
- Among the provisions of the Fair Housing Act is the requirement that new multi-family housing with more units be accessible to people with disabilities. This regulation, according to Barry Corbet, an activist in the disability rights movement, is the most widely ignored law since Prohibition (Corbet, 2000: 9b).
- In addition to providing medical benefits to those 65 and over, Medicare also benefits the severely disabled. The beneficiaries who are disabled before age 65, however, must wait two years before becoming eligible. This means, for example, that people with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (known as Lou Gehrig’s disease), a neurological disorder that progressively deteriorates the spinal cord and the brain, causing loss of muscle control and, typically, death in three years, must pay for their expensive care, drawing down their families’ resources, requiring them in some cases to raid their children’s college funds or sell their homes.
- In 1999, the U.S. Supreme Court narrowed the ADA, ruling that people with physical impairments that can be treated with medication or devices such as eyeglasses or hearing aids are not protected.
- In 2001, by a five to four majority, the U.S. Supreme Court held that state employees could not collect damages from their states for offenses under the federal ADA (Rosenbaum, 2001).

- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act mandated equal educational opportunities for disabled students. In 2005, the Supreme Court ruled that parents have the burden of proving that the school system does not provide a free, appropriate education for the special needs of their child. This ruling protects school districts from challenges, making equity more difficult to obtain.
- The 2010 update to the ADA required that Automatic Teller Machines (ATMs) be equipped with speech-enabled technology so that the 10 million or so visually impaired customers could use the machines without assistance. When the due date (March 15, 2012) for making these changes passed, more than half of ATMs had compliance issues (Sidel, 2012). So, too, with hotels that resist the requirement that they must provide lifts to give people with disabilities access to pools and whirlpools (DeLollis, 2012).

Despite legislative and judicial setbacks, the disabilities movement perseveres and continues to make a difference. In 2000, for example, a class-action suit, the first of its kind in the United States, was filed against Kaiser Permanente, a health maintenance organization (HMO), on behalf of all its California members with disabilities. The lawsuit argued that Kaiser discriminated against disabled patients by having inaccessible medical equipment (e.g., mammography machines that cannot be used by people in wheelchairs). The next year (2001), Kaiser agreed to a far-reaching settlement that included not only installing accessible medical equipment but also removing architectural barriers and instituting training programs, handbooks, and a complaint system to meet the needs of the disabled. In 2004, the Supreme Court ruled five to four in *Tennessee v. Lane* that courthouses must provide access to people with disabilities.

The Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act of 2008 became effective on January 1, 2009 (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2009). The act met objections of the disability advocacy community that the original act was too narrowly defined. Specifically, the original was amended to emphasize that the definition of disability be construed in favor of broad coverage of individuals to the maximum extent permitted by the terms of the ADA. The effect of this change was to make it easier for an individual seeking protection under the ADA to establish that he or she has a disability within the meaning of the ADA.

To provide equal rights and opportunities for people with disabilities requires long-term solutions such as universal health care and a living wage. Some more readily achievable short-term goals, such as government actions to strengthen the ADA and other federal laws, will help the cause immeasurably (see “Social Policy: A Progressive Strategy for Including More People with Disabilities in the Workforce”).

## Prenatal Testing and Disability Rights

The primary rationale for prenatal testing is to determine whether the fetus is “normal” or will result in a child with a disability. When the test affirms that possibility, the prospective parents have the choice and the legal right to terminate the pregnancy if they wish. For example, when a test reveals that a fetus has an extra twenty-first chromosome—the hallmark of Down syndrome—an estimated 90 percent of parents choose to terminate the pregnancy (Carmichael, 2008). For a poignant argument against aborting a fetus with the extra chromosome, see the essay by columnist George F. Will about his son, Jon, who has Down syndrome (Will, 2007:72).

## Social Policy

### A Progressive Strategy for Including More People with Disabilities in the Workforce

There is an inherent tension between government mandates such as the Americans with Disabilities Act and the goal of business, which is to maximize profits. It costs businesses to supply ramps, elevators, voice-activated ATMs, and the like. So they resist the legislation, and once passed, typically “drag their feet” in achieving compliance.

Disability advocates argue that unemployment is one area where the various laws intended to bring people into the workforce just have not worked. For example, in January 2012, the unemployment rate for people with disabilities was 50 percent higher than it was for their nondisabled peers (much of the following is from Trottman, 2012). Faced with this inequity, the Labor Department in the Obama administration proposed that businesses contracting with the federal government must have at least 7 percent of their labor force people with disabilities. The federal government has the leverage since roughly 200 businesses generate \$700 billion in business with the government (including

defense contractors, firms in health care, construction, and information-technology). The government said, in effect, if you want a government contract, then you must abide by this mandate or face the cancellation of your contract or being barred from future contracts.

Should this plan become law, it would be a landmark rule compelling companies to meet a hiring quota. The companies involved argue that disabled workers are sometimes not hired because their impairments make them less than efficient workers. Disability advocates argue, on the other hand, that new technologies make it far easier for people with disabilities to complete work assignments.

What do you think? Should the government use its leverage to insist on an employment quota for people with disabilities? Does the goal of providing employment opportunities for those with physical and mental impairments trump the freedom of employers to hire the employees of their choosing?

This issue is a thorny one for those who favor a woman’s right to choose (and we are among them) if we examine the ramifications of aborting “disabled” fetuses from the perspective of people with disabilities (these arguments are primarily from Hershey, 2000).

Foremost, when a woman chooses to abort a fetus rather than to give birth to a disabled child, she accepts society’s negative views about people with disabilities:

She is making a statement about the desirability or the relative worth of such a child. Abortion based on disability results from, and in turn strengthens, certain beliefs: children with disabilities (and by implication adults with disabilities) are a burden to family and society; life with a disability is scarcely worth living; preventing the birth is an act of kindness; women who bear disabled children have failed. (Hershey, 2000:558)

In short, the choice to abort a disabled fetus is a rejection of children and adults who have disabilities.

Second, most people with disabilities, despite the manifold medical and social difficulties associated with their conditions, affirm that their lives are meaningful and worthwhile. Laura Hershey, for example, has a rare neuromuscular condition. She must rely on a motorized wheelchair for mobility, a voice-activated computer for writing, and the assistance of Medicaid-funded attendants for daily needs such as

dressing, bathing, eating, and going to the bathroom. She also has a house, a career, a partner, and a community of friends with and without disabilities. She says,

My life of disability has not been easy or carefree. But in measuring the quality of my life, other factors—education, friends, and meaningful work, for example—have been decisive. If I were asked for an opinion on whether to bring a child into the world, knowing she would have the same limitations and opportunities I have had, I would not hesitate to say, “Yes.” I know that many women do not have the resources my parents had. Many lack education, are poor, or are without the support of friends and family. The problems created by these circumstances are intensified with a child who is disabled. No woman should have a child she can’t handle or doesn’t want. Having said that, I must also say that all kinds of women raise healthy, self-respecting children with disabilities, without unduly compromising their own lives. (2000:559)

Third, in addition to traditional genetic testing, the Human Genome Project, which maps DNA, can predict hundreds, perhaps thousands, of disorders before birth and, in doing so, has the potential to eliminate hereditary diseases in a generation. It also presents a danger. Many in the disabled community fear that the widespread use of these genetic tools and abortion for the purpose of eliminating disability could inaugurate a new eugenics movement. Two examples from the twentieth century show how governments have viewed the lives of people with disabilities to have little value and indicated they should be extinguished (Silvers, 1998):

- A 1939 German decree authorized physicians to put to death impaired persons who could not be cured. In the next two years, about 200,000 physically and mentally impaired children and adults were killed because they were judged to have “lives unworthy of life.”
- As late as the 1930s, more than half of the states in the United States had laws encouraging sterilization of people with disabilities, typically those with developmental disabilities and epilepsy and the blind and the deaf.

Abortion, then, presents a major quandary for feminists who defend the right for women to choose, a right that can conflict with efforts to promote acceptance, equality, and respect for people with disabilities. Such is the dilemma of Laura Hershey, cited earlier, a pro-choice feminist who is also disabled. She offers this solution to a highly complex issue:

I wouldn’t deny any woman the right to choose abortion. But I would issue a challenge to all women making a decision whether to give birth to a child who may have disabilities. The challenge is this: Consider all the relevant information, not just the medical facts. More important than a particular diagnosis are the conditions awaiting a child—community acceptance, access to buildings and transportation, civil rights protection, and opportunities for education and employment. Where these things are lacking or inadequate, consider joining the movement to change them. In many communities, adults with disabilities and parents of disabled children have developed powerful advocacy coalitions. I recognize that, having weighed all the factors, some will decide they cannot give birth to a child with disabilities. It pains me, but I acknowledge their right and their choice. (2000:563)

## Chapter Review

### 10.1 Understand the difference between the individual (medical) model of disability and the social model of disability.

- About one in five U.S. residents has some form of impairment. Approximately 15 percent of people with disabilities were born with the condition; 85 percent will experience a disabling condition in the course of their lives.
- The individual approach (the medical model) defines disability in physiological terms, a physical or mental condition caused by the genes, accident, or disease. The goal is to return people with disabilities to “normal,” and if this is not possible, to get them to adapt to their environment.
- The social model, while acknowledging the biological basis of disability, focuses on the ways that social factors “disable” those with impairments. Some of these social factors are barriers to physical access, limited access to resources, and negative stereotypes.

### 10.2 Explain what constitutes a minority group.

- People with disabilities constitute a minority group. Their marginality in society occurs because (a) they are defined as different; (b) the names given to them by society demean, diminish, trivialize, and deprecate; (c) the fact of disability establishes a master status by which people are categorized; (d) they are stigmatized; (e) they are excluded; (f) disability combines with other stratification hierarchies to form a matrix of oppression; and (g) they experience discrimination.
- Almost 30 percent of working-age people with disabilities live below the poverty level, compared to 13.6 percent of working-age people without disabilities.

### 10.3 Demonstrate how those with disabilities do not conform to traditional gender expectations.

- People with disabilities face a number of social barriers in the related areas of gender and

sexuality. Women and men who are physically disabled do not conform to traditional cultural expectations of masculinity and femininity.

- People with disabilities confront a number of stereotypes or misinformation about their sexuality.
- People with disabilities, both children and adults, are more likely to be abused physically and sexually than those without disabilities. Deaf people who cannot speak and people with learning disabilities are the most vulnerable to both types of abuse.

### 10.4 Describe the disability rights movement and the effects of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

- To counter their secondary status in society, many people with disabilities have taken an active part in the disability rights movement, a social movement with the goal of achieving empowerment and collective human, civil, and legal rights. Through the use of demonstrations and protests, this movement has succeeded, in part, to achieve favoring legislation that attempts to eliminate discrimination in housing, schooling, and the workplace as well as the removal of architectural and other barriers to access to buildings and transportation. Most significant was the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, which, although flawed in its details and in its enforcement, advanced the cause of equality for people with disabilities.
- Many in the disabled community fear that the widespread use of prenatal testing and abortion for the purpose of eliminating disability could inaugurate a new eugenics movement. Abortion presents a major quandary for feminists who defend the right for women to choose—a right that can conflict with efforts to promote acceptance, equality, and respect for people with disabilities.

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## Key Terms

**Ableism** Discrimination in favor of the able bodied.

**Disability** Reduced ability to perform tasks one would normally do at a given stage of life that is exacerbated by the individual and institutional discrimination encountered.

**Hegemonic** Of the dominant belief system, which privileges the group in power.

**Impairment** The state of being mentally or physically challenged.

**Individual model of disability** (also known as the medical model). Disability is defined in terms of some physiological impairment because of genetics, accident, or disease.

**Master status** Status that has exceptional importance for social identity, overshadowing other statuses. Being defined as a member of a minority group is a master status.

**Matrix of domination** Intersections of the hierarchies of class, race, gender, sexuality, and disability in which each of us exists.

**Ontological truth** Universal and undeniable reality.

**Social model of disability** The real problem with physical and mental impairment is not physical but social—the way people with able bodies view people with disabilities and the institutionalization of these views in limited physical access and other social barriers that interfere with the potential of people with disabilities.

**Social movement** Group that develops an organization and tactics to promote or resist social change in society.

**Stigma** Attribute that is socially devalued and disgraced.

## Chapter 11

# Crime and Justice



## Learning Objectives

- 11.1** Explain the complicated nature of the definition of crime.
- 11.2** Explain how crime rates vary by sex, age, social class, and race.
- 11.3** Explain how the United States system of justice is biased against certain groups in society.

This chapter examines the nature of crime and how society reacts to criminal behavior in the processing of criminals. These topics are important because they help us understand the role of the powerful in regulating social behavior and the bias of the system against the powerless.

## The Definition of Crime

### 11.1 Explain the complicated nature of the definition of crime.

People are concerned with crime for obvious reasons. If left unchecked, crime destroys the stability necessary for the maintenance of an orderly society. In addition, public opinion polls routinely show that even when crime rates are low or declining, people harbor fears about being a potential victim of criminal activities (Saad, 2010). Although legitimate, these concerns direct attention away from the deviance that results from the orderly working of society and from crimes that are much more costly than street crimes (which we tend to think are overwhelmingly the greatest criminal danger). These ironies will become apparent as we examine how crime is defined.

### What Is Crime?

Groups and individuals within society differ in their definition of crime. Some people equate crime with all antisocial behavior. Others argue that crimes are acts such as racism, sexism, and imperialism that violate basic human rights. Similarly, some people use moral rather than legal criteria to define what is or is not a crime. For example, Martin Luther King, Jr., and his followers believed the laws enforcing racial segregation were morally wrong, so to violate them was not a crime but a virtue. Antiabortion activists believe that abortion is a crime regardless of what the formal law decrees.

Although there is no universally accepted definition of **crime**, the most common one—the breaking of a law—officially labels people and separates society into criminal and noncriminal categories. In other words, criminality is a social status determined by how an individual is perceived, evaluated, and treated by legal authorities. Generally, the law designates as criminal any behaviors that violate the strongly held norms of society. There is common agreement in the United States, for example, that the law should protect property from theft and vandalism. There is also universal agreement that society must protect its citizens from bodily harm (rape, assault, and murder). But, although there may be consensus in society on certain laws, the political nature of the lawmaking and enforcement process has important negative implications for the individuals caught up in them.

Consider, for example, how local and federal authorities treated antiwar protesters during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Their behavior was considered criminal because it threatened the power structure. What the powerful consider criminal depends, in fact, on what they perceive to be the intent of the individuals they observe. In the United States, society does not always forbid or condemn some acts of force that injure people or destroy property. Property damage during the celebration of sports victories, Halloween, or Mardi Gras is often overlooked or trivialized. Even 10,000 beer-drinking, noisy, and sometimes destructive college students on the beaches of Florida during spring break are allowed to go on such a binge because “kids will be kids.” But if the same 10,000 college students were to destroy the same

#### Crime

An act that breaks the law.



amount of property in a demonstration whose goal was to change the system, the acts would be defined as criminal and the police called to restore order by force if necessary. Thus, violence is condoned or condemned through political pressures and decisions. The basic criterion is whether the act supports or threatens existing social and political arrangements. If they are not supportive, then by definition the acts are to be condemned and punished.

A related implication of the political nature of crime is that the design of laws is influenced by a class bias. “The law and the legal order especially favor the very wealthy, but they favor enough of the rest of the population to appear to be equal. Yet the law clearly has never done a good job supporting the most marginalized sectors of the population: the poor in general, and African Americans, and other minorities” (Shelden, 2001:15). This view pervades the criminal justice system, as discussed later in this chapter.

Because the definition of a crime depends on the current law, as society changes and as new interest groups become powerful, the laws and interpretations of the laws regarding criminal behavior may also change. Many behaviors once considered criminal no longer are, such as marrying someone of another race or selling liquor.

Finally, because crime is defined by the powerful in society, the organization and priorities of society are never regarded as harmful to human life (and therefore a moral crime). Yet the order of society itself can be very destructive to some categories of people, as Carmichael and Hamilton showed in their classic 1967 book, *Black Power*. They noted that when White terrorists bombed a Black church in Birmingham, Alabama, and killed five children, the act was deplored by most elements of U.S. society. But when hundreds of Black babies die each year in Birmingham because of the effects of racism, no one in the power structure gets upset and calls this violence. Although high infant mortality and rates of preventable disease, which are perpetuated through discrimination, take many more lives than civil disorder or street crimes, the term *violence* is not applied to these crimes.

(Carmichael and Hamilton, 1967:4). Forty years later, the infant mortality rate was *still* twice as high for Blacks as for Whites (*Washington Post*, 2007), but this is not labeled a moral crime by the dominant society.

## Categories of Crime

The *Uniform Crime Reports* of the FBI focus on traditional types of crime, which tend to be concentrated among the young and the poor. The focus on traditional crime ignores other types that may actually be more costly to society in terms of lives and property—organized, white-collar, corporate, and political crime. Another type of crime—moral order crime—is significant in enforcement costs but not necessarily in human costs.

**TRADITIONAL STREET CRIMES** These are the crimes emphasized by the police, the government, and the media. They are the FBI’s index crimes of burglary, larceny, auto theft, robbery, rape, assault, and murder. These are serious crimes against property or violence against people that many people consider to be the whole of crime. People accused of these crimes typically clog the courts and prisons. The perpetrators of these types of crimes are disproportionately people on the economic margins of society—the poor, the uneducated, the unemployed, the homeless, and racial minorities.

In evaluating this type of crime, we need to consider two types of offenders. One type is a habitual offender, who, for whatever reason, continues his or her criminal patterns. For all seven major traditional crime categories, the majority of those arrested are repeaters. Obviously, the career criminal must be converted to a new way of life, to a legitimate career that offers all the gratifications received through criminality, if rehabilitation is to be successful.

The other type is a one-time-only criminal (the accidental or incidental criminal). Progressives maintain that such people should not be punished harshly, for that would be counterproductive. For example, locking up a one-time offender might have the unintended consequence of hindering a person's employment prospects and perhaps creating a career criminal.

Conservatives, on the other hand, argue for swift and severe punishment to deter the person from a life of crime and to reinforce the notion in the rest of society that crime does not pay. The criminal justice system in the United States has mainly approached criminality from this conservative perspective.

This growth in punitiveness was accompanied by a shift in thinking about the basic purpose of criminal justice. In the 1970s, the sociologist David Garland argues, the corrections system was commonly seen as a way to prepare offenders to rejoin society. Since then, the focus has shifted from rehabilitation to punishment and stayed there. Felons are no longer persons to be supported, but risks to be dealt with. And the way to deal with the risks is to keep them locked up. (Loury, 2007: 2)

Since the 2007 to 2009 economic recession, we are starting to see a change in this philosophy. Because it costs states a large amount to put offenders in prison, cash-strapped states are increasingly turning to alternative sentencing methods and streamlined probation and parole for low-level offenders. It costs approximately \$79 a day to keep an inmate in prison but \$3.50 a day to monitor the same person on probation or parole (Richburg, 2009).

Texas, known for its hard sentencing laws and conservative judges, implemented new rules in 2007, including shortened probation (from ten years to five), increasing the rate of offenders receiving parole, and more drug and DWI (driving while intoxicated) courts. They have consequently seen a significant decrease in their prison population (Richburg, 2009). As states see their budgets dwindling, many are considering these cheaper alternatives to prison. In 2010, the combined U.S. prison population decreased 0.3 percent, the first decline since 1972 (Guerino, Harrison, and Sabol, 2011).

**CRIMES AGAINST THE MORAL ORDER** To enforce the morality of the majority, legislation defines certain acts as criminal if they are deemed offensive. Violations of these laws are **moral order crimes**. Examples of this type of crime are gambling, recreational drug use, and prostitution. Sometimes these acts that violate the moral order are called **victimless crimes** because, even though they may offend the majority, they do not harm other people. The argument for such laws is that the state has a right to preserve the morals of its citizens in the interest of promoting social stability and consensus.

Should an individual have the right to choose among alternative forms of behavior without fear of social sanction if that behavior does not harm other people? The answer to this question is not as unqualified as it may seem; many so-called victimless crimes in fact hurt other people, at least indirectly. The family members of an

#### **Moral order crimes**

Acts that violate laws that enforce the morality of the majority.

#### **Victimless crimes**

Acts that violate moral order crimes; they may offend the majority, but they do not harm other people.

alcoholic, drug addict, or compulsive gambler are affected both materially and emotionally by his or her habit. Overindulgence in alcohol or a drug increases the probability of automobile accidents. Prostitution is a victimless crime, except that some people are unwillingly forced to become prostitutes.

A fundamental problem with legislating morality, aside from putting limitations on individual freedoms, is that it labels people as “criminals” on the basis of the tastes of those in power. Thus, **secondary deviance** (deviant behavior that is a consequence of the self-fulfilling prophecy of a negative label) may result not because someone harmed another but because his or her act was presumed by powerful others to be harmful to them.

### Secondary deviance

Deviant behavior that is a consequence of the self-fulfilling prophecy of a negative label.

The detection, arrest, and prosecution of victimless criminals is an enormous and expensive task. More than half the arrests and roughly 80 percent of the police work in the United States are related to the regulation of private morals (alcohol abuse, pornography, juvenile runaways, drug use, prostitution, and gambling). In 2010, 51 percent of federal inmates were serving time for drug offenses (Guerino, Harrison, and Sabol, 2011). If these private acts were legalized, then the police, the courts, and the prisons would be free for other, more important duties. Formerly, illicit activities could become legitimate businesses providing tax revenues to local and state governments. Most important, organized crime, which now acquires most of its income from providing illegal goods and services, would no longer be able to hide its investments and profits. Thus, laws against victimless crimes are indirectly responsible for maintaining organized crime.

Moral order crimes also contribute to the corruption of the police and courts. Although many police officers are unwilling to accept bribes from murderers and thieves, they may accept them from the perpetrators of victimless crimes using the justification that they believe these crimes are harmless and impossible to control anyway. This rationale opens the way for people involved in organized crime to buy protection for their illicit activities.

### Organized crime

A business operation that seeks profit by supplying illegal goods and services.

**ORGANIZED CRIME** **Organized crime** is a business syndicate that seeks profit by supplying illegal goods and services such as drugs, prostitution, pornography, gambling, loan sharking, sale of stolen goods, money laundering, and even disposal of hazardous wastes. In short, people can and do organize to provide what others want, even if it is illegal. In fact, the illegality of what people want ensures that someone will supply the goods or service because the profits are so high.

Several characteristics of organized crime serve to perpetuate it. First, organized crime supplies illegal goods and services that are in great demand. So, one reason for the continued existence of organized crime is that it fills a need of supply and demand. If moral order crimes were decriminalized, organized crime would be left with products and services that could be easily and cheaply supplied by legitimate sources, and its profits and existence might be eliminated.

A second characteristic of organized crime is that it depends on the corruption of police and government officials for survival and continued profitability. Bribery, campaign contributions, delivery of votes, and other favors are used to influence police personnel, government attorneys, judges, media personnel, city council members, and legislators.

Another characteristic of organized crime is its use of violence to enforce conformity with the organization. There are strict rules for conduct and means of enforcing those rules. Individuals who cheat or fail to meet their obligations are disciplined

severely. Violence is also used to eliminate competition. When rival organizations vie for the monopoly of a geographic territory or the distribution of a particular service or product, the struggle is often extremely violent.

Finally, organized crime is structured to ensure efficiency. This organization is not composed just of members of a criminal society. There are criminals, of course, but many of these people are linked with legitimate members of society as well. Together, the criminal and legitimate elements combine to form networks within cities, regions, and even nations.

In 2008, after a fifteen-year hiatus, the Organized Crime Council (which makes reports to Congress) met and turned its attention to the transnational nature of organized crime. These crime networks that we know as organized crime are often controlled by a racial or ethnic group. The stereotype, thanks to movies like *The Godfather*, is that Italians dominate them. However, the Organized Crime Council reports that the top organized crime threat in the United States is from Eurasian/Russian crime syndicates (Finklea, 2010).

**WHITE-COLLAR CRIME** The public, influenced by the media and the FBI reports, focuses its fears on traditional street crimes such as assault and robbery. Even though these are legitimate concerns, crime of the street variety (typically by the young, poor minority person) is much less significant in cost and social disruption than are **white-collar crimes**—those committed by middle-class and upper-middle-class people in their business and social activities (such as theft of company goods; embezzlement; bankruptcy fraud; swindles; tax evasion; forgery; theft of property by computer; passing bad checks; illicit copying of computer software, movies, and music; and fraudulent use of credit cards, automatic teller machines, and telephones). Some examples of the magnitude of white-collar crimes follow:

- Telephone marketing swindlers cheat U.S. consumers out of an estimated \$40 billion annually.
- Time theft by employees (e.g., faked illness, excessive breaks, and long lunches) costs U.S. businesses as much as \$200 billion annually.
- Surveys by the Internal Revenue Service consistently find that three of ten people cheat on their income taxes. The IRS estimated that Americans underpaid their taxes by \$400 billion in 2006 (*Time*, 2006). This does not include the monies received from the selling of goods and services for cash and tips that go unreported to the government (that if reported would generate an estimated \$345 billion in taxes annually).



Movies like *The Godfather* contribute to stereotypes regarding Italians and organized crime.

#### White-collar crimes

Illicit acts committed by middle-class and upper-middle-class people in their business and social activities.

- Otherwise law-abiding citizens routinely copy or purchase pirated computer software, videos, and music. Many also engage in cable TV theft. Others photocopy copyrighted materials, even though these activities are against the law.
- A poll of workers found that they had seen 37 percent of their co-workers take office supplies or shoplift, 25 percent steal product or cash, and 18 percent claim falsely that they had worked extra hours (*Business Week*, 2002).
- According to Bureau of Justice Statistics, in 2010, 7.0 percent of American households (8.6 million) had at least one member who was a victim of identity theft (2012).
- Executives at major corporations such as Enron, Global Crossing, and WorldCom, knowing that their companies were soon to lose much of their value, sold stock for personal gain worth about \$5 billion from 1999 to 2005.
- In what has been called the largest securities fraud in history, Wall Street financier Bernard Madoff used what is called a **Ponzi scheme** to con investors out of approximately \$65 billion. He was sentenced to 150 years in prison in 2009.

### Ponzi scheme

An investment fraud that involves the payment of purported returns to existing investors from funds contributed by new investors (rather than from any legitimate investment activity).

Although we know that white-collar crimes are expensive and extensive, we do not know by how much. The statistics just noted understate the actual amount because many of them are difficult to detect. Moreover, the victims are often embarrassed at their naiveté in having been bilked. Whatever the numbers, the losses are huge. The criminal activities of the relatively well-to-do are widespread and expensive. What is remarkable, however, is how lenient U.S. society is to such wrongdoers when they are caught. Moreover, for the relatively few who are sentenced to prison (compared to street criminals), they serve relatively light sentences.

### Corporate crimes

Illegal acts by business enterprises.

**CORPORATE CRIME** Business enterprises can also be guilty of crimes, which are known as **corporate crimes**. The list of illegal acts committed in the name of corporate good includes fraudulent advertising, unfair labor practices, noncompliance with government regulations regarding employee safety and pollution controls, price-fixing agreements, stock manipulation, copyright infringement, theft of industrial secrets, marketing of adulterated or mislabeled food or drugs, bribery, swindles, selling faulty merchandise, and overstating earnings to increase the value of company stock. The magnitude of such crimes far surpasses the human and economic costs from other types of crime. Some examples follow:

- The National Highway and Traffic Safety Administration has recorded 203 deaths and more than 700 injuries, amid thousands of complaints, involving rollover-prone Ford Explorers that crashed following sudden tread separation on factory-installed Firestone tires. Internal corporate memos at the two corporations reveal that Ford and Firestone “willfully and knowingly kept unsafe products on the market” (Milchen and Power, 2001:9).
- In 2000, the world’s largest auction houses, Sotheby’s and Christie’s, agreed to pay \$512 million to settle claims that they cheated buyers and sellers in a price-fixing scheme dating back to 1992.
- Bayer sold a blood-clotting medicine for hemophiliacs, a medicine that carried a high risk of transmitting AIDS, in Asia and Latin America while selling a new, safer product in the West (Bogdanich and Koli, 2003).

- In 2004, Schering-Plough settled with the government for \$345 million because it charged private insurers much lower prices on Claritin than it charged the government programs of Medicare and Medicaid (Schmit, 2004).
- In recent years Exxon, International Paper, United Technologies, Weyerhaeuser, Pillsbury, Ashland Oil, Texaco, Nabisco, and Ralston-Purina have been convicted of environmental crimes.
- Cosco did not tell the Consumer Product Safety Commission of the more than 200 children who had been injured by its tandem stroller and did not recall the stroller until more than a year after it began receiving what turned out to be 3,000 complaints. "This is a pervasive problem in a wide range of products used by children. . . . Product manufacturers frequently conduct internal investigations but remain publicly silent as complaints about alleged defects pile up. In the past three years, 75 percent of the most dangerous problems that led to recalls were never voluntarily reported to the government" (O'Donnell, 2000: 1B).
- Archer Daniels Midland (ADM) pled guilty and was fined \$100 million (the company had revenues of \$13.6 billion) for its role in conspiracies to fix prices and eliminate competition and allocate sales in the lysine and citric acid markets worldwide. In return for its guilty plea, ADM was granted immunity against charges of price fixing on other products.
- ConAgra executives knowingly resold eighty tons of meat in 2000 that South Korea customs agents had quarantined because they said it contained a potentially lethal bacteria. Rather than destroy the meat or cook it to kill the pathogens, the meat was sold to other countries with lower standards than South Korea's (Migoya, 2002).
- Costain Coal pled guilty to twenty-nine counts and no contest to three counts of misconduct at a Kentucky mine shaft site where an explosion killed ten workers. These counts included violations of the Mine Safety Act's mandatory health and safety standards and false statements on records filed by the company.
- Halliburton has been found guilty repeatedly of overcharging the government for fuel, services (food and housing of troops), and construction during and following the first and second Iraqi wars. Moreover, contrary to federal laws prohibiting companies from doing business with countries supporting terror—Iraq, Iran, and Libya—Halliburton circumvented these restrictions by setting up subsidiaries in foreign countries (Herbert, 2003a).



Wall Street financier Bernard Madoff conned investors out of approximately \$65 billion.

These examples make three points. First, the goal of profit is so central to capitalistic enterprises that many corporate decisions are made without consideration for the consequences to their customers and employees. But not only are entrepreneurs indifferent to people, society is also essentially indifferent to certain offenders. The punishments meted out to individual white-collar criminals, and especially to corporate officials, are incommensurate with their misdeeds. Moreover, criminal

corporations are treated much more gently than criminal individuals. For instance, states commonly have “three strikes and you’re out” laws (i.e., if found guilty of three felonies, you go to prison for life), but these do not apply to corporations. Second, the companies that are criminally prosecuted represent only a fraction of corporate wrongdoing. And third, the costs of corporate crimes far outweigh the costs of street crimes.

The General Accounting Office, the investigative arm of Congress, estimates that health care fraud alone costs up to \$100 billion each year. Another estimate suggests that the annual cost of antitrust or trade violations is at least \$250 billion. By comparison, the FBI estimated that in 2002, the nation’s total loss from robbery, burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft and arson was almost \$18 billion. That’s less than a third of the estimated \$60 billion Enron alone cost investors, pensioners, and employees. (Drutman, 2003:2)

### Political crimes

Illegal acts intended to influence the political system. Also, the abuse of authority by those in power. Finally, actions by governments that are illegal or immoral.

**POLITICAL CRIME** Typically, **political crimes** are seen as any illegal acts intended to influence the political system. The operant word in this definition is *illegal*. Is it illegal to disobey unjust laws such as laws supporting racial segregation? Is it illegal to oppose tyranny? If the answer to these questions is yes, then Martin Luther King, Jr., and George Washington must be considered political criminals. The definition given here assumes that the political system is always right and that any attempt to change it is wrong. Although antithetical to the heritage of the early American colonists and the Declaration of Independence, such thinking is typical of how those in power interpret any attempt to change the existing political system.

Another way to conceive of political crime is to concentrate on the deviance of the people in power. One example of this type of political crime is the imprisonment or harassment by the powerful of those who act against established authority. Such acts include the jailing of Martin Luther King, Jr., the FBI’s infiltration of dissident groups, the Internal Revenue Service’s intimidation of people on President Nixon’s “enemies list,” and the punishment of people involved in providing housing, transportation, and jobs to refugees escaping political repression in Guatemala and El Salvador (the Sanctuary Movement).

Government itself can be engaged in illicit activities. Some examples are the involvement in covert actions to overthrow legitimate governments, such as the Reagan administration’s policy to aid the Contra effort in Nicaragua; the U.S. attack on Panama to capture its leader, Manuel Noriega; the suppression of popular revolts in countries favorable to the United States; the use of secrecy, lying, and deceit; the use of people as unwilling and unknowing guinea pigs in medical experiments; and war crimes. For example:

- The government revealed in 1995 that the Department of Energy conducted 435 human radiation experiments involving 16,000 people during the Cold War. Included among these experiments was one in which eighteen people were injected with plutonium without their knowledge or consent (Eisler, 2000).
- From 1932 to 1972, the U.S. Public Health Service followed 400 African American men with syphilis without treating them. The purpose of the research was to determine the natural course of syphilis. In 1947, when penicillin was found to be an effective treatment for syphilis, it too was withheld from the men and their families (Washington, 2006).

We have seen that there are a number of different types of crimes and criminals. However, the laws and their enforcement apparatus selectively focus on traditional street crimes.

## Crime Rates in the United States

### 11.2 Explain how crime rates vary by sex, age, social class, and race.

The innately political nature of crime is clearly evident when one examines the official crime rates, which emphasize certain types of crimes (those of the powerless) while minimizing or ignoring others. These discrepancies have profound implications because they mean, in effect, that some categories of people are disproportionately labeled criminals.

There are two basic sources of national crime statistics in the United States. The first is the *Uniform Crime Reports (UCR)*, published yearly by the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2015). The *UCR* statistics are based on the arrest figures and reports supplied by 18,000 law enforcement agencies. This means there is the potential to underreport the actual extent of crime because they list only crimes reported to the police.

Official crime rates from the *UCR* are also misleading because they imply that the amount of crime varies a good deal from year to year or from region to region. These changes may occur, but the official statistics make real variations difficult to determine. In some cases, the actual incidence of crime may not change, but the accuracy of reports may be in question. For example, in a recent survey of retired police officers in New York City, the officers said that the intense pressure to produce annual reductions in crime led some supervisors and precinct commanders to manipulate crime statistics (Rashbaum, 2010). Other police departments in Atlanta, Dallas, New Orleans, Washington, and Baltimore have also been accused of tampering with crime data.

Another problem with these statistics is that they focus on traditional crimes and omit white-collar crimes, corporate crime, organized crime, and political crimes. The FBI statistics (called index crimes) emphasize violent crimes (murder, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault) and property crimes (burglary, larceny, motor vehicle theft, and arson). This focus has the effect of directing public attention almost exclusively to crimes involving violence and property, in which the poor and minorities are thought to be the major perpetrators, and away from the crimes of the affluent.

The second major source of crime statistics comes from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), conducted annually by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) department. Instead of gathering crime data from police departments, these crime statistics come from a nationally representative survey of households. The benefit of using these statistics to gauge the amount of crime in society is that they include crimes regardless of whether they were reported to the police. According to the NCVS, only 51 percent of all violent victimizations and 39 percent of all property crimes were reported to the police in 2010 (Truman, 2011).

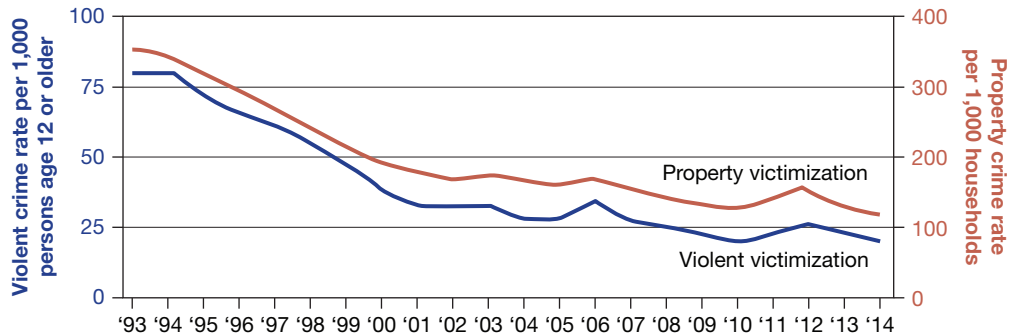
### Violent Crimes and Property Crimes

According to NCVS data, in 2014 approximately 3 million U.S. residents experienced violent crimes and 10.4 million households experienced property crimes (Langton and Truman, 2015). This represents a decrease in violent and property crimes since 2012 (see Figure 11.1).



**Figure 11.1** Violent and Property Victimization, 1993–2014

SOURCE: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 1993–2014



## Murder and Nonnegligent Manslaughter

According to the *Uniform Crime Report* data (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2015), 14,249 people were murdered nationwide in 2014. Looking closely at the 2014 statistics, two things are apparent: (1) The majority of murder victims and murder offenders are male (77.5 percent of victims; 88 percent of known offenders), and (2) given their numbers in the general population, Blacks are overrepresented among both victims and offenders. According to the 2014 Census, Blacks are 12.6 percent of the population, yet they make up 50.9 percent of murder victims and 53 percent of offenders.

Looking more generally at crime rates over time, crime rates for all types of crimes appeared to rise in the 1990s, with a trend toward decreasing rates since 2000. At the same time:

- Expenditures increased 420 percent for police departments, 660 percent for the Department of Corrections, and 503 percent for the Judicial Branch from 1982 to 2006 (Bureau of Justice Statistics [BJS], 2010).
- The prison population increased from 319,598 in 1980 to 2,266,800 in 2010. Currently, there are 6.9 million people in jail, prison, on parole, or on probation (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2014).

Let's examine what kinds of people are arrested and labeled as criminals in U.S. society.

## Demographic Characteristics of People Arrested for Crimes

The data from official sources clearly indicate that people from certain social categories are more likely than others to be arrested for criminal activities. We examine these categories of sex, age, social class, and race.

**SEX** Overall, men are more likely to be both the offender and the victim in a crime. Although this has remained fairly consistent over the years, women's crime rates are increasing. In terms of arrests, in 2010 men accounted for 74.5 percent of individuals arrested, but this represents a 6.8 percent decrease in their crime rate from 2001, whereas women's crime rate increased 10.5 percent over that same period. *Uniform Crime Report*

data show some interesting arrest trends by sex from 2001 to 2010. In the twenty-nine different crimes reported, women's rate increased in thirteen categories while men's rate increased in five. Women experienced the largest increase in arrests (over a 30 percent increase) for larceny-theft, vagrancy, and driving under the influence. Overall, the number of males arrested for property crimes in 2010 declined 7.2 percent from 2001, while the number of females arrested for property crimes rose 27.1 percent in the same period.

In spite of these increases, there were 106,232 women offenders incarcerated in state and federal facilities in 2014, compared to 1,402,404 male inmates. In other words, the national imprisonment rate for males was about fourteen times the imprisonment rate for females in 2014.

**AGE** According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2014), incarceration rates peak for males and females between the ages of 25 and 34 and drop off sharply for males after age 49 and for females after age 44. This "maturation leads to less crime" phenomenon occurs across White, Black, and Hispanic populations.

**SOCIAL CLASS** The bulk of the people processed by the criminal justice system for committing street crimes are the undereducated, the poor, the unemployed, or those working at low-level jobs. There are several explanations for this relationship. First, the kinds of crimes listed by the FBI are those of the lower-income classes (white-collar and corporate crimes, for example, are omitted). Second, the police and others in the criminal justice system assume that lower-income people are more likely to be criminals. Thus, they place more personnel in lower-income neighborhoods, which ensures that they will find more criminal activity. Third, economic deprivation may induce people to turn to crime to ease their situations. The evidence is clear that direct interpersonal types of crime (robbery, larceny, assault) are committed disproportionately by those in poverty. In addition, the National Crime Victimization Survey indicates that lower income households are more likely than higher income households to experience property crime (Truman, 2011). In fact, households in the lowest income category were victims of burglary at a rate that was more than two times higher than the rate for households earning \$75,000 or more.

Social class is also significant for crimes in the upper strata of the stratification system. Those in lofty occupational and political roles commit white-collar crimes. Embezzlement, computer crimes, fraud, bribery, manipulation of the stock market, land swindles, etc., involve people at the other end of the social hierarchy from those most likely to engage in street crimes. The irony is that although white-collar, political, and corporate crimes do much more harm to society than do street crimes, crimes by the poor are seen as the "crime problem."

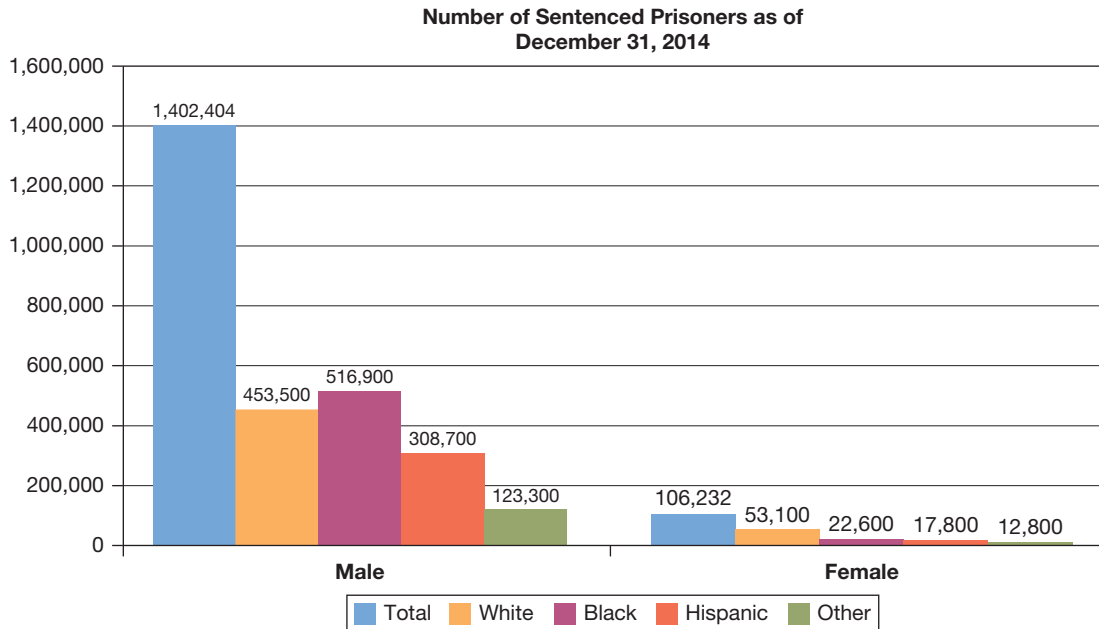
**RACE** People labeled as criminals in the United States are disproportionately people of color—African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans (see Figure 11.2). The rates of sentenced prisoners in the United States show that Black males have a disproportionately high rate of incarceration. In 2014, Black males were incarcerated at a rate of



Forty-eight states allow the shackling of female inmates while they are giving birth.

**Figure 11.2** Number of State and Federal Prisoners by Demographic Characteristics, as of December 31, 2014

**SOURCE:** Data from Carson, E. Ann. 2015. "Prisoners in 2014." Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice. Online: <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/p14.pdf>. Page 15.



2,724 per 100,000, compared to 465 White males per 100,000. The rate for Black males age 30–34 was 6,412 incarcerated per 100,000, which means that approximately 6.4 percent of the Black male population age 30–34 was incarcerated in 2014 (Carson, 2015).

Although racial minorities have more contact with the criminal justice system than Whites, this statistic does not mean that race causes crime. Racial minorities commit many crimes on the street because the social conditions of unemployment, poverty, and racism fall more heavily on them. Especially in urban centers, more and more African Americans are jobless and are living in poverty and in conditions conducive to high rates of violence and crime. Moreover, we should remember that the official statistics reflect arrest rates and are not necessarily a true indication of actual rates. The bias of the system against the poor, and especially poor minorities, makes the likelihood of their arrest and conviction greater than for well-to-do Whites, as shown in the next section on the criminal justice system.

## Unjust System of Justice

### 11.3 Explain how the United States system of justice is biased against certain groups in society.

Justice refers to the use of authority to uphold what is lawful in a completely impartial and fair manner. Even though fairness is the goal of the U.S. system of justice, it is far from realized. The law itself, the administration of the law by the police and judges,

and the prisons all express bias against certain categories of people. To document this assertion, we examine the criminal justice system from multiple directions: laws, police, the judicial process, and the U.S. correctional system.

## Laws

Of all the requirements for a just system, the most fundamental is a body of nondiscriminatory laws. Many criminal laws are the result of public consensus on what kinds of behaviors should be punished (such as murder, rape, and theft). The laws devised to make these acts illegal and to specify the extent of punishment for violators are nondiscriminatory because they do not single out a particular social category as the target. Although these laws in themselves are not discriminatory, the remainder of this chapter demonstrates that the administration of them often is unfair.

Other laws, however, do discriminate because they result from the exertions of special interests to translate their objectives into public policy. In contrast, some segments of society (such as the poor, minorities, and youth) rarely have access to the lawmaking process and therefore often find the laws unfairly aimed at them. Vagrancy, for example, is really a crime that only the poor can commit.

One example of this interest group approach to the law is the pre-Civil War and Jim Crow legislation in the South. The majority created laws to keep the races separate and unequal. Here are a few specific examples of the historical bias of the law against Blacks:

- The law played a critical role in defining and sanctioning slavery. For instance, the law made slavery hereditary and a lifetime condition.
- The slave codes denied Blacks the rights to bring lawsuits or to testify against a White person.
- The slave codes denied Blacks the rights to marriage.
- Jim Crow laws codified the customs and uses of segregation.
- After Reconstruction, the grandfather clause, the literacy test, and the poll tax were legal devices designed to keep Blacks from voting.
- In the nineteenth century, the law allowed only White men to sit on juries.

Not only is the formation of the law political, so too is its administration. At every stage in the processing of criminals, authorities make choices based on personal bias, pressures from the powerful, and the constraints of the status quo. Examples of the political character of law administration include attempts by the powerful to coerce other people to their view of morality, resulting in laws against pornography, drug use, and gambling; pressure exerted by the powerful on the authorities to crack down on certain kinds of violators, especially individuals and groups who are disruptive (protesters); pressure exerted to keep certain crimes from public view (embezzlement, stock fraud, the Iran-Contra scandal); pressure to protect the party in power, elected officials, and even the police department; and any effort to protect and preserve the status quo.

## Police

Formal law enforcement policy begins with the police. They decide whether a law has been broken. They interpret and judge what behavior is “disorderly,” how much noise constitutes a “public nuisance,” when a quarrel becomes a “criminal assault,”

when protest becomes illegitimate, and what constitutes “public drunkenness.” Their authority to interpret these questions suggests that the police have great decisional latitude. Unlike other agencies in the criminal justice process, the police in their work often deal with their clients in isolation.

Given the great discretionary powers of the individual police, one must determine whether police officers as a group tend to hold particular biases that affect their perceptions and actions. Several characteristics of the job and the types of people attracted to it suggest that certain biases may prevail among this occupational category.

The job itself causes police personnel to develop a distinctive way of perceiving the world. Foremost is that they are given the authority to enforce the law. They have power—even the ultimate power of legitimate force—at their disposal to uphold the law. As authorities sworn to uphold the law, police support the status quo. Naturally, then, they find people who defile the flag or otherwise protest against the system abhorrent.

Second, the danger inherent in their occupation promotes a particular worldview among the police. The element of danger tends to make them suspicious of behavior that is nonconforming or otherwise unusual. In the interests of self-defense, they tend to assume the worst of people they believe to be dangerous (minorities, protesters, drug users).

The police also tend to be socially isolated. Because they have actual power over other citizens, police personnel are the objects of hostility for many, but especially for minority group members. This hostility is manifested in abusive language and other forms of harassment. The result, of course, is that the police, even those relatively free of prejudice toward minorities, tend to become hostile toward members of certain social categories over time. The harassment directed toward the police also increases the threat of danger to them. The result is a self-fulfilling prophecy: The police, harassed by victimized categories in society, in turn harass their tormentors, which leads to charges of police brutality and the justification to be hostile toward them.

Tensions between the police and the public have become increasingly pronounced after a series of deaths at the hands of police. These deaths and actions were captured on video and made public. Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Walter Scott, and Freddie Gray were all Black males who died during altercations with police. Eric Garner died after police used a chokehold on him; Michael Brown, Tamir Rice (a 12-year-old), and Walter Scott were shot by police; and Freddie Gray died from injuries to his spinal cord after being physically detained by the police. These and other incidents sparked the formation of Black Lives Matter, an activist group dedicated to fighting against racism, racial profiling, and the killings of Black people by police and others.

The evidence is clear that suspects who are poor, minority, and male are more likely to be formally arrested than suspects who are white, affluent, and female. **Racial profiling** (the practice of targeting citizens for police encounters on the basis of race) is common. DWB (driving while Black or Brown), or more recently, DWM (driving while Muslim) or FWM (flying while Muslim) is not a crime, but because of racial profiling by the police, there is the assumption of criminal behavior. For example, more than 80 percent of the automobile searches by the New Jersey state police on the New Jersey Turnpike during the 1990s were conducted on vehicles driven by African Americans and Latinos (Kocieniewski and Hanley, 2000). A report of Missouri police found that they stop Black motorists at a rate 30 percent higher than White drivers and search them 70 percent more often (Associated Press, 2001). This targeting of

### Racial profiling

The practice of targeting citizens for police encounters on the basis of race.

racial minorities by the police is based on the assumption that racial minorities are more likely than Whites to commit crime (Lichtenberg, 2006).

A 2008 report by the American Civil Liberties Union in Arizona found that Black and Latino drivers were two and a half times more likely than white drivers to be searched, and Native American drivers were three and a quarter times more likely than Whites to be searched, despite the fact that they were *less* likely than Whites to be found with contraband (ACLU, 2009). The ACLU concludes,



The disproportionate rates at which minorities are stopped and searched, in addition to the often high concentrations of law enforcement in minority communities, continue to have a tremendous impact on the overrepresentation of minorities (and especially members of African American, Latino, and Native American communities) in the American criminal justice system. (2009: 12–13)

The police engage in racial profiling also in situations other than in traffic encounters. For example, the police are much more likely to target drug use in poor neighborhoods than the use of drugs on a middle-class college campus, even though the level of drug use may be higher on campus. The result is that a greater proportion of African Americans are arrested for drug charges than middle-class Whites, thereby reinforcing the stereotypes and the rationale for further use of racial profiling.

## Judicial Process

How fair is the process by which lawbreakers are prosecuted, tried, convicted, and sentenced? Given that the courts deal only with those whom the police arrest, clearly the process begins with a bias. The question is: Do the courts increase the degree of unfairness or not? A related question involves the operation of the principle that individuals brought before the courts are presumed innocent: How great is the gap between principle and practice?

To answer these questions, let us examine the formal procedures of the justice system for the commission of a serious crime. The police arrest the probable offender and bring him or her before a magistrate. The magistrate examines the evidence and decides whether to allow the alleged offender to be free on bail. The case is then turned over to a prosecuting attorney, who formally charges the defendant. This charge is subject to review by a judge at a preliminary hearing or by a grand jury. If the defendant pleads not guilty, then he or she comes to trial, where the facts of the case

Protesters march in New York City against racial profiling and the New York Police Department's "Stop and Frisk" policy.

are argued by the prosecuting and defense attorneys before a judge and jury. If the jury finds the defendant guilty, he or she is sentenced by the judge to a term in prison or to a term of probation.

**MAGISTRATE AND THE SETTING OF BAIL** The primary functions of the magistrate are to inform defendants of their right to counsel, to assign them counsel if so requested, to set a date for a preliminary hearing, and to set bail. In the last procedure, the magistrate exercises considerable discretion.

### Bail

Posting of money by the accused to guarantee that he or she will be present at the trial.

**Bail** is the posting of money by the accused to guarantee that he or she will be present at the time of trial. The Constitution provides the right to bail in noncapital cases. Bail allows accused people to stay out of jail, thereby retaining their family, community, and work responsibilities; most important, it allows them a chance to investigate and prepare their cases.

Several practices in setting bail, however, undermine the principle of treating all people fairly. The primary problem is that the amount of bail to be posted is left to the discretion of the magistrate, who may set high bail to “teach the accused a lesson” or to “protect the community.” Magistrates have often taken such an approach when the defendants have been political protesters and minority group members. This practice violates the Eighth Amendment, which specifically forbids the setting of excessive bail; moreover, the concept of preventive detention contradicts the presumption of innocence that is supposed to be at the heart of the judicial process.

The setting of bail is also unfair because magistrates tend to determine the amount of bail by the type of crime alleged instead of by the accused’s ability to pay. Moreover, the accused or their families typically obtain bail money from professional bondspersons, who receive 5 to 10 percent of the total as their fee. If the bail were set at \$10,000 for everyone accused of a felony and the accused had to pay a bondsperson a fee of \$1,000, clearly the accused who were poor would suffer the greatest hardship.

The obvious result of the system of setting bail is that the poor remain in jail and the wealthy are released, either because the latter have their own money or bail or because bail bondspersons consider them less risky. This result highlights another problem: the power of bail bondspersons to decide whom they will bond and whom they will not. Of course, the poor are considered a greater risk. Moreover, bondspersons may refuse to grant bail as a “favor” to the police.

Thus, the biggest problem with the bail-setting practice as it now operates is that it tends to imprison the poor. Time spent in jail before trial varies by locality and by the backlog of pending cases. In some jurisdictions, defendants who cannot make bail spend as long as eighteen months in jail awaiting trial. Clearly, this situation violates the principle that the accused person is presumed innocent until proven guilty, for it provides punishment before conviction. And the difference between those who languish in jail before their trial and those who are free is money.

### Plea bargaining

Arrangement between the prosecution and the accused whereby the latter pleads guilty in return for a reduced charge.

**PLEA BARGAINING** Fewer than 10 percent of the people charged with crimes ever go to trial. The thousands of cases that bypass the trial process do so because either the charges are dropped or the people accused plead guilty to the original or lesser charges. The latter event is called **plea bargaining** because the defendants bargain away their right to a trial in return for their guilty plea and a more lenient punishment than if they were found guilty of the original charge. Plea bargaining has become the rule, not the exception, in the disposition of criminal cases in the United States.

There are many pressures on defendants, lawyers, prosecutors, and judges to encourage plea bargaining. Foremost is the overwhelming caseload facing police, prosecutors, and judges. Without guilty pleas to speed defendants through the system, the criminal justice process could not function because of impossibly crowded courts. One obvious solution is for judges to encourage guilty pleas by implementing the agreements negotiated by prosecutors and defense counsel. Similarly, prosecutors encourage plea bargaining because of their large caseloads. In addition, prosecutors must have a high conviction rate, and plea bargaining achieves this goal at relatively little expense.

Defendants are pressured in several ways to plea bargain. People assigned as defense counsel typically encourage their clients to “cop a plea.” One reason they encourage plea bargaining is that assigned counsel receive little compensation, and they would rather return quickly to their more lucrative private practice. Counsel may also feel that plea bargaining is in the best interests of the client because it will reduce time spent in jail awaiting trial. District attorneys often force plea bargaining on defendants by charging them with more serious crimes (carrying heavier penalties). Compelling defendants to plea bargain has the effect of reducing caseloads. A defendant who refuses to bargain faces the possibility of serving a longer sentence and for a more serious offense. Public defenders also encourage plea bargaining to reduce the burden of their large caseloads on their small investigative staffs. They would rather concentrate their efforts on capital crimes.

There are special pressures on defendants who are poor or of moderate means to plead guilty. They will be unable to bear the expense of a lengthy trial. Moreover, those unable to make bail must await trial in jail. These factors deter poor defendants from insisting on their rights. Although overcrowding in the courts may make it a necessity, plea bargaining subverts the basic foundations of the system of criminal justice. Contrary to the Bill of Rights, the practice operates on an implicit assumption of guilt. It fails to distinguish between the innocent and the guilty, thus penalizing the innocent and rewarding the guilty. Moreover, because it reduces sentences, plea bargaining erodes the elements of deterrence on which criminal sanctions are based. The procedure especially discriminates against the poor. The poor defendant, already in jail, is pressured by court-appointed counsel to bargain from a position of weakness. In a plea bargaining situation, the need for competent and conscientious counsel outweighs all other factors. Yet it is inevitable that a lawyer receiving a handsome fee for his or her services will be more interested in a client’s welfare than an overburdened and undercompensated court-appointed attorney.

**ADVERSARY SYSTEM** An intrinsic feature of the U.S. criminal justice system is the concept of adversary roles. In the **adversary system**, the state and the accused engage in a public battle to argue and provide evidence before an impartial judge or jury. For this principle to work, the adversaries must be relatively equal in ability, incentive, and resources. But this is not usually the case. The state has enormous resources (police, crime labs, detectives) with which to build its case. The accused, if wealthy, can match the resources and expertise of the state. In the famous O. J. Simpson case, for example, the defendant spent between \$5 million and \$6 million for a team of lawyers, jury selection experts, DNA authorities, and other specialists. In what would have been a speedy trial and probably an open-and-shut case of guilt for a poor defendant, the Simpson team was able to contest every piece

### Adversary system

The U.S. system of justice, whereby the state and the accused engage in a public battle to argue and provide evidence before an impartial judge or jury.



of evidence by the prosecution, present counter-theories, and raise a reasonable doubt among the jurors:

The Simpson case has demonstrated perhaps more starkly than ever before that in the American justice system, as in so much else in this country, *money changes everything—and huge amounts of money change things almost beyond recognition.* (Gleick, 1995:41; emphasis added)

But the Simpson case was an anomaly. Of all felony defendants in the United States, 80 to 90 percent are too poor to hire their own lawyer and are represented by court-appointed attorneys. These poor defendants are especially disadvantaged by the adversary system. Obviously, they cannot pay for detective work, hire expert witnesses, and do the other things necessary to build their case.

**TRIAL BY JURY** Fundamental to a fair system of criminal justice is the right to a trial by a jury consisting of a representative body of citizens. In practice, however, certain categories of people are underrepresented on juries: minorities, people not registered to vote, students, and low-prestige occupational groups. The result is that the poor, especially the poor from minority groups, are typically not judged by a jury of their peers (see “A Closer Look: Jena Six”).

#### A CLOSER LOOK

##### **Jena Six**

In high schools across the country, teachers and administrators must deal with school fights on a regular basis. Most of the time, the students are punished or suspended, and the public never hears about them. This was not the case, however, for the infamous “Jena Six.” In December 2006, racial tensions were mounting at Jena High School in central Louisiana. One particular day, a Black student sat under a tree that was known to students as the “White tree” where only White students could sit. The next day, three nooses were hanging from the tree.

The principal expelled the White students responsible, but the school board and superintendent overruled him, reducing the punishment to in-school suspensions. As tensions mounted, there was a fight in which a White student suffered a concussion and multiple bruises. Six Black students were arrested and faced felony charges of attempted murder with potential fines of more than \$90,000 and potential sentences of up to twenty years. They became known as the “Jena Six.”

A judge reduced the charges against five of the six boys and only one of the Jena six went to trial. Mychal Bell (16 years old) was initially tried as an adult for aggravated assault and conspiracy.

He was tried before a white judge and an all-white jury. He had only a court-appointed counsel who called no witnesses. The prosecutor argued that the gym shoes on his feet constituted a “deadly weapon.” He was convicted, jailed with prohibitive bond, and faced twenty years in prison. (Jackson, 2007: 1)

The severity of the charges caught the attention of civil rights groups across the country, and protests mounted. An online civil rights group raised more than \$275,000 for legal defense for the Jena Six, and in September 2007, more than 40,000 demonstrators went to Jena to protest unequal justice for the students. In December 2007, Mychal Bell pleaded guilty to second-degree battery and was sentenced to eighteen months in jail.

In 2009, the case was resolved when the other five students pleaded no contest to simple battery and agreed to fines and seven days of probation. The civil rights group (ColorofChange.org) that raised the money for their defense said in a press statement: Today's plea deal shows that the original charges in the case were unfair and vastly overblown. The story of the Jena six was an extreme example of what can happen when a justice system biased against Black boys operates unchecked. But it's also an example of what can happen when hundreds of thousands of people across the country stand up to challenge unequal justice. (quoted in Facing South, 2009:1)

The failure of juries to reflect communities is significant because the people least represented are those most likely to challenge community norms. This situation puts a special burden on defendants accused of political crimes (such as antiwar and civil rights protest).

In selecting a jury, attorneys for the state and the accused attempt to choose jurors who are likely to favor their particular side. The selection process tends to be unfair, however. The state, with enormous investigatory and financial resources at its disposal, may use the police and the FBI to investigate minute details about each prospective juror. Unless the accused is very wealthy, the defense usually decides on the bases of intuition and superficial information.

Trial outcomes are also affected to some extent by whether the case is heard by a jury or a trial judge. The research suggests that juries tend to be more lenient than judges. This points to another inequity of the judicial system: Because jury trials increase the probability of acquittal for defendants, they should be equally available to all people.

**JUDICIAL SENTENCING** Until the 1970s, judges were given considerable latitude in determining the exact punishment for convicted criminals. The discretion of the judges was almost without limits, and sometimes the results were very inconsistent from judge to judge and

Individuals from poor minority groups are typically not judged by a jury of their own peers.



even by a particular judge. This discretionary sentencing permitted individualized justice. In other words, the judge could take into account the peculiar factors of the case in the sentencing decision. Although this ideal is a worthy one, the procedure resulted in a kind of courtroom roulette, depending on the law in the jurisdiction, the ideology of the judge, media attention, and other factors. Most telling among these other factors were the social class and racial characteristics of the defendants, with a strong tendency for middle- and upper-class Whites to receive lighter sentences than lower-class Whites and racial and ethnic minorities.

Beginning in the 1970s, there was a movement to curb the discretionary power of judges with the passage of mandatory and determinate sentencing laws. **Mandatory sentencing** forced judges to incarcerate violent and habitual criminals. **Determinate sentencing** means that for a given offense, the judge must impose a sentence (sometimes a fixed sentence and sometimes a range, depending on the state), within the guidelines of the law, depending on the crime and the offender's past record. Typically, a sentencing commission would be appointed in a state to determine these penalties.

The leading example of mandatory sentencing is the "three strikes and you're out" law passed by the federal government (1994) and many state legislatures. The essence of this law is that someone found guilty of three serious crimes would be locked up for life with no hope for parole (serious is defined differently by the various states, with some accepting only violent crimes in this category, whereas others may include low-level property crimes and drug offenses). This provision is popular because it is punitive on so-called habitual criminals and thus will potentially lower the crime rate by getting those habitual criminals off the streets. There are several problems with this get-tough policy, however. First, despite having the highest imprisonment rates of all industrialized countries, the United States still has the highest crime rates, so clearly "three strikes" is not working. Second, this mandatory provision increases the demand on limited prison space. Third, lower-level offenders increasingly populate the prisons (small-time thieves, repeat property criminals, and drug offenders). The percentage of inmates in federal prisons convicted of violent crimes, for example, has decreased while the proportion there for drug offenses has increased to almost half of all federal prisoners (see Figure 11.3).

As mentioned previously, the rising prison population coupled with tough economic times has caused some states to ease their mandatory sentencing regulations and seek cheaper alternatives to imprisonment. In 2003, Delaware and Washington, for example, reduced prison terms for nonviolent drug offenders, thus saving millions and reducing prison overcrowding.

Critics of the system argue that in spite of mandatory and determinate sentencing laws, the judicial sentencing process continues to be biased. This becomes obvious when looking at who actually receives the death penalty—**capital punishment**. As of December 2015, thirty-six states and the federal prison system held 2,984 prisoners under sentence of death. Of these inmates, 98 percent are male, and 50 percent have less than a high school education. Racial minorities are also disproportionately found on death row (e.g., Blacks comprise 12.6 percent of the population, but they made up 42 percent of those awaiting execution in 2015).

### Mandatory sentencing

By law, judges must incarcerate certain types of criminals.

### Determinate sentencing

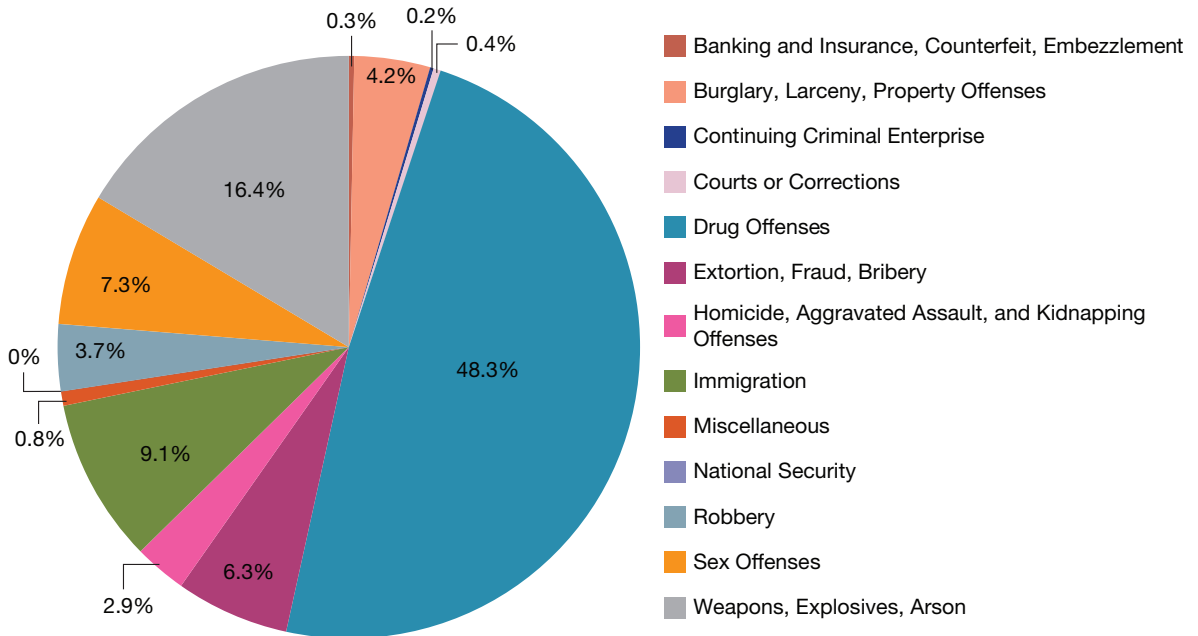
For a given offense, a judge must impose a sentence within the guidelines of the law.

### Capital punishment

Killing of a criminal by the state.

**Figure 11.3** Types of Offenders in Federal Prison, 2015

**SOURCE:** Data from Federal Bureau of Prisons, U.S. Department of Justice. Prisoner Population as of October 2015. Online: [http://www.bop.gov/about/statistics/statistics\\_inmate\\_offenses.jsp](http://www.bop.gov/about/statistics/statistics_inmate_offenses.jsp)



In sum, the bias that disadvantages minorities and the poor throughout the system of justice continues as parole board members, corrections officers, and others make judgments that often reflect stereotyped notions. At every stage of the judicial process, the poor and racial minorities are at a distinct disadvantage. From the decision to arrest or let go with a warning, to the setting of bail, to trial and sentencing, disparities persist.

### U.S. Correctional System

In 2013, the total number of people in the U.S. correctional population (incarcerated, on supervised probation or parole) was 6.9 million. In terms of incarceration, more than 1.5 million were incarcerated in 2014, by far the highest rate in the world.

Why does the United States imprison so many people? The prison boom started in the 1980s, when President Reagan signed a bill that created mandatory minimum sentencing penalties for drug offenses. This bill resulted in a 1,200 percent increase in the number of people jailed for drug violations (Romano, 2011). Overall, America’s “war on drugs” (see Chapter 12) resulted in massive incarceration and an overburdened correctional system.

Because building prisons and housing prisoners is expensive (\$50,000 per inmate per year in California), there has been a rise in the privatization of correctional facilities (referred to as the **prison-industrial complex**). Corrections Corporation of

#### Prison-industrial complex

The privatization of correctional facilities.

America is the nation's largest operator of for-profit prisons. In 2011, the company offered to buy prisons in forty-eight states, asking for a twenty-year management contract plus the guarantee that the prisons would remain at least 90 percent full (Kirkham, 2011). Proponents of privatization argue that states can benefit from the infusion of cash, while opponents raise questions about whether profit motive should be a part of our criminal justice system. Some civil rights advocates worry that the for-profit model depends on spending as little as possible on the prisoners and prisons in order to increase the profit margin, which could result in poor conditions and prisoner safety issues. As Adam Gopnik argues, "the interest of private prisons lies not in the obvious social good of having the minimum necessary number of inmates but in having as many as possible, housed as cheaply as possible" (2012:74). As previously mentioned, the Corrections Corporation of America will buy prisons only if guaranteed that they will remain at least 90 percent full. Shouldn't it be our goal as a society to *reduce* the numbers of incarcerated?

Not only does the United States have a very high rate of incarceration, but the prison population is also unrepresentative of the general population, being disproportionately racial and ethnic minorities, the poor, and the uneducated. Consider the following:

- More than half of all Black men without a high school diploma go to prison at some time in their lives (Gopnik, 2012).
- In 2014, Black males had an imprisonment rate that was six times higher than White males (2,724 per 100,000 Black male residents compared to 465 per 100,000 White males).
- According to the Innocence Project, nearly 70 percent of the 242 people that have been exonerated by DNA testing are racial minorities (that is, they were convicted of crimes and later DNA testing found them to be innocent) (2012).
- African American youth make up 30 percent of those arrested while they only represent 17 percent of the overall youth population. Furthermore, African American youth are nine times more likely than White youth to receive an adult prison sentence (Shelton, 2009).

That the members of the disadvantaged in society (the poor and the minorities) are disproportionately represented in the prison population reinforces negative stereotypes already prevalent among the majority of the population. The large number of African Americans and the poor in prison is taken as proof that those groups have criminal tendencies. Moreover, the high **recidivism rate** (the return to crime by ex-prisoners; 50 to 60 percent of inmates in U.S. prisons or jails are not there for the first time) is viewed as further proof of the criminality of the poor, the uneducated, and minority groups. But, as we have seen, the criminal justice system is not just. Economic resources make a crucial difference at every stage in the process, while institutional discrimination has also kept minorities disproportionately underrepresented among police, lawyers, judges, and juries.

With an overcrowded prison system and a high recidivism rate, it is clear that the correctional system is not working as it stands. As criminologist Jeffrey Reiman states, "Prison produces more criminals than it cures" (2007:32) (see "Social Policy: Halden, the World's Most Humane Prison" for an alternative approach to incarceration).

### Recidivism rate

Percentage of offenders who, after their treatment or punishment has ended, are arrested and convicted of new offenses.

## Social Policy

### Halden, the World's Most Humane Prison

In 2010, Halden prison opened in southeastern Norway. Halden is not your typical prison; there are no bars, and prisoners have private cells with large windows for sunlight and private bathrooms. The prisoners enjoy flat-screen televisions in their rooms and mini-refrigerators. Ten to twelve cells share a common living room and kitchen, where they cook for each other and socialize. The facility also includes a gym, a training room, a chapel, a library, a sound studio, and a school. There is a free-standing two-bedroom house to host families during overnight visits, and the grounds include jogging trails and a rock-climbing wall. The architects designed the prison to avoid an institutional feel, and the entire prison was built under the principle that repressive prisons do not work. Instead, at Halden they believe that

treating prisoners humanely will boost their chances of reintegrating into society (Adams, 2010).

Halden brings up the fundamental question: What are prisons for? Are they for punishment or rehabilitation? Obviously, in Norway they believe prisons are for rehabilitation. Because many of the prisoners come from dysfunctional homes, at Halden they promote a sense of family. The guards do not wear guns, and routinely eat and socialize with the inmates (Adams, 2010).

This approach is a far cry from the U.S. approach to incarceration, and it appears to be working. Officials in Norway claim that within two years of their release, 20 percent of Norway's prisoners end up back in jail (a much lower recidivism rate than the United States rate of 50–60 percent) (Adams, 2010).

## Stopping the Cradle to Prison Pipeline

As this chapter has shown, the United States has the highest incarceration rate in the industrialized world. We spend billions of dollars each year to imprison more of our citizens than any other country, and our system of justice does not treat all groups of people equally. The president of the Children's Defense Fund, Marion Wright Edelman, wrote,

Nationally, one in three Black boys and one in six Latino boys born in 2001 are at risk of going to prison during their lifetimes. Although boys are more than five times as likely to be incarcerated as girls, the number of girls in the juvenile justice system is significant and growing. This shamefully high incarceration rate of Black youths is endangering our children at younger and younger ages and poses a huge threat to our nation's future. America's cradle to prison pipeline is putting thousands of young people on a trajectory that leads to marginalized lives, imprisonment, and often premature death. (2009: 1)

The Children's Defense Fund has started a "Cradle to Prison Pipeline Crusade," aimed at preventing children from entering the pipeline and helping the children already trapped there. A number of states are working on plans to break the pipeline. The Children's Defense Fund points to Missouri as a model for the rest of the country.

The state of Missouri used a rehabilitative and therapeutic approach to overhaul its juvenile justice system that has been hailed as a national model for juvenile justice reform. The philosophy behind Missouri's program is to treat youths as potentially

productive members of society instead of lost causes in a prison cage. The results are clear. Missouri's juvenile recidivism rate has only eight percent of those incarcerated coming back into juvenile custody and eight percent going into Missouri's prisons. It is one of the best success stories in the country. (Edelman, 2009:1)

The pipeline to prison is connected to many of the topics in this book, especially racial inequality, poverty, and education. High school dropouts are almost three times as likely to be incarcerated as high school graduates, and, as we have seen, half the prison population awaiting execution does not have a high school diploma. Thus, the Children's Defense Fund points to early childhood intervention programs (such as Head Start) and education reform as key components in stopping the pipeline for at-risk youth. The challenge for states is to make the commitment and invest in *prevention*, rather than continue to spend a disproportionate amount of funds and resources on corrections and punishment.

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## Chapter Review

### 11.1 Explain the complicated nature of the definition of crime.

- Although there is no universally accepted definition of crime, the most common one—the breaking of a law—officially labels people and separates society into criminal and noncriminal categories. In other words, criminality is a social status determined by how an individual is perceived, evaluated, and treated by legal authorities.
- Because the definition of a crime depends on the current law, as society changes and as new interest groups become powerful, the laws and interpretations of the laws regarding criminal behavior may also change. Many behaviors once considered criminal no longer are, such as marrying someone of another race or selling liquor.
- Traditional street crimes are the crimes emphasized by the police, the government, and the media. They are the FBI's index crimes of burglary, larceny, auto theft, robbery, rape, assault, and murder. These are serious crimes against property or violence against people that many people consider to be the whole of crime, and people accused of these crimes are the ones who typically clog the courts and prisons.
- Victimless crimes are private acts designated as criminal by powerful interest groups that are able to legislate morality. Making these acts criminal creates several problems: (a) They are costly to enforce, and, if legal, they would bring in significant tax revenues; (b) they make organized crime profitable; and (c) they contribute to the corruption of the police and courts.
- Organized crime is a business syndicate that supplies illegal goods and services. Organized crime thrives because of (a) the high demand for illegal goods and services, (b) corruption among the police and government officials, (c) violence and intimidation, and (d) its well-organized operation at all levels—locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally.
- Losses resulting from individual white-collar crime amount to many times the monetary loss from street crimes. Yet official agencies do not devote as much attention to white-collar crimes, and the few criminals that are apprehended often receive relatively light sentences.
- Corporate crimes are the most dangerous and expensive to society because they involve unsafe working conditions, pollution of the environment, unsafe products, and fraud.
- Political crimes are of two types: (a) acts that threaten the power structure and (b) illegal acts by those in power.

### 11.2 Explain how crime rates vary by sex, age, social class, and race.

- There are two basic sources of crime statistics in the U.S. The FBI's *Uniform Crime Reports* is based on reports gathered from law enforcement agencies across the country.
- These statistics focus on street crimes against people and property. They omit white-collar crimes, corporate crimes, political crime, and organized crime. The perpetrators of these types of crimes are disproportionately people on the economic margins of society—the poor, the uneducated, the unemployed, the homeless, and racial minorities.
- The second major source of crime statistics is the National Crime Victimization Survey. These statistics come from surveys of households, thus they also include crimes *not* reported to the police.
- The rates of violent crimes (including homicide) and property crimes are lower now than in the 1990s. At the same time, expenditures for police departments and courts have increased over time, and there are 6.9 million people in jail, prison, on parole, or on probation.
- According to the official crime statistics, (a) more males than females commit crimes (males are also more likely to be victims of crime), (b) young adults ages 25–34 have the highest street crime rates, and (c) the poor, undereducated, unemployed, and racial minorities are more likely to be arrested and labeled as criminals.

### 11.3 Explain how the United States system of justice is biased against certain groups in society.

- The system of justice is fundamentally unjust. The laws favor the powerful. The Crime

Index channels police activities toward certain criminal acts (street crimes) and away from others (white collar). The poor are disadvantaged at every stage of the judicial process because lawyers, bail, and an adequate defense are costly.

- Racial profiling (the practice of targeting citizens for police encounters on the basis of race) is common, and tensions between the police and the public have become increasingly pronounced after a series of deaths at the hands of police. These deaths and actions were captured on video and made public.
- The U.S. incarcerates more people than any other country, a boom that began in the 1980s with the “war on drugs.” Corporations have taken advantage of cash-strapped states and have bought or manage correctional facilities as a for-profit enterprise.
- As of December 2015, thirty-six states and the federal prison system held 2,984 prisoners under sentence of death. Of these inmates, 98 percent are male, and 50 percent have less than a high school education. Racial minorities are also disproportionately found on death row (e.g., Blacks are 12.6 percent of the population, but they made up 42 percent of those awaiting execution in 2015).
- The “cradle to prison pipeline” is the idea that some children in American society are at great risk to end up in the American correctional system. Solutions to the crime problem must veer away from the current ideology of punishment to focus on prevention and breaking this pipeline.

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## Key Terms

**Adversary system** The U.S. system of justice, whereby the state and the accused engage in a public battle to argue and provide evidence before an impartial judge or jury.

**Bail** Posting of money by the accused to guarantee that he or she will be present at the trial.

**Capital punishment** Killing of a criminal by the state.



**Corporate crimes** Illegal acts by business enterprises.

**Crime** An act that breaks the law.

**Determinate sentencing** For a given offense, a judge must impose a sentence within the guidelines of the law.

**Mandatory sentencing** By law, judges must incarcerate certain types of criminals.

**Moral order crimes** Acts that violate laws that enforce the morality of the majority.

**Organized crime** A business operation that seeks profit by supplying illegal goods and services.

**Plea bargaining** Arrangement between the prosecution and the accused whereby the latter pleads guilty in return for a reduced charge.

**Political crimes** Illegal acts intended to influence the political system. Also, the abuse of authority by those in power. Finally, actions by governments that are illegal or immoral.

**Ponzi scheme** An investment fraud that involves the payment of purported returns to existing

investors from funds contributed by new investors (rather than from any legitimate investment activity).

**Prison-industrial complex** The privatization of correctional facilities.

**Racial profiling** The practice of targeting citizens for police encounters on the basis of race.

**Recidivism rate** Percentage of offenders who, after their treatment or punishment has ended, are arrested and convicted of new offenses.

**Secondary deviance** Deviant behavior that is a consequence of the self-fulfilling prophecy of a negative label.

**Victimless crimes** Acts that violate moral order crimes; they may offend the majority, but they do not harm other people.

**White-collar crimes** Illicit acts committed by middle-class and upper-middle-class people in their business and social activities.

# Chapter 12

# Drugs



## Learning Objectives

- 12.1** Explain the politics behind the definition of drugs and the current United States drug laws.
- 12.2** Discuss the most commonly abused illegal and legal drugs and how drug use varies by class, race, and gender.
- 12.3** Critique the U.S. “war on drugs” policy.

**Drug**

Any substance that affects the structure or function of the body when ingested.

**Politics of drugs**

The labeling of some drugs as legal and others as illegal depends on the definition of drugs by the most powerful interest groups, which are able to get their definitions incorporated into the law.

Throughout history, people have sought to alter their consciousness through the use of both legal and illegal substances. A **drug** is any substance that affects the structure or function of the body when ingested. This broad definition includes such substances as aspirin, caffeine, nicotine, heroin, and alcohol. Every society accepts some drugs as appropriate and regards others as unacceptable. Some drugs are considered dangerous, and others are harmless. But the definitions vary from society to society, and within U.S. society they are inconsistent and often ambiguous.

Many people in the United States are concerned about the drug problem. But what is meant by “the drug problem”? Is drug use equated with abuse? Why are alcohol and tobacco legal drugs when they are addictive, physically harmful, and socially disruptive? Is drug use a medical or a criminal problem?

Three points should be made at the outset of this discussion. First, definitions concerning drugs and drug-related behaviors are socially constructed. That is, definitions about drugs are not based on some universal standard but rather on meanings that people in groups have imputed to certain substances and behaviors. Second, as is true with all social problems, members of different societies or groups (e.g., religious and political) within a society often differ in their beliefs about this phenomenon. Third, the definition of drugs by the most powerful interest groups in a society will become part of the law and be enforced on others. Thus, the labeling of some drugs as legal and others as illegal involves politics. Therefore, in examining such topics as the history of drug laws, types of drugs, the extent of drug use and abuse, and the consequences of official drug policies, this chapter continually refers to the **politics of drugs**.

## The Politics of Drugs

### 12.1 Explain the politics behind the definition of drugs and the current United States drug laws.

Drugs are a social problem in U.S. society. Yet not all drugs are considered problems, nor are all people who take drugs. Some drugs are legal, and others are not. Some drugs caused problems once but are now considered safe; others that were not considered problems now are considered unsafe. Some drug use is labeled “abuse,” whereas other use is not. Ironically, the drugs most objected to and most strictly controlled are not those most dangerous to users and society. Marijuana and heroin, though defined as illegal by the federal government, are less dangerous than barbiturates, alcohol, and nicotine, which can be legally obtained and used indiscriminately. To explain such irrationality, we must understand how drugs and their use came to be legal or illegal.

### Historical Legality of Drugs

The definition of drug use and abuse is complicated in U.S. society because different patterns of use are acceptable for different people. Some religious groups forbid the use of any drugs, even for medicinal purposes. Others accept medicines but reject all forms of drugs, including caffeine, for recreational use. At the other extreme are groups that may use drugs in their religious rituals to expand the mind. Time also changes interpretation. Early in the twentieth century, for example, it was socially acceptable for men to smoke tobacco, but not for women. Then around 1950 or so, it

became socially acceptable for women to smoke tobacco, and smoking was regularly seen in movies and on television. Now, increasingly, smokers of both sexes find their smoking unacceptable in public places.

Not only is there variance from group to group within society and from time to time, but there has also been virtually no consistency concerning the legality of drugs historically. The history of the acceptance or rejection of opiates (such as opium, morphine, and heroin) in the United States affords a useful example because it parallels what happened to public attitudes toward other drugs.

Opiates were legal in the nineteenth-century United States and were widely used as painkillers in the Civil War, with many soldiers becoming addicted. Morphine was legally manufactured from imported opium, and opium poppies were legally grown in the United States. Opium was widely dispensed in countless pharmaceutical preparations.

The only nineteenth-century context in which opiates were declared illegal was one created by anti-Chinese sentiment. The Chinese, who were imported to the West Coast to provide cheap labor to build the railroads, brought opium with them. At first, their opium dens were tolerated. But as the cheap Chinese labor began to threaten the White labor market, there was agitation to punish the Chinese for their “evil” ways. San Francisco and several other West Coast cities passed ordinances around 1875 prohibiting opium dens. These laws were, as some analysts have noted, aimed at the Chinese, not the drug.

The early 1900s were characterized as a period of reform. A number of individuals and groups wanted to legislate morals; the Eighteenth Amendment, which prohibited the sale and use of alcohol, was passed in 1919 as a result of pressure from these reform forces. These groups rallied against **psychoactive drugs** because they believed them to be sinful. They fought against “demon rum” and “demon weed,” as well as other moral evils such as gambling and prostitution. They believed they were doing God’s will and that, if successful, they would provide a better way of life for everyone. Therefore, they lobbied vigorously to achieve appropriate legislation and enforcement of the laws to rid the country of these immoral influences.

As a result of these reform efforts, Congress passed the Harrison Narcotics Act of 1914. This act was basically a tax law requiring people who dispensed opium products to pay a fee and keep records. The law was relatively mild. It did not prohibit the use of opium in patent medicines or even control its use. It did, however, establish a Narcotics Division in the Treasury Department (which eventually became the Bureau of Narcotics). This department assumed the task (which was not specified in the formal law) of eliminating drug addiction. Treasury agents harassed users, physicians, and pharmacists. The bureau launched a propaganda campaign to convince the public of a link between drug use and crime. Finally, the bureau took a number of carefully selected cases to court to broaden its powers. In all these endeavors, the bureau was successful. The net result was that a medical problem became a legal problem.

### Psychoactive drug

Chemical that alters the perceptions and/or moods of people who take it.

A bottle of opium from the nineteenth century, when it was legal.



This point cannot be overemphasized: Prior to the Harrison Act, drug addicts were thought (by the public and government officials) to be sick and in need of individual help. They were believed to be enslaved and in need of being salvaged through the humanitarian efforts of others. But with various government actions (laws, court decisions, and propaganda) and the efforts of reformers, this image of addicts changed from a “medical” to a “criminal” problem. Once defined as a criminal problem, the solution became incarceration.

## Factors Influencing Drug Laws and Enforcement

The previous section shows how differently a drug can be viewed over time. Clearly, current policies regarding opium (most common in the form of heroin) are repressive, but alcohol and tobacco continue to be socially acceptable drugs. These differences, especially because the laws do not reflect the drugs’ relative dangers to users, demonstrate that official drug policies are arbitrary and problematic. What, then, are the factors that affect the focus of our drug laws? We examine two: cultural factors and interest groups.

**CULTURAL FACTORS** Drug laws and policies tend to reflect how people typically perceive drug use. Certain drugs have negative stereotypes, and others do not. Government may have orchestrated these stereotypes or they may be the result of faulty research, propaganda of reformers, negative portrayals in the media, religious ideology, and so on. In the 1940s, for example, most people in the United States shared the assumption that marijuana smokers were “dope fiends.” They believed marijuana users were criminals, immoral, violent, and out of control (an idea encouraged in anti-drug propaganda films like *Reefer Madness* in 1936). Until about 1965, public consensus supported the strict enforcement of marijuana laws. Marijuana was believed to be a dangerous drug associated with other forms of deviance, such as sexual promiscuity and crime. Even college students were virtually unanimous in their condemnation of marijuana smokers as deviants of the worst sort. But the social upheavals of the 1960s included experimentation with drugs and the questioning of society’s mores. Rapid changes in attitudes and behavior occurred, especially among the young and college educated. Most significantly, the use of marijuana skyrocketed. In 1965, 18,815 people were arrested for violations of state and local marijuana laws, and these numbers continue to increase each year. By 2010, over half of all arrests for drug abuse violations were for marijuana (either possession or selling), totaling 853,839 arrests in one year (Drugwarfacts.org, 2012).

While the use, sale, and possession of marijuana is illegal under federal law, four states (Alaska, Colorado, Oregon, and Washington) have legalized both medical and nonmedical use (the consequences of this legalization will be discussed further later in the chapter). Public opinion polls reveal that Americans are divided over the legalization of marijuana, but support for legalization is growing (see Figure 12.1). Those opposed to legalization believe marijuana is physically addictive and that its use leads to the use of hard drugs (in other words, they believe it is a “**gateway drug**”). Research has shown both notions to be false. Marijuana is not physically addictive; it does not cause people to use heroin or other, harder drugs. Despite the facts, however, many still believe the negative stereotypes and thus support strict enforcement.

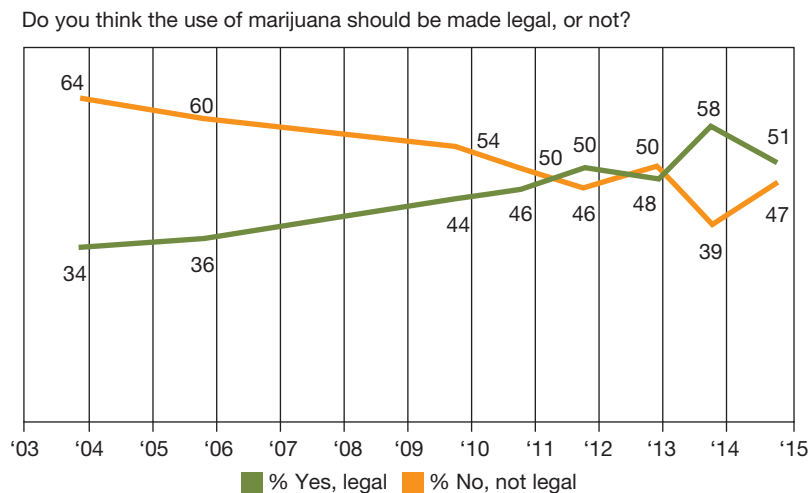
### Gateway drug

The belief that the use of a drug will lead to the use of other hard drugs like heroin and cocaine.

Some drug use has been interpreted as a symbolic rejection of mainstream values, and in this situation those supporting the status quo condemn the drug. Drugs such as alcohol and nicotine do not have this connotation. Because marijuana use was closely associated with the youth protest of the 1960s, many construed it as a symbol of an alternative lifestyle, a rejection of the traditional values of hard work, success through competition, initiative, and materialism and as support for socialism, unpatriotic behavior, sexual promiscuity, and rejection of authority. As long as this view prevailed, punitive measures against marijuana users seemed justified to many if not most citizens.

**Figure 12.1** Americans' Support for Legalizing the Use of Marijuana – Recent Trend

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**INTEREST GROUPS** The approaches for controlling drug use have more to do with the power and social class structure of society than with the inherent characteristics of the substance being controlled. Just as the early anti-opium laws were aimed at Chinese workers, not at opium itself, so the reform movements aimed at prohibition of alcohol represented retaliation by the old middle class—rural, Protestant, native-born—against the largely Catholic urban workers and immigrants who threatened their privileged status. Jenkins examines the relationship between power and drug laws and finds,

Historical examples are not hard to find. Joseph Gusfield's book *Symbolic Crusade* explained the temperance movement in nineteenth-century America in terms of underlying conflicts between old-established elite groups, who were mainly Anglo-Saxon and Protestant, and newer Catholic populations, who were German and Irish. As Catholics viewed alcohol consumption more tolerantly than did Protestants, temperance laws became a symbolic means of reasserting WASP power and values. Other writers have suggested ethnic agendas for the campaigns to prohibit opium in the 1880s (as part of an anti-Chinese movement) and marijuana in the 1930s (which stigmatized a drug associated with African Americans and Mexicans). Repeatedly, African Americans have been the primary targets of such movements, whether the drug in question was cocaine in the progressive era, heroin in mid-century, or crack in the 1980s. During the drug war launched by Presidents Reagan and Bush, for example, the crack cocaine favored by black users attracted savage penalties in the form of severe mandatory sentences for dealing and possession, while lesser sanctions were inflicted upon the mainly white users of cocaine in its powdered form. (1999: 13)

A final example of the relationship between social class and drug policy can be found in the current drive to liberalize marijuana laws. When the lower working class (such as Mexican Americans) was the primary user of marijuana, the law against its use was extremely punitive. In the 1960s, this changed when middle-class, White, affluent college youth became the primary users. However much parents may have disagreed with their children's use of marijuana, they did not want them treated as criminals and stigmatized as drug users. The ludicrousness of the gap between the punishments for marijuana use and for alcohol use became readily apparent to the educated. As a result, White, affluent, and powerful people in most communities and states mounted a push to liberalize the laws.

Mosher and Akins (Mosher and Akins, 2007) argued that by demonizing certain drugs and not others, the government, the criminal justice system, and the media all serve their own interests. For example, a significant part of U.S. agriculture and consumer industry is engaged (with government support) in the production and marketing of nicotine and alcohol products. Even though it is well known that tobacco is harmful to users, the government will not ban its use because of the probable outcry from farmers, the states where tobacco is a major crop, and the tobacco manufacturers, wholesalers, retailers, transporters, and advertisers. Marijuana, on the other hand, is merchandised and sold illegally, so there is no legitimate economic interest pushing for its legalization.

Similarly, the pharmaceutical industry works diligently to dissuade Congress from further restricting amphetamines and other pills. In 1970, pushed by President Nixon, Congress passed the Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act. Some forces tried to include amphetamines in the dangerous-drug category in that bill, but without success. The law declared marijuana possession a serious crime but did not do the same for amphetamines, despite irrefutable evidence that they are more dangerous to the user.

The illegal status of some drugs enables illicit economic interests to flourish. Underworld suppliers of drugs oppose changes in the law because legalization would seriously reduce their profits. They therefore promote restrictive legislation. The result is often a strange alliance between underworld economic interests and religious/moral interests seeking the same end—prohibition of the drug—but for opposite reasons. Thus, a member of Congress could safely satisfy religious zealots and organized crime alike by voting for stricter drug laws.

The law enforcement profession is another interest group that may use its influence to affect drug policy. If drugs and drug users are considered threats, then budgets to seize them will be increased. More arrests will be made, proving the necessity of enforcement and, not incidentally, the need for higher pay and more officers. Perhaps the best example of this syndrome is provided by the activity of the Narcotics Bureau, created by the Harrison Act of 1914. As mentioned earlier, the bureau was instrumental in changing the definition of opiate use from a “medical” activity to a “criminal” one. The bureau used a number of tactics to “prove” that its existence was necessary: It won court cases favorable to its antidrug stance; it vigorously used the media to propagate the “dope fiend” mythology; and it used statistics to incite the public or to prove its own effectiveness.

In effect, the Narcotics Bureau created a **moral panic**. Moral panics occur when a social problem is defined as a threat to societal values and interests. Moral panics often involve the exaggeration of social phenomena and can result in changes in social

### Moral panic

Moral panics occur when a social problem is defined as a threat to societal values and interests. Moral panics typically involve the exaggeration of a social problem; the public response to it is also exaggerated.

policy. Some examples include the media's portrayal of crack cocaine and "crack babies" in the 1980s; the "dope fiend" mythology promoted by the United States government in the early 1900s and again in the 1960s; and more recently, the media portrayal of methamphetamine, "meth babies," and methamphetamine-related crime.

Although *all* drugs are associated with certain harms to individuals and to society, the current drug laws are illogical. They reflect successful political lobbying by a variety of powerful interest groups, with the less powerful suffering the consequences. Despite the drug laws and shifting definitions of certain drugs, an examination of the extent of drug use in U.S. society demonstrates the prevalence of this social problem among all social groups.

## Drug Use in The United States

### 12.2 Discuss the most commonly abused illegal and legal drugs and how drug use varies by class, race, and gender.

Drugs are used worldwide for pleasure and medicinal purposes. The average U.S. household has about thirty different drugs in its medicine cabinet and numerous alcoholic beverages in its liquor cabinet. Approximately 90 percent of the people in the United States are daily caffeine users, and roughly 45 million Americans currently smoke cigarettes. One of the most comprehensive studies on drug use is the annual National Household Survey on Drug Use and Health conducted by SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2015). According to the most recent reports for 2014, 52.7 percent of the population over age 12 (~139 million people) reported being a current user of alcohol, 25.2 percent (66.8 million people) used tobacco products in the past month, and 10.2 percent (26.9 million people) used an illicit drug in the past month (see Figure 12.2). A University of Michigan survey (Monitoring the Future) found that 38.7 percent of twelfth graders had used some illicit drug and 60.2 percent had used alcohol in the last year (Johnston et al., 2015). In 2012, there were more than 1.5 million state and local arrests for drug abuse violations (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2015). In short, a significant portion of Americans uses psychoactive drugs, both legal and illegal.

### Illegal Drugs

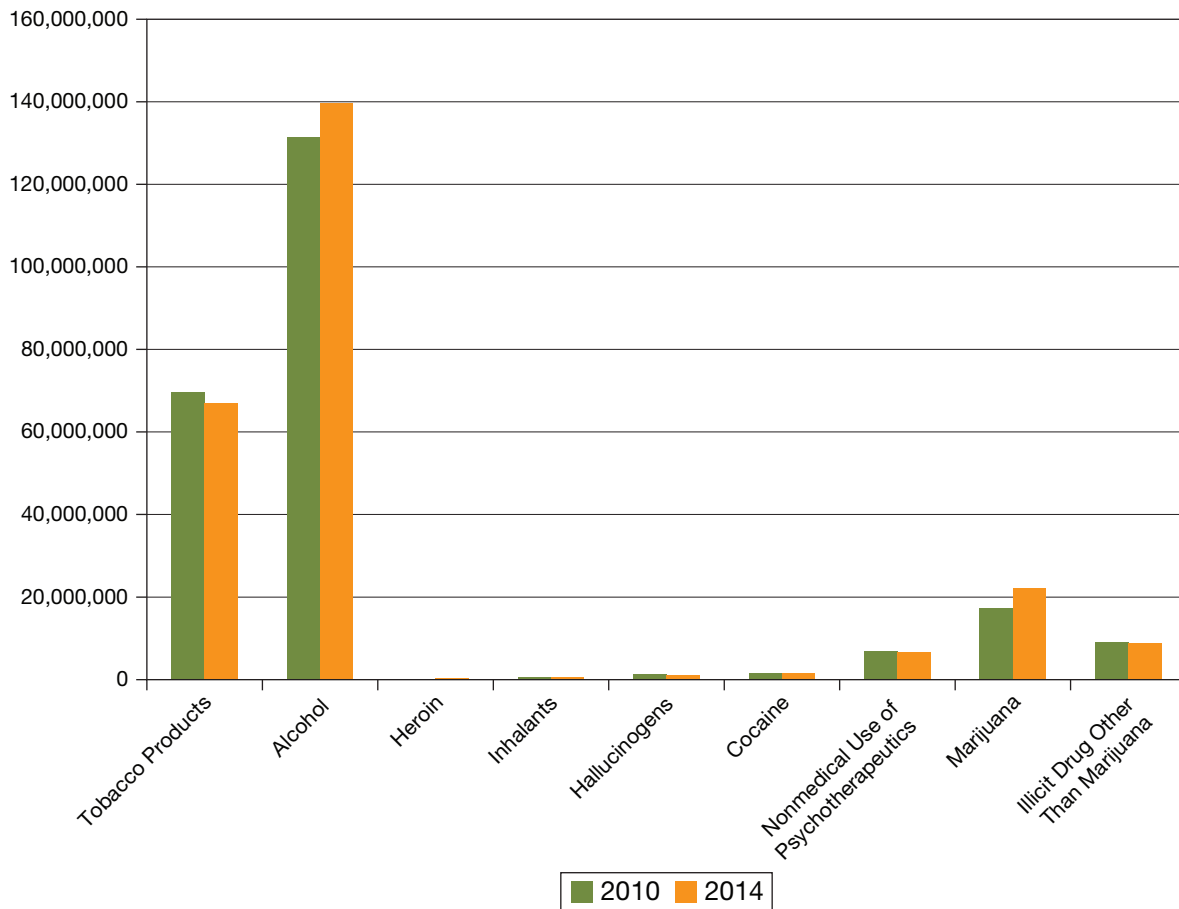
As previously noted, the legality of drugs may shift over time (for example, opium use, or what is currently happening with marijuana). The following drugs are considered illegal in the United States.

**HALLUCINOGENS** Also called psychedelics, hallucinogens produce sensory experiences that represent a different reality to the user. Hallucinogens occur naturally in the peyote cactus, some mushrooms, and certain fungi and other plants. Bad experiences with psychedelics include panic associated with loss of control, the common hallucination that spiders are crawling over the body, paranoia and delusions, and occasionally suicide. The psychedelic drug phencyclidine (PCP) is perhaps the most dangerous. This drug, which is relatively easy to manufacture, can cause psychotic reactions (hallucinations, combative or self-destructive impulses), loss of bowel and bladder control, slurred speech, and inability to walk. Taken in large quantities, it can induce seizures, coma, and death. There is no evidence that physical dependence develops for any of the hallucinogenic drugs. For some people, though, psychological



**Figure 12.2** Past Month Drug Use among Persons Age 12 and Older: 2010 and 2014

**SOURCE:** SAMHSA, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. 2009. "National Survey on Drug Use and Health: 2002-2014." Online: <http://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUH-DetTabs2014/NSDUH-DetTabs2014.pdf>.



dependence occurs. In 2014, 1.1 million people reported using a hallucinogen in the previous month (SAMHSA, 2015).

The drug ecstasy is a synthetic drug with stimulant and hallucinogenic effects. Ecstasy is one of several popular drugs known as "club drugs," used by youth at dance parties, clubs, and bars. In 2014, 2.3 million Americans reported using ecstasy in the past year (SAMHSA, 2015). According to research by the University of Michigan, ecstasy use declined among eighth, tenth, and twelfth graders since its peak in 2001, but rates increased for twelfth graders between 2010 and 2011 and have remained steady since then (Johnston et al., 2015). Regular use can produce blurred vision, confusion, sleeplessness, depression, muscle cramping, fever, chills, hallucinations, and anxiety. Used in combination with alcohol, the effects can be dangerous. The most serious effect of ecstasy is that the drug interferes with the body's ability to regulate temperature. The sharp increase in body temperature can result in severe dehydration, or, on the opposite extreme, an individual will drink too much water and can suffer from water poisoning of his or her bloodstream.

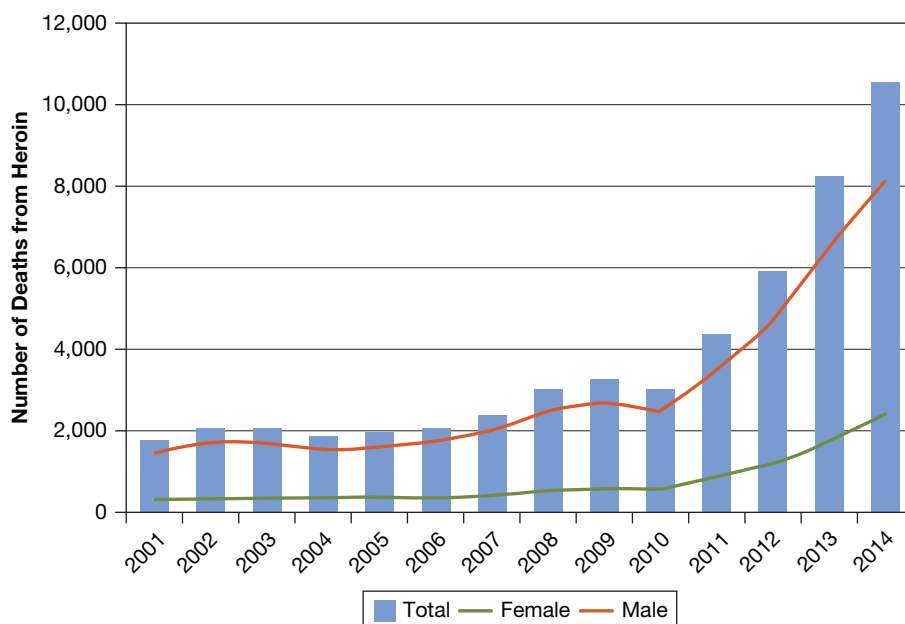
**GHB (GAMMA HYDROXYBUTYRATE)** GHB is a central nervous system depressant that, similar to the drug Rohypnol or “roofie,” can produce amnesia (an idea made popular in the movie *The Hangover*). It is a colorless, odorless liquid mixed with alcoholic drinks or fruit juices. It relaxes or sedates the body, slowing breathing and the heart rate. Users feel euphoric, then sleepy. Overdose results in nausea, vomiting, drowsiness, and headache and can escalate to loss of consciousness, seizures, and a comatose state. GHB has two qualities that make it a favorite date-rape drug: (1) It knocks out users and their short-term memory, and (2) it clears quickly from the body, so laboratory tests might not detect it.

**NARCOTICS (OPIATES)** Narcotics are powerful depressants that have a pronounced effect on the respiratory and central nervous systems. Medically, they are used very effectively to relieve pain, treat diarrhea (paregoric), and stop coughing (codeine). These drugs, which include opium and its derivatives (morphine and heroin), also produce a feeling of euphoria.

Opiates are highly addictive and highly dangerous. Prolonged users experience severe withdrawal symptoms. Because the drug is not regulated, it can include harmful impurities and be of varying potency. As a result, thousands die annually of heroin overdoses, and these figures are increasing (see Figure 12.3). The sharing of needles is a major cause of hepatitis and, in recent years, HIV infection (the precursor of AIDS). Efforts to supply clean needles to the addict population are resisted by government officials because that would appear to condone, even promote, an illegal activity. Another danger associated with heroin is the high cost of purchasing the illegal drug

**Figure 12.3** National Overdose Deaths from Heroin, 2001–2014

**SOURCE:** National Institute on Drug Abuse – original data found <http://www.drugabuse.gov/related-topics/trends-statistics/overdose-death-rates>



(maintaining a heroin addiction can cost hundreds of dollars per day). The users must spend much of their time finding ways to supply their habit, which may include theft or prostitution. The possession of heroin is a criminal offense, leading to incarceration. Taken together, then, the criminal activities an addict turns to plus the complications of poor-quality drugs and infection lead to a relatively high rate of deaths.

The annual prevalence of heroin use has remained fairly constant and low among those ages 19–30. More disturbing are trends for other opiate-based legal painkillers such as Vicodin and OxyContin. The potential for addiction to painkillers and other prescription drugs was made public when Rush Limbaugh, a well-known conservative radio host, admitted to being addicted to prescription painkillers in 2003, as well as the drug-related deaths of popular stars Anna Nicole Smith, Brittany Murphy, and Michael Jackson. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2015), prescription drugs have now surpassed heroin and cocaine as the leading cause of fatal overdoses.

**COCAINE** Cocaine is a strong central nervous system stimulant. An estimated 15 percent of people who try cocaine become addicted. Two studies conducted in 2004 used rats to demonstrate this addictive nature of cocaine. In a French study, rats were given cocaine for three months, and then the scientists cut the rats' drug supply. They found that a certain percentage of the rats were very persistent in trying to get their cocaine, even if it meant getting shocked electrically. In the British study, they also found that rats were willing to experience shocks on their feet to get their fix of cocaine, but only those rats that had been taking cocaine for a long time. The rats that had been taking cocaine for only a short time gave up after their first electric shock (reported in *Medical News Today*, 2004).

In 2014, there were 1.5 million current cocaine users (SAMHSA, 2015). Repeated use of cocaine can produce paranoia, hallucinations, sleeplessness, tremors, weight loss, and depression. Snorting cocaine draws the cocaine powder through the nasal passages, leading to permanent damage to the mucous membranes and serious breathing difficulties. Moreover, snorting allows the cocaine to be absorbed rapidly into the bloodstream and subsequently the brain. If the user desires a more potent dosage, cocaine can be injected in solution directly into the veins or chemically converted and smoked in the process called freebasing. Another variation is to mix cocaine with heroin, which combines a powerful stimulant with a potent depressant.

Crack is a smokable form of cocaine, created by mixing cocaine, baking soda, and water and heating them. This potent drug provides an instant rush, reaching the brain within eight seconds, with peak effects within a few minutes. Crack is thus powerfully addictive and places severe stress on the heart, brain, and lungs.

**METHAMPHETAMINE** Also known as speed, crystal, crank, chalk, glass, or ice (among other nicknames), methamphetamine is part of a subclass of amphetamines. It is a powerful addictive stimulant that affects the central nervous system. It can be injected, smoked, snorted, and ingested orally or anally. Methamphetamine use decreases appetite, heightens energy levels, enables people to be physically active for long periods, and provides a sense of euphoria similar to that of cocaine (Covey, 2007).

Methamphetamine use is associated with a number of negative effects, both short- and long-term. Short-term effects include higher pulse rate, higher blood pressure, increased body temperature, convulsions, irritability, and nervousness. During the

coming-down period, the user may become agitated and potentially violent (Covey, 2007). Long-term effects include severe psychological and physical dependence, violent behavior and paranoia, chronic fatigue, depression, open sores and infections on the skin from picking and scratching at imaginary bugs, tooth decay and dental deterioration, and severe weight loss. Methamphetamine acts as a corrosive on the gums and teeth and softens the teeth so that they literally melt away.

Methamphetamine use and addiction has become a frequent topic in the mass media. Much as it did during the “crack epidemic” of the 1980s and 1990s, the media are again using the word *epidemic* to describe the problem. The government has also turned its attention to methamphetamine. Congress passed the Comprehensive Methamphetamine Control Act of 1996, the Methamphetamine Anti-Proliferation Act of 2000, and the Combat Methamphetamine Epidemic Act (CMEA) of 2005. The first of these acts doubled the maximum penalties for possession of the drug and possession of equipment used to manufacture the drug from four to ten years. All three acts also focus on limiting the sale of ingredients that can be used to manufacture methamphetamine. The CMEA of 2005 regulates the retail, over-the-counter sales of ephedrine, pseudoephedrine, and phenylpropanolamine, which are common ingredients in cough, cold, and allergy products. Those drugs are now placed out of customer reach, customers must show identification and sign a log book, and customers are limited to no more than 9 grams of ephedrine per month.

Studies on the amount of methamphetamine use are mixed. Many substance abuse authorities believe that use and distribution are on the rise, thus resulting in an “epidemic.” On the other hand, the U.S. DEA claims that the number of meth labs has decreased as a result of the Combat Methamphetamine Epidemic Act, and prominent research studies show a decline in use. The National Survey on Drug Use and Health shows that numbers of past-month users have declined from 731,000 in 2006 to 569,000 in 2014 (SAMHSA, 2015). Despite these declining numbers, the spread of methamphetamine use has been “likened to an epidemic moving from the West and Southwest to the rest of the country” (Covey, 2007:23).

## The Controversy over Marijuana

Like alcohol, marijuana is a social drug. Marijuana comes from the hemp plant *Cannabis sativa*, a plant cultivated for at least 5,000 years and found throughout the world. It is the world’s fourth most widely used psychoactive drug (following caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol). In 2014, approximately 22.1 million Americans used marijuana at least once in the month prior to being surveyed, and new studies indicate that more college students smoke marijuana daily than cigarettes (Kesling, 2015). As noted earlier in this



1 AGE: 29



2 AGE: 31

-20 lbs.

Regular methamphetamine use can cause dramatic physiological damage both inside and outside the body, as shown in these photos of the changed facial appearance of this young woman.

chapter, more and more Americans are in favor of legalizing marijuana. Arguments for legalization point out that marijuana is not physiologically addictive; there is no evidence of a lethal dose; and it has been found to have positive effects for certain medical problems, such as migraine headaches, muscle spasms associated with epilepsy and multiple sclerosis, glaucoma, and asthma. Of special note is the successful use of marijuana to reduce or eliminate the nausea that accompanies chemotherapy treatments for cancer. It can also stimulate appetite in the chronically ill.

In spite of these facts, the federal government remains firmly opposed to the legalization of marijuana. Under the Controlled Substances Act, the Drug Enforcement Administration classifies marijuana as a **Schedule 1 drug**. That is, it has high potential for abuse and no currently accepted medical use in treatment in the United States. Many consider marijuana addictive, asserting that it creates psychological dependence. Some researchers have argued that it causes lower levels of sex hormones to be produced in males and breaks up chromosomes, causing genetic problems for future generations.

### Schedule 1 drug

Classified by the Drug Enforcement Administration as a drug that has high potential for abuse and no currently accepted medical use.

Furthermore, marijuana use may have a negative effect on the lungs, and may increase the likelihood of developing cancer of the neck or head as well as increasing the risk of chronic cough, bronchitis, and emphysema. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, heavy marijuana use is also associated with depression, anxiety, job-related problems and higher job turnover, lower high school graduation rates, and lower grades (2012).

Currently, twenty-three states and Washington, DC, have laws that remove the state-level criminal penalties for growing or possessing medical marijuana (the possession limits vary in each state), something that the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration is openly against (DEA, 2012). It is the current position of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration that smoking marijuana is harmful, and there are safer medicinal drug alternatives that have been approved by the Federal Drug Administration. In the states that have removed state-level criminal penalties, individuals who use marijuana for medical purposes are not exempt from federal laws because marijuana is still classified as a Schedule 1 drug.

As of December 2015, four states (Alaska, Colorado, Oregon, Washington) and the District of Columbia have legalized marijuana for recreational use. According to statistics, one year after marijuana retail stores opened in Colorado, crime rates are lower, tax revenue from marijuana sales amounted to \$40.9 million in ten months, and there has been an increase in jobs and a decrease in traffic fatalities. In fact, Colorado now has the fastest-growing economy in the United States, and unemployment is at a six-year low (Drug Policy Alliance, 2015).

Statistics show that marijuana use is on the rise across the country. As more states approve the use of medical marijuana, and other states consider legalizing recreational use, the perceived risk for using marijuana has been steadily falling (see “Speaking to Students: Generational Forgetting” for a closer look at drug use patterns over time).

## Legal Drugs

At the beginning of this chapter, we pointed out that the definitions concerning drugs and drug-related behaviors are socially constructed; that is, these definitions shift and change over time. Nothing illustrates this more poignantly than looking at the legality of certain drugs and the age at which the consumption of such drugs becomes *defined* as legal. For example, in 1992, Congress directed all states to establish 18 as the

## Speaking to Students

# Generational Forgetting

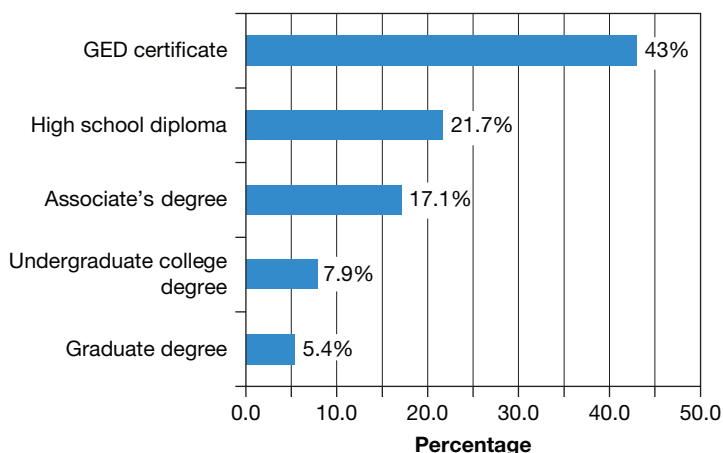
Monitoring the Future (MTF) is a long-term study of American adolescents, college students, and adults conducted by the University of Michigan. Conducted annually since 1975, MTF demonstrates drug use and drug attitude trends over time and reveals interesting patterns (see Johnston et al., 2015). The authors of MTF find that determinants of drug use are at least partly affected by perceived benefits and perceived risks associated with each drug. For example, the perceived risk associated with marijuana use has been falling for the past five years, and daily use among teenagers is on the rise. In another example, the rise in abuse of prescription drugs may be related to the fact that many of the drugs are advertised on television and prescribed by doctors, so the perceived risk associated with taking them is lessened. When a new drug emerges (like bath salts), or an old drug makes a comeback, there is a lag time when the risks associated with that drug are unknown. “Generational Forgetting is when drugs make a comeback in popularity because knowledge among youth of the drug’s adverse consequences faded as generational replacement took place” (Johnston et al., 2012: 7). According to MTF, LSD and methamphetamine were widely used in the 1960s and then made a comeback in the 1990s due to generational forgetting. Similar patterns can be seen for heroin, cocaine, PCP, and crack cocaine. Today, LSD, inhalants, and ecstasy are all showing signs of a comeback and generational forgetting, that is, the perceived risk associated with these drugs has declined. It would appear, then, that educating the public on the risks associated with each different drug type is an important component to reducing drug use in the population.

minimum age to purchase and smoke cigarettes. In Alaska and Utah, the minimum age is 19. That a person can simply step over a state line and his or her behavior will be defined as illegal or not demonstrates this social construction.

**NICOTINE** Nicotine is the active ingredient of tobacco. Cigarette smoking remains the leading preventable cause of death in the United States—accounting for one of every five deaths (480,000 people) each year (American Lung Association, 2015). This figure includes approximately 42,000 deaths per year from secondhand smoke exposure. Nicotine is a stimulant that raises blood pressure, increases the heart rate, dulls the appetite, and provides the user with a sense of alertness. As a stimulant, nicotine is responsible for a relatively high probability of heart disease and strokes among cigarette smokers. In addition to the nicotine, smokers inhale various coal tars, nitrogen dioxide, formaldehyde, and other ingredients that increase the chances of contracting lung cancer, throat cancer, emphysema, and bronchitis. Former Surgeon General Richard Carmona has reported that smoking causes no fewer than twenty-six diseases, including cancers of the stomach, uterus, cervix, pancreas, and kidneys (*Arizona Daily Star*, 2004). Moreover, inhaling secondary tobacco smoke contributes to respiratory infections in babies, triggers new cases of asthma in previously unaffected children, and exacerbates symptoms in asthmatic children. Because of all the health problems associated with smoking, the CDC estimates that the cost of smoking to the nation is approximately \$170 billion per year on medical care and more than 156 billion in lost worker productivity (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015).

**Figure 12.4** Current Cigarette Smoking among Adults Age 18 and Over, by Education: 2014

**SOURCE:** Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Current Cigarette Smoking Among Adults—United States, 2005–2014. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 2015; 64(44):1233–40 [accessed 2015 Dec 8].



rise. Electronic cigarettes are battery-powered devices that produce an odorless vapor that contains nicotine and flavorings—flavorings that may appeal to teenagers. In fact, the number of high school students who tried e-cigarettes tripled in 2014 (to 13.4 percent), while the smoking of traditional cigarettes hit a low of 9.2 percent, indicating that traditional smoking in high school is less common than e-cigarette use (Centers for Disease Control, 2015). Advertised as a “safer” alternative to smoking, little is known about the long-term effects of its use. Studies have found that e-cigarette vapor may in fact contain toxic chemicals such as formaldehyde, which has been linked to cancer. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) proposed regulations for e-cigarettes in April 2014, and sent its final regulations to the White House in October 2015 for a required 90-day review. The regulations are not open to the public, but they most likely will include a ban on the sale of e-cigarettes to minors, and products cannot be marketed as “safe” and must instead include warnings about nicotine and other ingredients, etc.

In recent years, the tobacco industry has faced declining sales due to public smoking bans, increased tobacco taxes, and public antismoking campaigns. The tobacco companies have responded in three ways. First, the tobacco companies have invested heavily in the federal, state, and local campaigns of politicians in the hope of favorable legislation (regarding such issues as public smoking, selling through vending machines, reining in the Federal Drug Administration, and the extent of liability in impending lawsuits). In fact, the tobacco industry spent more than \$22 million on lobbying in 2014 (OpenSecrets.org, 2015).

The second strategy of the tobacco companies is to increase their advertising in the United States and attempt to hook new users. According to the CDC (CDC, 2015), in 2012 (latest data available), tobacco companies spent \$9.6 billion on advertisements and promotions in the United States alone. This amounts to \$26 million per day, or

Current estimates indicate that approximately 40 million adult Americans smoke cigarettes. Looking at patterns of smoking behavior, several points are clear (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015): (1) More adult men smoke than women (18.8 percent versus 14.8 percent); (2) smoking and education are inversely related (that is, as education level goes up, the incidence of smoking goes down; see Figure 12.4); and (3) cigarette smoking is more common among adults living below the poverty level than among those not in poverty (26.3 percent versus 15.2). Thus, the poor and uneducated are more likely to smoke.

While statistics show that traditional cigarette smoking is on the decline, the popularity of electronic cigarettes and water pipes is on the

annually \$30 for every person in the United States and more than \$228 for each adult U.S. smoker. This advertising is aimed primarily at minorities, women, and youth. Consider the following:

- Studies have found a high density of tobacco billboards in racial and ethnic minority communities. A study by the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine found 2.6 times as many ads per person in predominantly Black neighborhoods as in predominantly White neighborhoods (Toland, 2007).
- Tobacco companies have marketed specifically to Hispanics and American Indians, including the promotion of cigarette brands like Rio, Dorado, and American Spirit (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015).
- In 2007, R.J. Reynolds unveiled a new product called “Camel No. 9,” a cigarette with a decorative pink band, a tiny pink camel, and an ebony box with hot-pink and teal accents. With the slogan “light and luscious,” it is clearly a product targeting women and young girls (Quindlen, 2007).
- Smoking is featured in many video games targeting youth. For example, the game “The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay” has players win packs of cigarettes, and the game makes fun of the warning labels on the packs (Perry, 2010).
- In 2007, a report by the Harvard School of Public Health showed that cigarette companies increased the amount of nicotine in their cigarettes by an average of 11 percent from 1998 to 2005 (reported in Siegel, 2007). Although tobacco companies deny claims of a deliberate increase in nicotine, antismoking groups argue that this was a calculated move to hook new smokers on their product.

A third strategy of the tobacco companies is to increase advertising and sales overseas to compensate for declining domestic sales.

**ALCOHOL** According to the National Household Survey on Drug Use and Health, 52.7 percent of the population over age 12 consumed alcohol in the past month (SAMHSA, 2015). Although alcohol is not legal for those under age 21, more than one-third of 18-year-olds (36.4 percent) report drinking alcohol in the past month (SAMHSA, 2015). Alcohol is a depressant that directly affects the central nervous system, slowing brain activity and muscle reactions. Thus, it is a leading cause of accidents. In fact, every day almost 30 people in the United States die in motor vehicle crashes that involve an alcohol-impaired driver (Centers for Disease Control, 2015).

Continued use of large quantities of alcohol can result in indigestion, ulcers, degeneration of the brain, and cirrhosis of the liver; more than 20,000 Americans die of cirrhosis of the liver each year. Malnutrition is often associated with prolonged use of alcohol; a pint of whiskey provides about half of a person’s daily calorie requirements but without the necessary nutrients. Heavy consumption also reduces the production of white blood cells, so alcoholics have a low resistance to bacteria. Alcoholics, in addition, run the danger of permanent destruction of brain cells, resulting in memory loss and erratic behavior. Chronic use also results in physiological addiction. Withdrawal can be very dangerous, with the individual experiencing convulsions and delirium. The conclusion is inescapable, then, that alcohol is a dangerous legal drug for individuals and societies.



## Drug Use Patterns by Class, Race, and Gender

Drug use and abuse is most often discussed as an individual's choice, an individual's behavior, and an individual's problem. However, examining drug use from a sociological standpoint reveals interesting patterns by class, race, and gender. These patterns demonstrate that a person's place in the social structure can increase or decrease the odds that he or she will use drugs and alcohol. Drug use is not uniform throughout society. For example, men of all ages and races are more likely than women to use illicit drugs. Even marital status matters—married women are less likely to use tobacco, engage in binge alcohol use, or use an illicit drug compared to divorced, separated, never married, or cohabitating women. In terms of social class, intravenous drug users continue to be found predominantly among the inner-city poor. This practice places them at great risk of exposure to the AIDS virus from the sharing of needles.

As indicated previously in Figure 12.4, cigarette smoking is inversely related to education level. The lower the education level, the greater the incidence of cigarette smoking. The CDC estimates that nearly 26.3 percent of people living below the poverty line smoke. Statistics also reveal interesting differences by race/ethnicity and smoking. Native Americans have the highest rates of smoking (29.2 percent), and Asians have the lowest rates of smoking (9.5 percent; Centers for Disease Control, 2015).

Alcohol use also varies greatly by race, social class, and age. Whites are more likely to report current use (defined as consuming any alcohol in the past month) than any other racial group (57.7 percent compared to 44.2 percent for Blacks and 38.7 percent for Asians) (SAMHSA, 2015). Youth in general are more likely to report binge and heavy use, with the highest prevalence among 21- to 25-year-olds. College students often are heavy binge drinkers during their college years. In fact, research indicates that around 63.3 percent of college students drink alcohol, and 42.2 percent binge drink (defined as five or more drinks in a row; SAMHSA, 2012a). Gender, too, is relevant, as Black women are much more likely than White women to be abstainers. Recall that the incidence of smoking decreases with higher levels of education. The opposite is true for drinking. The rates of current alcohol use increase with increasing levels of education.

Recently, tobacco and alcohol companies have come under fire for targeting minority neighborhoods. They sponsor sports tournaments and music festivals in predominantly Black neighborhoods and purchase considerable advertising in Black publications. In 2004, cigarette companies came out with a new line of flavored cigarettes that antismoking activists claim specifically targets minority teens. The packaging features graffiti artists and other hip-hop imagery that appeals to minority youth (Associated Press, 2004a).

In looking at the statistics, it is clear that drug use cuts across all class, racial, and gender lines. It is how the drugs (and the persons using those drugs) are defined that determines drug treatment and handling by the authorities. For example, in 2010 an estimated 5.1 million persons used pain relievers nonmedically, and they are often middle- and upper-class Whites (2.2 million used tranquilizers, 1.1 million used stimulants, and 374,000 used sedatives; SAMHSA, 2012a). Unlike the poor—who tend to use illicit drugs and therefore are hassled by the authorities and treated in prisons and public hospitals—the more affluent tend to use legal and prescription drugs and are

treated by private physicians. Thus, their addiction is typically protected and hidden from public awareness.

## Why Use Drugs?

It is clear that *all* drugs have the potential for harm—even those drugs that seem completely risk free. Aspirin, for example, may seem like a drug with few side effects, but taken in large doses, it can result in ulcers and stomach bleeding. A person needs only listen closely to commercials advertising drugs to see their potential for harm. By law, drug companies must state the possible side effects, and often they are numerous—from bowel problems to sexual dysfunction. So why do we subject ourselves to potential harm?

**MEDICAL PRESSURES** In recent times, chemists have created numerous synthetic substances that have positive health consequences. Vaccines have been developed to fight diseases such as polio, mumps, smallpox, diphtheria, and measles. Many of these contagious diseases have been eliminated by the wonders of science. Similarly, antibiotics were created as cures for a number of infectious diseases. The public quickly accepted these drugs as beneficial. As a result, Americans are a highly drugged society, and total prescription drug expenditures in 2014 reached \$360.7 billion. In fact, U.S. residents spend far more on prescription drugs than do people in other developed countries, and rising costs have even driven some to smuggle prescriptions from other countries.

**CULTURAL PRESSURES** The United States has become a “quick-fix” society, with individuals seeking instant results and striving to meet cultural ideals about perfection. In seeking mental perfection, physical perfection, and improved physical performance, Americans have increasingly turned to artificial substances and enhancements to meet those ideals. In the early 1950s, chemists made a breakthrough in drugs that treated mental disorders such as depression, insomnia, aggression, hyperactivity, and tension. These drugs (tranquilizers, barbiturates, and stimulants) have since been widely prescribed by doctors for these problems. **Psychopharmacology**, the science of drugs that affect the mind, is on the verge of developing pills that will enrich memory, heighten concentration, enhance intelligence, and eliminate shyness or bad moods.

Recently, there has been much controversy over the use of so-called behavior drugs for children. The CDC estimates that in 2010, ADHD (attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder) diagnoses in children rose to 5.2 million (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012). From 2001 to 2004, there was a 49 percent rise in the use of ADHD drugs by children under the age of 5 and an astonishing 369 percent increase in spending on such drugs. In fact, this spending exceeded the spending for antibiotics and asthma medication for children (Johnson, 2004). The symptoms for ADHD are inattentiveness, fidgeting, not listening, being easily distracted, making careless mistakes, and excessive talking. Stimulants such as Ritalin, Adderall, Concerta, and Dexedrine are prescribed to have the paradoxical effect of calming and focusing children who are chronically inattentive and hyperactive. These drugs stimulate the central nervous system, with many of the same pharmacological effects of cocaine. They affect the brain by enhancing the chemical dopamine, the

### Psycho-pharmacology

Science of drugs that affect the mind.

neurotransmitter that plays a major role in cognition, attention, and inhibition. Their side effects are nervousness, insomnia, and loss of appetite. Although these stimulants for children are often successful, their widespread use raises some important questions:

- The United States consumes 80 percent of the world's methylphenidate (the generic name for Ritalin). Are American youth more hyperactive than youth in other countries?
- Is hyperactivity the inevitable by-product of a society-wide addiction to speed—to cellular phones, faxes, e-mail, overnight mail, ever-faster computers? How are children affected by the high-stimulus activities that saturate their lives—video games, interactive television, hundreds of cable channels, and fast-action movies with vivid violence?
- According to the CDC (2011), 13.2 percent of boys have received a diagnosis of ADHD compared to 5.6 percent of girls. Is the preponderance of boys diagnosed as hyperactive because adults find that boys are more difficult to control than girls?
- What is the role of the pharmaceutical companies in the rapid growth of medications for ADHD? This is a billion-dollar sector of the pharmaceutical market.
- What is the role of managed-care companies and insurers in promoting the medication of children for ADHD? These organizations are concerned with costs, and it is much cheaper to prescribe pills, thus avoiding referring children to more expensive mental health specialists.
- Ritalin and other stimulants prescribed for ADHD work on the brain much like cocaine does. Children using this drug are “wired” every day, raising concern over its long-term effects. This is not the only way that children are wired. Companies promote energy drinks (high in caffeine) targeting youth by using names like Rockstar, Monster, Red Bull, and Venom. Are we creating an entire generation (called by some the “Rx generation”) with a “sweet tooth for cocaine”?

The widespread use of these stimulants leads to their abuse by adolescents and adults seeking pharmacological highs. Taken in larger amounts than prescribed and crushed and snorted, these drugs produce euphoria, greater energy and productivity, increased sexual appetite, and an overall feeling of being a lot smarter. As a result, the DEA says that drugs to treat ADHD rank among today's most stolen prescriptions and most abused drugs (Drug Enforcement Administration, 2012).

Not only has U.S. society become increasingly concerned with mental perfection, but also the cultural ideals of physical perfection are overwhelming. Drugs can offer a way to meet these ideals. Consider the following:

- The largest area of growth in nonsurgical cosmetic procedures is in Botox injections (3,588,218 procedures in 2014). The injected toxin blocks the nerve impulses, temporarily paralyzing the muscles that cause wrinkles (American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, 2015).
- In 2003, the FDA approved Humatrope, a brand of human growth hormone, for healthy children with short stature (defined as height more than 2 standard deviations below the mean for their age and sex).

- Ephedra, found in products to aid weight loss, enhance sports performance, and increase energy, was banned in 2004 after it was linked to deaths and reports of serious health problems.

Mental perfection and physical perfection also pave the way for other performance pressures. The pressure to succeed in competitive situations may also encourage some people to take drugs. Individuals who want to be especially alert or calm to do well may take a drug to accomplish their goal. Sports present an excellent example of drug use to enhance performance. Athletes use two types of drugs: **restorative drugs** (to heal a traumatized part of the body) and **additive drugs** (to improve performance). Amphetamines, human growth hormones, hormones such as androstenedione (the favorite of home-run king Mark McGwire) and Creatine, and anabolic steroids are the additive drugs commonly used by athletes. Amphetamines increase alertness, respiration rate, blood pressure, muscle tension, heart rate, and blood sugar. The user is literally “psyched up” by amphetamines. Moreover, these drugs have the capacity to abolish a sense of fatigue. Growth hormones increase body size and strength. Anabolic steroids aid in adding weight and muscle. If an athlete wants to be a world-class weightlifter, shot putter, or discus thrower, the pressures are great to use anabolic steroids: They make the user stronger, and many competitors use such drugs to get the edge on the competition. Football players, even in high school, may use drugs to gain weight and strength and to outperform their competitors. At the 2012 London Olympics, the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) banned more than 100 athletes from competing in the games due to doping suspensions. Also in 2012, the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency stripped Lance Armstrong of his seven Tour de France titles and banned him from cycling for life due to the use of banned performance-enhancing drugs. In 2016, WADA released a report that Russia was involved in a state-sponsored doping program during the 2014 Sochi Winter Games, and recommended that they be banned from participation in the 2016 Rio Olympics. Clearly, the use of performance-enhancing drugs by professional athletes is an ongoing problem around the world.

Performance pressures have also extended into the bedroom, with drugs like Viagra, Cialis, and Levitra available to aid with sexual performance. Viagra, approved by the FDA in 1998, is a \$2 billion-per-year seller for Pfizer, Inc.

The pressures to use drugs are unrelenting. They come from doctors, coaches, parents, teachers, peers, and advertising. People may learn to drink in families where social drinking is an integral part of meals, celebrations, and everyday relaxation. In situations such as cocktail parties, guests are expected to drink alcoholic beverages as part of the social ritual. Peer groups are also important for the entry of the individual into the world of illicit drug use. The person learns from others how to use the drug and how to interpret the drug’s effects positively. Similarly, the pressures to meet society’s ideals of mental and physical perfection and performance can be overwhelming, with drugs offering a “quick-fix” solution.

#### Restorative drugs

Chemicals that heal a traumatized part of the body.

#### Additive drugs

Chemicals that improve performance.

The reputation of professional baseball has been tarnished with accusations of steroid abuse.



## U.S. Official Policy: A War on Drugs

### 12.3 Critique the U.S. “war on drugs” policy.

In 1971, President Richard Nixon called drug abuse “public enemy number one,” and thus began the U.S. “war on drugs.” The U.S. drug war is fought on two fronts: stopping the flow of drugs into the United States and using the criminal justice system to punish those who sell and use illegal drugs within the United States. The federal government spent over \$15 billion in 2010 on the War on Drugs (a rate of about \$500 per second) (Drugsense.org, 2012). In fact, the drug war has cost taxpayers more than \$1 trillion since 1971 (Associated Press, 2010b).

#### Interdiction

Public policy of stopping the flow of drugs into the United States by guarding the borders and by curtailing the creation, processing, and distributing of drugs in other countries.

Stopping the supply of drugs into the country (**interdiction**) involves the use of customs agents at the borders inspecting the baggage of passengers and cargo from planes, trucks, and ships. It involves working with other countries (especially Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Mexico) to destroy the places where drugs are grown, manufactured, and processed and to destroy the transportation networks to the United States (by sea and air, and by land through Mexico). These efforts involve the State Department, the Treasury Department, the Coast Guard, various branches of the military, and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). These agencies train local soldiers and supply them with equipment (helicopters, radar, and surveillance aircraft) and supplies (herbicides, guns, and munitions). This means, of course, that the United States is involved in destroying the crops (e.g., opium poppy and coca) of local farmers. It means the involvement of the United States (through the CIA) in local politics, siding with pro-U.S. factions against anti-U.S. factions, or involvement in civil wars, where rebels finance their operations with drugs in the fight against the established governments. It encourages violence, threats, and bribery as drug cartels use any means to keep their lucrative businesses flourishing (see “Social Problems in Global Perspective: Mexico’s Drug War”).

The policy of interdiction clearly is a failure. Drugs are found by the U.S. Customs, sometimes in large amounts. But massive amounts of drugs cross U.S. borders and enter an intricate distribution system within this country. Despite all our efforts, we have not stopped the supply; we have only dented it and made the drugs that enter the United States more expensive. The drug policy of interdiction also fails because it has led to strained relations with drug-producing nations in South America. By fighting our battles on their soil, the United States is often viewed as the villain.

The second front in the war on drugs occurs within the United States. Beginning in the 1970s, the courts became more punitive toward people selling or possessing illegal drugs. In New York State, for example, a law was passed in 1973 requiring a minimum sentence of fifteen years to life for a first-time offender caught selling as little as 2 ounces or possessing 4 ounces of cocaine or heroin. The police, too, became more active in ferreting out buyers and sellers through the use of undercover agents, wiretaps, and sting operations. As a result, the number of adults arrested for drug offenses grew from about 500,000 in 1980 to approximately 1.5 million in 2012 (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2015). In fact, the United States imprisons a larger fraction of its population for drug offenses than European nations do for all crimes. This has led to tremendous overcrowding of both the courts and the prisons, resulting in a huge and costly growth in the number and size of prisons. (In California, it costs approximately \$47,000 per year to incarcerate one prisoner.)

## Social Problems in Global Perspective

### Mexico's Drug War

There is a war going on in Mexico. In 2006, then Mexican President Felipe Calderón declared war on the country's drug cartels. Putting 45,000 army troops on the streets, he pledged to arrest the cartel leaders, confiscate their drugs, and seize the large amounts of cash they need to operate. According to the Mexican government, between 2007 and 2014 more than 164,000 people were victims of homicide (Breslow, 2015). The drug cartels have conducted kidnappings, executions, and assaults. In early 2009, the police chief in Ciudad Juarez resigned after drug traffickers began to make good on their promise to kill police officers in the city until the chief stepped down (Navarrette, 2009). The gangs have dumped severed heads in front of town halls and have essentially terrorized the Mexican people to put pressure on the government to back down. In 2011, thirty-five bound, tortured bodies were dumped onto a main thoroughfare during rush hour in the city of Veracruz (Associated Press, 2011).

The United States has a large stake in Mexico's war, as it is estimated that 90 percent of all the cocaine flowing into the United States comes from Mexico, and 90 percent of the guns seized in drug-related violence in Mexico come from the United States (Navarrette, 2009). In addition, the Mexican drug cartels have established a presence in approximately 230 U.S. cities. The United States has stepped in and provided \$1.5 billion in funds (part of the \$1.8 billion Merida Initiative) to help combat the war on drugs in Mexico and Central America. In addition, it has added officers and announced new security measures at the border. But according to some experts, the American demand for illegal drugs plays the most important role in fueling Mexico's drug war. "No matter how much law enforcement or financial help the U.S. government provides Mexico, the basics of supply and demand prevent it from doing much good" (Crary, 2009: 1).

### Consequences of Official Drug Policies

The drug laws in the United States are irrational, and they do not achieve their intended goals of deterring crime by severely punishing the seller and user. There are three reasons this approach does not work to deter crime. First, by making drugs illegal and therefore dangerous to produce, transport, and sell, society pushes the cost to many times what it would be if they were legally available. Thus, heroin users, for example, are often forced into crime to sustain a high-cost habit. Crimes committed to produce money for drugs are typically nonviolent (prostitution, shoplifting, selling drugs, and burglary), but their cost is enormous. Suppose, for example, that there are 100,000 addicts in New York City with habits each costing \$50 daily. If they each steal \$300 worth of goods daily to get the \$50 (a 6-to-1 ratio is about the way fencing works), the amount stolen in the city would be \$30 million daily, or \$10.68 billion a year!

The second reason that punitive drug laws encourage crime is that someone has to supply the illicit goods. Legislation does not dry up demand, as was vividly shown during Prohibition. Organized crime thrives in this climate. Illegal drugs are, for the most part, imported, processed, and distributed by organized crime groups. Drug laws, then, have the indirect effect of providing organized crime with its most lucrative source of income.

A third source of crime caused by drug laws is police corruption. Black market activities by organized crime or other entrepreneurs are difficult without the cooperation of police officials or drug enforcement agents, so their assistance is often bought.

The end result of police corruption and the realization that drug laws are arbitrary (such as the fact that marijuana is illegal in most states but alcohol is legal) causes widespread disrespect for the law and the judicial system. As Garrison Keillor has said, “A marijuana grower can land in prison for life without parole while a murderer might be in for eight years. No rational person can defend this ...” (Keillor, 2005:26). A final source of irreverence toward the law is the overzealousness of narcotics agents. In their efforts to capture drug law violators, agents have sometimes violated the constitutional rights of individuals (wiretapping, search and seizure without a warrant, entrapment, use of informants who are themselves addicts, and so on). All these abuses have contributed to an attitude of insolence on the part of many people toward agents of the law.

Criminal laws create crime and criminals. If there were no law regulating a behavior, then there would be no criminal. So it is with drug laws. Prior to 1914, heroin users were not criminals, nor were marijuana users before 1937. The drug laws, then, have created large numbers of criminals. By labeling and treating people as criminals, the justice system creates further crime (secondary deviance). In other words, efforts at social control actually cause the persistence of the deviant behaviors they are designed to eliminate. Several interrelated processes are at work here. First, as noted earlier, the drug user is forced to rely on illegal and very expensive sources. This reliance typically forces the user into crime or interaction with the criminal fringes of society. Second, when processed by the criminal justice system, the individual is stigmatized, which makes reintegration into normal society very difficult. All these factors encourage those pejoratively labeled by society to join together in a deviant drug subculture.

Official drug policies have been predicated on the assumption that punitive laws and rigorous enforcement were necessary to eradicate the menace of certain drugs. The policies, however, have had just the opposite effect. They have harmed the drug users in a variety of unnecessary ways; they have cost society untold billions of dollars in enforcement costs and have clogged courts and prisons; they have resulted in additional indirect and direct crime; and they have kept organized crime very profitable.

## Is the Drug War Racist?

The official policy of the federal government is to punish the sellers and users of illicit drugs. The problem is that the laws and the punishment for their violation are unfair to Blacks and other racial minorities. Four facts buttress this allegation. First, the data on past month illicit drug use by race reveal a rate of 12.4 percent for Blacks and 10.4 percent for Whites. According to the 2010 Decennial Census, there are 223,736,465 Whites and 38,929,319 Blacks in the United States. Given their numbers in the general population, this means that overall there are more Whites using illicit drugs than Blacks, yet the data show consistently that *Blacks are more likely to be imprisoned for drug offenses* (Knafo, 2013).

Second, federal drug enforcement has waged its war against drugs almost exclusively in minority neighborhoods. The issue is one of targeting—studies show that Blacks are more likely to be stopped while driving and searched. As Glasser notes,

In Florida blacks were seventy-five times more likely than whites to be stopped and searched for drugs while driving. And it turned out that these racially targeted

stops were the explicit result of a Drug Enforcement Administration program begun in 1986, called Operation Pipeline, that “trained” 27,000 state troopers in forty-eight states to spot cars that might contain drugs. Most of the cars spotted were driven by blacks. And this happened even though three-quarters of monthly drug users are white! (2006: 25)

Third, historically the laws have differed in the severity of punishment if violated. Although powder cocaine and crack cocaine are the same drugs, prior to the Fair Sentencing Act of 2010, federal law treated them quite differently. Under previous law, crack offenses led to sentences 100 times more severe than powder cocaine sentences (Diamond and Millhiser, 2011). This unfair 100-to-1 ratio was racist because the defendants in crack cocaine cases are almost always Black. In order to remedy this injustice, the Fair Sentencing Act reduces the disparity in the amounts of powder cocaine and crack cocaine required for the imposition of mandatory minimum sentences. In July 2011, the U.S. Sentencing Commission voted unanimously to retroactively apply the Fair Sentencing Act to prisoners convicted under the previous law, affecting over 12,000 (primarily African American) prisoners. While a step in the right direction, this not does counteract point number one above that Blacks and other minorities are more likely to be stopped and searched for drugs.

As a final example of the racial double standard in the war on drugs, consider the disposition of those found guilty of drug violations. There is a strong tendency for the courts to administer medical treatment for White drug users and the criminal justice system for Black users. This is especially true when social class is added to the racial mix—affluent Whites compared to poor Blacks.

## Alternatives

The nation’s drug laws and policies, as we have seen, are counterproductive. They not only fail to accomplish their goals but in many respects also actually achieve the opposite results. The drug war creates criminals. Organized crime flourishes because of official drug policies. The criminalization of drugs encourages corruption within the criminal justice system, and it reduces the freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution. As conducted, the war on drugs is unfair to racial minorities through racial profiling. It overburdens the courts and prisons, and most significant, it does not work.

The United States has alternatives concerning drug policy: (1) continue to wage the war on drugs by enacting and enforcing criminal laws; (2) legalize drugs and regulate them through licensing and taxation; (3) take a public health approach, with an emphasis on decriminalization; and (4) address the social causes of drug use. We have already considered the first option—the criminalization of drug use—so we concentrate here on the other alternatives.

**REGULATION OF TRADE OR USE THROUGH LICENSING AND TAXATION** Legalizing a drug but regulating its use, as is now the case with alcohol, tobacco, and prescription drugs, has some obvious benefits:

- It ensures the products’ conformity to standards of purity and safety.
- It dries up the need for vast criminal networks that distribute drugs.
- It provides the government with revenues.
- Prison space and police activities would be reserved for the truly dangerous.



Opponents argue that government regulation would actually condone the use of drugs. This apparent approval, together with the easy availability and relatively low prices, would promote experimentation and use of the drug, perhaps increasing the number of users. While the majority of public opinion polls show that the public is not in favor of the legalization of all drugs, as we have shown polls do indicate that attitudes are shifting regarding the legalization of marijuana, especially for those under the age of 30.

Under the government regulation option, the biggest population to deal with would be the heroin addicts. These users are a special problem to themselves and society. Their habits are the most expensive, so of all drug users, they are most likely to turn to crime. Their habit also requires almost full-time diligence in securing the drug; and being “strung out,” they do not function normally in society. How, then, should the government deal with them? Hard-liners argue that they should be classified as criminals and incarcerated. Other people suggest that addicts could remain in society and be relatively productive if drugs were supplied to them cheaply, under government regulation and medical supervision.

### Heroin maintenance

British approach to heroin addiction that treats addicts as sick rather than criminal; thus, addicts are placed under the jurisdiction of physicians who administer drugs to their patients.

This can be accomplished through **heroin maintenance**, which treats addicts as medical problems rather than criminal problems. Methadone or buprenorphine are medications that can be taken orally for the treatment of narcotic withdrawal and dependence. Taken once per day, methadone suppresses withdrawal symptoms for 24 to 36 hours. The drug does not make the user drowsy, it does not impair cognitive functions, and it does not interfere with driving a car or operating machinery. Although it is also addictive, the net effect is that a methadone user can continue to be a productive member of society without having to steal for his or her habit.

A number of the nation’s heroin addicts are on **methadone maintenance**. Most states control and closely monitor the distribution of the drug. A benefit to this close monitoring is that there is no sharing of needles, a common problem among heroin users. Thus, it helps to control the spread of HIV infection.

### Methadone maintenance

Used for heroin maintenance, this treatment provides a heroin substitute (methadone) to addicts under medical supervision.

In addition, methadone costs about \$13 per day, a cheaper alternative to incarceration, where the average cost in state prison is approximately \$67 per day. Through the methadone maintenance program, addicts are not labeled as criminals. They are considered to have a medical, not a moral, problem. Equally important is that addicts remain participating members of the community.

Critics of methadone maintenance argue that such programs encourage wider use of hard drugs. They also assert that these plans will not be acceptable to most citizens, who will continue to label addicts as criminals and sinful. Liberals, although likely to approve of either plan over the current criminal model, foresee a danger in government control over an addict population dependent on it for drugs. Also, such programs attack the problem at the individual level (blaming the victim) and ignore the social and cultural sources of drug use.

**NONINTERFERENCE** Libertarians argue that it is none of the government’s business what drugs people put into their bodies. There should be no governmental interference in this private act. This view, however, does not excuse drug users from their behavior. Former Seattle police officer Norm Stampler says,

If I choose to inject, inhale, sniff, snort, or for that matter, put a bullet in my brain, that's a choice I should have as an adult. Where the line is drawn for society is if I choose to be irresponsible in committing those acts. Then I need to be held accountable for my behavior. For instance, if I furnish a kid with drugs, or if I abuse a spouse, then I need to be held accountable for my criminal actions. The hypocrisy of keeping the prohibition on these substances going, yet making no moves to ban alcohol as a choice for adults, is staggering. We know there are far greater problems associated with alcohol abuse. Just as with alcohol, though, I think it should be viewed as a basic civil liberty for people to be able to use whatever drugs they want, and second, to treat the abuse of drugs as a medical problem, which is what it is. It is a public health issue, not an issue for the law to deal with. (Quoted in Talvi, 2005:27)

Proponents of total **decriminalization of drugs** argue that all societies throughout known history have had psychoactive drugs. Legislation and strict enforcement will not curb the tendency among many people to want to alter their consciousness artificially. Such acts should be neither penalized nor encouraged because it is none of the government's business what individuals do to themselves. The United States could follow the example of other countries such as Brazil, Uruguay, Portugal, and Mexico, who have all changed their laws to eliminate jail time for people carrying small amounts of drugs for personal use (see "Social Policy: Drug Decriminalization in Portugal").

Critics suggest that decriminalization will encourage the spread of drug use. Drug use will spread because drugs will be readily available and because commercial interests will see potential profits in these formerly illicit drugs and will produce them and promote their use. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, some argue that drug use is not an isolated act that affects only the user. In short, although many people believe that drug use is a "victimless vice," there is always a victim.

What, then, is the answer to drug use? Probably some combination of these alternatives makes the most sense. Clearly, the arguments about the solution will continue to incite passion. There will be those who are concerned with the use of certain drugs and who feel that society must control such deviance. They insist on imposing their morals on others. At the other extreme are those who are more concerned with how the laws and their rigorous enforcement cause social problems. As the various segments of society continue the debate, legislation will be proposed and eventually passed. The astute observer should note the role of interest groups in what is decided and who benefits and who loses by the decision reached.

**ADDRESS THE SOCIAL CAUSES OF DRUG USE** When one looks at drug use across the United States, it is clear that drugs are correlated with poverty, education, gender, social location, and race/ethnicity. The United States has spent billions of dollars tackling the supply side of drugs through regulating its borders and other social control efforts, yet an effective drug policy must also focus on reducing the demand for drugs. Addressing social problems such as poverty, violence, and racial-ethnic inequality is a necessary first step in lowering drug use rates in America.

**Decriminalization of drugs**

Legalization of drugs.

## Social Policy

### Drug Decriminalization In Portugal

In the late 1990s, Portugal had incredibly high rates of drug abuse, crime, and the highest rate of drug-related AIDS deaths in the European Union (Specter, 2011). Faced with a problem that was not going away, Portuguese leaders decided on a bold and controversial move and in 2001 they passed a law that made Portugal the first country to fully decriminalize personal drug use. To be clear, drugs are *not* legal in Portugal, but an individual caught with small amounts of drugs for personal use is not jailed. Instead, the individual meets with a panel from the Commission for the Dissuasion of Drug Addiction, usually consisting of a lawyer or judge, a doctor, and a social worker. The panel then recommends a small fine or treatment, or nothing is done at all. Users are most often sent to counseling or treatment programs; thus drug users are viewed as having medical or psychological problems rather than as criminals. In fact, the Portuguese government moved responsibility for drug control issues from the Justice Department to the Ministry of Health (Specter, 2011). Proponents of the law argue that since 2001:

- Adolescent drug use has decreased.
- Rates of drug-related deaths and infectious diseases have fallen.

- Drug-related court cases have dropped 66 percent (Associated Press, 2010c).
- Drug-related, new HIV cases have dropped 75 percent (Associated Press, 2010c).
- Decriminalization did not bring a surge in use: The number of regular users has held steady.
- Street drug overdoses have dropped.
- Decriminalization has allowed the Portuguese justice system to focus its energies on more significant criminals and more dangerous crimes.

The Portuguese model is typically called “harm reduction,” which means that rather than trying to eliminate drug abuse, the goal is to minimize the negative consequences of drug use. As part of the program, outreach health workers drive the streets and provide addicts with clean needles and health screens. Opponents of the law argue that harm reduction is not effective; all it does is create more docile drug addicts with no incentive to actually quit their addiction. Regardless, it is hard to ignore the positive consequences of harm reduction when comparing the model to the United States’ \$1 trillion “War on Drugs,” where punitive drug laws have overburdened the prison system.

## Chapter Review

### 12.1 Explain the politics behind the definition of drugs and the current United States drug laws.

- Whether drugs in U.S. society are defined as legal or illegal is based not on their potential for harm to the users or society but on politics—the exercise of power by interest groups and the majority to legislate their views on others.
- The acceptability of certain drugs such as marijuana or heroin has varied historically.

Opiates, once legal in the United States, became illegal for two reasons: (a) members of the White working class on the West Coast felt threatened by cheap Chinese labor and sought coercive measures against those Chinese, and (b) religious groups interpreting opiate use as a moral evil mounted successful pressure. The result was the Harrison Narcotics Act of 1914, which established a Narcotics Division of the Treasury Department, whose goal was to eliminate drug

addiction. Behavior once considered a medical problem became a criminal problem, and the solution became incarceration.

- Laws defining which drugs are legal and which are not reflect negative stereotypes held by the general public and efforts for control by interest groups (such as religious groups, the pharmaceutical industry, and organized crime) and law enforcement professionals. The result is that current drug laws are illogical. They are not related to the danger of the drugs but reflect the political interests of the powerful.

### 12.2 Discuss the most commonly abused illegal and legal drugs and how drug use varies by class, race, and gender.

- Most people in the United States take some drug on a regular basis. Illegal drugs used by millions in U.S. society are psychedelics/hallucinogens like PCP and ecstasy, opiates, cocaine, and methamphetamine.
- Attitudes toward marijuana are currently shifting as twenty-three states have removed state-level criminal penalties for growing or possessing medical marijuana, and four states have legalized marijuana for recreational use. The federal government remains opposed to the legalization of marijuana.
- Cigarette smoking remains the leading preventable cause of death in the United States. Currently, more men smoke than women, smoking and education are inversely related, and cigarette smoking is more common among adults living below the poverty level.
- The prevailing culture, group norms, and social pressures strongly affect the patterns of drug use and their behavioral effects. Drug use varies by age, education level, race, gender, and social class. Men of all ages are more likely than women to use illegal drugs.
- The pressure to use drugs may come from doctors, coaches, pharmaceutical firms, tobacco

and alcohol companies, and one's friends and associates. Drugs are used increasingly to meet cultural standards of mental and physical perfection.

### 12.3 Critique the U.S. "war on drugs" policy.

- The U.S. war on drugs has cost taxpayers more than \$1 trillion since 1971. It entails stopping drugs from coming into the country and punishing those who use and sell drugs. In large part, this war has not succeeded.
- Drug laws promote crime in at least three ways: (a) users often engage in criminal activity because the drugs, being illegal, are so expensive; (b) punitive drug laws encourage organized crime by making importation, processing, and distribution of illegal drugs extremely lucrative; and (c) people selling illicit drugs often corrupt the police.
- The drug war appears to be racist because of four patterns in the criminal justice system: (a) Blacks are overrepresented in the prison population for drug offenses given their numbers in the population and their drug usage statistics; (b) drug enforcement occurs almost exclusively in minority neighborhoods; (c) prior to the Fair Sentencing Act of 2010, although crack cocaine and powder cocaine are basically the same, the government punished the (primarily Black) users and sellers of crack much more severely; and (d) the courts tend to administer medical treatment for White drug users and the criminal justice system for Black users.
- Government can adopt alternative policies toward drug use: (a) prohibition of trade and use through enforcement of criminal penalties (the current policy); (b) regulation through licensing and taxation; (c) noninterference (ignoring drugs because what people do to themselves is not the government's business); and (d) addressing the underlying social causes of drug use to reduce the demand for drugs.

## Key Terms

**Additive drugs** Chemicals that improve performance.

**Decriminalization of drugs** Legalization of drugs.

**Drug** Any substance that affects the structure or function of the body when ingested.

**Gateway drug** The belief that the use of a drug will lead to the use of other hard drugs like heroin and cocaine.

**Heroin maintenance** British approach to heroin addiction that treats addicts as sick rather than criminal; thus, addicts are placed under the jurisdiction of physicians who administer drugs to their patients.

**Interdiction** Public policy of stopping the flow of drugs into the United States by guarding the borders and by curtailing the creation, processing, and distributing of drugs in other countries.

**Methadone maintenance** Used for heroin maintenance, this treatment provides a heroin substitute (methadone) to addicts under medical supervision.

**Moral panic** Moral panics occur when a social problem is defined as a threat to societal values and interests. Moral panics typically involve the exaggeration of a social problem; the public response to it is also exaggerated.

**Politics of drugs** The labeling of some drugs as legal and others as illegal depends on the definition of drugs by the most powerful interest groups, which are able to get their definitions incorporated into the law.

**Psychoactive drug** Chemical that alters the perceptions and/or moods of people who take it.

**Psychopharmacology** Science of drugs that affect the mind.

**Restorative drugs.** Chemicals that heal a traumatized part of the body.

**Schedule 1 drug** Classified by the Drug Enforcement Administration as a drug that has high potential for abuse and no currently accepted medical use.

## Chapter 13

# The Economy and Work



## Learning Objectives

- 13.1** Understand how the U.S. economy compares to pure capitalism and pure socialism.
- 13.2** Understand how mega economic trends affect individual U.S. workers.
- 13.3** Describe how the characteristics of work in the United States can be a source of social problems.

The next five chapters of this book describe the fundamental institutions of society that channel behavior in prescribed ways in the important areas of social life—the economy and work, family, education, the health care system, and the military. We begin with a chapter on the economy of the United States. Three areas are emphasized: the domination of huge corporations, mega economic trends that affect U.S. workers, and the social problems associated with work.

## The Corporation-Dominated U.S. Economy

### 13.1 Understand how the U.S. economy compares to pure capitalism and pure socialism.

Industrialized societies organize their economic activities according to one of two fundamental forms: capitalism or socialism. Although no society has a purely capitalist or socialist economy, the ideal types provide opposite extremes on a scale that helps us measure the U.S. economy more accurately. We begin with a brief discussion of each type.

### Capitalism

#### Capitalism

The economic system based on private ownership of property, guided by the seeking of maximum profits, competition, and a government policy of *laissez-faire*.

#### Laissez-faire

A government policy whereby the government allows the marketplace to function without interference.

Four conditions must be present for pure **capitalism** to exist—private ownership of property, personal profit, competition, and a government policy of *laissez-faire*. These necessary conditions constitute the underlying principles of a pure capitalist system. The first is private ownership of property. Individuals are encouraged to own not only private possessions but, most important, also the capital necessary to produce and distribute goods and services. In a purely capitalist society, there would be no public ownership of any potentially profitable activity.

The pursuit of maximum profit, the second essential principle, implies that individuals are free to maximize their personal gains. Most important, the proponents of capitalism (see “A Closer Look: Adam Smith”) argue that profit seeking by individuals has positive consequences for society. Thus, seeking individual gain through personal profit is considered morally acceptable and socially desirable.

Competition, the third ingredient, is the mechanism for determining what is produced and at what price. The market forces of supply and demand ensure that capitalists produce the goods and services wanted by the public, that the goods and services are high in quality, and that they are sold at the lowest possible price. Moreover, competition is the mechanism that keeps individual profit seeking in check. Potential abuses such as fraud, faulty products, and exorbitant prices are negated by the existence of competitors who soon take business away from those who violate good business judgment. So, too, economic inefficiency is minimized as market forces cause the inept to fail and the efficient to succeed.

These three principles—private ownership, personal profit, and competition—require a fourth condition if true capitalism is to work: a government policy of *laissez-faire*, allowing the marketplace to operate unhindered. Capitalists argue that any government intervention in the marketplace distorts the economy by negatively affecting incentives and freedom of individual choice. If left unhindered by government, the profit motive, private ownership, and competition will achieve the greatest good for the greatest number in the form of individual self-fulfillment and the general material progress of society.

## A CLOSER LOOK

### Adam Smith

Adam Smith (1723–1790), a Scottish economist, is the godfather of laissez-faire capitalism. His *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, written in 1775, presented a logical vision of how society was bound inextricably by the private decisions of entrepreneurs and consumers alike.

Of the many issues that Smith addressed, one is paramount for our concerns: How does society hang together when everyone is pursuing his or her own self-interest? For Smith the answer is in the laws of the marketplace: Each person producing what will bring a profit meets the needs of society and its citizens. But if all entrepreneurs are profit hungry, what will prevent them from taking unfair advantage of their consumers? The answer, simply, is competition. The existence of competition will keep prices fair and product quality high.

The market also regulates the incomes of those who produce the goods. If wages are too high in one kind of work, other workers will rush to that type of job, bringing down the exorbitant wages. Similarly, if wages are too low, then workers will change to better-paying jobs. The marketplace also reduces the possibility of surpluses because entrepreneurs, foreseeing the problem, will move to more profitable arenas where the demand and profits are high. Thus, the laws of the marketplace provide an “invisible hand” that regulates the economy without government intervention. The government is not needed to fix prices, to set minimum wages, or to protect against consumer fraud. All that is needed is a free and competitive marketplace. The question, of course, is whether the nature of the marketplace in a world of huge multinational corporations, multimillion-member labor unions, and conglomerates is the same as it was in the eighteenth century.

Critics argue that capitalism promotes inequality and a host of social problems because the object is profit, not enhancing the human condition. Put another way: Capitalism is about profit, not social justice.

The economy of the United States is not purely capitalistic. Taxes are levied on the population to raise monies for the common good, such as the federal interstate highway system, the air traffic control system and the subsidizing of airports, flood control projects, the defense establishment, the postal system, and disaster relief. In many ways, the government interferes with the market by monitoring the safety of food and drugs, prohibiting the sale of certain products, regulating the environment, insisting on health and safety regulations in workplaces, issuing licenses, protecting the civil rights of women and minorities, taxing income, subsidizing certain business activities, overseeing the banking and insurance industries, and raising or lowering interest rates.

Moreover, although U.S. social programs are less generous than those found in the social welfare states, there is nonetheless some help for victims of natural disasters, preschool training for children of the poor, low-interest student loans, Medicare, and Medicaid.



## Socialism

### Socialism

The economic system in which the means of production are owned by the people for their collective benefit.

### Totalitarian

Controlling the people of a country in a very strict way with complete power that cannot be opposed.

### Egalitarianism

Equality of opportunity for the self-fulfillment of all, equality rather than hierarchy in decision-making, and equality in sharing the benefits of society.

**Socialism** is an economic system in which the means of production are owned by the people for their collective benefit. The five principles of socialism are democratization, egalitarianism, community, public ownership of the means of production, and planning for common purposes. True socialism must be democratic. Representatives of a socialist state must be answerable and responsive to the wishes of the public they serve. Nations that claim to be socialist but are **totalitarian** violate this fundamental aspect of socialism. The key to differentiating between authentic and false socialism is to determine who is making the decisions and whose interests are being served. Thus, it is a fallacy to equate true socialism with the politico-economic systems found in Cuba or the People's Republic of China. These societies are socialist in some respects; that is, their material benefits are more evenly distributed than those in the United States. But a single political party controls their economies and governments in an inflexible and authoritarian manner. Although these countries claim to have democratic elections, in fact the citizens have no electoral choice but to rubber-stamp the candidates of the ruling party. The people are denied civil liberties and freedoms that should be the hallmark of a socialist society. In a pure socialist society, democratic relations must operate throughout the social structure: in government, at work, at school, and in the community.

The second principle of socialism is **egalitarianism**: equality of opportunity for the self-fulfillment of all, equality rather than hierarchy in decision-making, and equality in sharing the benefits of society. For some socialists, the goal is absolute equality. For most, though, equality means a limit to inequality, with some acceptable disparities in living standards. This more realistic goal of socialism requires a fundamental commitment to achieving a rough parity by evening out gross inequities in income, property, and opportunities. The key is a leveling of advantages so that all citizens receive the necessities (food, clothing, medical care, living wages, sick pay, retirement benefits, and shelter).

The third feature of socialism is community, which is the “idea that social relations should be characterized by cooperation and a sense of collective belonging rather than by conflict and competition” (Miller, 1991: 406). This sense of the collective is evidenced by a relatively high taxation rate to provide for the common good—such as universal health care, paid maternity leave, subsidized childcare, universal preschool programs, and a generous retirement program (see “Social Policy: The Swedish Welfare State”).

The fourth characteristic of socialism is the public ownership of the means of production. The people own the basic industries, financial institutions, utilities, transportation, and communications companies. The goal is serving the public, not making profit.

The fifth principle of socialism is planning. The society must direct social activities to meet common goals. This means that socialists oppose the heart of capitalism, which is to let individuals acting in their own interests in the marketplace determine overall outcomes. For socialists, these uncoordinated activities invite chaos, and although they possibly help some people in the society, they do damage to others. Thus, a purely socialist government requires societal planning to provide, at the least possible individual and collective cost, the best conditions to meet the material needs of its citizens. Planning also aims to achieve societal goals such as protecting the environment, combating pollution, saving natural resources, and developing new

## Social Policy

### The Swedish Welfare State

Sweden, although a capitalist economy for the most part, is socialist in its generous welfare provisions that level the extremes in wealth and poverty. The Swedish system is based on the principle that the government is responsible to provide basic services for the entire population. In broad outline, the present welfare system includes the following provisions:

- **A national health insurance program.** Patients choose their own physicians, and health services are subsidized for all residents of Sweden.
- **A family support program for parents and children.** Prenatal care, delivery, and postnatal care are free. All children under the age of 20 receive free medical and dental care. Working parents may take a leave from work to care for their infant for a total for both parents of 480 days (divided as they choose) while being compensated at 80 percent of their wages. Either parent may take time off for the care of a sick child (60 days a year per child), with compensation for lost earnings. All children ages 4 and 5 are provided three hours of free preschool a day.
- **Care of the elderly.** Everyone who has lived in Sweden for at least three years is entitled to at least a minimum pension. Full pension is for those who have lived in Sweden for forty years.

The elderly receive a housing subsidy. Institutionalized care is provided when needed, but the preference is for the elderly to receive nursing care in their homes, which is subsidized, whenever possible.

- **Subsidized housing.** The government provides nonprofit municipal housing, establishes rent ceilings, subsidizes financing, and provides housing allowances. These provisions allow lower-income families to afford decent housing.

To provide these many and expensive services of the welfare state, Swedish taxes are relatively high. Direct taxes include an income tax on employment, income from capital, business income, a national property tax on real estate, and an inheritance tax. Directly, there are a state sales tax and consumption taxes to curb the use of energy (oil and gas, electrical power, and motor vehicles), tobacco, gaming, and alcohol. As a result, the total tax revenue for Sweden as a percentage of gross domestic product in 2009 was 49.7 percent (compared to 28.2 percent for the United States, 40.6 percent in Germany, 39.0 percent in the United Kingdom, and 33.4 percent for Canada).

**SOURCE:** Eitzen, D. Stanley, *Solutions to Social Problems: Lessons from Other Societies*, 5th Ed., © 2010. Reprinted and Electronically reproduced by permission of Pearson Education, Inc., Upper Saddle River, New Jersey.

technologies. Public policy is decided through the rational assessment of the needs of society and how the economy might best be organized to achieve them. In this situation, the economy must be regulated by the government, which acts as the agent of the people. The government sets prices and wages; important industries are run at a loss if necessary. Central planning minimizes dislocations such as surpluses or shortages or unemployment. The goal is to run the economy for the good of the society.

Critics of democratic socialism argue that “the nanny state” minimizes individual freedom and choice. Government monopoly is inefficient because of a centralized bureaucracy making “one-size-fits-all” decisions. Taxes are high to pay for the social programs, robbing individuals of their earned income. And, the argument goes, the “cradle-to-grave” social programs for individuals and families reduce their motivation to succeed, an attitude that, when held by many, limits creativity, economic productivity, and growth.

## The Corporation-Dominated U.S. Economy

The U.S. economy has always been based on the principles of capitalism; however, the present economy is far removed from a free enterprise system. The major discrepancy between the ideal system and the real one is that the U.S. economy is no longer based on competition among more or less equal private capitalists. Huge corporations, contrary to classical economic theory, now dominate the market and control demand rather than respond to the demands of the market. However well the economic system might once have worked, the increasing size and power of corporations disrupt it. This development calls into question the appropriate economic form for a modern postindustrial society.

Karl Marx, more than 130 years ago, when bigness was the exception, predicted that capitalism was doomed by several inherent contradictions that would produce a class of people bent on destroying it. The most significant of these contradictions for our purposes is the inevitability of monopolies. Marx hypothesized that free enterprise would result in some firms becoming bigger and bigger as they eliminate their opposition or absorb smaller competing firms. The ultimate result of this process is the existence of a monopoly in each of the various sectors of the economy. Monopolies, of course, are antithetical to the free enterprise system because they, not supply and demand, determine the price and the quality of the product.

For the most part, the evidence in U.S. society upholds Marx's prediction. Less than 1 percent of all corporations produce more than 80 percent of the private-sector output. Few corporations dominate most sectors of the economy. Instead of one corporation controlling an industry, the typical situation is domination by a small number of firms. When four or fewer firms supply 50 percent or more of a particular market, a **shared monopoly** or **oligopoly** results, which performs much as a monopoly or cartel would. Most economists agree that above this level of concentration—a four-firm ratio of 50 percent or more—the economic costs of a shared monopoly are manifest (for example, higher prices by 25 percent). Government data show that a number of industries are highly concentrated (especially in the media and news industry). For example:

### Shared monopoly

When four or fewer firms supply 50 percent or more of a particular market.

### Oligopoly

When a small number of large firms dominate a particular industry.

- Less than 1 percent of all corporations account for more than 80 percent of the total output of the private sector.
- Of the 15,000 commercial U.S. banks, the largest fifty hold more than one-third of all assets.
- One percent of all food corporations control 80 percent of all the industry's assets and about 90 percent of the profits.
- Six U.S.-based transnational corporations ship 90 percent of the grain in the world market.
- Five massive conglomerates (Viacom/CBS, Disney/ABC, News Corp./Fox, NBC/Comcast, and AOL/Time Warner) now command 75 percent of prime-time television. Similarly, two conglomerates (Clear Channel and Viacom) together own radio stations with 42 percent of the nation's listeners. Less than 1 percent of all corporations account for more than 80 percent of the total output of the private sector.

As previously stated, proponents of capitalism argue that the profit motive, private ownership, and competition will achieve the greatest good for the greatest number in the form of individual self-fulfillment and the general material progress of society. However, the concentration of power and wealth in large corporations makes it difficult for small business owners to compete and survive. Furthermore, while a few families are fabulously wealthy (the 400 richest Americans own as much wealth as the bottom half of the population), millions of American workers live below the poverty line.

## Mega Economic Trends

### 13.2 Understand how mega economic trends affect individual U.S. workers.

The structure of contemporary society shapes families and individuals within them. Three interrelated trends of great magnitude especially affect our jobs, incomes, and our futures—globalization, the structural transformation of the economy, and the Great Recession (this section is taken largely from Baca Zinn, Eitzen, and Wells, 2015: Chapter 4).

### Globalization

Among other changes, the new technologies have, most significantly, magnified the connections among all peoples across the globe. The Internet makes worldwide communications instantaneous. Money moves across political boundaries with a few keystrokes. Low wages in one country affect wages elsewhere. A drought in one part of the world drives up prices for commodities everywhere, and overproduction of a product in one region brings down the prices of that product elsewhere. A collapse in the stock market of one nation has ramifications for financial markets around the world. Movies, television, and advertising from one society affect the tastes, interests, and styles in other places. Polluted air from China, for example, rides the jet stream and in five days reaches the west coast of the United States and Canada. Deforestation in the developing nations has a major effect on climate change everywhere. Global warming, caused by the burning of fossil fuels, changes climates, generates megastorms, and increases the spread of tropical diseases around the world. A disease such as HIV/AIDS left Africa some fifty years ago and now infects 34 million people worldwide and 1.2 million in North America. H1N1 became a **pandemic** (worldwide health danger) within a few months, as did the Ebola outbreak in 2014. There has been a dramatic increase

### Pandemic

Worldwide health danger.

Container ships enter U.S. ports with goods produced elsewhere to be sold here. The merchandise is relatively cheap, but there is a high cost in fewer jobs for U.S. workers.



**Globalization**

The processes by which the earth's peoples are increasingly interconnected economically, politically, culturally, and environmentally.

**Capital flight**

Investment choices that involve the movement of corporate monies from one investment to another (investment overseas, plant relocation, and mergers).

**Structural transformation of the economy**

Fundamental change in the economy resulting from several powerful contemporary forces: technological breakthroughs in microelectronics, the globalization of the economy, capital flight, and the shift from a manufacturing economy to one based on information and services.

in migration flows, especially from poorer to richer nations. With sophisticated weapons systems, no nation is immune from assault from other nations or terrorist acts by revolutionary groups.

Each of these is an example of **globalization** (the processes by which everyone on Earth becomes increasingly interconnected economically, politically, culturally, and environmentally). We concentrate here on economic globalization.

Although trade between and among nations is not new, global trade entered a new phase after World War II. What have evolved are a global trade network, the integration of peoples and nations, and a global economy with a common ideology and economic structure: capitalism. Former colonies have established local industries and sell their raw materials, products, and labor on the global market. The United States emerged as the strongest economic and military power in the world, with U.S. corporations vitally interested in expanding their operations to other societies for profit. The tearing down of tariff barriers has accelerated the shift to a global economy. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), both passed in 1994, are two examples of agreements that increased the flow of goods (and jobs) across national boundaries. In 2005, President Bush signed the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), which institutes a Western Hemisphere-wide version of NAFTA. In 2014, thanks to Free Trade Agreements, 47 percent of U.S. goods exports (totaling \$765 billion) went to partner countries (International Trade Administration, 2015).

The globalization of the economy is not a neutral process. Decisions are based on what will maximize profits, thus serving the owners of capital and not necessarily workers or the communities where U.S. operations are located. In this regard, private businesses, in their search for profit, make crucial investment decisions that change the dynamics in families and communities. Most significant are the corporate decisions regarding the movement of corporate money from one investment to another (called **capital flight**). This shift of capital takes several forms: investment in plants located in other nations, plant relocation within the United States, and mergers. Although these investment decisions may be positive for corporations, they also take away investment from others (workers and their families, communities, and suppliers).

## The Transformation of the Economy: From Manufacturing to Services

The Industrial Revolution, which began in Great Britain in the 1780s, was a major turning point in human history. With the application of steam power and, later, oil and electricity as energy sources for industry, mining, manufacturing, and transportation, fundamental changes came to the economy, the relationship of people and work, family organization, and a transition from rural to urban life. In effect, societies are transformed with each surge in invention and technological growth.

The U.S. economy was once dominated by agriculture, but in the twentieth century, while agricultural productivity increased, the number employed in an agrarian economy declined precipitously. Manufacturing replaced agriculture as the dominant economic activity, indicating a **structural transformation of the economy**. Now we are undergoing another transformational shift—from an economy dominated by manufacturing to one characterized by service occupations and the collection, storage, and

dissemination of information. Reflecting this shift, from 2000 to 2010, some 54,621 U.S. factories shut down and the number of employees in manufacturing fell from 17 million to 11.5 million (Bureau of Labor Statistics, reported in Lind, 2011). To further illustrate, in 1917 the largest U.S. corporation, with three times the assets of its nearest competitor, was U.S. Steel, employing 268,000 workers. Today, the largest employer in the United States is Walmart, with more than 1.4 million employees.

While manufacturing declined in the United States, transnational corporations shifted their manufacturing to low-wage economies. Manufacturers moved offshore because profits are greater and because giant retailers (e.g., Walmart) have compelled manufacturers to move offshore in search of lower prices for consumers and higher profits for themselves (Meyerson, 2010: A16–A17). This migration of jobs takes two forms, both related to capital flight: offshoring and outsourcing (Friedman, 2005). **Offshoring** is when a company moves its production to another country, producing the same products in the same way, but with cheaper labor, lower taxes, and lower benefits to workers. Apple, for example, employs 700,000 workers in China making its iPhones, iPads, and computers (Isaacson, 2011: 546). **Outsourcing** refers to taking some specific task that a company was doing in-house—such as research, call centers, accounting, or transcribing—and transferring it to an overseas company to save money and reintegrating that work back into the overall operation. This move to low-wage economies results in three negative effects on U.S. workers: job loss, lower wages, and weakened workers' unions.



U.S. call centers are now often outsourced to overseas companies in order to save money.

### Offshoring

When a company moves its production to another country, producing the same products but with cheaper labor, lower taxes, and lower benefits to workers.

### Outsourcing

The process of transferring a specific task (such as accounting or transcribing) to a foreign firm to save money and reintegrating that work back into the overall operation.

## The Changing Nature of Jobs

Every new era poses new problems of adjustment, but this one differs from the agricultural and industrial eras. The earlier transformations were gradual enough for adaptation to take place over several decades, but conditions are significantly different now. The rate of change now is phenomenal and unprecedented.

Businesses are profitable and more productive than ever, but they do so with fewer workers. Among the reasons for this are that Americans work more hours than any other Western nation (an average of 1,804 hours a year, compared to 1,434 for German workers) (Begala, 2011). More important, machines are replacing humans in the workplace (automation). Robots replace humans doing routine work such as picking fruit, welding, assembling, painting, and scanning products for defects. Now robots can see, feel, move, and work together. As a result, factory production is up by one-third, but factory employment has dropped by about one-third (Davidson, 2012).

Automation affects white-collar workers as well as blue-collar workers (Lyons, 2011). Software replaces law clerks in the search for previous court opinions. Self-service in the checkout lines at supermarkets and other stores replaces workers. The Internet, for example, allows people to make their own travel arrangements, reducing or eliminating the need for travel agents, or to buy and sell stocks, making stockbrokers unnecessary. Also, software is available that helps people do their tax returns without the need of a tax specialist. Within firms, computer programs take care of payrolls, inventory control, and delivery schedules, reducing the need for accountants.

The employer/employee relationship is also being reshaped. The Internet is revolutionizing how business is transacted. More than 30 million American workers work in temporary, contracted, self-employed, leased, part-time, and other “nonstandard” arrangements (**contingent employment**). These workers typically lack an explicit contract for ongoing employment and thus receive sporadic wages. They earn less than their counterparts who do the same work, and they have fewer benefits such as health insurance, family leave, and retirement, thus costing their employers up to 30 percent less than regular employees (Davidson, 2009).

### Contingent employment

Employment arrangement whereby employees work as temporaries or independent contractors, freeing employers from paying fringe benefits.

A generation or so ago, workers tended to work for one or two employers during their working years. Employers were loyal to their workers (“If you do your job, you’ll have a job”) and workers were loyal to their employers. But the nature of work has changed dramatically. Now many workers are not allied with an employer, working, as we have seen, as contingent workers. Millions of workers are dismissed as their employers modernize the plants or move them elsewhere. Still other workers find their skills not keeping up with technological changes. Others leave jobs for other jobs. Sociologist Richard Sennett has calculated that young workers today with at least two years of college can expect to change jobs at least eleven times before retirement (reported in Schwartz, 2004).

## The Great Recession

The transformation of the economy and the effects of globalization have created considerable economic havoc in the past few decades. Adding to these dislocations is the Great Recession, which began in 2007 and, while technically over in 2009, the economic problems associated with it continue.

**PRELUDE TO THE ECONOMIC CRISIS** As we have seen, the transformation of the economy, at least in the short run, marginalized millions, increased unemployment, drove social mobility downward, and made many millions insecure about their jobs, health care, and retirement. Furthermore, many families went deep into debt with credit cards, car loans, college loans, and home equity loans. Families were also buying homes because home values had risen for half a century, most steeply from 1997 to 2006. This price appreciation tempted many to speculate, “flipping” recently purchased houses for a quick profit. Others took advantage of easy credit to refinance by taking out second mortgages to remodel their homes or to purchase big-ticket items such as automobiles and boats.

### Subprime loans

Loans sold to people with questionable credit records.

Mortgage market lenders encouraged this housing “bubble.” About 20 percent of home loans in 2005 were “**subprime loans**”—that is, loans sold to people with questionable credit records. These loans went disproportionately to African Americans and Latinos, many buying homes for the first time. They were offered no-money-down

loans, with what appeared to be low interest rates. The “low” rates were for the first two years but then the loans increased substantially when the “variable rate” clause (found in the fine print of the loan contract) was enforced. In 2011 Bank of America agreed to a record \$335 million settlement with the Justice Department, agreeing that its financial mortgage unit from 2004 to 2008 had discriminated against more than 200,000 African American and Latino borrowers by charging higher fees and interest rates than charged to Whites and steering them into subprime mortgages.

Add to this mix the reckless and irresponsible deal making on Wall Street, which involved an intricate, intertwined system of loan brokers, mortgage lenders, Wall Street trusts, hedge funds, offshore tax havens, and other predators (Hightower, 2007; see also Moyers and Winship, 2009). For example, subprime loans were bundled and sold to third parties. These “derivatives” were financial contracts between a buyer and a seller that derive value from an underlying asset, such as a mortgage or a stock. This allowed banks and insurance firms to leverage their assets by as much as forty times the value of the underlying asset. There were five agencies at the federal level that could have regulated these reckless practices but did not because they assumed the financial players would police themselves (Hightower, 2007).

**THE ENSUING ECONOMIC CRISIS** These forces converged in 2007, creating a “perfect storm” of economic devastation. It began when subprime borrowers began defaulting on their mortgages. That sent housing prices tumbling, unleashing a domino effect on mortgage-backed securities (Gandel and Lim, 2008). Banks and brokerages that had borrowed money to increase their leverage had to raise capital quickly. Some, like Merrill Lynch and Bear Stearns, were forced to sell their assets to other banks at bargain rates (Bear Stearns was sold to JPMorgan for \$236 million, down from its value of \$20 billion a year earlier). Others, like Lehman Brothers, failed. The stock market dropped precipitously. Credit dried up. Business slowed, causing companies to lay off workers by the hundreds of thousands. What happened in the United States affected markets elsewhere, causing a worldwide recession and a further slowing of business activity here and abroad. The result was the worst economic downturn in the United States since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

**HOUSING WOES** The value of homes grew rapidly in the new millennium, reaching a peak in 2006. By this time many homeowners were on the financial edge as they purchased overvalued houses, assuming their value would increase even more. But the housing bubble burst, causing values to decline precipitously, losing \$4 trillion in value from 2005 to the end of 2008 and another \$2 trillion in the next three years (Allegretto, 2011). The newly unemployed found they could not meet their monthly payments. Those who purchased subprime mortgages were especially vulnerable. By 2009 some 1.5 million homes owned mostly by African Americans were lost through subprime foreclosures. Banks repossessed 1 million homes in 2010. During the Great Recession, the value of the average home plummeted by more than 30 percent. This meant that more than one-fourth of home owners (11 million) were “under water” (i.e., they owed more on their mortgages than their homes were worth). Adding to the loss of home value was the accompanying drop in the building of new homes, with the construction industry losing 2 million jobs from 2005 to 2010.

**LEGACY OF THE GREAT RECESSION** The Great Recession, while technically over by 2010, has had lasting social consequences. First, federal, state, and local governments



lost significant tax revenues, causing them to face serious budget shortfalls. Politicians had two possible remedies: increase taxes or decrease spending. In the current political climate, the emphasis is on decreasing spending. At the federal level, there have been cuts to programs such as Head Start, Women Infants and Children, Pell grants for college students, and support for public education. In 2011 nine states, for example, cut spending for preschool programs by at least 10 percent (Economist, 2011c). The main targets, however, will be programs for seniors—Medicare and Social Security. State governments experiencing financial difficulties have made significant cuts in public education (K-12 and college), unemployment benefits, and various types of welfare. In short, the Great Recession gave politicians cover to repeal the progressive legislation passed since the 1930s.

Second, the economic crunch gave employers reason to reduce or eliminate worker benefits. In this time of economic uncertainty, corporations do little hiring or even decrease their workforce, relying more heavily on temporary workers or independent contractors.

Third, the “American dream” has become a dream rather than a reality for more and more Americans, resulting in a pessimistic outlook about the future.

Fourth, the Great Recession has affected families and personal behavior. Couples are marrying later and having fewer children. The number of cohabitating couples has increased. Divorce has actually decreased, not because couples are more compatible but rather because the divorce process is expensive and homes are difficult to sell. Household size has increased, reversing a half-century slide, as high unemployment and the housing bust forced some people to double up. Most notable is the rise in young adults ages nineteen to twenty-nine living with their parents (34 percent compared to 25 percent in 1980) (El Nasser, 2012).

A final legacy of the Great Recession is a diminished trust in the U.S. economic system and the government. Clearly, the institution of the economy did not work to keep markets stable. Rather, rampant speculation by banks and lending organizations made the situation worse, as did the lack of government oversight, a condition sought by corporations and their lobbyists. Lenders sometimes engaged in fraud, taking advantage of the disadvantaged with their subprime schemes. Clearly, the self-regulating market did not work, requiring the federal government to bail out failing banks and insurance companies. After the bubble burst in 2008, the government stepped in to avoid a deepening crisis. It seized control of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, the nation’s largest housing finance entities, guaranteeing up to \$100 billion for each company to ensure they would not fall into bankruptcy. The government also bailed out American International Group with \$85 billion; set aside \$700 billion to ease the credit crunch among banks; the government purchased \$250 billion in stock in the nine major banks and financial institutions; and it loaned significant amounts to

Some areas of the U.S. experienced serious declines in housing values during the Great Recession, resulting in distress sales, foreclosures, and owners walking away from their mortgages.



General Motors and Chrysler. These actions were a recognition that the self-cleansing nature of markets had failed. Now the government was involved in overseeing the business world and having a financial stake in these troubled enterprises. This marks an ideological change from the laissez-faire capitalist philosophy that argues the government should stay out of economic affairs. Despite signs of economic recovery post-recession, the legacy of the Great Recession is a diminished trust in the U.S. economic system as well as distrust in the government's ability to address the economic difficulties faced by American families (Teixeira and Halpin, 2014).

## Work and Social Problems

### 13.3 Describe how the characteristics of work in the United States can be a source of social problems.

Work is central to the human experience. Societies are organized to allocate work to produce the goods and services needed by the society and its members for sustenance, clothing, shelter, security, and even luxury. Work provides individuals and their families with their social identity, economic resources, and social location. Work dominates their time and is a primary source of life's meaning because it constitutes their contributions to other people.

The world of work also has a dark side, however. The structure of work is a major source of social problems. Work is alienating for many people. The organization of work sometimes exploits, does harm to workers, and often dehumanizes them. The distribution of work and how it is rewarded are major sources of inequality in society. This section focuses on these social problems generated by the social organization of work.

### Control of Workers

With the advent of the Industrial Revolution, more and more families left agrarian life, moved to cities, and worked in factories. Work in these factories was sometimes difficult, sometimes dangerous, often tedious, and usually boring. There was always the threat of lowered productivity and worker unrest under these adverse conditions. The factory owners and their managers used several tactics to counteract these potential problems and especially to maintain high productivity—scientific management, hierarchical control, technical control, and extortion.

**Scientific management** (also called Taylorization, after its founder, Frederick Taylor) came to the fore in U.S. industry around 1900. The emphasis was on breaking down work into very specialized tasks, the standardization of tools and procedures, and the speeding up of repetitive work. These efforts to increase worker efficiency and therefore to increase profits meant that workers developed a very limited range of skills. Instead of a wide knowledge of building cars or furniture, their knowledge was severely curtailed. This specialization had the effect of making the workers highly susceptible to automation and to being easily replaced by cheaper workers. But this scientific management approach also had a contradictory effect. In its attempt to increase efficiency by having workers do ever more compartmentalized tasks, it increased the repetition, boredom, and meaninglessness of work—hence, the strong tendency for workers to become alienated and restless.

#### Scientific management

Efforts to increase worker efficiency by breaking down work into very specialized tasks, the standardization of tools and procedures, and the speeding up of repetitive work.



The scientific management model made work tasks less-skilled and repetitive, and thus workers became vulnerable to being replaced by machines.

### **Alienation**

Separation of human beings from each other, from themselves, and from the products they create.

the ladder. Those who hope to be upwardly mobile in the organization must become obedient rule followers who do not question authority.

Workers are also controlled by management's use of technology to monitor and supervise them. Some businesses use lie detectors to assess worker loyalty. Psychological tests and drug tests (80 percent of major companies require employees to undergo urine tests for drugs) are used to screen applicants for work. E-mail and use of the Internet are monitored. Telephone taps have been used to determine whether workers use company time for personal use. Management uses closed-circuit television, two-way mirrors, and other devices to determine whether workers are using their time productively. The most common contemporary technology for worker control is the computer. The computer can count keystrokes, time phone calls, monitor frequency of errors, assess overall employee performance, and even issue warnings when the employee falls short of the ideal.

## **Alienation**

**Alienation** is the separation of human beings from each other, from themselves, and from the products they create. In capitalism, according to Karl Marx, worker alienation occurs because the workers do not have any control over their labor, because managers manipulate them, because they tend to work in large, impersonal settings, and because they work at specialized tasks. Under these circumstances, workers use only a fraction of their talents and have no pride in their own creativity and in the final product. Thus, we see that worker alienation is linked with unfulfilled personal satisfaction.

Alienation is not limited to manual workers. The work of white-collar workers such as sales clerks, secretaries, file clerks, bank tellers, and data entry clerks is mostly routine, repetitive, boring, and unchallenging. These workers, like assembly line workers, follow orders, do limited tasks, and have little sense of accomplishment.

## **Dangerous Working Conditions**

In a capitalist economy, workers represent a cost to profit-seeking corporations. The lower management can keep labor costs down, the greater its profits. Historically, low labor costs meant that workers received low wages, had inferior or nonexistent fringe

Closely related to scientific management is the use of bureaucracy to control workers. Work settings, whether in factories, universities, offices, or corporations, are organized into bureaucratized hierarchies. In this hierarchy of authority (chain of command), each position in the chain gives orders to those below, taking responsibility for their actions and following orders from above. The hierarchical arrangement controls workers by holding out the possibility of advancement, with more prestigious job titles, higher wages, and greater benefits as one moves up

benefits such as health care and pensions, and worked in unhealthy conditions. Mines and factories were often extremely unsafe. The labor movement early in the 1900s gathered momentum because of the abuse experienced by workers.

After a long and sometimes violent struggle, the unions were successful in raising wages for workers, adding fringe benefits, and making the conditions of work safer. But the owners were slow to change, and worker safety was, and continues to be, one of the most difficult areas. Many owners of mills, mines, and factories continue to consider the safety of their workers a low-priority item, presumably because of the high cost.

About forty-five years ago, the federal government instituted the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to make the workplace safer. The result has been a 62 percent drop in workplace fatalities, despite resistance by the business community and weak enforcement by the government. Even with this dramatic drop in worker deaths, the problem of worker safety remains.

In 2013, 4,405 workers were killed on the job (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). Minorities, especially Latinos, have the highest work-related death rates. The reason for the higher Latino rate is the influx of Latino immigrants, who take the dangerous and hard-to-fill jobs in construction, meatpacking plants, and as farm laborers. Undocumented workers often are exploited because if they complain, they will be deported. They usually do not join unions, which help protect workers, and they do not protest when conditions are dangerous.

Significant occupational dangers continue to plague workers, especially those in certain jobs, such as loggers, structural iron and steel workers, refuse collectors, roofers, electrical power line installers and repairers, miners, and farmers. In addition to falls, fires and explosions, cave-ins, violent weather, and equipment malfunctions, there are also dangers from invisible contaminants such as nuclear radiation, chemical compounds, coal tars, dust, and asbestos fibers in the air. These dangers from invisible contaminants are increasing because the production of synthetic chemicals has increased so dramatically.

This discussion raises some critical questions: Should profits supersede human life? Are owners guilty of murder if their decisions to minimize plant safety result in industrial deaths? (See "A Closer Look: The Upper Big Branch Mine Disaster: Preventable?") Who is a greater threat, the thug in the streets or the executives in the suites? Criminologist Jeffrey Reiman answers these questions, arguing that:

Is a person who kills another in a bar brawl a greater threat to society than a business executive who refuses to cut into his profits to make his plant a safe place to work? By any measure of death and suffering, the latter is by far a greater danger than the former. Because he wishes his workers no harm, because he is only indirectly responsible for death and disability while pursuing legitimate economic goals, his acts are not called "crimes." Once we free our imagination from the blinders of the one-on-one model of crime, can there be any doubt that the criminal justice system does not protect us from the gravest threats to life and limb? It seeks to protect us when danger comes from a young lower-class male in the inner city. When a threat comes from an upper-class business executive in an office, the criminal justice system looks the other way. This is in the face of growing evidence that for every two American citizens murdered by thugs, more than three American workers are killed by the recklessness of their bosses and the indifference of their government. (2007:87)

## A CLOSER LOOK

### The Upper Big Branch Mine Disaster: Preventable?

In the month prior to the worst mining disaster in four decades, the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) cited Massey Energy for fifty-three safety violations in its Upper Big Branch Mine in West Virginia. On April 5, 2010, an explosion in that mine killed twenty-nine miners. After this disaster, the MSHA investigated and issued 369 citations and orders on the owner, Massey Energy, including twenty-one “flagrant violations” of safety and health standards. The report concluded that the explosion that caused this tragedy was entirely preventable. It was the result of an ingrained culture of greed and recklessness that put profits before workers’ safety. Among the charges by the MSHA (reported in Jameson, 2011; Mauriello, 2011; and Daly, 2011):

- Mine managers were given advanced notice by Massey as to when federal and safety inspectors were to visit the mine.
- The company kept two sets of safety books, one that included known dangers and another version for miners and inspectors that minimized the dangers.
- The explosion was caused when methane was ignited from outdated equipment; inoperable sprinklers combined with already unsafe working conditions.
- Ventilation levels were dangerously low due to the company’s failure to comply with its ventilation plan.
- Management showed an intentional pattern of covering up safety hazards.
- When inspectors identified safety hazards, Massey often failed to take corrective action.
- There was an atmosphere of intimidation that kept workers from bringing safety concerns to inspectors.

Massey was acquired by Alpha Natural Resources in June 2011 for \$7.1 billion, thereby assuming Massey’s legal liabilities for the disaster. Alpha agreed to a \$209.5 million settlement. Of that, \$46.5 million went to families of the victims, \$128 million to fund mine safety upgrades and research and training, and \$35 million in penalties for federal mine safety violations. The settlement, approved by the Justice Department, allowed Alpha to escape pleading guilty to any criminal charges.

## Sweatshops

### Sweatshop

Substandard working environment where labor laws are violated.

A **sweatshop** is a substandard work environment where workers are paid less than the minimum wage and are not paid overtime premiums and where other labor laws are violated. In 2013, a spotlight on sweatshops occurred due to the collapse of a garment factory in Bangladesh, killing more than 1,100 young women and child laborers. Sweatshops are not just located in third world countries, however. The U.S. Department of Labor estimates that more than half of the nation’s 22,000 garment factories are sweatshops, mostly in New York, California, Texas, Florida,

and Georgia, but also offshore in U.S. territories like American Samoa, Guam, and Saipan, where the garments are labeled “Made in the USA” (cited in Lendman, 2010). The workers in these places make clothes for such brands as Levi Strauss, Esprit, Casual Corner, the Limited, and the Gap and for such merchandisers as J.C. Penney, Sears, and Walmart. The workers, mostly Latina and Asian immigrant women, are paid much less than the minimum wage, receive no benefits, and work in crowded, unsafe, and stifling conditions.

U.S. corporations also sell products produced by workers, many of whom are children, working in sweatshop conditions in other countries. Foxconn, for example, employs 1.2 million workers in China who assemble 40 percent of the electronics equipment sold worldwide, much of it in the United States to companies such as Microsoft, Hewlett-Packard, Dell, Amazon, and Apple. It is the largest supplier of Apple’s hugely popular iPads and iPhones. Workers at Foxconn and other plants are typically young women who work up to 14-hour shifts six or seven days a week. The work environment is characterized by military-type discipline (Arthur, 2012). Workers are exploited in sweatshops throughout the low-wage countries (e.g., China, India, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Nicaragua, and Haiti) making shoes, apparel, athletic equipment, toys, and tools for American consumers.

## Unions and Their Decline

Historically, labor unions have been extremely important in changing management–labor relations. Joining together, workers challenged owners to increase wages, add benefits, provide worker security, and promote safety in the workplace. Through the use of strikes, work slowdowns, public relations, and political lobbying, working conditions improved, and union members, for the most part, prospered. In wages and benefits, union workers earn more than nonunion workers. Consider the following differences between union workers and unorganized workers:

- The median yearly earnings of workers in 2010 were \$47,684 for union workers, compared with \$37,284 for employees not represented by unions (Bureau of Labor Statistics, reported in Bauerlein and Jeffery, 2011:21).
- Union members are more likely to have employer-provided health insurance, pensions, and paid sick leave than nonunion workers (vanden Heuvel, 2010).
- Women union members earn 33 percent more than women nonunion workers.
- African American union members earn 35 percent more than African American nonunion workers.
- Latino union members earn 51 percent more than Latino nonunion workers (A. Levin, 2004).
- There are fewer fatalities and injuries in underground coal mines that are unionized than at nonunion mines (Morantz, 2011).

Despite all of the benefits, unions have lost their power since about 1980, as membership declined from a high of about 35 percent of wage and salary workers in the mid-1950s, and 20 percent in the early 1980s, to 11.9 percent in 2010. With such small and dwindling numbers, labor unions are in danger of becoming irrelevant. The reasons for the decline in union membership (and clout) are several. First, there was

a direct assault against unions by Republican Presidents Reagan, George H. W. Bush, and George W. Bush. Each of these administrations was unsympathetic with strikes and sometimes used federal leverage to weaken them. Similarly, their appointees to the post of Secretary of Labor and the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) were pro-business rather than pro-labor.

Second, public opinion has turned against unions because some of them are undemocratic, scandal ridden, and too zealous in their demands. Public opinion has also turned against organized labor because of a pro-business, pro-capitalist bias by Republicans, especially since the Reagan administration.

Third, businesses do all they can to block unions. Typically, companies are required to have a union vote if 30 percent of workers sign a petition. When such an election does occur, companies have won more than half the time, versus 28 percent in the early 1950s. The anti-union vote by workers is the result usually of an all-out assault by the company, including information arguing that unionization may lead to downsizing or even closing plants, “worker appreciation” days with free barbecues or pizza, the selective firing of workers who are union activists (an illegal activity, but it happens in about one-fourth of the union drives, according to a commission study established by President Clinton), and other forms of intimidation. Walmart, for example, has been formally cited numerous times for using illegal tactics to deny its workers the right to join a union.

Another major reason for the decline of union strength is the transformation of the economy. Manufacturing jobs, which are in decline, have historically been pro-union, whereas service jobs, which are increasing, have been typically nonunionized. Similarly, the advent of computers, modems, and fax machines has increased the number of people who work at home as temporary and part-time workers. These workers are the least likely to join unions.

And, finally, some corporations have moved their operations to nonunion states. Automobile manufacturers, for example, have bypassed the industrial (and heavily unionized) North and have opened assembly plants in the South, where there is an anti-union climate. Nissan became the first foreign car maker in the South (in Tennessee and later in Mississippi), followed by Toyota (Kentucky, Texas, and Alabama), Honda, Mercedes-Benz, Hyundai (Alabama), and BMW (South Carolina). Now the aircraft industry is involved in a similar migration, with Boeing building an assembly line in South Carolina for its 787 Dreamliner jet.

These forces have given the strong advantage to management and limited the political power of the working class. Faced with the threat of plants closing or moving to nonunion localities or to low-wage nations, unions have chosen, typically, to give back many of the gains they made during the 1960s and 1970s. Thus, workers have lost real wages and benefits. Another consequence of union decline is that the workplace may be less safe: Some of the most injury-prone industries, like cattle, pig, chicken, turkey, and catfish processing and textiles, have clustered in right-to-work (i.e., nonunion) states across the South.

With union strength dwindling, incomes have stagnated or declined and the middle class is shrinking. This has consequences for the economy, as workers will not be able to purchase enough goods and services to encourage economic growth and society-wide prosperity. In short, demand for products will fall, resulting in employers laying off workers or reducing their wages and benefits further.

## Discrimination in the Workplace: Perpetuation of Inequality

Women and minorities have long been the objects of discrimination in U.S. industry. In 2013, 33,068 charges of racial discrimination and 27,687 charges of sex discrimination were filed with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. The charges now and in the past have centered on hiring policies, seniority rights, restricted job placement, limited opportunities for advancement, and lower pay for equal work. A number of court suits (and those settled out of court) illustrate that discriminatory policies have been common among such major corporations as AT&T, General Motors, and Northwest Airlines and in such industries as banking and steel.

In contemporary U.S. society, men and women, with some exceptions, are accorded different, and unequal, positions in religious, government, school, work, and family activities. Looking only at work, women and men often do different work both in the family and in the labor force. This division of labor between the sexes preserves the differential power, privilege, and prestige of men. Men are overrepresented in administrative and supervisory roles, and women's pay lags behind men's in virtually every sector of the economy.

## Unemployment

The Bureau of Labor Statistics supplies the official unemployment statistics. The official unemployment rate in the United States since 2000 has ranged from a low of 3.9 percent in October 2000 to a high of 10.2 percent in late 2009. The official unemployment rate is misleading, however, because it understates, dramatically, the actual magnitude of unemployment. The unemployment rate does not include those discouraged persons who have stopped looking for jobs within the past four weeks. If these **discouraged workers** were added to the official unemployment rate of 10 percent, the rate would be much higher than the "official" rate (see Figure 13.1 for U.S. unemployment rates over time).

Unemployment is commonly believed to be functional (i.e., have positive consequences) for society by reducing inflationary pressures. It is also kept relatively high by capitalists because high unemployment deflates wages and therefore increases profits. When unemployed people are willing to work, workers will not make inordinate demands for higher wages for fear that they will be replaced by cheaper labor. Thus, even unionized labor becomes relatively docile when unemployment is high.

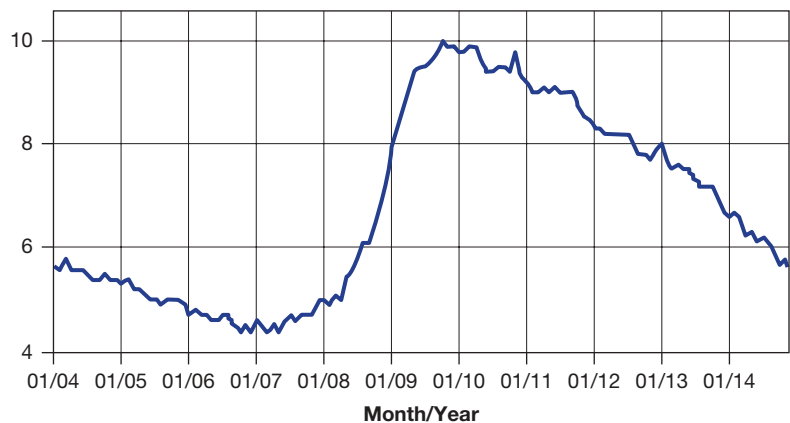
Unemployment affects some groups more than others. This reserve army of the unemployed

### Discouraged workers

People who have not actively sought work for four weeks. These people are not counted as unemployed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

**Figure 13.1** U.S. Employment Rate Over Time

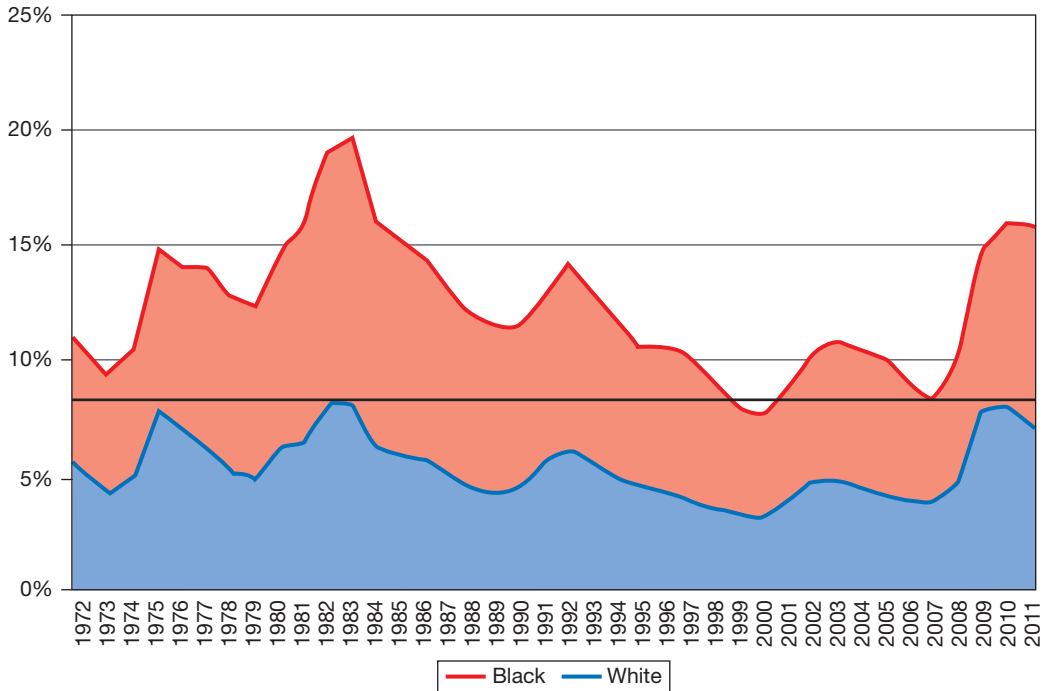
**SOURCE:** Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey. <http://data.bls.gov/timeseries/lms14000000>





**Figure 13.2** Black and White Annual Unemployment Rates, 1972 to 2011

**SOURCE:** Algernon Austin. "For African Americans, 50 Years of High Unemployment." Economic Policy Institute (February 22, 2012).



(unemployed people who want to work) is disproportionately composed of people of color (Latinos, African Americans, Native Americans), teenagers, and residents in declining cities. Typically, the official unemployment rate for African Americans is at least twice as high as the rate for Whites. In 2011, for example, the African American unemployment rate averaged 15.8 percent, twice the White average of 7.9 percent. These proportions by race tend to be relatively constant, whether the overall unemployment rate is high or low, whether the economy is in a boom or a slump. Thus, the labor market assigns people of color disproportionately not only to the low-paying jobs but also to jobs that are unstable.

An important consequence of the reserve army of the unemployed being composed primarily of racial minorities is that it inflames racial antipathies against them by people who hold unstable jobs. These job holders perceive their enemy as the people below them (commonly, recent immigrants), who will work for lower wages, rather than as the capitalists who oppose full employment and adequate wages for all people.

## Benefits Insecurity

With relatively weak unions, high unemployment, and competition from low-wage economies, U.S. corporations have been reducing their benefits to workers. Some corporations have even declared bankruptcy to renege on benefits promised to their workers (e.g., United Airlines, Delta Airlines, Northwest Airlines, and Delphi Corporation, the largest U.S. auto parts maker). Others (e.g., General Motors, Chrysler,

Caterpillar, Harley-Davidson, and Kohler) have negotiated with unions to set up a two-tiered system. The first tier maintains benefits to those already hired. New hires, on the other hand, will receive not only lower wages than those in the first tier but a greatly reduced benefits package as well. Another strategy by employers is to shift retirement plans from defined benefit (a guaranteed retirement benefit based on years of service) to one based on the investments of employees (e.g., 401k). This relieves employers from future obligations. In effect, then, corporations, which used to provide for the risks of old age and ill health of their workers, shifted those risks off the corporate ledger and onto the worker (Hacker, 2006).

## Conclusion

In summary, the problems associated with work in U.S. society are structural in origin. The source is not in unmotivated or unwilling or undereducated workers. To understand the work setting in our society, we must understand globalization and the nature of capitalism, where profit—not the human consequences—guides managerial decisions. And in looking at unemployment, we must recognize that the economy fails to produce enough jobs with living wages and adequate benefits for the workers to maintain a middle-class lifestyle. Finally, in examining this labor market, we must understand that the economy is undergoing a profound transformation. The next few generations will be caught in the nexus between one stage and another, and many will suffer because of the dislocations. So, too, will a society that refuses to plan, but, rather, lets the marketplace dictate the choices of economic corporations.

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## Chapter Review

### 13.1 Understand how the U.S. economy compares to pure capitalism and pure socialism.

- There are two fundamental ways in which society can organize its economic activities: capitalism and socialism. No society has a purely capitalist or purely socialist economy.
- Capitalism in its pure form involves (a) private ownership of property, (b) the pursuit of personal profit, (c) competition, and (d) a government policy of allowing the marketplace to function unhindered (*laissez-faire*).
- Critics argue that capitalism promotes inequality and a host of social problems because the object is profit, not enhancing the human condition.
- Socialism in its pure form involves (a) democracy throughout the social structure; (b) equality of opportunity, equality rather than hierarchy in decision-making, and equality in sharing the benefits of society; (c) public ownership of the means of production; (d) community; and (e) planning for common purposes.
- Critics of democratic socialism argue that it minimizes individual freedom and choice, and that taxes are too high in such systems.
- The U.S. economy has always been based on the principles of capitalism; however, the present economy is far removed from a free enterprise system. The major discrepancy between the ideal system and the real one is that the U.S. economy is no longer based on competition among more-or-less equal private capitalists. Huge corporations, contrary to classical economic theory, now dominate the market and control demand rather than respond to the demands of the market.
- The concentration of power and wealth in large corporations makes it difficult for small business owners to compete and survive.

### 13.2 Understand how mega economic trends affect individual U.S. workers.

- The economy of the United States is in the midst of a major structural transformation due to globalization and technological advances.
- The globalization of the economy is not a neutral process. Decisions are based on what will maximize profits, thus serving the owners of capital and not necessarily workers or the communities where U.S. operations are located. Most significant are the corporate decisions regarding the movement of corporate money from one investment to another (called capital flight).
- Deindustrialization and the shift to a service economy have reduced the number of jobs providing a middle-class standard of living and have expanded the number of lower standard-of-living jobs. Reflecting this shift, from 2000 to 2010, some 54,621 U.S. factories shut down and the number of employees in manufacturing fell from 17 million to 11.5 million.
- More than 30 million American workers work in temporary, contracted, self-employed, leased, part-time, and other “nonstandard” arrangements (contingent employment). These workers typically lack an explicit contract for ongoing employment and thus receive sporadic wages. They earn less than their counterparts who do the same work, and they have fewer benefits such as health insurance, family leave, and retirement.
- The Great Recession, while technically over by 2010, has had lasting social consequences. These include, among other things, federal cuts to public education and other social programs, an overall reduction in wages, household changes in size and composition, and a diminished trust in the government.

### 13.3 Describe how the characteristics of work in the United States can be a source of social problems.

- Societies are organized to allocate work to produce the goods and services required for survival. The way work is organized generates important social problems.

- Owners and managers of firms and factories control workers in several ways: (a) through scientific management, (b) through bureaucracy, (c) and by monitoring worker behavior.
- Blue-collar and white-collar workers in bureaucracies and factories are susceptible to alienation, which is the separation of human beings from each other, from themselves, and from the products they create. Specialized work in impersonal settings leads to dissatisfaction and meaninglessness.
- A primary goal of business firms in a capitalist society is to reduce costs and thus increase profits. One way to reduce costs is not to provide adequately for worker safety.
- The U.S. Department of Labor estimates that more than half of the nation’s 22,000 garment factories are sweatshops, mostly in New York, California, Texas, Florida, and Georgia, but also offshore in U.S. territories like American Samoa, Guam, and Saipan.
- Labor unions have declined in numbers and power. This decline has resulted in lower real wages and benefits, less-safe work conditions, and a declining middle class.
- Another work-related problem is discrimination, in which women and minorities have long received unfair treatment in jobs, pay, and opportunities for advancement.
- The official government data on unemployment hide the actual amount by undercounting the unemployed in two ways: (a) people not actively seeking work (discouraged workers) are not counted; and (b) people who work at part-time jobs are counted as fully employed.
- An important consequence of the unemployed being composed primarily of racial minorities is that it inflames racial antipathies against them by people who hold unstable jobs. These job holders perceive their enemy as the people below them (commonly, recent

immigrants), who will work for lower wages, rather than as the capitalists who oppose full employment and adequate wages for all people.

- The problems associated with work in U.S. society are structural in origin. The source is

not in unmotivated or unwilling or undereducated workers. To understand the work setting in our society, we must understand globalization and the nature of capitalism, where profit—not the human consequences—guides managerial decisions.

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## Key Terms

**Alienation** Separation of human beings from each other, from themselves, and from the products they create.

**Capital flight** Investment choices that involve the movement of corporate monies from one investment to another (investment overseas, plant relocation, and mergers).

**Capitalism** The economic system based on private ownership of property, guided by the seeking of maximum profits, competition, and a government policy of laissez-faire.

**Contingent employment** Employment arrangement whereby employees work as temporaries or independent contractors, freeing employers from paying fringe benefits.

**Discouraged workers** People who have not actively sought work for four weeks. These people are not counted as unemployed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

**Egalitarianism** Equality of opportunity for the self-fulfillment of all, equality rather than hierarchy in decision-making, and equality in sharing the benefits of society.

**Globalization** The processes by which the earth's peoples are increasingly interconnected economically, politically, culturally, and environmentally.

**Laissez-faire** A government policy whereby the government allows the marketplace to function without interference.

**Offshoring** When a company moves its production to another country, producing the same products but

with cheaper labor, lower taxes, and lower benefits to workers.

**Oligopoly** When a small number of large firms dominate a particular industry.

**Outsourcing** The process of transferring a specific task (such as accounting or transcribing) to a foreign firm to save money and reintegrating that work back into the overall operation.

**Pandemic** Worldwide health danger.

**Scientific management** Efforts to increase worker efficiency by breaking down work into very specialized tasks, the standardization of tools and procedures, and the speeding up of repetitive work.

**Shared monopoly** When four or fewer firms supply 50 percent or more of a particular market.

**Socialism** The economic system in which the means of production are owned by the people for their collective benefit.

**Structural transformation of the economy** Fundamental change in the economy resulting from several powerful contemporary forces: technological breakthroughs in microelectronics, the globalization of the economy, capital flight, and the shift from a manufacturing economy to one based on information and services.

**Subprime loans** Loans sold to people with questionable credit records.

**Sweatshop** Substandard working environment where labor laws are violated.

**Totalitarian** Controlling the people of a country in a very strict way with complete power that cannot be opposed.

# Chapter 14

## Families



### Learning Objectives

- 14.1** Explain the myths versus realities of family life in the United States.
- 14.2** Explain how societal economic transformations affect family life.
- 14.3** Explain the difficulties of managing work and family with little support from the system.
- 14.4** Understand the divorce rate and the consequences of divorce.
- 14.5** Examine the causes and consequences of violence in families.

Family changes occurring in the last few decades have led some social analysts to conclude that the family is in serious trouble, that we have lost our family values, and that the “breakdown of the family” causes social problems. The family is an easy target for those who blame social problems on bad people doing bad things. They assume that when the family fails, the rest of society fails. This view of the world is flawed in two fundamental respects. First, it reverses the relationship between family and society by treating families as the building blocks of society rather than as *a product of social conditions*. Second, it ignores the structural reasons for recent family changes and the profound changes occurring throughout the world. Even in very different societies, families and households are undergoing similar shifts as a result of global economic changes.

Some social problems have their locus in family settings. Although many of these problems are rooted in conditions outside the family, they become family problems that affect growing numbers of children and adults. This chapter examines the family as a social institution and the social problems that have their locus in family life. The chapter is divided into five parts. The first section shows the gap between common images of the family and family life as it is actually experienced in this society. The remaining four sections examine representative family-based social problems: the economic disadvantages for some families and current changes in the larger economy that are producing new problems for families, problems in balancing work and family without social supports, divorce, and domestic violence. The theme of this chapter is that family life and family problems are connected with other social institutions and broad social forces.

## The Mythical Family in the United States

### 14.1 Explain the myths versus realities of family life in the United States.

There are many myths about families. These beliefs are bound up with nostalgia and cultural values concerning what is typical and true about families. The following myths, based on folk wisdom and common beliefs, are rarely challenged except by social scientists and family scholars.

1. **The myth of a stable and harmonious family of the past.** Most people think families of the past were better than families of the present. They are believed to have been more stable, better adjusted, and happier. However, family historians have found there is no golden age of the family. Many children were raised by single parents or stepparents, just as now. Divorce rates were lower because of strong religious prohibitions and community norms against divorce, but this does not mean that love was stronger in the past. Many “empty” marriages continued without love and happiness to bind them.

Historian Stephanie Coontz has reexamined our assumptions about family history. Her book *The Way We Never Were* (1992) exploded the myth that the family has recently “gone bad.” In her more recent book, *Marriage: A History* (Coontz, 2005), she shows how marriage changed from an economic and political institution to a voluntary love relationship. This change, not the loss of family values, is what makes marriage more fragile today. Family life of the past was quite different from the stereotype. Desertion by spouses, the presence of illegitimate children, and other

conditions that are considered modern problems existed in the past. Part of the family nostalgia holds that there were three generations living under one roof or in close proximity. This image of the three-generational family is also false. Few examples of this “classical family of western nostalgia” (Goode, 1983: 43) have been found by family historians.

2. **The myth of separate worlds.** This is the positive image of the family as a place of love and trust, where individuals escape from the outside world. It makes a distinction between “public” and “private” realms, with the family as a “haven in a heartless world.” Here, social relations are thought to be different from those in the world at large. Of course, love, intimacy, and trust are the glue for many families, but this glorification of private life tends to mask the dark side of some families, where emotional and physical aggression are commonplace and where competition between spouses and among children sometimes destroys relationships. This myth ignores the harsh effects of economic conditions such as globalization and the Great Recession (e.g., poverty or near poverty, unemployment and underemployment, **downward mobility** or the threat of downward mobility). It ignores the social inequalities (racism, sexism, ageism, homophobia) that prevent many people from experiencing the good things in life. And the idealized family view masks the inevitable problems that arise in intimate settings (tensions, anger, and even violence in some instances).
3. **The myth of the monolithic family form.** We all know what a family is *supposed* to look like. It should resemble the 1950s form. We get this image from our ministers and priests, from our politicians, from children’s literature, and from television. This image is of a White, middle-class, heterosexual father as breadwinner, mother as homemaker, and children at home, living in a one-family house. This model, however, represents a small proportion of U.S. households—22 percent of households consist of married couples with children in which only the husband works (Cohen, 2014). Today, family diversity is the norm. Contemporary family types represent a multitude of family forms, including single-parent households, stepparent families, extended multigenerational households, cohabiting couples, gay married couples, child-free couples, transnational families, lone householders with ties to various families, and many other kinds of families (see “Social Policy: Same-Sex Marriage”).
4. **The myth of a unified family experience.** We assume all family members experience family life in the same way. This image hides the diversity within families. The family is a gendered institution. Women and men experience marriage differently. There are gender differences in decision-making, in household division of labor, and in forms of intimacy and sexuality. Similarly, divorce affects them differently. Remarriage patterns differ by gender, as well. Girls and boys experience their childhoods differently, as there are different expectations, different rules, and different punishments according to gender.
5. **The myth of family decline as the cause of social problems.** Partly because of the myths about the past, and partly because the family has changed so much in the past few decades, many conclude that the breakdown of the family is responsible for today’s social ills. Fatherless families and women working outside the home are said to be the reasons for poverty, violence, drug addiction, and crime.

### Downward mobility

Movement to a lower social class.

## Social Policy

### Same-Sex Marriage

An issue dominating today's marriage debate is the definition (and legality) of marriage. At issue is whether marriage should be limited to a woman and a man or whether it can be between members of the same sex.

Supporters of same-sex marriage argue that homosexual couples should have the same rights as heterosexuals. Legalizing same-sex marriage provides gays the privileges of marriage such as Social Security benefits, health care, and pension benefits. If marriage is denied to lesbians and gays, then they are being discriminated against on the basis of sexuality.

Opponents argue that making same-sex unions legal denigrates marriage and abandons the basic building block of the family. This view dominated politics in

the United States until 2012, when President Obama announced his support for same-sex marriage. And in late June 2015, the United States Supreme Court ruled that same-sex couples indeed have the constitutional right to marry. At the time of the ruling, thirteen states banned same-sex marriage. This historic ruling brings the United States in line with other countries. Gay and lesbian couples have full marriage rights in Canada, Spain, the Netherlands, Belgium, South Africa, Norway, Sweden, Portugal, Iceland, Argentina, Denmark, France, Brazil, Uruguay, New Zealand, Britain, Luxembourg, and Finland. Between the June ruling and November, roughly 96,000 gay marriages have been celebrated in the United States (Lauter, 2015).

Divorced or unwed mothers, in this view, are damaging children, destroying families, and tearing apart the fabric of society. Again, we emphasize that this argument falsely reverses the relationship between family and society by treating families as the building blocks of society rather than as *a product of social conditions*, which we turn to in the next section.

## Economic Trends and U.S. Families

### 14.2 Explain how societal economic transformations affect family life.

Family forms in the United States are closely related to economic development. Prior to industrialization, there was very little separation between “work” and “family.” Production of goods and services was completed within the family. With industrialization, work moved outside the home into factories and families became private domestic retreats set off from the rest of society. Men went off to earn a wage in factories and offices, while middle- and upper-class women remained in the home to nurture their children. From the rise of the industrial economy until World War II, capitalism operated within a simple framework. Employers assumed that most families included one main breadwinner—a male—and one adult working at home directing domestic work—a female; in short, jobs with wives. As a result, many men received the income intended to support a family (known as a “family wage”). Note, of course, that the assumption was that working women did not need to earn a family wage.

The private family with a breadwinner father and a homemaker mother was an important historical development, but economic conditions precluded this pattern for



many families. In 1950, about 60 percent of U.S. households fit this pattern: an intact nuclear household composed of a male breadwinner, his full-time homemaker wife, and their dependent children. Although this family form was dominant in society, its prevalence varied by social class. The pattern clearly prevailed in working-class families, for example, but was much less likely among low-income families, where women have always had to work outside the home to supplement family income. Furthermore, with industrialization, wave after wave of immigrants filled the industrial labor force. Through their labor, entire families became a part of working society.

The developing capitalist economy did not provide equal opportunities for all. Many racial-ethnic minorities did not have the opportunity to become part of the industrial labor force. Instead, they labored in nonindustrial sectors of the economy, which often required family arrangements that were different from those in the dominant society. The breadwinner-homemaker pattern never applied to immigrants and racial minorities because they were denied the opportunities to earn a family wage. So, many married women took jobs to make ends meet. Some women took in boarders or did piecework; some worked as maids in middle-class and upper-class homes; and some became wage workers in sweatshops, department stores, and offices. For these families, the support of the community and extended family members was crucial (Albelda, 1992: 7).

Families have always varied with the social conditions surrounding them. From the original settlement of the American colonies through the mid-twentieth century, families of European descent often received economic and social supports to establish and maintain families. Following World War II, the GI Bill, the National Defense Education Act, the expansion of the Federal Housing Authority and Veterans Administration loan subsidy programs, and government funding of new highways provided the means through which middle-class Whites were able to achieve the stable suburban family lives that became the ideal against which other families were judged (Coontz, 1992). These kinds of supports have rarely been available for people of color and, until quite recently, were actively denied them through various forms of housing and job discrimination.

## Economic Insecurity and Family Life

Large-scale economic trends are reshaping U.S. families and households. We have discussed the powerful forces transforming the U.S. economy: (1) globalization, (2) technological change, (3) capital flight, and (4) the shift from an industrial economy to a service economy. These forces combine to affect families both directly and indirectly. They have reduced the number of jobs providing a middle-class standard of living and have expanded the number of lower-standard-of-living jobs. This results in increased job insecurity and fewer benefits such as health insurance, family leave, and retirement. These changes create a shrinking middle class, and downward social mobility for many.

The Great Recession has magnified these difficulties and created considerable discontinuity for family life. For example, wages for the employed have stagnated, and their benefits have been reduced or eliminated. Unemployment has risen sharply. Investments in stocks and home buying have declined precipitously, causing high rates of foreclosures and bankruptcies. The economic decline has increased the numbers of individuals and families who are “food insecure” and

homeless. Tough economic conditions have caused couples to delay marriage and if married to delay childbearing. Financial woes are a major source of financial discord. The bond for some couples may be strengthened as the partners work together to find solutions. Many others find their bonds weakened or severed by difficult economic times.

Although families throughout the social structure are changing as a result of macroeconomic forces, the changes are most profound among the working class. Blue-collar workers have been hardest hit by the economic transformation. Their jobs have been eliminated by the millions because of the new technologies and competition from other lower-wage (much lower) economies. They have been disproportionately fired or periodically laid off. Sometimes their places of work have shut down entirely and moved to other societies. Their unions have lost strength (in numbers and clout). And their wages have declined.

The Great Recession has also disproportionately affected men. Of every five jobs lost, men have lost four of them during this economic crisis (Reed, 2009). The growing proportions of women entering the workforce in downturn-resistant sectors like education and health care have significant ramifications for family dynamics, as women become primary breadwinners “while also retaining their household responsibilities. Meanwhile, husbands must reconstruct their definition of contributing to the family enterprise, often swapping a paycheck for a broom” (della Cava, 2009: D2).



More and more children are being raised by grandparents.

## Today's Diverse Family Forms

As families struggle, they often change. For example, housing woes and unemployment have pushed relatives to “double up” and share living quarters. Sometimes these arrangements are multigenerational, with adults sharing their home with their children, grandchildren, and one or two elderly parents. The 2010 census found that 5.1 million households were multigenerational, with three or more generations (Tavernise, 2010). Grandparents provide a safety net for their children’s children when their children cannot provide for them. But these grandparents typically are struggling during the Great Recession with the loss of retirement savings because of the stock market crash and the resulting loss of 401(k)s and IRAs. The added load of dependent grandchildren coupled with much less retirement income has severely eroded their “golden years.”

Another family form emerging from the economic crisis is the married couple that lives in the same house even though the individuals no longer want to live together. They continue to live together because it is too costly to maintain two homes. So they build walls, real and imaginary, to create separate spaces for each in the same larger space—still married, still living together, but living apart emotionally.

Many households are composed of two generations as adult children, faced with low-paying jobs and high college and/or credit-card debts, move in with their parents. Twenty-nine percent of young adults between the ages of 15 and 34 have moved back in temporarily with their parents (Mintz, 2012) (see “Speaking to Students: Moving Back Home”).

## Speaking to Students

### Moving Back Home

The extended economic downturn that began in 2007 will affect families for years to come. The Great Recession has produced an increase of young, primarily middle-class, adults returning to their parents' homes after being away to college or having otherwise lived independently.

Among people aged 18–24, almost two-thirds of men (60 percent) live with their parents. Half of women in this group do (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011a). “These ‘boomeranged’ adults are a generation facing an historic transformation in the route to a successful job and family life” (Mintz, 2012). In the 1950s and 1960s, the pattern was to finish school and then leave the family of origin. Leaving the childhood home was an important and inevitable rite of passage for young adults. Owning a house and starting a nuclear family was their dream. “Failure to launch” was a social disgrace.

Today’s economic conditions have changed patterns of how and when people form families. Moving back home for financial reasons often comes before living independently or marrying. This sequence is no longer a stigma.

Is this trend a good thing or a bad thing? Will young people unused to struggle return to the immature dependence of childhood with free food and laundry service? Or will moving back in with mom and dad provide a gradual transition to successful adulthood in today’s economy? Some family experts say that pulling together in a household to survive may make young adults more responsible—like the frugal and self-reliant Depression Era generation. What do you think?

#### Household

Residential unit in which members share resources. These units vary in membership and composition. A household is not always a family (parents and children), and a family is not always a household (because it may be separate geographically).

#### Family

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, a family is people related by birth, marriage, or adoption.

#### Nonfamily household

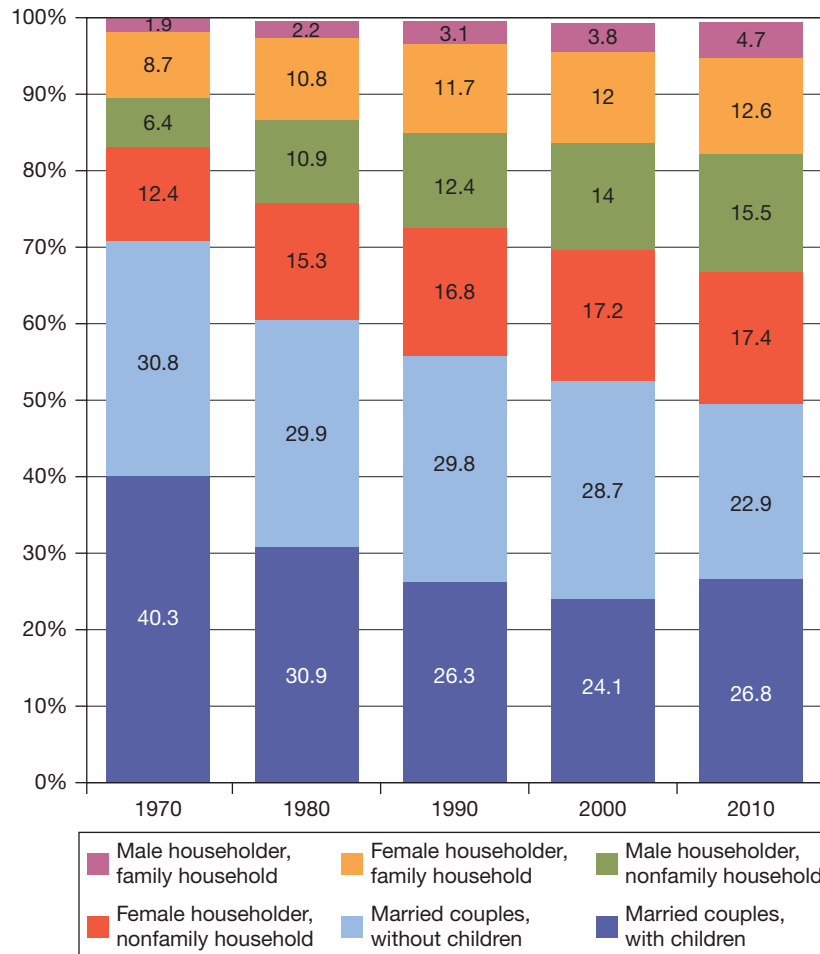
Persons who live alone or with unrelated individuals.

The U.S. Bureau of the Census defines a **household** as all persons living in a housing unit regardless of relationship to each other. A household may consist of one person who lives alone or of several people who share a dwelling. A **family**, according to the Census Bureau, includes two or more people who are related by birth, marriage, or adoption and who reside together. A **nonfamily household** includes the householders who live alone or share a residence with individuals unrelated to the householder, such as college friends sharing an apartment. The growth of the nonfamily household (that is, persons who live alone or with unrelated individuals) is one of the most dramatic changes to occur during the past four decades, as shown in Figure 14.1. In 1970, 81 percent of households were family households; by 2010, just 66 percent were family households. At the same time, nonfamily households have been on the rise. The fastest growth has been among persons living alone.

Another dramatic shift in household composition has been the decline in the percentage of households with children. Two-parent households with children dropped from 40 to 23 percent of all households between 1970 and 2010 (Fields, 2004; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). This downward trend reflects the postponement of marriage and children and the shift toward smaller families. However, household composition varies considerably among different segments of the population. Minorities are more likely than Whites to live in households that include children. In 2010, 40 percent of African American households and 54 percent of Latino households had at least one child under age 18, compared with 31 percent of White households

**Figure 14.1** Households by Type: 1970–2010 (percent distribution)

**SOURCE:** Fields, Jason C. 2004. "America's Families and Living Arrangements: 2003." Current Population Reports, P20-553. Washington, DC: Bureau of the Census, p. 4. U.S. Census Bureau, 2010. *Families and Living Arrangements: Historical Times Series*. Table HH-1: Households by Type: 1940 to Present.



(U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). This difference arises primarily because minority populations tend to have a younger age structure than the White population (that is, a greater share of minorities are in the prime childbearing ages), and minorities tend to have higher fertility rates than Whites. In the next decade, the overall composition of households is projected to continue to shift, with a decreasing proportion of family households and continued growth of nonfamily households.

In sum, macro-level changes produce a wide range of family and household formations, including one-parent families, cohabiting couples (both gay and straight) with children, dual-worker families, and many varieties of extended families such as divorce-extended families and multigenerational families. Still, married couples with

children continue to be a prominent family pattern. Parents and children now live in increasingly diverse settings, including intact biological families, stepfamilies and blended families, and single-parent families. Structural changes have made families more diverse and altered family experiences.

## Institutional Support for Families

### 14.3 Explain the difficulties of managing work and family with little support from the system.

Regardless of their form, families now face new challenges when it comes to balancing work and family demands, and support from institutions and the government has been scarce.

### Balancing Work and Family with Few Social Supports

One of the greatest changes in the past few decades has been the increased participation of women in the labor force. Since 1960, the rise of women's participation in the labor force has been dramatic. In 2010, 70 percent of married women with dependent children (birth through age 17) were in the workforce. The rise in **dual-worker families**, or in married-couple families in which both spouses or partners are in the labor force, has both positive and negative consequences for family life. Because both partners work, families have been able to keep their incomes from falling, but this does not mean the economy is working for families. According to the Families and Work Institute, two-thirds of parents say they do not have enough time with their children and two-thirds of married workers say they don't have enough time with their spouse. Nearly half of all employees with families report conflicts between their job and their family life, more so than a generation ago (Boushey, 2007: A2).

Very few jobs make it easy to balance work and family needs. (The following is based on Baca Zinn, Eitzen, and Wells, 2011: 210–212.) Workplaces have been slow to respond to the needs of their employees who are or will soon be parents. The traditional organization of work—an inflexible eight-hour workday—makes it difficult for parents to cope with family problems or the conflicting schedules of family members. Unlike some other countries, the United States has only recently become aware of the complex struggle that most workers face in trying to combine paid work and family work. Only in the past decade or so have political, business, and professional leaders had very much to say about work and family. In the 1990s, the federal government made modest efforts to help families cope with childcare through tax credits, programs for subsidizing the childcare costs of low-income parents, and the **Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA)**.

The FMLA requires employers of fifty or more people to provide twelve weeks of *unpaid* leave to any worker who has a medical emergency or needs to care for an adopted or newborn child or a seriously ill child, spouse, or parent. FMLA does not cover part-time workers. A total of 41 million workers in the United States—nearly half of the private workers—are ineligible for family leave under this law, and of

#### Dual-worker family

Family in which both spouses or partners are in the labor force.

#### Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993

Federal law providing workers in establishments with more than fifty workers the right to twelve weeks unpaid job-protected leave for meeting family health needs.

course many eligible families cannot afford to take unpaid time off to care for their family members. The FMLA of 1993 remained unchanged until 2009, when several points of clarification were added to the original legislation. The 2009 bill also expands military family leave entitlements, permitting eligible employees to take up to twenty-six weeks of leave to care for a service member with a serious injury or illness (U.S. Department of Labor, 2009).

More than two-thirds of all children under the age of 5 are in a childcare arrangement on a regular basis by someone other than a parent. Many of these children are young because 75 percent of women go back to work by a child's ninth month. The children may attend daycare centers or nursery schools, go to the home of a provider, or be cared for by a relative, neighbor, or babysitter.

The United States has no comprehensive childcare system. This lack of a system differentiates us from the other industrialized nations. Currently, the federal government is involved modestly in providing for childcare through two programs. First, it permits the deduction of childcare payments on income tax returns. This amounts to about a \$4 billion tax credit, which is considerable. The problem, however, is that by being tied to taxes, it benefits the most affluent families and has negligible effects on the poor because they do not earn enough to take advantage of it. Second, the welfare legislation of 1996 included approximately \$4 billion in new childcare funds over six years. "But the new law forces so many parents into the work force that this increase falls far short of what is needed to meet the new demand for child care generated by the law, much less to ensure that vulnerable children receive good care" (Children's Defense Fund, 1997: 38).

The government's less-than-adequate childcare programs are fundamentally flawed in at least two respects. Foremost, they are underfunded. The amounts the federal government promised simply do not meet childcare needs. The other problem is that they rely on the states to implement the programs and to match the federal grants if they are to receive monies. The states, through their governors, legislatures, and social service bureaucracies, vary greatly in their enthusiasm for childcare, their licensing and monitoring of childcare programs, and the standards they set to ensure quality in childcare. If history is a guide, then it is likely that many states will not commit the greater resources needed to receive the federal funds.

## Single Parents and Their Children

Today, one-third (34 percent) of all U.S. children ages 17 and younger live with just one parent, up from 9 percent in 1960 (Livingston, 2014). The disproportionate number of single-parent families headed by a woman is a consequence, first, of the relatively high divorce rate and the very strong tendency for divorced and separated women to have custody of the children. Second, there is the relatively high rate of never-married mothers (in 1960, 5 percent of U.S. babies were born to unmarried mothers; in 2010, 40 percent were). To counter the common myths, the facts indicate that more than three-fourths of out-of-wedlock births are to women age 20 and older. Moreover, although the *unwed birth rate* for African Americans and Latinos is higher than for Whites, there are *more unwed births* among Whites than among African Americans and Latinos.

The important question to answer concerning this trend is, What are the effects on children of living in mother-only families? Research has shown consistently that children from single-parent homes are more likely than children from intact families to have behavioral problems. McLanahan and Booth's (1991) review of the research on children from mother-only families, compared to children from two-parent families, shows the following:

- They have poorer academic achievement. This relationship is even more negative for boys than for girls.
- They are more likely to have higher absentee rates at school.
- They are more likely to drop out of school.
- They are more likely to marry early and to have children early, both in and out of marriage.
- If they marry, they are more likely to divorce.
- They are more likely to commit delinquent acts and to engage in drug and alcohol use.

Because more than 80 percent of one-parent families are headed by women, the common explanation for the disproportionate problems found among the children of single parents has been that the absence of a male adult is detrimental to their development. Also, the absence of a spouse makes coping with parenting more difficult. Coping is difficult for any single parent—female or male—because of three common sources of strain: (1) responsibility overload, in which single parents make all the decisions and provide for all their family's needs; (2) task overload, in which the demands of work, housekeeping, and parenting can be overwhelming for one person; and (3) emotional overload, in which single parents must always be on call to provide the necessary emotional support. Clearly, when two people share these parental emotional and financial strains, it is more likely that the needs of the children will be met.

Although the factors just described help to explain the behavioral differences between children from one-parent and two-parent homes, they sidestep the major reason—a fundamental difference in economic resources. As Andrew Cherlin has argued, "It seems likely that the most detrimental aspect of the absence of fathers from one-parent families headed by women is not the lack of a male presence *but a lack of a male income*" (Cherlin, 1981: 81; emphasis added). There is a strong likelihood that women raising children alone will be financially troubled. In 2010, for example, 31 percent of children living in single-parent families headed by a woman were poor, compared with 6 percent of children in married-couple families (DeNavas-Walt et al., 2011).

The reasons for a disproportionate number of mother-headed families that are poor are obvious. First, many single mothers are young and never married. They may have little education, so if they work, they have poorly paid jobs. Second, many divorced or separated women have not been employed for years and find it difficult to re-enter the job market. Third, and more crucial, jobs for women, centered as they are in the bottom tier of the segmented job market, are poorly paid (women, we must underscore again, presently earn about 78 cents for every dollar earned by men). Fourth, half the men who owe child support do

not pay all they owe, and a quarter of them do not pay anything; women who do receive child support find that the amount covers less than half the actual cost of raising a child.

The economic plight of single-parent families is much worse for families of color. Women of color who head households have the same economic problems as White women who are in the same situation, plus the added burdens of institutional racism. In addition, they are less likely to receive child support and they are more likely to be high school dropouts, further reducing their potential for earning a decent income. The financial difficulties of women heads of households are sometimes alleviated in part by support from a kinship network. Relatives may provide childcare, material goods, money, and emotional support. The kin network is an especially important source of emergency help for African Americans and Latinos. But for many, kin may not be near or helpful.

In summary, the behavioral social costs attributed to the children of single mothers are, in large part, the result of living in poverty. Living in poverty translates into huge negatives for single mothers and their children—differences in health care, diet, housing, neighborhood safety, and quality of schools, as well as economic disadvantages, leading to a greater probability of experiencing low self-esteem, hopelessness, and despair.

## Societal Response to Disadvantaged Children

As a nation, the United States has taken deliberate actions to reduce poverty among the elderly while simultaneously allowing childhood poverty to increase. In 1970, the proportion of elderly in poverty was double the national average, yet by 2014, the poverty rate among the elderly was below the national average (10 percent compared to the national rate of 13.5 percent). The poverty rate for children under age 18 in 1970 was more than one-third lower than that for the elderly. By 2014, this situation had changed, with 21.1 percent of children under age 18 living in poverty (DeNavas-Walt and Proctor, 2015; see Figure 14.2).

During the last twenty years, federal benefits to the elderly have risen from one-sixth of the federal budget to 30 percent (to about \$300 billion annually). This increase occurred because federal policymakers created programs such as Medicare and Medicaid and because Social Security benefits were indexed to offset inflation. Conversely, however, these same decision makers did not provide adequately for needy families with children. The government actually reduced the programs targeted to benefit children (e.g., the children's share of Medicaid, Aid to Families with Dependent Children [AFDC], Head Start, food stamps, child nutrition, and federal aid to education).

Childhood poverty is especially acute for racial minorities. The bias against children in federal programs is heightened for minority children. The late senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan pointed out that there are two ways the federal government provides benefits to children in single-parent families. The first is Aid to Families with Dependent Children. The majority of the children receiving this type of aid are Black or Hispanic. Since 1970, the government has decreased the real benefits by 13 percent. The other form of assistance is Survivors



Availability of quality daycare is often the biggest problem facing working parents.



Insurance (SI), which is part of Social Security. The majority of children receiving SI benefits are White, and these benefits have increased by 53 percent since 1970 (adjusted for inflation). Moynihan, writing eight years before the 1996 welfare legislation, said,

To those who say we don't care about children in our country, may I note that the average provision for children under SI has been rising five times as fast as average family income since 1970. We do care about some children—majority children. It is minority children—not only but mostly—who are left behind. (1988: 5)

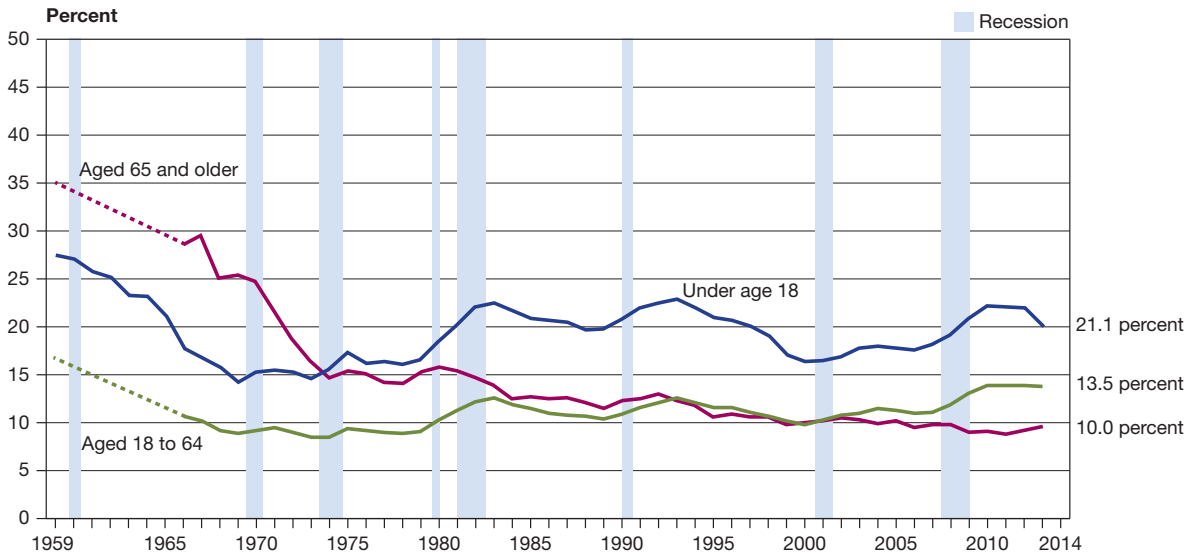
Another telling illustration is that although Congress in 1996 eliminated AFDC and severely cut food stamps and school nutrition programs for the poor, it did not cut cash and food programs for poor senior citizens.

The decisions to disproportionately help the elderly reflect the electoral power that the elderly have compared to the young. The elderly are organized, with several national organizations dedicated to political action that will benefit their interests. The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), for example, is the nation's largest special-interest organization, with more than 40 million members. With the elderly making up 16 percent of the voting public (and much more in states such as Florida and Arizona, which have high concentrations of elderly people), politicians tend to pay attention to their special needs.

Children, on the other hand, have no electoral power and few advocates (an exception is the Children's Defense Fund). Their parents, especially those who are poor, are not organized. So, in a time of fiscal austerity, the needs of children—prenatal care for poor women, nutritional and health care, daycare, and better schools—are underfunded. The irony is that the political right wing, which claims to be pro-family, limits

**Figure 14.2** Poverty Rates by Age: 1959 to 2014

**SOURCE:** Carmen DeNavas-Walt and Bernadette D. Proctor. 2015. U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, P60-252, *Income and Poverty in the United States: 2014*. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, p. 14. Online: <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2015/demo/p60-252.pdf>



**NOTE:** The 2013 data reflect the implementation of the redesigned income questions. The data points are placed at the midpoints of the respective years. Data for people aged 18 to 64 and 65 and older are not available from 1960 to 1965.

its political agenda to antiabortion legislation and court cases and ignores or fights governmental assistance to needy children and their struggling parents.

The argument is not that the elderly and the young should compete for scarce resources and that one or the other should win. Rather, both age groups are dependents and are in need. The test of a civilization is the condition of its dependents. So far, the United States has opted to care moderately well for one and not at all for the other.

## Divorce

### 14.4 Understand the divorce rate and the consequences of divorce.

Most people in the United States marry, but not all marriages last forever; some eventually are dissolved. Some marriages become intolerable because they are filled with tension and violence (as shown in the next section of this chapter). Some marriages fail because the love the wife and husband once shared diminishes for various reasons. Still other marriages break up because of the relentless strains brought about by poverty.

**Divorce**—the formal dissolution of marriage—is a relatively common experience in the United States. Politicians, clergy members, editorial writers, and others have shown great concern over the current high rates of marital dissolution in the United States using a commonly cited (although inaccurate) statistic that 50 percent of marriages will end in divorce. The statistic is calculated by using the annual marriage rate

#### Divorce

The formal dissolution of a marriage.

per 1,000 people compared with the annual divorce rate. But this statistic is misleading because the people who are divorcing in any given year are not the same as those who are marrying in that same year. A better way to calculate is to find how many people who have ever married end up divorced. Measured this way, the rate has never exceeded 41 percent and is currently decreasing (Wong, 2014). Various government documents from the Census Bureau (“Marital Status and Living Arrangements”), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the National Center for Health Statistics reveal the following patterns for first marriages (summarized in Coontz, 2007):

- One in five marriages ends in divorce or separation within five years.
- Couples who separate do so, on average, after seven years and divorce after eight years.
- Divorce patterns for African Americans differ from those of Latinos and Whites. Latinos have divorce rates that are about the same as those of Whites, but African Americans are more likely to experience economic hardships that lead to marital disruption and divorce rates that are twice as high as Whites’.

Some of the many reasons for the increased divorce rate include increased independence (social and financial) of women, economic restructuring that eliminates many jobs for men and makes women’s employment necessary, women’s inequality, greater tolerance of divorce by religious groups, and reform of divorce laws, especially the adoption of **no-fault divorce** in many states (i.e., one spouse no longer has to prove that the other was at fault to obtain a divorce). An important reason is the striking change in public attitudes toward divorce. Divorce is a difficult step and one that commands sympathy for the partners and children. But it is no longer considered a moral violation. Instead, divorce is generally accepted today as a possible solution for marital difficulties.

#### No-fault divorce

One spouse does not have to prove the other was at fault in order to obtain a divorce.

## Consequences of Divorce

Divorce is an intensely personal event, and this intensity makes the breakup a painful experience, even when both parties want the marriage to end. In this section, we review the personal side of divorce—the consequences for ex-wives and ex-husbands and for their children.

**“HIS” DIVORCE** Both partners in a divorce are victims. Each is affected, in the typical case, by feelings of loneliness, anger, remorse, guilt, low self-esteem, depression, and failure. Although ex-spouses tend to share these negative feelings, the divorce experience differs for husbands and wives in significant ways because of the structure of society and gender inequality. Ex-husbands have some major advantages and a few disadvantages over their ex-wives. Most men have the advantage of being better off financially than their former wives. Typically, they were the major income producers for their families, and after the separation their incomes stay disproportionately with them.

Another benefit that men have over women after divorce is greater freedom. If there are children, they usually live with the mother (about 85 percent), so most men are free from the constraints not only of marriage but also of childcare. Thus, they are

freer than ex-wives to date, travel, go to school, take up a hobby, or work at a second job.

The experience of ex-husbands on some counts, however, is more negative than that of ex-wives. Many divorced men, especially those from traditional marriages, experience initial difficulty in maintaining a household routine. They are more likely to eat erratically, sleep less, and have difficulty with shopping, cooking, laundry, and cleaning. And because ex-wives usually have legal custody of the children, ex-husbands are able to see their children only relatively rarely and at prescribed times. Thus, they may experience great loneliness because they have lost both wife and children.

The image of liberated ex-husbands as swinging bachelors does not fit many men, and statistics show that men are more likely to remarry and quicker to do so than women.

**“HER” DIVORCE** Contrary to common belief, about two-thirds of divorces are initiated by women (Sweeney, 2002). The only exception is that older wives in long-term unions are less likely than their husbands to file for divorce (Hacker, 2003: 27). This is an interesting anomaly because women benefit less from divorce than men. To be sure, many ex-wives are relieved to have ended an onerous relationship, and some are even freed from a physically abusive one. Some are now liberated from a situation that stifled their educational and career goals. Of course, divorce also frees spouses to seek new and perhaps more fulfilling relationships.

For women, the negatives of divorce can be overwhelming. Divorced mothers who retain sole custody of their children often feel overburdened by the demands of full-time parenting and economic survival. The emotional and schedule overloads that usually accompany solo parenting leave little time for personal pursuits.

Both ex-husbands and ex-wives tend to lose old friends. For the first two months or so after the divorce, married friends are supportive and spend time with each of the former mates. But these contacts soon decline because, as individuals, divorced people no longer fit into couple-oriented activities. This disassociation from marital friends is especially acute for women because their child-raising responsibilities tend to isolate them from adult interactions.

On the positive side, women tend to have stronger family and friendship networks than men. These networks provide support, explaining, in part, why women fare better emotionally than men after divorce. Moreover, because most women receive custody of their children after divorce, they are more connected to their children than noncustodial fathers.

The biggest problem facing almost all divorced women is a dramatic decline in economic resources. Paul Amato, after examining the relevant research, concludes that “overall, mothers’ postseparation standard of living [is] only about one half that of fathers” (Amato, 2001: 1277).

## Children of Divorce

Approximately 65 percent of divorcing couples have minor children, meaning that about 1.5 million children are involved in new divorces annually. This means that about two-fifths of children—one in three White children and two in three African American children—by age 16 will experience the permanent disruption of their parents’ marriage. Most of them will remain with their mothers and live in a fatherless

home for at least five years. Most significant, many children of divorce effectively *lose* their fathers. Some are twice cursed by the broken relationships of their parents. About one-third of White children and one-half of Black children whose mothers remarry will experience a second divorce before the children reach adulthood.

The crucial question is, what are the consequences of divorce for children? There is clearly the possibility of emotional scars from the period of family conflict and uncertainty prior to the breakup. Children will be affected by the permanency of divorce and the enforced separation from one of the parents. Most commonly, this is separation from their father.

There are the possible negative effects of being raised by a single parent who is overburdened by the demands of children, job, economics, and household maintenance. And there are the negative consequences that may result from the sharp decline in resources available to the family when the parents separate. The data are consistent: Female-headed single-parent families, compared to two-parent families and to male-headed single-parent families, have much lower incomes. This severe decline in family resources for female-headed single-parent families produces a number of challenges for children's adjustment, often including moving to a different home and school, eliminating or greatly reducing the probability of a college education, and other alterations in lifestyles. As a result of all of these possible outcomes of divorce, children may experience behavioral problems, decline in school performance, and other manifestations of maladjustment.

Summaries of the research on the consequences of divorce on children (Amato, 2001; Amato, Booth, Johnson, and Rogers, 2007; Fine, Ganong, and Demo, 2005; Wallerstein, 2003) reveal that children with divorced parents score lower than children with continuously married parents on measures of academic success, conduct, psychological adjustment, self-concept, and social competence. Although the differences between children from divorced and two-parent families are small, they are consistent. Research also finds that children are better off on a variety of outcomes if parents in high-conflict marriages divorce than if they remain married. But because only some divorces are preceded by a high level of conflict, "divorce probably helps fewer children than it hurts" (Amato, 2001: 1278).

We must note that the long-term effects of divorce are difficult to measure. Does divorce actually cause the problems displayed by divorced children? Could it be that these troubled children are being raised by troubled parents who eventually divorce (Cherlin, 1999)? Heatherington points out that many of the adjustment problems of children are the result of inept parenting and destructive family relations that were present *before* divorce and not the consequences of divorce (Heatherington, 2002: 63). We simply cannot know, for example, how the children from a particular family would have fared if the parents had stayed together in a tension-filled household. Reviews of the studies on the effects of divorce on children find that "the 'large majority' of children of divorce . . . do not experience severe or long-term problems: most do not drop out of school, get arrested, abuse drugs, or suffer long-term emotional distress" (Coontz, 2007: 100; Amato and Cheadle, 2005).

## Violence in U.S. Families

### 14.5 Examine the causes and consequences of violence in families.

The family has two faces. It can be a haven from an uncaring, impersonal world, a place where love and security prevail. The family members love each other, care for each other, and are accepting of each other. But there is also a dark side of the family. The family is a common context for violence in society. “People are more likely to be killed, physically assaulted, sexually victimized, hit, beat up, slapped, or spanked in their own homes by other family members than anywhere else in our society” (Gelles, 1995: 450). The intensity that characterizes intimate relationships can give way to conflict. Some families resolve the inevitable tensions that arise in the course of daily living, but in other families conflict gives way to violence.

### Violence and the Social Organization of the Family

Although the family is based on love among its members, the way it is organized encourages conflict. First, the family, like all other social organizations, is a power system; that is, power is unequally distributed between parents and children and between spouses, with the male typically dominant. As we saw in Chapter 9, the legal system and religious teachings have perpetuated male dominance. Threats to male dominance are often resisted through violence. Parents have authority over their children. They feel they have the right to punish children to shape them in ways the parents consider important.

Unlike most organizations, in which activities and interests are relatively narrow, the family encompasses almost everything. Thus, there are more “events” over which a dispute can develop. Family privacy is another characteristic that enhances the likelihood of violence. The rule in our society that the home is private has two negative consequences. First, it insulates the family members from the protection that society could provide if a family member becomes too abusive. Second, the rule of privacy often prevents the victims of abuse from seeking outside help.

### Intimate Partner Violence

Violence between husbands and wives, cohabiting partners, and dating couples in the form of beating, slapping, kicking, and rape is relatively common in U.S. society as well as in countries around the world. That such violence occurs between persons who supposedly joined together because of their mutual love is puzzling indeed.

Intimate partner violence is difficult to define. Researchers cannot agree on a common definition. As a result, the estimations of this phenomenon vary. The estimates of the incidence of intimate partner violence provided here use the definition in the National Violence Against Women (NVAW) Survey. This survey, undertaken by the National Institute of Justice and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), is the most recent national study of intimate partner violence. The NVAW Survey defines **intimate partner violence** to include rape, physical assaults, and stalking perpetrated by current and former spouses, cohabiting partners, and dating partners.

#### Intimate partner violence

Use of force, including rape, physical assaults, and stalking, perpetrated by current and former spouses, cohabiting partners, and dating partners.

**INCIDENCE OF INTIMATE PARTNER ABUSE** Conclusions about the incidence of violence among intimate partners vary according to who is included within the category of intimate partners and what actions are defined as abusive. Some studies continue to focus only on married couples and exclude dating couples. Some include same-sex partners, and others do not. Some researchers define domestic violence to include emotional abuse in addition to physical harm. This variation makes it difficult to obtain data on the extent of intimate partner abuse. Nonetheless, research consistently shows that it is a pervasive problem in the United States and a serious public health concern. The findings of the NVAW Survey allow for the following estimates of the scope of the problem:

- More than 33 million Americans have been victims of intimate partner violence at some point in their lifetime.
- Every year, around 1.3 million women and more than 800,000 men are physically assaulted by an intimate partner; many of these individuals are victimized repeatedly.
- In comparing the experience of abused women and abused men, we find that abused women are assaulted more frequently and are more likely to be injured than are men.
- Injuries inflicted by intimate partners are frequently severe enough to require medical care; approximately 550,000 female victims and 125,000 male victims require medical treatment every year (Tjaden and Thoennes, 2000).

Both women and men are victims of intimate partner violence; nonetheless, ample evidence—including the most recent study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—documents that most victims of domestic violence are women. This report, titled the *National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS)*, found that one in four women has been the victim of severe physical violence by an intimate partner while one in seven men experiences severe physical violence by an intimate partner. In addition, female victims experience multiple forms of violence while male victims most often experience physical violence (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012).

**CLASS, RACE, AND INTIMATE VIOLENCE** Although the statistics on intimate violence are somewhat unreliable, we do have a more precise understanding about the conditions under which this phenomenon occurs. Foremost, the connection to social class is clear. Although battered women are found in all social strata, they tend to be found primarily in families threatened by economic hardships. This relationship is generally viewed as the outcome of the stresses of poverty or the lack of resources. Managing family life in a context that may include, for example, crowded and substandard housing, unstable work, unreliable transportation, and neighborhood crime is difficult. In such situations, domestic violence against women would be viewed as the outcome of the “pileup of stressors” associated with inadequate resources (Fox et al., 2002: 749). However, it should be noted that in middle- and upper-class neighborhoods where housing may be farther apart and victims have more resources, domestic violence might be easier to conceal from the public.

Men's unemployment puts their partners at increased risk for abuse (Tjaden and Thoennes, 2000). Unemployment increases economic strains as bills accumulate and debt rises. In addition, unemployment can be devastating for men who believe it is their responsibility to be the primary provider.

An individual's vulnerability to abuse is shaped not only by her gender and class but also by her race (Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005: 02). The NVAW Survey (Tjaden and Thoennes, 2000) found that 25 percent of White women reported having been victimized by an intimate partner. For African Americans, the figure was 29 percent; for Hispanics, it was 23 percent; for Native Americans, it was 31 percent; and for Asian Americans, it was 15 percent. These data show that except for Asian Americans, people of color are more susceptible to domestic violence than Whites. There may be some basis for this generalization. Chapter 8 revealed that minority individuals experience disadvantages related to being a member of a minority group, such as a relatively high probability of joblessness, low wages for doing society's "dirty work," substandard housing, inferior schools, high-crime neighborhoods, and police harassment. Minorities have high rates of poverty and must contend with the stresses that accompany poverty.

We must view the apparent overrepresentation of people of color among the abusers and abused with caution. When demographic and socioeconomic factors are controlled, minorities are no more likely to be violent. In other words, racial differences in domestic abuse have less to do with racial patterns than they do with social class (Johnson and Ferraro, 2000).

## Child Abuse and Neglect

Child abuse is even more prevalent than intimate partner violence. Every week, child protective services (CPS) agencies receive nearly 60,000 referrals alleging child abuse or neglect: CPS agencies investigated the family environments of 3.5 million children in 2007 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009). This problem is reviewed here, focusing on the definition, incidence, causes, and consequences of child abuse.

**INCIDENCE** The precise extent of child abuse and neglect is impossible to know, for two reasons. First, studies of the phenomena have not used uniform definitions; and second, the issue is extremely sensitive to the people involved. To be the perpetrator or victim of child abuse is generally something for which people are stigmatized. Acts of violence and neglect are hidden from society because they occur in private. When asked by a survey researcher if they have ever physically abused their children, abusing parents will most likely deny such an act. Thus, many statistics are taken from police, teachers, social workers, and medical personnel, who must assume that the children were victims of abuse. Obviously, such subjective observations are subject to error. As one illustration of the problem of subjectivity, we can note that the parents and children of the middle and upper classes are commonly viewed quite differently by authorities than are those from the lower classes. Trained personnel are more likely to assess a poor child with a black eye as a victim of child abuse than a child from a rich family. Also, of course, many cases of abuse



and neglect are never seen by authorities. Official statistics, then, always underreport the actual incidence.

Although there are problems with defining and determining the exact incidence of child abuse, the government provides annual statistics. In 2013, the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) reported 3.5 million referrals to Child Protective Services alleging child maltreatment involving 6.4 million children.

**CONTEXTS** The reasons for the abuse and neglect of children by parents are complex and varied, involving personal, social, and cultural factors. The most commonly assumed cause for abusive behavior toward children is that the perpetrators are mentally ill. This assumption, however, is a myth that hinders the understanding of child abuse. In the view of experts, only about 10 percent of maltreating parents have severe personality disorders or psychoses. This is not to say that personal factors are unimportant. Obviously, abusive parents let their aggressive feelings go too far. There are several possible reasons that they do. One important reason is that abused children have a higher probability of becoming abusive parents than do non-abused children. In short, violence tends to beget violence. Some caution is advised concerning this relationship, however. The evidence is that about 30 percent of physically abused children grow up to be abusive adults. Although this is much higher than the overall societal rate of between 2 and 3 percent, we must not ignore the fact that seven in ten abused children *do not* become abusive adults (Gelles, 1993: 15).

A relatively common trait of abusing parents is chronic substance abuse. This activity reduces the normal restraints inhibiting aggression in the individual. Parents' alcoholism has long been associated with child abuse. Recent years have seen an increase in reports of child abuse in households in which parents used methamphetamines (Children's Defense Fund, 2005). Substance abuse is also associated with a number of other factors that produce strain and disruption in stable family patterns: greater unemployment, poor health, low self-esteem, isolation, and preoccupation with self.

Finally, a caution from Gelles and Straus: "When our explanations focus on 'kinds of people'—mentally disturbed, poor alcoholics, drug abusers, etc.—we blind ourselves to the structural properties of the family as a social institution that makes it our most violent institution with the exception of the military in time of war" (Gelles and Straus, 1988: 51).

The Children's Defense Fund states the relationship between social class and child abuse starkly: "Poverty is the single best predictor of child abuse and neglect. Children who live in families with annual incomes of less than \$15,000 are 22 times more likely to be abused or neglected than those with annual incomes of \$30,000 or more" (2005: 113).

Unemployment is another condition associated with child abuse. It may lead to poverty, low self-esteem (because of being a failure in a success-oriented society), and depression. The unemployed are also homebound, increasing their interaction with children.

**CONSEQUENCES** Many consequences of child abuse are obvious. More than 1,700 children die annually from abuse. Emergency rooms, clinics, and therapists

treat hundreds of thousands more. Less obvious are the long-term consequences of child abuse and neglect. Hundreds of studies have provided evidence on the health outcomes, cognitive behavior, and social behavior outcomes. The following is drawn from the summary of this body of literature provided by Chalk, Gibbons, and Scarupa (2002):

### **Health Outcomes**

- Various types of brain injuries are associated with childhood maltreatment, particularly when physical abuse and neglect occur in the first three years of life.
- Abuse and neglect may be associated with physical defects, growth and mental retardation, and speech problems.
- Maltreated children tend to have heightened levels of depression and low self-esteem.

### **Cognitive and Educational Outcomes**

- Some studies find associations between abuse and neglect and language deficits, reduced cognitive functioning, and attention deficit disorders.
- Both neglected and physically abused children tend to do poorly in school, as evidenced by low grades, low standardized test scores, and frequent retention in the same grade.

### **Social and Behavioral Outcomes**

- Antisocial behavior and physical aggression are two of the most consistent outcomes, along with fear and anger, of physical child abuse.
- Maltreatment can have a negative impact on children's emotional stability and self-regulation, problem-solving skills, and the ability to cope with or adapt to new or stressful situations.
- Maltreated children are at risk of getting into trouble with the law and running away from home.
- Several studies have suggested a link between childhood victimization and substance abuse in later life.

Violence in the family presents the ultimate paradox—the physical abuse of loved ones in the most intimate of social relationships. The bonds between wife and husband, parent and child, and adult child and parent are based on love, yet for many people these bonds represent a trap in which they are victims of unspeakable abuses.

Although it is impossible to know the extent of battering that takes place in families, the problem these forms of violence represent is not trivial. The threat of violence in intimate relationships exists for all couples and for all parents and children. Violence in the family, however, is not only a problem at the micro-level of family units. It also represents an indictment of the macro-level—society, its institutions, and the cultural norms that support violence.

All forms of intimate violence occur within a social context. This social context of intimate violence includes a patriarchal ideology that condones and maintains the power of men over women. The social context includes a media barrage with the consistent message that violence solves social problems. The social contexts include an economy in which poverty, unemployment, and corporate downsizing jeopardize millions of families. The social context includes institutional sexism, institutional racism, and institutional heterosexuality, which make life more difficult for certain categories of people, especially limiting the possibilities for women, people of color, and lesbians and gays. In short, these social forces create the conditions that foster abuse in intimate relationships.

Although the existence of family violence is strongly affected by social forces, individuals acting singly, or with others, can and do shape, resist, and challenge the forces affecting their lives. Concerned citizens—abused women, feminists, and others—have worked through organizations to change the societal forces that encourage abuse. They have also worked to change laws and procedures to protect the victims of abuse.

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## Chapter Review

### 14.1 Explain the myths versus realities of family life in the United States.

- The family is one of the most idealized of all of society's institutions. There are disparities between the common images of the family and real patterns of family life. Some myths about the family include: the myth of a stable and harmonious family of the past, the myth that families are separate from the world at large, the myth of a monolithic family form, the myth of a unified family experience, and the myth that family decline is the cause of social problems.
- Families are the product of social conditions.

### 14.2 Explain how societal economic transformations affect family life.

- Prior to industrialization, there was very little separation between "work" and "family." Production of goods and services was completed within the family. With industrialization, work moved outside the home into factories and families became private domestic retreats set off from the rest of society.
- From the rise of the industrial economy until World War II, capitalism operated within a sim-

ple framework. Employers assumed that most families included one main breadwinner—a male—and one adult working at home directing domestic work—a female.

- Globalization and other transformations have reduced the number of jobs. As the need for skilled labor has diminished, many blue-collar families have experienced unemployment or underemployment. Jobs providing a middle-class standard of living have also disappeared and produced downward mobility for families across the country. These difficulties have been magnified by the Great Recession, which has produced high rates of unemployment and changed the shapes of families in many ways.
- As families struggle, they often change. For example, housing woes and unemployment have pushed relatives to "double up" and share living quarters. Sometimes these arrangements are multigenerational, with adults sharing their home with their children, grandchildren, and one or two elderly parents. Another family form emerging from the economic crisis is the married couple that lives in the same house, even though the individuals no longer want to live together.

### 14.3 Explain the difficulties of managing work and family with little support from the system.

- A major demographic trend since World War II has been the sharp rise in mothers with young children who work outside the home. Few jobs make it easy to balance work and family. Thus, a critical need has emerged in society for accessible and acceptable childcare. In general, U.S. society has been unresponsive to this need.
- More than one-third of all children live in single-parent families, and most are headed by women. Single-parent families have a number of unique problems, the most prominent being a lack of economic resources.
- Twenty-one percent of all children in the United States live in poverty.
- The economic situation of children has worsened relative to the elderly. During the last twenty years, federal benefits to the elderly have risen from one-sixth of the federal budget to 30 percent, while programs targeting poor children have been reduced.

### 14.4 Understand the divorce rate and the consequences of divorce.

- The divorce rate in U.S. society is difficult to calculate, but many people cite the misleading

statistic that one in two marriages will end in divorce. The increased social and financial independence of women, greater tolerance of divorce by religious groups, no-fault divorce laws, and a more lenient public attitude toward divorce have all contributed to the divorce rate.

- Contrary to popular belief, roughly two-thirds of divorces are initiated by women. For women, the negatives of divorce can be overwhelming. Divorced mothers who retain sole custody of their children often feel overburdened by the demands of full-time parenting and economic survival. In spite of this, statistics show that men are more likely to remarry and quicker to do so than women.

### 14.5 Examine the causes and consequences of violence in families.

- Researchers on family violence have concluded that the family is among the most violent social groups and that the home is among the most violent settings in U.S. society. The way that families are organized in the United States—the unequal distribution of power, patterns of male dominance, the intensity of interaction, and privacy—encourages conflict.
- Although family violence occurs across the socioeconomic spectrum, both intimate partner violence and child abuse are correlated with socioeconomic hardship.

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## Key Terms

**Divorce** The formal dissolution of a marriage.

**Downward mobility** Movement to a lower social class.

**Dual-worker family** Family in which both spouses or partners are in the labor force.

**Family** According to the U.S. Census Bureau, a family is people related by birth, marriage, or adoption.

**Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993** Federal law providing workers in establishments with more than fifty workers the right to twelve weeks unpaid job-protected leave for meeting family health needs.

**Household** Residential unit in which members share resources. These units vary in membership and

composition. A household is not always a family (parents and children), and a family is not always a household (because it may be separate geographically).

**Intimate partner violence** Use of force, including rape, physical assaults, and stalking, perpetrated by current and former spouses, cohabiting partners, and dating partners.

**No-fault divorce** One spouse does not have to prove the other was at fault in order to obtain a divorce.

**Nonfamily household** Persons who live alone or with unrelated individuals.

# Chapter 15

# Education



## Learning Objectives

- 15.1** Explain the characteristics of education in the United States.
- 15.2** Critique the idea of Common Core education.
- 15.3** Assess the ways that schools perpetuate class and race inequality.
- 15.4** Discuss possible solutions to address the inequities in our education system.

This chapter examines one of society's basic institutions—education. The organization of education in society is both a source of and a potential solution to some of our most vexing social problems. The chapter is divided into four main sections. The first describes the characteristics of U.S. education. The second section takes a closer look at the lack of curriculum standardization in the United States and the controversy over Common Core standards. The third section describes the current role of education in perpetuating inequality in society. Finally, the concluding section describes alternatives to eliminate the inequities in education.

## Characteristics of Education in the United States

### 15.1 Explain the characteristics of education in the United States.

Educational systems across the world vary greatly in terms of structure, content, expectations, and values. We begin here by examining the characteristics of education in the United States.

### Education as a Conserving Force

The formal system of education in U.S. society is conservative because the avowed function of the schools is to teach newcomers the attitudes, values, roles, specialties, information, skills, and training necessary for the maintenance of society. In other words, the special task of the schools is to preserve the culture, not to transform it. Thus, the schools indoctrinate their pupils in the culturally prescribed ways. Children are taught to be patriotic. They learn the myths of the superiority of their nation's heritage; they learn who the heroes are and who the villains are. As Terry Everton notes,

Compulsory schooling defines good citizens as those who play by the rules, stay in line, and do as they're told. Learning is defined by how well we memorize and regurgitate what someone else has deemed we need to know. Creativity is permitted within the parameters of the guidance of licensed professionals whose duty it is to make sure we don't get too wacky with our ideas or stray very far from the boundaries of normalcy. (2004: 55)

There is always an explicit or implicit assumption in U.S. schools that the American way is the only really right way. When this assumption is violated on the primary and secondary school level by the rare teacher who asks students to consider the viability of world government or who proposes a class on the teachings of Karl Marx or about world

Children are taught to be patriotic as part of their cultural indoctrination.



religions, then strong enough pressures usually occur from within the school (administrators, school board) or from without (parents, the Christian right) to quell the disturbance. As a consequence, creativity and a questioning attitude are often curtailed in school.

## Mass Education

People in the United States have a basic faith in education. This faith is based on the assumption that a democratic society requires an educated citizenry so that individuals can participate in the decisions of public policy. For this reason they not only provide education for all citizens but also compel children to remain in school at least until the eighth grade or until age 16 (although the law varies somewhat from state to state).

Who can quarrel with the belief that all children should be compelled to attend school because it should be for their own good? After all, the greater the educational attainment, the greater the likelihood of larger economic rewards and upward social mobility. However, to compel a child to attend school for six hours a day, five days a week, forty weeks a year, for at least ten years, is quite a demand. The result is that many students are in school for the wrong reason. The motivation is compulsion, not interest in acquiring skills or curiosity about their world. This involuntary feature of U.S. schools

is unfortunate because so many school problems are related to the lack of student interest. It is no surprise that despite two decades of intense educational reform, approximately 24.5 percent of public high school students will not graduate with their senior class (Aud et al., 2012).

On the positive side, as a result of the goal of and commitment to mass education, an increasing proportion of people have received a formal education. In 2014, 86.4 percent of Americans over the age of 25 were high school graduates, or higher (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015).

## Preoccupation with Order and Control

Most administrators and teachers share a fundamental assumption that school is a collective experience requiring subordination of individual needs to those of the school. U.S. schools are characterized, then, by constraints on individual freedom. The school day is regimented by the dictates of the clock. Activities begin and cease on a timetable, not in accordance with the degree of interest shown or whether students have mastered the subject. Another indicator of order is the preoccupation with discipline (i.e., absence of unwarranted noise and movement and concern with the following of orders).



In their quest for order, some schools also demand conformity in clothing and hairstyles. Dress codes are constraints on the freedom to dress as one pleases. School athletic teams also restrict freedom, and the school authorities condone these restrictions. Conformity is also demanded in what to read and how to give the answers the teacher wants.

The many rules and regulations found in schools meet a number of expressed and implicit goals, but many of those goals may be outdated. In the past, the school year was developed around the farm calendar and the emphasis on order and conformity intended to prepare children for jobs in factories. We have now shifted from the industrial age to the information age as many factories have moved overseas. Is the regimented, factory-based school system the best educational approach in this new information age?

## A Fragmented Education System

Certain trends indicate that the educational system in the United States is moving toward greater fragmentation rather than less. Today, more parents are opting to send their children to private schools (about 11 percent or 6 million students) or to school them at home (about 2.9 percent or 1.5 million students) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012).

Taxpayer-funded charter schools are also growing rapidly. These schools are based on a hybrid “free-market” system in which educators, students, and parents choose a curriculum and educational philosophy free from the dictates of school boards and educational bureaucracies but are financed publicly. In 2010, 5,000 public schools were charter schools with more than 1.6 million students (Aud et al., 2012).

Vouchers are another plan that splinters the educational system. This plan gives parents a stipulated amount of money per child that can be used to finance that child’s education in any school, public or private. This plan sets up an educational “free market” in which schools have to compete for students. This competition will, theoretically, improve schools because they must provide what parents want for their children, whether that be better discipline, emphasis on learning the fundamentals, religious instruction, focus on the arts, vocational training, or college preparation.

Each of these educational reforms that are underway has strengths and weaknesses. Most important, they represent a trend that is rapidly dividing and subdividing the educational system. For many, this is viewed as a strength, representing the core American

Seventy percent of Black charter students attend schools where at least 90 percent of students are minorities.





values of individualism and competition. Others see this trend as fragmenting further an already disaggregated educational system. Moreover, they see private schools, charter schools, and voucher systems as working against inclusiveness through segregation. For example, 70 percent of Black charter students attend schools where at least 90 percent of students are minorities (Blume, 2010). This segregation serves to increase the gap between racial-ethnic groups and social classes in U.S. society.

## Local Control of Education

Although the state and federal governments finance and control education in part, the bulk of the money and control for education comes from local communities. There is a general fear of centralization of education under federal control. Local school boards (and the communities themselves) jealously guard their autonomy. Because, as is commonly argued, local people know best the special needs of their children, local boards control allocation of monies, curricular content, and the rules for running the schools, as well as the hiring and firing of personnel.

There are several problems with this emphasis on local control. First, tax money from the local area traditionally finances the schools. Whether the tax base is strong or weak has a pronounced effect on the quality of education received (a point we return to later in this chapter).

Second, local taxes are almost the only outlet for a taxpayers' revolt. Dissatisfaction with high taxes (federal, state, and local) on income, property, and purchases is often expressed at the local level in defeated school bonds and school tax levies. A current population trend—families with school-age children declining while the number of elderly Americans is rising—increases the ever-greater likelihood of the defeat of school bonds.

Third, because the democratic ideal requires that schools be locally controlled, the ruling body (school board) should represent all segments of that community. Typically, however, the composition of school boards has overrepresented the business

and professional sectors and overwhelmingly underrepresented blue-collar workers, the poor, and various minority groups. The result is a governing body that is typically conservative in outlook and unresponsive to the wishes of people unlike themselves.

Fourth, local control of education may mean that the religious views of the majority (or, at least, the majority of the school board) may intrude in public education. An explicit goal of the Christian Coalition, a conservative

Local control of education may mean that the religious views of the majority may intrude in public education.



religious organization founded by Pat Robertson, is to win control of local school boards. Its agenda opposes globalism, restricts sex education to abstinence from sexual intercourse, promotes school prayer and the teaching of biblical creationism in science classes, and censors books that denigrate Christian values (favorite targets are, for example, *Catcher in the Rye* by J. D. Salinger and John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*).

The following are some examples of attempts by states and cities to install religious values in schools:

- In 2002, the Cobb County Board of Education in Georgia voted to insert a sticker in school biology textbooks that reads: "This textbook contains material on evolution. Evolution is a theory, not a fact, regarding the origin of living things. The material should be approached with an open mind, studied carefully, and critically considered" (Slevin, 2005). Eleven parents filed suit against the school board, challenging the constitutionality of the textbook warning sticker. On December 19, 2006, a settlement was announced in which the school board agreed not to restore the warning sticker or take any actions that would prevent or hinder the teaching of evolution (National Center for Science Education, 2006).
- In 2005, the Kansas State Board of Education adopted standards of teaching science whereby evolution was to be represented as scientifically controversial. In February 2007, the board overturned that decision, ruling that evolution should be treated in a scientifically appropriate and responsible way (National Center for Science Education, 2007).
- Although the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed the posting of the Ten Commandments in public schools, numerous local school boards believe they can survive legal challenges if the commandments are posted in a display with other historical documents, such as the Magna Carta and the Declaration of Independence (D. Johnson, 2000).
- In 2002, the Texas Board of Education objected to a sixth-grade social studies book that read, "Glaciers formed the Great Lakes millions of years ago," because this statement was counter to the creation timeline of religious conservatives. The book was changed to read, "Glaciers formed the Great Lakes in the distant past" (Russell, 2003).
- Between 1995 and 2009, twelve states passed laws allowing mandatory moments of silence, "a way of reintroducing prayerlike public rituals without stating the word 'prayer'" (Bentele et al., 2014: 511).
- In March 2010, the Texas Board of Education voted to approve a social studies curriculum that portrays conservative ideas in a more positive light, emphasizes the role of Christianity in the nation's founding, and stresses the superiority of American capitalism (McKinley, 2010). Furthermore, the board adopted a resolution that seeks to curtail references to Islam in Texas textbooks, "as social conservative board members warned of what they describe as a creeping Middle Eastern influence in the nation's publishing industry" (Castro, 2010: 1).

As illustrated by these and a number of other lawsuits in recent years, the separation of church and state remains a volatile subject in the United States.

## The Sifting and Sorting Function of Schools

Schools play a considerable part in choosing the youth who come to occupy the higher-status positions in society. School performance also sorts out those who will occupy the lower rungs in the occupational-prestige ladder. Education is, therefore, a selection process. The sorting is done with respect to two different criteria: a child's ability and his or her social class background. Although the goal of education is to select on ability alone, ascribed social status (the prestige and socioeconomic status of one's family, race, and religion) has a pronounced effect on the degree of success in the educational system. The school is analogous to a conveyor belt, with people of all social classes getting on at the same time but leaving the belt in accordance with social class—the lower the class, the shorter the ride.

## The Common Core Controversy

### 15.2 Critique the idea of Common Core education.

Another characteristic of U.S. education not mentioned in the previous section is the lack of curriculum standardization across more than 14,000 school districts and fifty states. The late Albert Shanker, former president of the American Federation of Teachers, compared the United States with other countries that have a common curriculum: "In the U.S., we have no such agreement about curriculum—and there is little connection between what students are supposed to learn, the knowledge on which they are assessed, and what we expect our teachers to know" (1991: E7).

Since Shanker wrote this in 1991, there has been a national push for education based on common standards while at the same time preserving local control.

### No Child Left Behind

#### No Child Left Behind Act

Federal legislation requiring states to develop academic standards in reading, math, and science. Standardized tests are used to label schools as passing or failing.

This idea of having common standards is embodied in the 2001 **No Child Left Behind Act**. Signed by George W. Bush in 2002, the goal of this legislation was to close the gaps that plague education in the United States and make schools accountable for success or failure. For example, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2014b), only 35 percent of the nation's eighth graders are proficient in mathematics and just 36 percent are proficient in reading (the percentages of students performing *below* basic levels are 26 percent in math and 22 percent in reading). Compared with other industrialized nations, which have prescribed national curricula or highly specified national standards, U.S. students rank near the bottom in achievement.

To improve performance, the No Child Left Behind legislation requires states to develop academic standards in reading, math, and science. States, districts, and schools would then be responsible to ensure that all children achieve these state standards. Adequate yearly progress is measured by a single statewide assessment system given annually to all students from third to eighth grade. On the basis of these tests, schools are given a grade of "passing" or "failing." In the 2009–2010 school year, 38 percent of schools were labeled as "failing to make adequate yearly progress" (Education News, 2011). This percentage varies by state, with a low of 5

percent of schools in Texas failing to make progress, to a high of 91 percent of schools in the District of Columbia. In 2007, more than 1,000 of California's 9,500 schools were branded as "chronic failures," and state officials predicted that all 6,063 public schools serving poor students would be declared in need of restructuring by 2014 (Schemo, 2007).

While this legislation has been heralded as the most ambitious federal overhaul of public schools since the 1960s, a number of problems have become apparent. First and foremost, instead of one system, we have fifty. Each state was permitted to set its own proficiency benchmarks, with some setting a high and others setting a low standard. Because the federal government rewards those who meet the standards, the states with high standards are punished, while the states with low standards are unfairly rewarded. In their 2007 report "The Proficiency Illusion" (Cronin et al., 2007), researchers from the Thomas B. Fordham Institute examine *No Child Left Behind* in detail. In their comprehensive review, they find:

- State tests vary greatly in their difficulty, with Colorado, Wisconsin, and Michigan having the lowest proficiency standards in reading and math.
- Improvements in the passing rates on state tests can largely be explained by declines in the difficulty on those tests, rather than true growth in student learning.
- The tests in eighth grade are consistently and dramatically more difficult than those in earlier grades. Many states set the bar much lower in elementary school, giving false impressions to parents and teachers that students are doing well.

Critics of *No Child Left Behind* argue that there is no attempt to address the funding inequities among rich and poor districts within a state that perpetuate the achievement gaps, the chronic underfunding of poorer schools, or child poverty itself (Metcalfe, 2002). To rectify this, in March 2010 President Obama announced that an allocation of \$900 million in grants would be awarded to help turn around the nation's lowest-performing schools. Unfortunately, the 2007–2009 economic recession left states in fiscal crisis, and budget cuts to education are rampant, resulting in teacher layoffs and the reduction in school programs and supplies.

Understanding that NCLB is problematic, in February 2015, congressional efforts to reauthorize NCLB (renaming it the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)) have the following goals: a new accountability system; less testing to give students more time to learn; ensuring qualified educators; and decoupling high-stakes testing from accountability (National Education Association, 2015).

## Common Core

The lack of a common national curriculum in the United States has several negative consequences. First, there is a wide variation in the preparation of students, as states have the ability to raise or lower their standards. Second, because families move on the average of once every five years, there are large numbers of children each year who find the requirements of their new schools different from their previous schools'.

Finally, not only are many American students graduating without the skills necessary to compete in an information economy, but they also appear to be ill poised to compete in a global economy.

In a push for a common national curriculum, the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices joined with others to form the Common Core State Standards Initiative, an initiative to develop international benchmarks for all states so that all students are prepared to be competitive in a globalized market. The federal government was not involved in the development of the standards; this is purely a state-driven initiative. Parents, teachers, school administrators, and experts across the country developed the set of common standards, and as of January 2016 forty-two states and the District of Columbia have voluntarily adopted them.

While this seems like a step in the right direction, Common Core is very controversial, and groups have formed protesting the standards and asking their state legislatures to do away with Common Core. According to two high-profile public polls in 2014, 60 percent of those polled opposed the Common Core standards; many believed the standards limit the flexibility of teachers to teach what they think is best for their students (Camera, 2014). Organizations opposed to Common Core (like the right-wing group FreedomWorks) argue that Common Core takes control away from parents, who will no longer have a say in their child's education. They argue that a one-size-fits-all education policy is bad for students (Borowski, 2013).

On the other hand, supporters of Common Core (like Education Secretary Arne Duncan) argue that states have “dummed down standards” and that Common Core will hold all students to a higher expectation, something much needed in the United States (Resmovits, 2014). Contrary to popular myths about Common Core, school systems and teachers can choose their own materials—they just need to teach their students what the Core says their students should know for their grade level. The ultimate goal is to create more effective teachers and to improve how U.S. students compare internationally.

## Education and Inequality

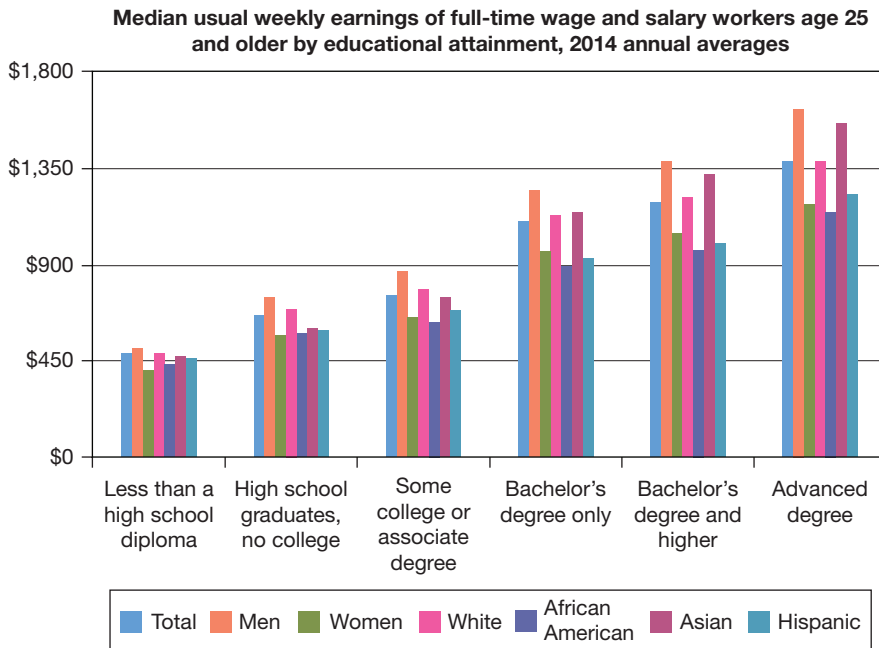
### 15.3 Assess the ways that schools perpetuate class and race inequality.

Education is presumed by many people to be the great equalizer in U.S. society—the process by which the disadvantaged get their chance to be upwardly mobile. The data in Figure 15.1 show, for example, that the higher the educational attainment, the higher the income. But these data do not in any way demonstrate equality of opportunity through education. They show clearly that men have higher earnings than women at every education level, and Blacks and Hispanics with the same educational attainment as Whites receive lower economic rewards at every educational level. These differences reflect discrimination in society, not just in schools. This section examines the ways that the schools help to perpetuate class and race inequities.

The evidence that educational performance is linked to socioeconomic background is clear and irrefutable (we include race/ethnicity along with economic status since they are highly correlated).

**Figure 15.1** Median Weekly Earnings of Full-Time Wage and Salary Workers Ages 25 and Older by Educational Attainment, Gender, and Race/Ethnicity, 2014

**SOURCE:** Table adapted from Aud, Susan, William Hussar, Frank Johnson, Grace Kena, Erin Roth, Eileen Manning, Xiaolei Wang, and Jijun Zhang. 2012. "The Condition of Education 2012." (NCES 2012-045). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, D.C. (Page 289). <http://nces.ed.gov>.



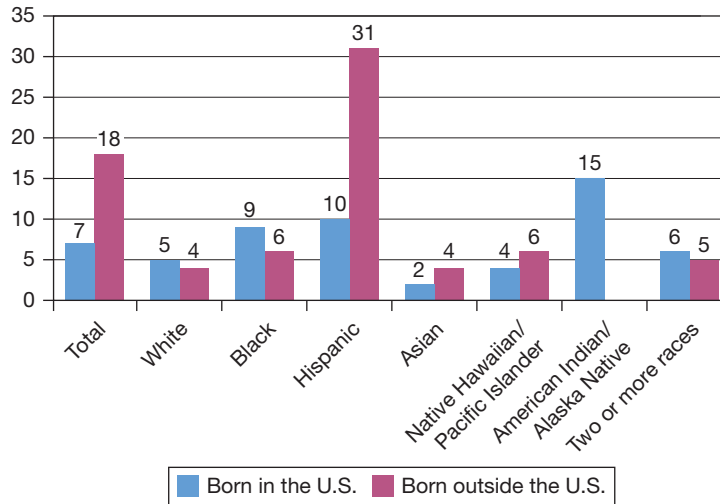
- African American, Latino, and Native American students lag behind their White peers in graduation rates and most other measures of student performance. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) defines the **status dropout rate** as the percentage of 16- to 24-year-olds that are not enrolled in school and have not earned a high school diploma or equivalency. In 2010, the status dropout rate for Asian/Pacific Islanders was 4 percent; for Whites it was 5 percent; for Blacks it was 8 percent; and for Hispanics it was 15 percent (Aud et al., 2012). The status dropout rates are even higher for minority students born outside the United States (see Figure 15.2).
- Researchers at Cornell University have found that the longer children live in poverty, the lower they tend to score on working-memory tests. In fact, those who spent their entire childhood in poverty scored about 20 percent lower on working memory than those who were never poor. They conclude that the chronic stress of poverty impairs the cognitive development of children (Stein, 2009).
- In 2013, among eighth graders, students eligible for free school lunches scored on average 27 points lower in math than students not eligible for free school lunches. In fact, 40 percent of those poor students scored below basic levels of competency,

#### Status dropout rate

The percentage of 16- to 24-year-olds not enrolled in school and who have not earned a high school diploma or equivalency.

**Figure 15.2** Status Dropout Rates (percentages) of 16- through 24-Year-Olds in the Noninstitutionalized Group Quarters and Household Population, by Nativity and Race/Ethnicity: American Community Survey (ACS) 2010

**SOURCE:** U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2010. Chart adapted from Aud, Susan, William Hussar, Frank Johnson, Grace Kena, Erin Roth, Eileen Manning, Xiaolei Wang, and Jijun Zhang. 2012. "The Condition of Education 2012." (NCES 2012-045). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, D.C. (Page 83). <http://nces.ed.gov>.



compared to just 14 percent of the students not eligible for free school lunches (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014).

- Achievement gaps in reading, writing, and mathematics persist between minority and White students. Table 15.1 shows the difference in average math scores of eighth graders in 2013. With the exception of Asian/Pacific Islander students (who scored higher than all other groups), the average score for White students was higher than the scores for Black, Hispanic, and Native American/Alaska Native students. Note also that as the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced lunch goes up, the average math scores go down—providing further evidence that educational performance is linked to socioeconomic background.

**Table 15.1** Eighth-Grade Math Proficiency by Race/Ethnicity, 2013

	Below Basic %	At or Above Basic %	At or Above Proficient %	At Advanced %
White	16	84	45	12
Black	48	52	14	2
Hispanic	38	62	21	3
Asian	13	87	60	25
American Indian/Alaska Native	41	59	21	3

**SOURCE:** Table adapted from Aud, Susan, William Hussar, Frank Johnson, Grace Kena, Erin Roth, Eileen Manning, Xiaolei Wang, and Jijun Zhang. 2012. "The Condition of Education 2012." (NCES 2012-045). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC (page 207). <http://nces.ed.gov>.

than the scores for Black, Hispanic, and Native American/Alaska Native students. Note also that as the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced lunch goes up, the average math scores go down—providing further evidence that educational performance is linked to socioeconomic background.

- A recent study by UCLA indicates that, in the twelve states studied, less than half of American Indian and Alaska Native students graduate from high school each year (Faircloth and Tippeconnie, 2010). It is important to note that

graduation rates in all racial-ethnic groups also vary greatly by gender (see “A Closer Look: Leaving Boys Behind?”).

- The high dropout rate for Hispanics and African Americans translates into a lifetime of poor outcomes. According to Thornburgh, “Dropping out of high school today is to your societal health what smoking is to your physical health, an indicator of a host of poor outcomes to follow, from low lifetime earnings to high incarceration rates to a high likelihood that your children will drop out of high school and start the cycle anew” (2006a: 32).

## A CLOSER LOOK

### Leaving Boys Behind?

In the 1990s, researchers and popular writers started writing about the “girl crisis” in America. According to books like *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* (Pipher, 1994) and *Failing at Fairness: How Our Schools Cheat Girls* (Sadker and Sadker, 1994), girls were believed to be suffering when they hit adolescence. In 1992, the American Association of University Women (AAUW) published “How Schools Shortchange Girls,” a study conducted by the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women. The report claimed that girls across the country were victims of a pervasive bias in schools. Teachers paid more attention to male students, gave them more time and feedback on their work, and did not encourage girls, especially in the areas of math and science. As a result, millions of dollars in grants were awarded to study the plight of girls in education (Sommers, 2000).

More recently, writers have been focusing on a different crisis in education, that of boys, not girls. Christina Hoff Sommers writes,

The research commonly cited to support the claims of male privilege and sinfulness is riddled with errors. Almost none of it has been published in peer-reviewed journals. Some of the data are mysteriously missing. Yet the false picture remains and is dutifully passed along in schools of education, in “gender equity” workshops, and increasingly to children themselves. . . . A review of the facts shows boys, not girls, on the weak side of an educational gender gap. (2000: 14)

According to Garibaldi, boys are increasingly disengaged in the “feminized” classroom (2006). Through movies, television, and rap music, pop culture teaches young boys it is not “cool” to like or do well in school and that to be masculine is to be disengaged and anti-authority (Wenzl, 2007). Those who propose that it is boys who are in crisis offer the following arguments:

- Boys are less likely to graduate from high school (65 percent versus 72 percent of girls; Greene and Winters, 2006).
- Boys are, on average, a year and a half behind girls in reading and writing (Sommers, 2000).
- Each year women receive more bachelor’s and master’s degrees than men (Mead, 2006).
- Boys are more likely to be held back a grade, drop out, and be suspended from school (Sommers, 2000).



- Girls continue to score higher on the Scholastic Aptitude Test in the area of writing. On the newly revamped SAT in 2006, girls scored an average of eleven points higher in writing (College Board, 2006).

So what is the truth concerning the gender gap in education? In a 2006 report by the Education Sector, Mead argued that “the real story is not bad news about boys doing worse; it’s good news about girls doing better” (2006: 1). In the report, using data from the National Assessment of Education Progress, Mead argued that American boys are scoring higher and achieving more than they have in the past, but girls have improved their performance on some measures even faster, which makes it appear as though boys are doing “worse.” The data seem to indicate that younger boys are doing quite well, but older boys are starting to slip when they reach twelfth grade. Mead argued that twelfth-grade girls are sliding as well. She argued, “The fact that achievement for older students is stagnant or declining for both boys and girls, to about the same degree, points to another important element of the boy crisis. The problem is most likely not that high schools need to be fixed to meet the needs of boys but rather that they need to be fixed to meet the needs of *all* students, male and female” (2006: 4).

In the battle over who is in crisis and more disadvantaged, two very important ideas seem to get left out. First of all, regardless of the statistics that more boys are dropping out of school and are less likely to go to college, women still, on average, earn less than men at every level of education. Furthermore, women continue to attain a small percentage of high-level jobs in corporations, politics, and other occupations, and they continue to be responsible for the majority of domestic work. In her criticism of the “boy crisis” literature, Douglas writes,

In 1999, one year before Sommers’ book came out, the top five jobs for women did not include attorney, surgeon, or CEO. They were, in order, secretaries, retail and personal sales workers (including cashiers), managers and administrators, elementary school teachers and registered nurses. In 2007, when presumably some of the privileged, pampered girls whose advantages over boys Sommers had kvetched about had entered the workforce, the top five jobs for women were, still secretaries in first place, followed by registered nurses, elementary and middle school teachers, cashiers, and retail salespersons.

Farther down the line? Maids, child care workers, office clerks and hairdressers. Not a CEO or hedge fund manager in sight. And, in the end, no president or vice president in 2008. But what about all those career-driven girls going to college and leaving the guys in the dust? A year out of college, they earn 80 percent of what men make. And 10 years out? A staggering 69 percent. (2010: 1–2)

Second, for every statistic that indicates a gender gap, there is an even larger gap by social class and race. Mead argues that “the gaps between students of different races and classes are much larger than those for students of different genders—anywhere from two to five times as big, depending on the grade.... Overall, poor, Black, and Hispanic boys would benefit far more from closing racial and economic achievement gaps than they would from closing gender gaps” (2006: 5).

These social class and racial gaps in academic achievement are found in almost every school and district in the United States. On the surface, these patterns reinforce the social Darwinist assumptions that the affluent are successful because they are intelligent, and, conversely, the poor and minorities are at society's bottom because they do not have the requisite abilities to be successful. Similarly, dysfunctional families, unmotivated students, and the culture of poverty are believed by some to explain the academic achievement gap. We argue, to the contrary, that structural factors explain why the poor and minorities are disadvantaged in our supposedly meritocratic educational system. In effect, the educational system is stacked in favor of middle- and upper-class children. Many interrelated factors explain why the education system tends to reinforce the socioeconomic and racial differences in the United States. We examine a few of these in the following sections.

## Financing Public Education

Approximately 50 million U.S. children attend public schools. While each state is somewhat different, these public schools receive funds from three governmental sources—about 10 percent from the federal government; about 45 percent from the state, depending on the allocation within each state; and 45 percent from local taxes in each district within the state (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). The result of this distribution is that schools are funded unequally in the United States, with public schools being more successful in educating children in middle-class communities but often failing children in poor neighborhoods.

Equal opportunity in education (at least as measured by equal finances) has not been accomplished nationwide because wealthier states are able to pay much more per pupil than are poorer states. The top-spending states, for example, invest more than double the amount per pupil than those states spending the least. Because the federal government provides only about 10 percent of the money for public schools, equalization from state to state is impossible as long as primarily state and local governments fund education because both entities vary in wealth and commitment to public education.

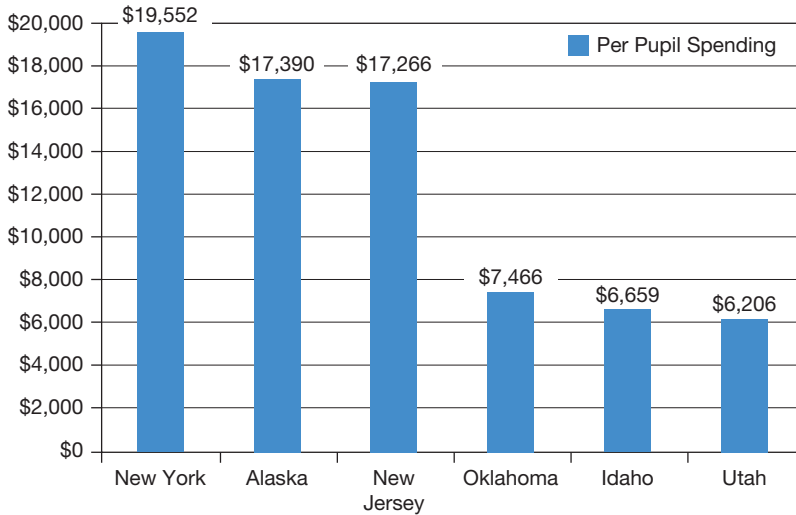
The disparities in per-pupil expenditures within a given state are also great, largely because of the tradition of funding public schools through local property taxes. This procedure is discriminatory because rich school districts can spend more money than poor ones on each student—and at a lower taxing rate. Thus, suburban students are more advantaged than are students from the inner city; districts with business enterprises are favored over agricultural districts; and districts with natural resources are better able to provide for their children than are districts with few resources. In some states, the disparity in spending for each pupil may be as much as three times more in affluent districts than in poor areas. Following are some examples:

- In Illinois, in 2007–2008 the New Trier Township High School District spent \$21,137 per student, while the Farmington Central Community Unit School District spent only \$6,728 per student, reflecting the large disparity in their local tax bases (New America Foundation, 2009).
- In 2014 in Upstate New York (the country's highest per-pupil spending state), per-pupil spending ranges from \$12,772 in Victor School District to \$32,416 in Hunter-Tannersville District (Thomas, 2014).
- Nationwide, data from the U.S. Census Bureau show that in 2012, per-pupil spending ranged from a high of \$19,552 in New York to a low of \$6,206 in

**Figure 15.3** States with the Highest and Lowest Spending per Student, 2012

**SOURCE:** Data from U.S. Census Bureau, Public Education Finances: 2012: <http://www2.census.gov/govs/school/12f33pub.pdf>

**NOTE:** District of Columbia is also in the top at \$17,468



Utah (see Figure 15.3). This gap is even greater when one considers the monies raised in each district from fundraisers, soda machine contracts, and foundation contributions.

There have been a number of court challenges to unequal funding within states, and systems in several states have been judged unconstitutional. Various schemes have been proposed to meet the objections of the courts, but inequities remain even in the more progressive states. Progressive plans to address financial inequities are fought by the affluent districts and their constituents because, they argue, their taxes should be spent on their children, not the children of others.

Overall, research shows that poor students and the schools serving them have fewer computers and other supplies; have teachers who are underpaid and have less teaching experience; are more likely to attend schools in need of repairs, renovations, and modernization (Filardo et al., 2006); and have higher pupil–teacher ratios (see “Speaking to Students: In-School Marketing”).

In sum, the financing of public education is upside down. The schools and students who need the most help receive the least, whereas those with advantages are advantaged all the more. In a study of school construction spending across the nation between 1995 and 2004, Filardo and colleagues found that out of the billions of dollars spent on school facilities, the least-affluent school districts (also those with predominantly minority student enrollment) made the lowest investment per student, and the most affluent districts made the highest investment (2006). Further, the money spent on schools serving low-income students was more likely used to fund basic repairs, but schools in more affluent districts were more likely to add science labs, technology, or other new programs. As stated by President Barack Obama, “For low-income students, the schools are made less decrepit; for wealthier students, they are made more enriching.... For all students to achieve, all must be provided adequate resources: effective teachers, inspiring school leaders, and enriching classroom environments” (2006: 1).

## Family and Community Resources

The average SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) scores for youth from families whose annual income is \$200,000 or more is 388 points higher than for youth from families whose income is \$20,000 or less (Goldfarb, 2014). How are we to explain these differences on the SATs by income? One factor highly correlated with income is parents’

## Speaking to Students

# In-School Marketing

We live in an advertising age. Through television, radio, billboards, movies, and the Internet, Americans are bombarded with advertisements. Research shows that the average American is exposed to 61 minutes of on-screen ads and promotions per day (Stelter, 2009), and the average American living in a big city sees up to 5,000 advertisements per day (Story, 2007).

In an effort to make up for declining school revenues, many school districts allow companies to market their products within the school environment in exchange for cash or computers and other supplies. Teenagers provide a target audience for marketers who want to catch consumers early and create brand loyalty. Smart companies understand that teenagers have enormous spending power, and they are ready and willing to capitalize on this through in-school marketing. In elementary, middle, and high schools, direct advertising can be found on:

- Book covers and educational posters in hallways.
- Sponsored educational materials. Teaching materials that are provided by companies can be very popular with teachers. The problem with advertising on teaching materials is that the companies producing such materials are not focused on education as the ultimate goal, but rather on selling their product (Carney, 2007).
- Channel One (a division of Alloy Media and Marketing) broadcasts daily to nearly 6 million teens in approximately 8,000 schools.
- School buses: Some school districts have sold advertising space on the side of their buses, and others broadcast radio programs with advertisements.
- Vending machines: Schools can have exclusive product sponsorships and can even receive bonuses if certain sales quotas are met (Carney, 2007).
- Athletics fields, scoreboards, and gymnasium walls.
- Fundraising items such as cookie dough, magazines, and other branded products.

Critics of this arrangement argue that advertising within an educational institution is exploitative.

Children, legally required to be in school, provide advertisers with a captive audience that is more likely to believe the advertising messages because they are displayed in a school/learning environment (Carney, 2007: 2).

In this way, marketing to students is dangerous because it seems as though the school endorses the product. A superintendent in Manassas Park says, "To me, it kind of cheapens the education mission, and it takes a captive audience and shoves advertising down their throats" (quoted in Birnbaum, 2009: 1).

Others argue that in tight economic times, schools are forced to do whatever it takes to bring in resources. Furthermore, in a culture saturated with advertising, students will be exposed to ads whether they are presented within the school environment or presented outside of school. Because this is the case, schools might as well benefit from the practice of marketing to students.

So the question for students, parents, and educators is, should education be "commercial-free"?

education level. For SAT takers in the class of 2004, scores were approximately fifty points higher than the national average for those whose parents had a graduate degree and thirty-nine points lower than the national average if their parents had only a high school diploma (Carnahan and Coletti, 2006).

Many benefits come from economic privilege. Poor parents (disproportionately people of color), most without health insurance, are unable to afford prenatal care, which increases the risk of babies being born at low birth weight, a condition that may lead to learning disabilities. As these poor children age, they are less likely to receive adequate nutrition, decent medical care, and a safe and secure environment. These deficiencies increase the probability that they will be less alert, less curious, and less able than healthy children to interact effectively with their environment.

Poor children are more likely than the children of the affluent to attend schools with poor resources, which, as we have seen, means they are less likely to receive an enriched educational experience. In their analysis of a nationally representative sample of kindergarten children, Lee and Burkam argue,

Low-SES [socioeconomic status] children begin school in kindergarten in systematically lower-quality elementary schools than their more advantaged counterparts. However school quality is defined—in terms of higher student achievement, more school resources, more qualified teachers, more positive teacher attitudes, better neighborhood or school conditions, private vs. public schools—the least advantaged U.S. children begin their formal schooling in consistently lower-quality schools. This reinforces the inequalities that develop even before children reach school age. (2002: 3)

Similarly, most poor young people live in communities that have few opportunities to apply academic skills and build new ones because such opportunities are either not available or not accessible (libraries, planetariums, summer camps, zoos, nature preserves, museums). The lack of community resources is especially destructive during the summer months, the time when children doing least well in school (a group that is disproportionately poor) slide backward the furthest.

Children from poor families cannot afford private early development programs, which prepare children for school. They can be in Head Start, but these government programs have funding for only about 60 percent of those eligible.

The level of affluence also affects how long children will stay in school because schools, even public schools, are costly. There are school fees (many school districts, for example, charge fees for participation in music, athletics, and drama), supplies, meals, transportation, and other costs of education. These financial demands pressure youth from poorer families to drop out of school prematurely to go to work. The children from the middle and upper classes, not constrained by financial difficulties, tend to stay in school longer, which means better jobs and pay in the long run.

The affluent also give their children educational advantages such as home computers; travel experiences abroad and throughout the United States; visits to zoos, libraries, and various cultural activities; and summer camps to hone their skills and enrich their experiences in such activities as sports, music, writing, and computers. Another advantage available to the affluent is the hiring of tutors to help children having difficulty in school or to transform good students into outstanding ones.

The well-to-do often send their children to private schools (about 11 percent of U.S. children attend these schools). Parents offer several rationales for sending their

children to private schools. Some do so for religious reasons. Another reason is that private schools, unlike public schools, are selective in whom they accept. Thus, parents can ensure that their children will interact with children similar to theirs in race and social class. Similarly, private schools are much more likely than public schools to get rid of troublesome students (e.g., behavioral problems and low achievers), thereby providing an educational environment more conducive to learning and achievement. A final reason for attending private schools is that the most elite of them provide a demanding education and entry to the most elite universities, which, in turn, lead to placement in top positions in the professional and corporate occupational worlds.

The preceding arguments show that a family's economic resources are correlated to their child's educational success. From test scores to dropout rates, some students are more advantaged than others.

## Higher Education and Stratification

As noted earlier, obtaining a college degree is an important avenue to later success. Because the payoff in jobs and pay is directly related to the prestige of the college or university attended, colleges play an important role in maintaining the stratified structure of society. From those who receive no college education to those who attend private, elite universities, each tier in the hierarchy results in different life chances.

On the lowest tier of the hierarchy are those who cannot afford to attend college. Although economic success is possible without a college degree, for most individuals, no college education translates into a lifetime of lower earnings and low-mobility jobs. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the cost of college rose at a rate more than twice the inflation rate. In 2011–2012, on average, the total annual expenses to attend a four-year private school (tuition, fees, room and board) were \$33,716 compared to \$16,789 for a four-year public school for in-state students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). The cost of room, board, fees, and tuition at the nation's most exclusive schools is more than \$50,000 for a single school year. The high costs, coupled with declining scholarship monies, prohibit college attendance not only for the able poor but also increasingly for children of the working and lower middle classes. A comparison of students from different income groups shows that 14 percent of those from the lowest income group will enroll in college, compared to 64 percent of those from the highest income group (Symonds, 2006).

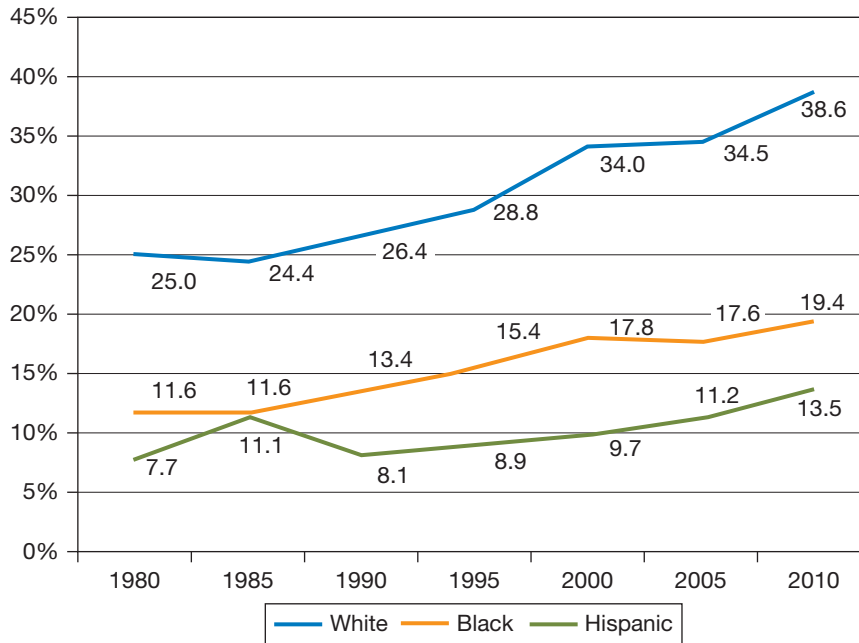
Because racial minorities are much more likely than Whites to be poor or near poor, they are underrepresented in colleges and among college graduates. The percentages of all racial groups who have completed a bachelor's degree or higher have increased since 1980, but the

America's elite schools, like Harvard, have a distinguished list of alumni, from former presidents to U.S. ambassadors.



**Figure 15.4** Percentage of 25- to 29-Year-Olds with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher, by Year and Race/Ethnicity

**SOURCE:** Aud, Susan, William Hussar, Frank Johnson, Grace Kena, Erin Roth, Eileen Manning, Xiaolei Wang, and Jijun Zhang. 2012. "The Condition of Education 2012." (NCES 2012-045). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, D.C. (Page 286). <http://nces.ed.gov>.



gaps between Whites and Blacks and Whites and Hispanics remain (see Figure 15.4). The disproportionately low number of college degrees earned by minorities is reflected in the relatively low number of students who attend and complete graduate school. This, of course, results in a low proportion of minorities in the various professions in the near future. Of special significance is the low minority representation among full-time faculty in higher education now and projected for the future.

For students who do attend college, money stratifies. The poorest, even those who are talented, are most likely to attend community colleges, which are the least expensive (today, 6 million of the nation's college students attend community colleges).

On the other end of the spectrum are the students with the greatest financial backing, who are the most likely to attend elite and prestigious private institutions. The most prestigious schools have the most resources, which means they can hire the most prestigious professors, maintain the most complete libraries and research facilities, and equip state-of-the-art classrooms. Despite falling endowments due to the economic recession, in 2011 Harvard had an endowment valued at \$31.7 billion, Yale had an endowment worth \$19.3 billion, and Stanford had an endowment worth \$16.5 billion (National Association of College and University Business Officers [NACUBO], 2012).

Although talent is an important variable, it is money—not ability—that places college students in this stratified system. For example, admission committees at elite universities give students from upper-class families favorable ratings if they are children of alumni or children of big contributors to the university's fundraising campaigns

(this is a reverse form of affirmative action, benefiting the children of the affluent, the most notable example being George W. Bush's acceptance into Yale). Reporter Daniel Golden argued that these children of celebrities, politicians, and wealthy executives, called "development cases," are often admitted to elite colleges with SAT scores sometimes 300 or 400 points lower than those of some rejected applicants (Golden, 2006).

Opponents of affirmative action argue that affirmative action policies undermine the meritocratic nature of colleges by rewarding and advancing students not on the basis of ability or talent, but rather on their race or minority status. In reality, the meritocratic system is undermined by the admittance and advancement of students who are well-connected or have relatives who are alumni, politicians, or donors to the institution. According to a five-year study of 146 top colleges, White students with below average qualifications were twice as prevalent as Black and Hispanic students who were admitted under affirmative action policies (Schmidt, 2007). While some of these White students may be recruited as athletes, most are so-called "development cases," admitted to keep their relatives happy with the institution.

A degree from a prestigious school opens doors of opportunity rarely available to graduates of the less-prestigious schools, yet entry goes disproportionately to the already advantaged.

## Segregation

Schools in the United States tend to be segregated by social class and race, both by neighborhood and, within schools, by ability grouping. Schools are based in neighborhoods that tend to be relatively homogeneous by socioeconomic status. Racial and economic segregation is especially prevalent at the elementary school level, carrying over to a lesser degree in the secondary schools. Colleges and universities, as we have seen, are peopled by a middle- and upper-class clientele. Thus, at every level, children tend to attend a school with children like themselves in socioeconomic status and race. According to a study of Southern California schools by the University of California, Los Angeles, the typical Latino student in the Los Angeles Unified School District goes to a school where just 6 percent of the students are White (Orfield, Siegel-Hawley, and Kucsera, 2011). This same study found that the typical Black student in San Diego attends a school where just 6 percent of the students are White. According to Fuentes (2007), Latinos living in New York attend schools that are 80 percent non-White. In short, the progress toward desegregation peaked in the late 1980s and has retreated because of racially segregated neighborhoods and school districts across the country challenging integration policies.

At the college level, some universities have also addressed the issue of segregation through the use of race-conscious admissions. At the University of Michigan, for example, the admissions committee used a point scale whereby students needed 100 points to be accepted to the university. Prior to 2003, underrepresented ethnic minorities received an automatic twenty-point bonus toward admission. A 2003 Supreme Court decision (*Gratz v. Bollinger*) found this system to be unconstitutional and too close to a quota system. At the same time, however, another Supreme Court decision (*Grutter v. Bollinger*) upheld that race could still be considered in the admission process, but minorities could not be awarded a fixed quantity of extra points. This decision has come under fire from the public. In 2006, Michigan residents voted overwhelmingly in favor of barring the state from granting preferences based on skin color or gender in public contracting, employment, and education (Brown, 2006).



In 2014, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the ban on affirmative action in public college admissions, in spite of the fact that minority enrollment is decreasing at the university (Blacks make up just 4.6 percent of undergraduates) (Woodhouse, 2014).

## Tracking and Teachers' Expectations

In 1954, the Supreme Court declared segregated schools unconstitutional. As we have seen, many schools remain at least partially segregated by social class and race because schools draw students from residential areas that are more or less homogeneous by class and race. Segregation is reinforced further by the tracking system within the schools. **Tracking** (also known as ability grouping) sorts students into different groups or classes according to their perceived intellectual ability and performance. The decision is based on grades and teachers' judgments but primarily through standardized tests. The result is that children from poor families and from ethnic minorities are overrepresented in the slow track, whereas children from advantaged backgrounds are disproportionately in the middle and upper tracks. The rationale for tracking is that it provides a better fit between the needs and capabilities of the student and the demands and opportunities of the curriculum. Slower students do not slow down the progress of brighter ones, but teachers can adapt their teaching more efficiently to the level of the class if the students are relatively homogeneous in ability. The special problems of the different ability groups, from gifted to challenged, can be dealt with more easily when groups of students share the same or similar problems. The arguments are persuasive.

### Tracking

Ability grouping in schools.

Although these benefits may be real, tracking is open to serious criticisms. First, students in lower tracks are given low-level work that increases the gap between them and students in the higher tracks, thereby reinforcing the U.S. stratification system. Kozol (2005) found evidence of tracking in his discussions with poor high schools students. For example, he found that minority students were funneled into vocational classes geared toward low-level employment (like sewing classes) rather than classes with academic substance that would prepare them for college. Thus, the tracking system is closely linked to the stratification system—that is, students from low-income families are disproportionately placed in the lowest track, resulting in a reinforcement of the social class structure.

Second, students in the upper track develop feelings of superiority, while those in the lower track tend to define themselves as inferior. As early as the second grade, students know where they stand on the smart-to-dumb continuum, and this knowledge profoundly affects their self-esteem. These psychological wounds can have devastating effects.

Third, the low-track students are tracked to fail. The negative labels, low teacher expectations, and poor education resources all lead to a high probability of failure among students assigned to the lowest track. Given all these negatives, it is not surprising that students who are discipline problems or who eventually drop out come disproportionately from the low track.

The tracking system is powerful in its negative effects. There are four principal reasons this system stunts the success of students who are negatively labeled: stigma, self-fulfilling prophecies, beliefs about future payoffs to education, and the creation of negative student subcultures.

### Stigma

Powerful negative social label that affects a person's social identity and self-concept.

**STIGMA** Assignment to a lower track carries a strong **stigma** (a label of social disgrace). Such students are labeled as intellectual inferiors. Their self-esteem wanes as they see how other people perceive them and behave toward them. Thus, individuals

assigned to a track other than college prep perceive themselves as second class, unworthy, stupid, and in the way. Clearly, assignment to a low track is destructive to a student's self-concept.

**SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY** A self-fulfilling prophecy is an event that occurs because it is predicted, and people alter their behavior to conform to the prediction. This effect is closely related to stigma. If placed in the college-prep track, students are likely to receive better instruction, have access to better facilities, and be pushed more nearly to their capacity than are students assigned to other tracks. The reason is clear: Teachers and administrators expect great things from the one group and lesser things from the other. Moreover, these expectations are fulfilled. Students in the higher track do better, and those in the lower track do not. These behaviors justify the greater expenditures of time, faculties, and experimental curricula for those in the higher track.

An example comes from a classic, controversial study by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968). Although this study has been criticized for a number of methodological shortcomings, the findings are consistent with theories of interpersonal influence and with the labeling view of deviant behavior. In the spring of 1964, all students in an elementary school in San Francisco were given an IQ test. The following fall, the teachers were given the names of children identified by the test as potential academic achievers, and five of these children were assigned to each classroom. The achievers were chosen by means of a table of random numbers. The only difference between the experimental group (those labeled as achievers) and the control group (the rest of the class) was in the imaginations of the teachers. At the end of the year, all the children were again tested, and the children from whom the teachers expected greater intellectual gains showed such gains (in IQ scores and grades). Moreover, they were rated by their teachers as being more curious, interesting, happy, and more likely to succeed than were the children in the control group.

The implications of this example are clear. Teachers' expectations have a profound effect on students' performance. When students are overrated, they tend to overproduce; when they are underrated, they underachieve. The tracking system is a labeling process that affects the expectations of teachers (and fellow students and parents). The limits of these expectations are crucial in the educational process. Yet the self-fulfilling prophecy can work in a positive direction if teachers have an unshakable conviction that their students can learn. Concomitant with this belief, teachers should hold themselves, not the students, accountable if the latter should fail. Used in this manner, the self-fulfilling prophecy can work to the benefit of all students.

**FUTURE PAYOFF** School is perceived as relevant for students going to college. Grades are a means of qualifying for college. For the non-college-bound student, however, school and grades are much less important for entry into a job. At most, students need a high school diploma, and grades really do not matter as long as one does not flunk out. Thus, non-college-bound students often develop negative attitudes toward school, grades, and teachers. This is reflected in the statistic that students from the lowest income quarter are more than six times as likely to drop out of high school as students from the highest income quarter (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, 2006).

As we have seen, being on the lower track has negative consequences. Lower-track students are more rebellious, both in school and out, and do not participate as much in school activities. Finally, what is being taught is often not relevant to their

world. Thus, we are led to conclude that many of these students tend to feel that they are not only second-class citizens but perhaps also even outcasts. What other interpretation is plausible in a system that disadvantages them, shuns them, and makes demands of them that are irrelevant?

**NEGATIVE STUDENT SUBCULTURE** The reasons given previously suggest that a natural reaction of people in the lower track would be to band together in a negative student subculture that is antagonistic toward school. This subculture would quite naturally develop its own system of rewards because those of the school are inaccessible.

These factors (stigma, negative self-fulfilling prophecy, low future payoff, and a negative student subculture) show how the tracking system is at least partly responsible for the fact that students in the lower tracks tend to be low achievers, unmotivated, uninvolved in school activities, and more prone to break school rules and drop out of school. To segregate students either by ability or by future plans is detrimental to the students labeled as inferior. It is an elitist system that for the most part takes the children of the elite and educates them to take the elite positions in society. Conversely, children of the non-elite are trained to recapitulate the experiences of their parents.

The conclusion is inescapable: Inequality in the educational system causes many people to fail in U.S. schools. This phenomenon is the fault of the schools, not of the children who fail. To focus on these victims is to divert attention from the real problem—the inadequacies of the school system.

## Possibilities for Promoting Equality of Opportunity

### **15.4** Discuss possible solutions to address the inequities in our education system.

A fundamental tenet of U.S. society is that each individual, regardless of sex, race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, age, and social class, has the opportunity to be equal on her or his own merits. In other words, the system must not impede individuals from reaching their potential and from gaining the unequal rewards of an unequal society. The data presented in this chapter show that U.S. schools tend to block the chances of minority and poor children in their quest to be successful in society. This section outlines several programs that schools and society could adopt to promote equality of opportunity for all children.

We must realize at the start that if the situation for poor and minority children is difficult now, it will worsen significantly if changes are not made. This assertion is based on three societal trends. The first, documented throughout this book, is that the gap between the affluent and the poor is widening. Also, as the demographic mix of the nation continues to change, increasing numbers of children of color from relatively poor families will attend schools. Today about 22 percent of schoolchildren have a foreign-born parent (mostly Latino and Asian), a proportion that will likely increase. The poor and children of immigrants are disproportionately found in inner cities in increasingly segregated neighborhoods. With the poor and people of color clustered in cities, these local governments, faced with a declining tax base, will be less and less able to provide the services required of their citizens, including education. Similarly, certain

regions—the Pacific Coast, the Southwest, and Florida—are especially affected by immigration, placing an extraordinary financial burden on those states and localities.

The second trend that will negatively affect the educational opportunities of minorities unless changes are made is that the number of minority students is increasing and will in the next decades make Whites the numerical minority (as they are today in many school districts). Moreover, racial and ethnic minorities are concentrated in poor states (the South and Southwest), in poor geographical regions (Appalachia, the Ozarks, along the Rio Grande, and in the Mississippi delta), and in poor sections of cities. This is significant because racial/ethnic minorities have higher rates of poverty, more unemployment, and lower educational attainment than do the more fortunate majority. In effect, under current policies, children of minorities are disadvantaged economically and are at greater risk of educational failure. So, wherever these children are overrepresented, there will be disproportionately less local money to meet their educational needs (because of the lower tax base). Ironically, the poor require more money than the affluent to catch up, such as enriched preschool, after-school programs, summer reading programs, and small classes, yet the richest school districts spend more per student.

In addition to the rise in the proportion of racial minority students, several demographic trends make reform difficult. One demographic trend negatively affecting education is the aging of society. As a greater proportion of the population no longer has children in school, there will be a greater reluctance on their part to vote for tax increases directed at education. Another population trend is for increased enrollments from the baby boom echo—that is, the children of children of the disproportionately large baby boom generation are in school or soon will be, swelling the numbers significantly. This means that more classrooms and teachers are needed at a time when many states are making cuts to education due to the economic recession.

All the previously mentioned demographic changes point to a society at risk for increasing the gap between rich and poor students. The next sections discuss several programs that schools and society could adopt to promote equality of opportunity for all children.

## Provide Universal Preschool Programs

The most important variable affecting school performance is not race but socioeconomic status. Regardless of race, children from poor families tend to do less well in school than do children from families who are better off. Long-term studies are beginning to show that the United States needs to invest in preschool-age children from disadvantaged families to counter some of these poor outcomes. In fact, the earlier the investment, the better. For example, in a forty-year study of 123 low-income children, intensive preschool attention resulted in higher academic achievement, higher earnings, and lower rates of criminal activity compared to a control group (reported in Farrell, 2006). Although the program was expensive (\$10,600 investment per pupil), researchers estimated that the benefit-to-cost ratio comes to \$17 for every \$1 invested.

## Offer Free Education

Beginning with preschool, there must be a commitment to a free education for all students. Presumably, public education at the elementary and secondary levels is free, but this assumption is a fallacy, as discussed earlier. Although circumstances vary

by district, typically children must pay for their supplies, textbooks, laboratory fees, locker rental, admission to plays and athletic events, meals, and participation in extracurricular activities. Some districts waive these costs for poor families, but waivers do not occur uniformly across school districts, and the procedures for granting these waivers are often degrading (i.e., done in such a way that other people know who receives the handouts). These costs are regressive because they take a larger proportion of the poor family's budget, thereby increasing the pressure to withdraw the child from school, where he or she drains the family resources.

By making education absolutely free to all children, communities could reduce dropout rates among the poor. A program of greater scope would also provide a living allowance for each child from a poor family who stayed in school beyond the eighth grade. This program would be analogous to the GI Bill, which provided similar benefits to soldiers returning after World War II. Special care must be given to provide these benefits, as did the GI Bill, without making their acceptance degrading.

An important way to produce equal opportunity is to provide a free college education to all students who qualify. This means the elimination of tuition and fees and an allowance for books for everyone, plus grants and loans for students in need to pay for living expenses while attending college. Students could then "give back" through community service or working on campus. An example comes from the College of the Ozarks, where students pay no tuition and work at least fifteen hours a week on campus (students are graded on their work performance in addition to their academics).

## Set National Education Standards

The government should provide national education standards, a national curriculum, and national tests. As noted before, the No Child Left Behind Act was a step in this direction, but it allows each of the fifty states to set its own standards. There are more than 14,000 school districts and 100,000 schools in the United States. We must require that each school district and school, rather than acting on its own, meet specific standards for school achievement agreed to by a national consensus among educational leaders. The minimum result of this requirement would be that students, whether growing up in Nebraska or New York, would learn the same basic materials at about the same time. It would also mean that as students move with their families from one locality to another, they would not be at a disadvantage because of the esoteric schooling they had received. The fact that forty-three states and the District of Columbia have voluntarily adopted the standards promoted by the Common Core State Standards Initiative is an important step in this direction.

## Reduce Funding Disparities across States and Districts

Another reform at the federal level would be to spend the federal monies unequally to equalize differences among the states. In effect, the federal government must take the money it receives in taxes and, like the fictional character Robin Hood, take disproportionately from the wealthy states and redistribute it to the poor states. Otherwise, the gap between the rich and poor states will be maintained.

Nationwide, the traditional property tax system of raising money for education locally is under assault. The supreme courts in various states are ruling in case after case that the states are failing the children in the poorer districts. States should be

encouraged to distribute their funds to eliminate or minimize disparities between rich and poor districts. This could be done by the federal government's withholding funds from states with discrepancies between their poor and rich districts that exceed federal guidelines. In such cases, the federal government could channel its monies directly to the poorer districts within the offending states.

## Reduce Class and School Size

Schools can be restructured to better meet the needs of students. A beginning would be to reduce class size. A Tennessee study (Project Star) found that students in smaller classes tended to achieve higher grades, had better high school graduation rates, and were more likely to attend college, and the gap between Black-White academic achievement narrowed by 38 percent (Herbert, 2001). Not only small classes but smaller schools are also beneficial, generating higher graduation rates, more participation, less alienation, and less violence. Results from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, a federally funded survey of 72,000 junior high and high school students, found that when the number of students in a school exceeded 1,200, students became more isolated from one another. Isolation contributes to the greater likelihood of engaging in risky behavior such as drug use, violence, and early sexual activity (reported in Fletcher, 2002).

## Attract and Retain Excellent Teachers

Schools need to attract and retain excellent teachers. This means higher salaries, mentoring of new teachers, and paying teachers a bonus for teaching in difficult school situations. This is especially challenging when states are inclined to make large cuts to education as they attempt to balance their budgets.

## Extend the School Day and Year

The United States devotes the shortest amount of time to teaching its children of any advanced nation. The six-hour day and the nine-month calendar instituted to accommodate farm life have not changed since the nineteenth century. Pushing for an extended school year, President Obama said,

We can no longer afford an academic calendar designed when America was a nation of farmers who needed their children at home plowing the land at the end of the day. That calendar may have once made sense, but today, it puts us at a competitive disadvantage. Our children spend over a month less in school than children in South Korea. That is no way to prepare them for a 21st century economy. (Quoted in Thomma, 2009: 1)

## Hold Educators Accountable

Virtually every state has instituted statewide examinations in the past decade, linking the results to such things as grade promotion, high school graduation, and teacher and principal salaries. The cornerstone of the No Child Left Behind legislation is to have nationwide testing, mandating annual tests in grades 3 through 8, plus one in high school, with penalties for those schools that fail. There are difficulties with this assessment of schools, as noted earlier. Do you punish schools from economically



The demands of the twenty-first century require students to work cooperatively, to be knowledgeable about technology, and to think outside the box.

disadvantaged districts with children who are more proficient in a language other than English? When a school fails, do you punish, or do you invest in more resources (tutoring, after-school programs, summer school, smaller class size, modern schools wired for the future)?

As witnessed in cases in Virginia and Georgia, the pressure on teachers and administrators that their schools score well may lead to cheating or to manipulating their rankings by assisting students during test taking, exempting special education students and slow learners from taking the tests, or through the subtle encouragement of slow learners to drop out of school.

These criticisms are valid and important, but they do not invalidate the need for standards and evaluation. The key is to heavily invest in poor children, beginning in preschool, and to enrich their school with meaningful experiences and talented, caring teachers. With such a commitment, over time all children can be held to the same standards and their schools held accountable.

## Reform the Educational Philosophy of Schools

The reforms listed earlier do not question the structure and philosophy of the educational system. The present system is predicated on the needs of an industrial society in which citizens must follow orders, do assigned tasks in the appropriate order and time span, and not challenge the status quo. According to Everton, “This is why school sucks. Rather than do what it pretends to—educate, foster curiosity, expand our intellects, and promote diversity—compulsory schooling segregates people on the basis of how well they’re willing to do what they’re told.... Compulsory schooling is at its best when diluting intellects in preparation for lifetimes of subservience to corporate masters” (2004: 55).

But these behaviors will not be appropriate for life in the twenty-first century. The future will likely require people who can cope with rapid turnover—changes in occupations, human relationships, and community ties. Moreover, the citizens of the future must be able to cope with myriad choices. Does an educational system built on order, a rigid time schedule, and the lecture method adequately prepare youngsters for life as it is and will be? The proponents of these and other alternatives are critical of U.S. education. They conclude that schools are failing not only children from the ghettos of large cities but also suburban and small-town youngsters. Wallis and Steptoe write,

For the past five years, the national conversation on education has focused on reading scores, math tests and closing the “achievement gap” between social classes. This is not a story about that conversation. This is a story about the big public conversation the nation is not having about education, the one that will

ultimately determine not merely whether some fraction of our children get “left behind” but also whether an entire generation of kids will fail to make the grade in the global economy because they can’t think their way through abstract problems, work in teams, distinguish good information from bad or speak a language other than English. (2006: 52)

Today’s economy demands that schools rethink their educational philosophy and focus more on twenty-first-century skills. Those skills include (1) knowing more about the world as global citizens, (2) thinking outside the box, (3) becoming smarter about new sources of information, and (4) developing good people skills (Wallis and Steptoe, 2006).

## Restructure Society

The approaches to equality described previously focus on changing either individual students or the schools. But if equality of opportunity is truly the goal, education cannot accomplish it alone. Closing the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students cannot be accomplished without a society-wide assault on racism and poverty. Poverty can be eliminated only through fundamental revisions in the economic and familial institutions. This is not to say that reform of the schools should be ignored. Efforts to improve our schools should parallel attempts to restructure the other institutions of society.

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## Chapter Review

### 15.1 Explain the characteristics of education in the United States.

- The system of education in the United States is characterized by (a) conservatism—the preservation of culture, roles, values, and training necessary for the maintenance of society; (b) a belief in compulsory mass education; (c) a preoccupation with order and control; (d) fragmentation; (e) local control; and (f) reinforcement of the stratification system through the sifting and sorting of students.

### 15.2 Critique the idea of Common Core education.

- There has been a national push for education based on common standards while at the same time preserving local control. This idea is embodied in the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act, signed by George W. Bush in 2002. The goal of this legislation was to close the gaps that plague education in the United States and make schools accountable for success or failure using standardized testing.

- No Child Left Behind is flawed because each state sets its own standards. Because the federal government rewards those schools who meet the standards, the states with high standards are punished, while the states with low standards are unfairly rewarded.
- In a push for a common national curriculum, the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices joined with others to form the Common Core State Standards Initiative, an initiative to develop international benchmarks for all states so that all students are prepared to be competitive in a globalized market. The federal government was not involved in the development of the standards; this is purely a state-driven initiative. Parents, teachers, school administrators, and experts across the country developed the set of common standards, and as of January 2016 forty-two states and the District of Columbia have voluntarily adopted them.
- Common Core is very controversial, and groups have formed protesting the standards and



asking their state legislatures to do away with Common Core.

### 15.3 Assess the ways that schools perpetuate class and race inequality.

- The belief that our society is a meritocracy, with the most intelligent and talented at the top, is a myth. Education, instead of being the great equalizer, reinforces social inequality.
- Educational outcomes are strongly linked to social class, race, and ethnicity.
- The schools are structured to aid in the perpetuation of social and economic differences in several ways: (a) by being financed principally through property taxes so that rich school districts spend more per student; (b) by offering an educational experience correlated to a family's economic resources; (c) by increasing the cost of attending college; (d) by segregating students by race and social class; and (e) by tracking according to presumed level of ability.
- The tracking system is closely correlated with social class; students from low-income families are disproportionately placed in the lowest track. Tracking thwarts the equality of educational opportunity for the poor by generating four effects: (a) a stigma, which lowers self-esteem; (b) the self-fulfilling prophecy; (c) a perception of school as having no future payoff; and (d) a negative student subculture.

### 15.4 Discuss possible solutions to address the inequities in our education system.

- Demographic changes such as the increasing number of minority students and students with

a foreign-born parent are widening the gap between poor and rich students.

- The government needs to invest in preschool programs to improve the life chances of disadvantaged youth.
- Beginning with preschool and continuing through college, there must be a societal commitment to free education.
- The federal government could promote equality of opportunity by providing national educational standards, a national curriculum, and national tests.
- The federal government must level the playing field by distributing money unequally to the states according to need and encouraging states to minimize economic disparities among their school districts.
- Promoting equality of opportunity and excellence in the public schools requires (a) reducing class and school size; (b) attracting and retaining excellent teachers; (c) extending the school year; (d) holding educators responsible for their students' outcomes; and (e) changing the philosophy of schools to meet the needs of the twenty-first century and global economy.
- The restructuring of schools will not meet the goal of equality of educational opportunity, radical critics argue, unless the society is also restructured. This change requires a society-wide assault on racism and poverty and a redistribution of wealth to reduce the inequalities that result from economic advantage.

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## Key Terms

**No Child Left Behind Act** Federal legislation requiring states to develop academic standards in reading, math, and science. Standardized tests are used to label schools as passing or failing.

**Status dropout rate** The percentage of 16- to 24-year-olds not enrolled in school and who have not earned a high school diploma or equivalency.

**Stigma** Powerful negative social label that affects a person's social identity and self-concept.

**Tracking** Ability grouping in schools.

# Chapter 16

## The Health Care System



### Learning Objectives

- 16.1** Understand the extent of the health care crisis in the United States.
- 16.2** Explain how access to health care varies by social class, race, and gender.
- 16.3** Describe the characteristics of the health care system in the United States that led to the 2010 reform.
- 16.4** Understand the Affordable Care Act of 2010.
- 16.5** Compare and contrast the Bismarck, the Beveridge, and the National Health Insurance models of health care.

This chapter is devoted to analyzing the system of health care in the United States. How does the current system work? Who benefits and who does not from the current system? Is reform needed? To answer these questions the chapter is divided into five parts: (1) a description of the contours of the health crisis, (2) the unequal access to health care, (3) the United States health care system leading up to the 2010 reform, (4) the Affordable Health Care Act of 2010, and (5) models of national health care: lessons from other developed nations.

## Crises in Health Care

### 16.1 Understand the extent of the health care crisis in the United States.

#### Rising Health Care Costs

The United States has experienced a steep growth rate in medical expenses. Americans spend \$2.3 trillion annually on health care, more than twice what most advanced nations spend (Kantarjian, 2014). In 2013 health care costs were 17.1 percent of its GDP on health care, up from 5 percent in 1960 and 13.6 percent in 2000. This is much more, both in amount spent per capita and percentage of gross domestic product, than any other advanced modern nation, spending around 50 percent more per person than the next highest spending countries, Switzerland and Norway. Compared to the U.S., where health care spending accounts for over 17 percent of GDP, Switzerland spends 11.4 percent and Norway 9.6 percent.

There are several reasons health care in the United States is so expensive compared to other countries. Most significant, profit drives the U.S. system: private hospitals, insurance companies, and medical equipment manufacturers seek greater returns on their investments. A report by Health and Human Services stated that in 2010 the largest insurance companies—WellPoint, United Health, Cigna, Aetna, and Humana—combined for over \$15 billion in profits, a 22 percent increase from 2009. Most significant, profits for the ten largest insurance companies increased 250 percent over the last decade (Alazraki, 2011).

Second, the system is inefficient. Especially costly is the paperwork involved in insurance claims from hundreds of different insurance firms. Physicians and hospitals have to hire additional personnel to deal with the layers of paperwork. According to research published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, 31 percent of the money spent on health care goes for paperwork and administration (reported in Bennett, 2010).

Third, many physicians practice **defensive medicine**—tests and procedures doctors perform primarily to protect themselves from lawsuits. The practice of defensive medicine means, in effect, that much of the health care that is delivered—as much as one-third, according to a Dartmouth study—is unnecessary (cited in Saporito, 2005).

Fourth, lawsuits alleging malpractice on the part of physicians, pharmaceutical companies, and hospitals account for about 4 percent of total health care costs (Weitz, 2004:235).

Fifth, science keeps inventing costly new tests, new drugs, and new treatments. Because health insurers pay doctors and clinical facilities most of what they charge, there are financial incentives to use the new and expensive technologies. Related to

#### Defensive medicine

The practice of requiring extra diagnostic tests and medical procedures to protect the physician from liability.

this, many physicians, to increase their incomes, install expensive equipment in their offices (ultrasound, magnetic resonance imaging, etc.). Research shows that self-referring doctors order tests for their machines far more frequently than doctors who refer patients to radiologists and other specialists.

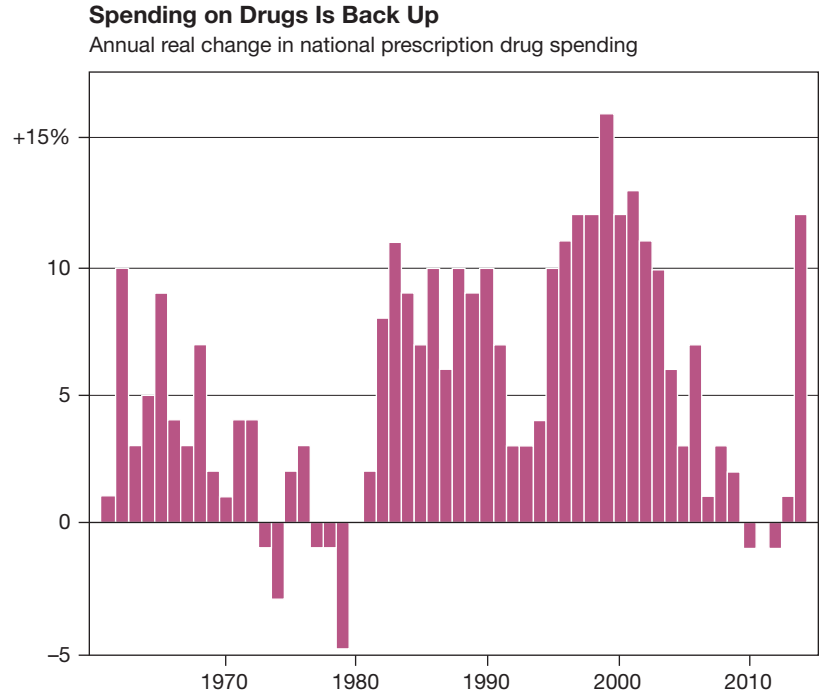
Another source of the high cost of health care in the United States is the shortage of primary-care physicians and the overuse of specialists. The income of general practitioners (primary-care physicians) is less than half, on average, of what specialists make. Thus, the financial incentive is for medical students to choose the specialty route. The services of specialists are costly, and they are more prone than primary-care physicians to rely on expensive technical procedures for their livelihood. Because there is a shortage of general practitioners, fewer patients go to them on a regular basis, which means they are less likely to receive preventive care. One estimate is that if everyone went to a general practitioner regularly, health care costs would go down by \$67 billion a year (Carmichael, 2010).

A final reason for the costly health care system is the wide use of prescription drugs, the greatest part of the health care bill of Americans. The cost in 2010 was \$307.4 billion for prescription drugs, a cost that has risen in most years since 1980 (see Figure 16.1). Drug costs are an especially heavy burden on the elderly, who take an average of four prescription drugs per person.

The U.S. pharmaceutical industry is comprised of profit-seeking companies that conduct research, manufacture, advertise, and sell their products. The United States is the only developed nation that allows direct-to-consumer marketing of pharmaceuticals. Significantly, the pharmaceutical companies spend more on advertising than on research and development. As a result of these factors the profit margin for pharmaceutical firms averages 17 percent, much more than found in other industries. Drug prices in the United States compared to the cost in other industrialized countries are 35 percent to 55 percent higher. In 2013, Americans spent \$1,034 per person on prescription drugs, compared to \$761 per person in Canada and

**Figure 16.1** Annual Real Change in National Prescription Drug Spending

**SOURCE:** Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Found in [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/22/upshot/prescription-drug-costs-are-rising-as-a-campaign-issue.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/22/upshot/prescription-drug-costs-are-rising-as-a-campaign-issue.html?_r=0).



\*2014 spending is an estimate. Spending is measured on drugs sold through retail channels, and does not include some drugs administered by doctors.

\$294 per person in Mexico (Sanger-Katz, 2015). As long as drug companies hold the patent to a drug, the prices rise from year to year. In 2008 the price for brand-name drugs rose 8.7 percent, more than double the inflation rate (Werner, 2009). When the patent expires, the price drops immediately as generic copies are sold. When several drug manufacturers produce a similar generic, the price drops further due to the competition (Barry, 2008).

To summarize, the U.S. health care system is comprised of various commercial enterprises seeking profits. Consider the emphasis on profit by the health insurance firms. The money paid by the insurance industry to physicians, hospitals, and pharmacies for treating insured patients is referred to as “medical loss.”

That is, when health insurance actually pays for somebody’s health care, the industry considers it a loss....Insurance executives, securities analysts, and the business media carefully watch each company’s medical loss ratio to make sure that the actual medical payments don’t eat too deeply into administrative costs and profits. According to their filings with the Securities and Exchange Commission, most for-profit insurance companies maintain a medical loss ratio of about 80 percent, *which is to say that 20 cents of every dollar people pay in premiums for health insurance doesn’t buy any health care* (emphasis added). (Reid, 2009:37)

## Does the High Cost of Health Care Translate into Good Health Consequences?

With the United States spending more per capita on health care than any other country, it seems reasonable to expect that Americans would be the healthiest people on Earth, yet Americans do not fare as well as those in Western Europe, Scandinavia, Canada, and Japan. Consider the following:

- The Social Progress Index 2015 ranks the United States 68th out of 133 in health and wellness (The Social Progress Imperative, 2015).
- The Commonwealth Fund ranks the United States as the worst of the developed countries on “avoidable mortality.” Compared to six other industrialized countries, the United States comes in last in terms of health care quality, efficiency, access to care, and equity (The Commonwealth Fund, 2016).
- The United States ranks forty-third in average life expectancy (Central Intelligence Agency, 2015).
- The United States ranks 167th (out of 224 countries) in keeping newborns alive. The **infant mortality rate** (babies who die within one year of birth) for the United States is more than twice as high as the rate in the top-ranked countries.

Christopher Murray, a physician and health economist at Harvard, summarized the meaning of these last three rankings: “Basically you die earlier and spend more time disabled if you’re an American rather than a member of most other advanced societies” (quoted in Reid, 2009:244).

So even though Americans spend more on health care than any other country, that spending does not translate into higher-quality care or better health outcomes. Furthermore, within the United States, we find great disparities in health outcomes based on social class, race, and gender, which we turn to in the next section.

### Infant mortality rate

Number of deaths before age 1 per 1,000 live births.

## Unequal Access to Health Care

### 16.2 Explain how access to health care varies by social class, race, and gender.

In examining the structure of a society and any of its institutions, the analyst of social problems asks, who benefits and who suffers from the way it is organized? When health care delivery is the focus, the answer to this question is clear: Glaring inequities result in some categories of people being less healthy than others. Our examination of this structural inequity focuses on the three fundamental structures of inequality—class, race, and gender—which are key determinants of health (i.e., the distribution of health and disease) and health care delivery (i.e., the distribution of treatment). These structures of inequality make a difference, not surprisingly, with the already advantaged being advantaged even more and the already disadvantaged being disadvantaged further.

### Social Class

Economic disadvantage is closely associated with health disadvantages. Put another way, how people live and die depends in large measure on the social class to which they belong. The poor are more likely than the affluent to suffer from certain forms of cancer (cancers of the lung, cervix, and esophagus), hypertension, low birth weight, hearing loss, diabetes, and infectious diseases (especially influenza and tuberculosis).

The physical health of poor people is more likely to be impaired than is the health of the more well-to-do because of differences in diet, sanitation, shelter, exposure to environmental hazards (e.g., air pollution, lead, untreated water), unsafe work conditions, medical treatment, and lifestyle. Regarding lifestyle, for instance, the lower a person's social class, the more likely he or she uses tobacco. Child health, as another example, varies by family income.

An obvious health advantage of the affluent is access to health-promoting and health-protecting resources and, when needed, access to medical services, typically paid for, at least in part, with health insurance. The lower the prestige and the lower the wages in the job, the less likely the pay will include a health benefits package provided by an employer.

The uninsured, of course, cannot afford the costs for physicians, dentists, and hospitals, so they often do without. Poor pregnant women, for example, often do not receive prenatal and postnatal health care. The consequences are a relatively high maternal death rate (typically from hemorrhage and infection) and a relatively high infant mortality rate. Ironically, when the uninsured go to a doctor, they pay more for services than the more well-to-do insured patients. The reason is that health insurance companies insist on discounts. The result is that a doctor may charge \$25 for a routine exam insured by a group insurance plan but charge \$175 for the same exam for a person without insurance (see “Social Problems in Global Perspective: The More Equal the Society, the Healthier the Citizens”).

Millions of poor people in the United States are treated under Medicaid, but there are serious problems with this program. Many physicians refuse to treat Medicaid patients because they receive less reimbursement for their services. This results in delayed medical attention and then typically in hospital emergency room visits, where such patients cannot be turned away. This overburdens hospitals and postpones treatment, as patients often must wait many hours before being seen by a physician.

## Social Problems in Global Perspective

### The More Equal the Society, the Healthier the Citizens

British health researchers Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett (2010), citing reams of research findings, make a provocative argument that among rich industrialized societies, the most equal societies are healthier than the more unequal ones. Put another way, the wealthiest and most unequal societies score lower than the more equal societies on every measure of health, happiness, and well-being (Conniff, 2010).

It's not just that the poor are better off in the more equal societies (such as the Scandinavian countries, Netherlands, Japan), but people in all income levels in these societies are. Conversely, rich people and poor people are less healthy in the more unequal countries. In the United States, for example, the culture based on competitiveness and individualism assaults the affluent, causing higher rates than in the more equal countries of hypertension, diabetes, heart disease, and mental disorders such as depression, anxiety, and alcohol addiction.

Wilkinson and Pickett say:

The [health and social] problems in rich countries are not caused by the society not being rich enough (or even by being too rich) but by the scale of material differences between people within each society being too big. What matters is where we stand in relation to others in our own society. (2010:25)

The evidence shows that reducing inequality is the best way of improving the quality of the social environment, and so the real quality of life, for all of us....National standards of health...are substantially determined by the amount of inequality in a society. If you want to know why one country does better or worse than another, the first thing to look at is the extent of inequality. (29–30)

Even when the poor do go to physicians, hospitals, and clinics, they are more likely than the more affluent to receive inferior services. The poor are more likely to receive care in inadequate (in number of staff and quality of equipment) health care facilities. Without medical insurance, they are relegated to crowded emergency departments staffed by overworked nurses and physicians. Poor communities have fewer hospitals, and the quality of those hospitals is lower than in more affluent communities. Research shows, for example, that the best-performing hospitals are concentrated in higher-income counties. Consequently, heart patients in wealthier communities have a better chance of getting recommended treatments at their local hospitals than do patients in lower-income areas.

In sum, the privileged have better access to and make better use of the health care system. Early intervention at the onset of a disease and medical management of a chronic illness affect both the survival rates and the quality of life. The fewer the economic resources, the less likely a person will receive preventive care and early treatment. This is because medicine in U.S. society is a market commodity and thus is dispensed unequally to the people who can afford it.

### Race/Ethnicity

To examine health outcomes by race implies that there are biological differences among the races. Since race is a socially constructed concept rather than biologically based, the differences in health outcomes by race are, almost entirely, a consequence of disproportionate poverty and discriminatory treatment.

Racial/ethnic minorities in the United States are disproportionately poor (e.g., about one in four Latinos and African Americans live below the poverty line). This fact combined with racial discrimination leads to unfavorable patterns of health and health care delivery for them. Let's examine some of these health differences by race.

**LIFE EXPECTANCY** Perhaps the best illustration of the difference that race makes on health is in life expectancy. The life expectancy for African American males in 2013 was 4.7 years less than for White males, and for Black females it is 3.1 years less than for White females (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014).

**INFANT MORTALITY** The rate of infant mortality in the United States reveals striking differences by race. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2014), the Black infant mortality rate in 2013 (11.22 per 1,000 live births) was more than twice the White rate (5.07 per 1,000). Native Americans also had a relatively high rate of 7.6 per 1,000 live births. The infant mortality rate may be correlated with factors such as prenatal care and low birth weight. There is a substantial racial disparity in early prenatal care, with about nine of ten White mothers receiving it, compared to about three of four Latino and African American mothers. Low birth weight is closely related to two factors: mothers not receiving adequate prenatal care and/or prospective mothers smoking during pregnancy. African Americans have a low birth weight rate of 13.2 percent, compared to 7 percent for non-Hispanic Whites.

**HEART DISEASE** Heart disease in all its forms is the nation's leading cause of death. The evidence is that Black men are twice as likely as White men to die from heart disease before the age of 65. Overall, the national death rate from heart disease for African American men is 841 per 100,000 compared to 666 White men. A study of a national sample of 237,000 Medicare patients from 1999 through 2005 found that Black patients are less likely to receive implantable heart devices than White patients (reported in Rubin, 2007).

**CANCER** The death rate from cancer is about three and one-half times greater for Black males than for White males. The rate for Black women is also higher than it is for White women. The problem, generally, is that African Americans (and Latinos) are more likely to be diagnosed with cancer in its later stages, making survival less likely. This, of course, is not because of race per se but because of the greater likelihood that African Americans and Latinos are poor and uninsured.



The infant mortality rate in the United States is more than twice as high as the rate in the countries with the lowest rate.



The cancer rate is higher for African Americans than Whites for all cancers except stomach cancer and breast cancer. Once cancer is detected in both Blacks and Whites, Whites have a much higher survival rate. Overall, Asian American women are much less likely than White or Black women to develop breast cancer, and their five-year survival rate is the best.

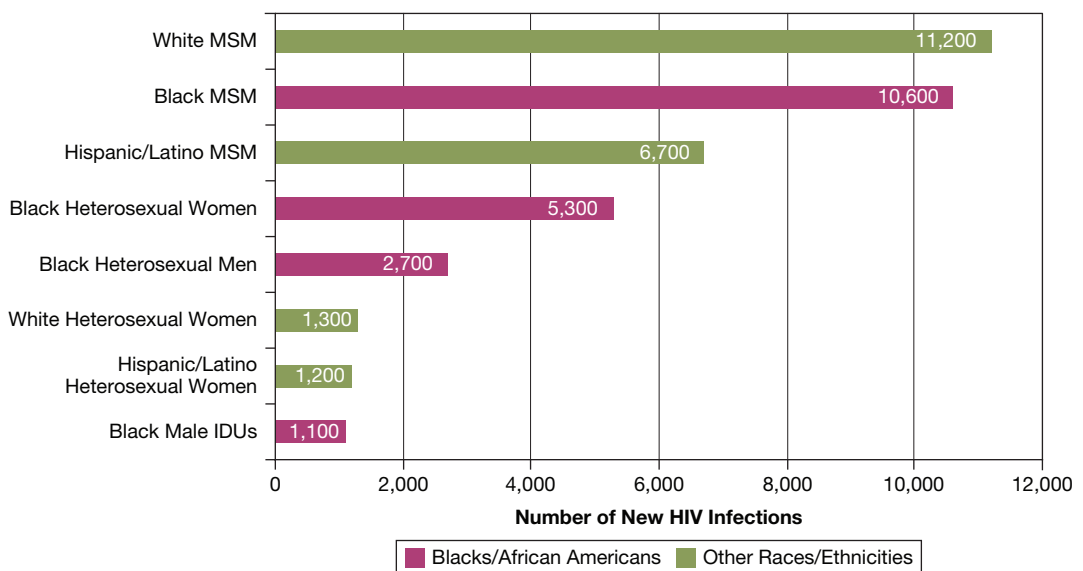
**COMMUNICABLE DISEASES** The diseases especially found among the poor (e.g., influenza, pneumonia, and tuberculosis) are disproportionately found among African Americans and Hispanics because they are disproportionately poor. Tuberculosis occurs fourteen times more frequently among African Americans than Whites, and it is four times more likely to occur among Hispanics than Whites. Native Americans are four times more likely to die from tuberculosis and dysentery than are non-Native Americans.

Since the killer HIV/AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) epidemic began in 1981, the worldwide death toll is 39 million people. According to the World Health Organization, 35 million people were living with HIV at the end of 2013 worldwide. Having HIV is no longer a death sentence, however, because new drugs are available that are effective in preventing HIV from becoming AIDS. The problem is that these new drugs go only to those who can afford them, and to a fortunate few who are poor but live in states with generous assistance, resulting in the benefits disproportionately going to those with class and racial privilege. Especially hard hit are minority men and women (see Figure 16.2). Consider the following facts for the United States (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012):

**Figure 16.2** Estimates of New HIV Infections in the United States for the Most-Affected Subpopulations, 2010

**SOURCE:** Centers for Disease Control. "HIV in the United States: Factsheets." <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/group/raciaethnic/africanamericans/index.html>

**NOTE:** Subpopulations representing 2% or less of HIV diagnoses are not reflected in this chart. Abbreviation: MSM, men who have sex with men.



- Although African Americans make up about 13 percent of the population, they account for about half (46 percent) of all people in the United States who live with HIV.
- HIV/AIDS is the leading cause of death for Blacks 25 to 44 years of age (the fifth leading cause of death for Whites and the fourth leading cause for Latinos).
- The number of people with HIV per 100,000 population in 2010 was 15.3 for Whites, 44.7 for Latinos, and 116.0 for African Americans.
- Two-thirds of new infections among women occur in Black women. In 2010, the rate of new AIDS cases for Black women was twenty times that of White women and five times greater than the infection rate for Latinas.

## Gender

The health of women and the health care they receive reflect primarily their status in society and only secondarily their physiological differences from men. Women do have significant health advantages over men; for example, their life expectancy exceeds that of males by about seven years. These advantages begin in the womb, where female fetuses have a 10 percent higher survival rate than male fetuses. These advantages continue after birth and throughout the life cycle, as male death rates exceed female death rates at all ages. Women are less likely than men to die from the leading causes of death, including heart disease, cancer, accidents, suicide, and homicide (the only exceptions are death from diabetes and Alzheimer's).

There are both biological and social reasons for some of the health advantages that women have over men. During early childhood, girls have biological benefits over boys, as exhibited by their greater resistance to infectious and chronic diseases. As adults, women in the past were more protected than were men, at least until menopause, especially from heart disease and hypertension, because of the hormone estrogen. Also due to monthly fertility cycles and childbearing, women are more likely to see a physician regularly or be admitted into a hospital than are men.

More important than the biological differences between the sexes are the significant social differences that also account for gender differences in health. The adolescent and young adult male gender role includes being assertive and daring. This accounts for the greater likelihood of males being in automobile accidents (five out of seven victims of traffic accidents are men), driving while drunk, and using more alcohol (men are three times as likely to be alcoholics), illegal drugs, and cigarettes (recently, however, the number of women who smoke is increasing, so the difference between men and women is converging). Males also are more likely than females to work in dangerous jobs (including military combat).

Women on average are less likely than men to have medical insurance. This is because they are more likely than men to work at part-time jobs or do contingent work, thus not qualifying for employer-supplied health insurance. Also, insurance coverage for women stops under their husbands' policies when they are widowed or divorced. These disadvantages are strongest for women between ages 45 and 64 (before they qualify for Medicare) and especially for African American and Latina women in this age category (about 35 percent of women compared with two-thirds of men). As a result, millions of women are too poor to buy health insurance but earn too much to get public aid.

Whether one has health insurance is literally a matter of life and death. Using the example of breast cancer, researchers have found that uninsured women are less likely to receive cancer-screening services than are women with private insurance, less likely to have their breast cancer adequately evaluated, less likely to get regular mammograms, and less likely to have their breast cancer aggressively treated (Jackson, 2006).

Women face two major health risks. One is childbearing, which can be unhealthy, even deadly, for mothers. The other health risk is a consequence of traditional gender roles. Because women in U.S. society are evaluated by their physical appearance, they are much more likely than men to suffer from anorexia nervosa and bulimia (conditions that result when individuals take extraordinary measures to lose weight). Women are also much more likely than men to risk surgery for cosmetic reasons (liposuction, breast implants or reduction, and facelifts), which may have negative health effects.

The advantage women have over men in mortality rates is overshadowed by the advantages men receive from the medical profession. First, males dominate the medical schools and the medical profession. Women in medicine are vastly overrepresented in the nurturing, supportive, underpaid, and relatively powerless roles of nurse and aide, or if they are physicians, they are most likely to be in general practice or specialize in pediatrics.

Second, until 1990, when the government confirmed that women had been intentionally left out of federally funded medical research, much medical research has excluded women as subjects. For example, the major study on whether taking daily doses of aspirin can reduce the risk of a heart attack used 22,071 subjects—all men. In most cases, a drug proved effective in men is also effective for women. But the differences in hormone proportions and the menstrual cycle can be important. In the aspirin study, it would have been useful to determine whether taking aspirin prevents heart attacks in premenopausal women, in only postmenopausal women, or not in any women. Another study used 12,866 male subjects to explore the links between heart disease and high cholesterol, lack of exercise, and smoking. By excluding women from the study, the medical profession has no clear scientific proof whether the linkages among these variables found for men also occur for women.

The National Women's Health Resource Center has noted that other major health studies have overlooked women. As in the aspirin and heart disease studies, research using only male subjects has studied diet, exercise, and cholesterol; Type A behavior and heart disease; binge drinking; and alcohol and blood pressure.

Third, research appears to put women's health priorities second to men's. For example, the National Institutes of Health has spent much less of its research budget on women's health care issues than on men's issues. Perhaps this explains why medical research has yet to come up with an acceptable, safe, and effective male contraceptive. This deficiency has meant that women have had to bear the responsibilities and health risks of contraception. This oversight in medical research is gradually being rectified. Recent research has uncovered genes linked to hereditary breast cancer, made advances in the prevention of osteoporosis, and created drugs to fight ovarian cancer.

Fourth, female patients interacting with male physicians encounter a number of sexist practices. These include paternalistic attitudes; insensitivity toward the special problems of women surrounding the menstrual cycle, childbirth (see "Voices: Does the Doctor's Gender Matter?"), and menopause; siding with husbands who were

## Voices

### Does the Doctor's Gender Matter?

[A] female OB or a female nurse can sympathize a little more with what you are going through than a male.... [Male attendants] could possibly watch their wives go through it, but they don't know what it's like exactly.

—TRICIA, WHITE MOTHER OF TWO

I wanted to be sure to be heard, and I know with medicine, being a child of a physician, I just [know] at times that women's concerns can be seen as over-reactive, exaggerating, unfounded concerns.

—TONYA, AFRICAN AMERICAN MOTHER OF ONE

You know, when I said to her, "Gee, this really hurts over here," she could relate to it. With a guy, it was kind of like, "It's all just in your mind." She really could relate to everything. And her personality was wonderful, and she had a great bedside manner. She listened to your questions.

—JILL, WHITE MOTHER OF TWO

These women's comments exemplify many others' feelings about women as doctors.\* A 1996 study of women's childbirth experiences in a mid-Atlantic state found that the gender of the doctor did affect many women's reproductive experiences. Eight (or 42 percent) of nineteen interviewees specifically chose female doctors. Some explained that they had had prior bad experiences with male OB-GYNs or intimates and thus had switched to female doctors at some point. Other women specifically wanted a doctor who should be "more caring," hinting that feelings and emotions during pregnancy and childbirth were important. Others explained that they wanted to be on more "equal footing" with their attendant.

Vicki, a mother of two from England, recounted her experience with a male OB-GYN:

Yeah, he basically gave me no information. When I asked him about birth courses, you know, ... he told me to go to the birthing course at the hospital. And [the class] was mostly on drugs, it was very strange. And he patted me on the head and said, "I'll handle it, don't you worry about a thing." And I didn't like that, and I didn't want any part of it [the second time].

The authoritative medical knowledge that this doctor held supposedly gave him the right to withhold certain types of information from Vicki, leaving her with little knowledge of what would happen during birth. He assumed that Vicki would be comfortable simply allowing him to "handle it." The desire to be heard and informed is also evident in this next woman's response:

Just from the different experiences I've had, [female doctors will] sit down and listen to you more, they'll understand your concerns, or they'll answer questions you might not have thought of that they've known.... Just in general, they seem more, not more caring or sympathetic, just open to other ideas, instead of being a leader person. (Heidi, White mother of three)

The fact that female doctors often have had their own birthing experiences was an additional reason to choose them, for experience was equated with greater competency, knowledge, and understanding of the birth process. Thus, female doctors brought comfort for many women on many levels. Stephanie, a White mother of two, stated: "You have a lot going on, you know, they're prodding and poking you and I just felt—because I'm a modest person—I just knew that I would be more comfortable with a female [doctor]." Rachel, a White mother of one, stated that

\*All names of women have been changed to ensure confidentiality.

she “would be more comfortable [asking a] myriad of questions with a woman. I felt that I could get a little bit more of an insight especially because [my doctor] had had children as well.” And Natasha, another White mother of one, suggested that she was not comfortable “talking about this kind of stuff to begin with, so I have a hard time talking about this stuff even with a woman. I probably would have been red in the face the whole time talking to a man.”

In contrast to the situations explained here, women who received prenatal care from male doctors did not necessarily “choose” the gender of their doctor. Of

those who had male doctors, only three out of eleven (approximately 25 percent) stated that the gender of their doctor mattered to them. Thus, we can assume that the rest of the women interviewed simply followed a pre-established model for birth (perhaps going to doctors whom relatives or friends recommended), which included birth in a hospital setting with a male doctor in charge. If gender did matter to a woman, then she was more likely to seek out a female doctor.

**SOURCE:** Dillaway, Heather E. “Does the Doctor’s Gender Matter?” Copyright 2000. This essay was written expressly for Social Problems. Used with permission.

leery of vasectomies and performing, rather, tubal ligations on wives, even though the cost and medical risk were much greater; and requiring more specific tests for men than for women during diagnostic examinations. Another example of male physicians’ insensitivity to women often occurs during an unwanted pregnancy. Many male physicians often consider women’s interests secondary to fetal survival.

In sum, in the United States one’s experience with the health care system is largely dependent on one’s social class, race, and gender. The more advantaged you are, the better access to quality care you will have.

## The Health Care System in the United States Prior to the 2010 Affordable Care Act

### 16.3 Describe the characteristics of the health care system in the United States that led to the 2010 reform.

The Affordable Health Care Act (also known as “ObamaCare”) was passed in 2010. The push for health care reform came from what has been labeled a “health care crisis”—growing numbers of the uninsured, ever-increasing costs, and increasing profits for health care corporations. Let’s examine more closely the health care system prior to the Affordable Care Act.

The health care system in the United States has three unique characteristics. First, there are separate health systems for different categories of people. Second, the system relies heavily on for-profit private insurance to pay the bills and for-profit hospitals to care for the sick. And, third, the system is dominated by privately owned managed care.

### Different Plans for Different Categories of People

Each of the advanced nations has one health program for its people. The United States, in sharp contrast, maintains separate systems for different categories of people.

**THE PLAN FOR WORKERS** Health insurance is linked to employment for most working people under age 65. That is, the worker and the employer share the premiums for a health insurance policy (in 2011, the cost for a family plan for a family of

four amounted to a premium of \$4,129 for the worker and \$10,944 for the employer). But there are problems with this employer-based insurance coverage. Prior to the 2010 reform, employers were not required to provide health insurance for their employees. Indeed, the proportion of employers including a health care package declined from 80 percent of all companies in 1991 to 60 percent in 2011. If not dropping health insurance coverage, some employers require employees to pay a larger proportion of the premiums or pay higher deductibles for coverage. Employers have also reduced their health costs by employing more part-time workers and independent contractors because they do not receive any benefits. Finally, basing insurance on employment means that when someone becomes unemployed or leaves an employer to work for another, he or she loses the coverage previously held.

#### **THE PLAN FOR NATIVE AMERICANS, MILITARY PERSONNEL, AND VETERANS**

For certain categories of people, health care is provided and financed by the federal government. Native Americans receive free care in government clinics. Those in the active military are cared for as needed. The Department of Veterans Affairs owns and operates clinics and hospitals for military veterans. Health practitioners in these settings are government employees. The cost of health care for these selected categories is free for those who qualify.

**THE PLAN FOR THOSE 65 AND OVER** The government has a near universal health plan for the elderly—**Medicare**. This system covers about 45 million elderly and people with disabilities of any age. Workers pay a payroll tax for Medicare, and the government pays for most of their health expenses when they become eligible.

#### **Medicare**

Government program that provides partial coverage of medical costs primarily for people age 65 and older.

**THE PLAN FOR THE UNINSURED** The uninsured have access to medical care if they can pay the bills out-of-pocket at the time of treatment. The other alternative is to go to the emergency room in a hospital, as hospitals are required to attend to the medical needs of the indigent.

**THE PLAN FOR THE POOR** **Medicaid** is the government health program for the very poor (and also for those with permanent disabilities). The federal government and each state fund it jointly. Each state administers its version of Medicaid, thus Medicaid varies among states in quality, eligibility of patients, coverage, and the adequacy of fees for the services of physicians and hospitals.

#### **Medicaid**

Government health program for the poor.

## Private Insurance

The health care system for most Americans depends on the health insurance industry. Health insurance is a necessity. However, 49.9 million people—16.3 percent of the population—were uninsured in 2010, which means that they were essentially left outside the health care system. The large number of uninsured Americans was a driving factor in the push for health care reform.

Because the health insurance firms are for-profit entities, they use various techniques to enhance their profits. Raising rates is the most common one. Other profit-enhancing tactics are:

- They hire armies of adjusters and investigators to examine claims looking for reasons to deny payment.
- They apply “rescission,” which is the legal term for “We’re canceling your coverage.” This occurs, typically, when an insured person, because of injury or disease,

requires long-term, expensive care. The justification for cancellation may be that the individual's problem is the result of being overweight, having a risky lifestyle, or not following doctor's orders.

- They do not insure people with a "preexisting condition." In other words, they refuse to insure the very people who need their services the most.

The Affordable Care Act, which we discuss in the next section, incorporates provisions to correct all of these profit-enhancing techniques by insurance companies.

Without health insurance, bad things happen. Some examples: A Harvard study found that uninsured patients with traumatic injuries were almost twice as likely to die in the hospital as similarly injured patients with health insurance (Gawande et al., 2009). Lack of health insurance kills 45,000 adults a year, according to a study by the *American Journal of Public Health*. "More Americans die of lack of health insurance than terrorism, homicide, drunk driving, and HIV combined" (Sklar, 2009:15). And, according to a Harvard University study, more than 62 percent of all personal bankruptcies are the result of overwhelming medical expenses (cited in Keller, 2011).

## For-Profit Hospitals

Traditionally, hospitals in the United States have been nonprofit organizations run by religious organizations, universities, and municipalities. Since the mid-1960s, however, private profit-oriented hospitals and hospital chains have emerged, and they have grown rapidly through mergers and acquisitions. These transactions, plus the explosive growth of outpatient centers, have resulted in a reduction of available hospital beds and the number of hospitals.

Also, after a merger or acquisition, the new company can purge its rolls of costly customers or, at a minimum, force them to pay steep premium hikes. This corporate strategy, which is detrimental to many patients, is, however, in compliance with the insurance laws in most states.

In addition to downsizing in the hospital industry, there has been a simultaneous process of concentration of ownership. For example, Columbia/HCA Health Care Corporation, the world's largest for-profit hospital chain, owned, at the end of 2006, some 173 hospitals, 107 outpatient diagnostic and surgery centers, and hundreds of nursing homes, home care units, blood centers, and psychiatric facilities. Columbia's strategy has been to purchase nonprofit hospitals, creating quasi-monopolies. They then slash basic services and increase the price of services to boost profits.

A number of strategies are employed by the for-profit hospitals to optimize profits. They avoid low-income areas by locating in states and neighborhoods with well-insured populations. Often they build hospitals without emergency departments, neonatal intensive units, or burn units because such facilities often lose money. For-profit hospitals have a special interest in minimizing their care for emergency patients because emergency facilities attract Medicaid and charity cases, and federal law requires that hospitals must care for all emergencies, even if the patients have no insurance. Thus, hospitals without emergency departments or with inadequate emergency facilities can avoid having to provide treatment for little or no reimbursement.

Private hospitals treat people who can afford their services, often leaving aside those who cannot. This practice is called **patient dumping**. These practices help the hospital's bottom line, but they do not help the poor who need specialized care. Also,

### Patient dumping

Practice by physicians and private hospitals of treating only patients who can afford their services.

patient dumping decreases the quality of care at public hospitals because it increases overcrowding and increases the demand on the limited resources of public hospitals. The practice of patient dumping also indirectly increases the profits of private hospitals by increasing the desire of many of the affluent to choose them over public hospitals.

Another strategy to increase profits is to purchase all the nonprofit hospitals in an area, creating a monopoly—and with a monopoly comes higher prices for services. Still other organizations purchase hospitals that are nonunion, which allows them to keep salaries and wages relatively low. They can also skimp on the quality of supplies, the level of cleanliness, and the level of staffing. Thus, as private, profit-seeking interests increasingly own hospitals, the cost of medical care has increased.

To summarize, proponents of for-profit hospitals argue that they are more efficient than nonprofits. Critics counter that they charge more, provide less charitable care, and have lower personnel costs because of lower patient-staff ratios (Budrys, 2012:40).

## Managed Care Networks

Doctors used to practice alone or in a small group of doctors, treating patients, setting fees, and billing patients. Now 93 percent of medical school graduates will become employees of large clinics, managed care companies, or hospital systems (the following depends on Glasser, 2009). We focus here on the surge to managed care systems that began in the 1970s. This shift to physicians as employees has important implications for the doctor–patient relationship. The relationship has become depersonalized. In the past the focus was on knowing one’s patients and, in a small practice, knowing one another’s patients. Patients in managed care, in contrast, often do not see the same physician. The human relationship between doctor and patient has evaporated.

The care you get—and how long you get it—is only the care your health plan will reimburse your doctor for.... Personal knowledge and concern have evaporated in the world of employee–physicians, replaced by cookie-cutter best-practice guidelines and rules on prescribing drugs, acceptable lengths of hospital stays and the number of clinic patients a doctor must see per hour.

And why not? Everyone in medicine knows that these are no longer the physician’s patients. They belong to the insurance companies, the health plans, the hospitals. With that understanding comes personal indifference and professional exhaustion. (Glasser, 2009:24)

The implication is that managed care has taken management of patients’ health away from physicians and put it in the hands of ancillary personnel in corporate headquarters. Thus, physicians in managed care networks no longer have the freedom to practice what they believe is the best medicine for their patients.

Managed care networks, as in other profit-oriented medical entities, seek to enhance the bottom line by maximizing the number of healthy and insured patients while restricting the number who are sick. In other words, the sickest patient is a cost center to be avoided. This is accomplished by **medlining** (the practice in health care of avoiding the sick, similar to the practice of redlining, the practice in lending and insurance of avoiding deteriorating neighborhoods or racial minority neighborhoods).

### Medlining

Practice of managed care organizations of limiting the number of patients with health problems while maximizing the number of healthy patients.





There are many public misconceptions about the Affordable Care Act of 2010.

## Reforming the Health Care System of the United States

### 16.4 Understand the Affordable Care Act of 2010.

The United States is the only developed nation without some form of universal health care. There have been attempts to reform the U.S. health care system going back to 1912, but they have all failed. Teddy Roosevelt campaigned for a national health care plan in 1912, but Woodrow Wilson defeated him. In 1915, Congress debated a bill providing for universal medical coverage, but when the United States declared war with Germany in 1917, the issue died. In 1935, President Franklin D. Roosevelt passed the Social Security Act. This legislation originally included health care reform but it was dropped because it was considered too divisive. In 1943, Congress considered a bill to establish a national medical care and hospitalization fund, but it failed to pass. In 1949, President Harry Truman called for the creation of a national health insurance plan, but the American Medical Association denounced it as “socialized medicine” and when war broke out with North Korea, it was abandoned. In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson sought to enact universal health care. He dropped the universal aspect of it but was able to establish Medicare and Medicaid. In 1974, President Richard Nixon proposed a version of national health care similar to the Obama proposal of 2009, but the Watergate scandal intervened and it did not survive. In 1976, President Carter pushed for a mandatory health plan, but an economic recession derailed it. In 1986, President Reagan signed COBRA, a requirement that employers allow former workers to stay on the company health plan for eighteen months after leaving a job. President Bill Clinton in 1993 presented a national health care plan to Congress that required businesses to cover their workers and mandated everyone to have health insurance, but it failed to pass. Then in 2009, President Obama, faced with a dysfunctional system, made the overhaul of the health care system his primary goal.

One medling strategy is to not have physicians who treat severe conditions (e.g., cardiologists) in the network. Similarly, when building clinics or recruiting doctors, the managed care network can limit exposure to the chronically sick by seeking those in affluent locales, where the incidence of AIDS and tuberculosis, for example, is low.

In sum, the United States health care system is flawed, inefficient, and wasteful. Most important, the for-profit system that prevails in the United States lacks a social mission and it is more responsive to Wall Street than to Main Street.

## The Politics of Health Reform

During 2009 and 2010, the members of Congress engaged in heated debate over health reform. The sides coalesced into two contentious factions—Democrats generally favoring change and Republicans blocking reform measures with unanimous opposition. Undergirding the arguments was a basic philosophical issue: Is the organization of health care a concern of government (the Democratic position), or should it be left to the marketplace (the Republican position)? At a practical level, roughly \$2.6 trillion, the amount spent on health care annually, was at stake. The division of that money was at the center of the debate. Insurance and pharmaceutical companies feared losing their profits. Doctors, hospitals, and managed care networks were concerned about their futures. Individuals and families worried about how changing the system would affect their pocketbooks as well as the quality of health care they would receive. In short, there were interest groups with a huge stake in the status quo. The result was a bitter struggle, with a variety of tactics employed by the forces for and against changing the health care system. We focus here on the efforts opposing reform.

**INFLUENCING THE PUBLIC** Interest groups on all sides of the health care debate spent more than \$210 million on television advocacy advertising in 2009 (Seelye, 2010). An orchestrated campaign was also waged by conservative commentators such as Rush Limbaugh and media outlets such as Fox News to persuade the public that Obama and the Democrats were leading the country down a wrong and dangerous path, with an ever-greater government intrusion into the lives of individual Americans. Among their arguments were that the government overreach was tantamount to losing freedom, that it would subsidize abortion, that it would lead to “death panels” composed of Washington bureaucrats, and that it would be too costly.

The efforts by those opposed to health care reform were successful in turning public opinion against reform and in turning some people such as Tea Partiers into rabid opponents. The signs at their rallies showed Obama as Hitler, displayed communist symbols such as the hammer and sickle, and stated: “Obamacare: Socialized Medicine,” “Obama Lies and Granny Dies,” “No Socialism—No Death Panels!”, “Obama Care: Goodbye to Old People!”, and “Congress Ain’t My Doctor.”

**INFLUENCING CONGRESS** In 2009, there were 3,098 health-sector lobbyists in Washington—nearly six for each member of Congress. Their efforts were intended to either block reform legislation or to shape the resulting legislation to maintain their advantage (Sklar, 2009). The nonpartisan Center for Responsive Politics found that the federal lobbying by health and health insurance industries amounted to \$648 million in 2009, the most money ever by a business sector for federal lobbying (cited in Seelye, 2010). One interested industry, the pharmaceutical and health products industry, spent \$266.8 million on lobbying in 2009, an all-time record for a single industry (Jackson, 2010).

Another tactic to influence the final composition of health care legislation was funneling money to key legislators. Nearly 60 percent of the health care industry’s campaign contributions to members of Congress went to lawmakers sitting on five powerful committees where the health reform legislation was crafted. The hope behind these contributions was that the influential legislators would form the legislation to their advantage. Max Baucus, for example, chair of the Senate Finance Committee, was the leading recipient of Senate campaign contributions from the

hospitals, insurers, and other medical interest groups, receiving \$1.5 million in 2007 and 2008 (Eggen, 2009).

**LEGISLATIVE BLOCKAGE BY THE MINORITY** The Republicans, as the minority party in both houses of Congress, agreed on a strategy of total opposition to health reform. For example, when the Senate voted on a crucial health care bill on Christmas Eve 2009, not a single Republican voted in favor. In the 435-seat House, only one Republican broke ranks. There were two roots to this negativism. For some, opposition was based on principle: that it was wrongheaded to go with a government plan rather than let the marketplace determine health care. For others, their extreme partisanship was political—to deny Obama a major victory (Klein, 2010:21).

Also, the Republicans in the Senate used the rules of that body such as the filibuster to block health reform legislation. The rules require sixty votes to stop a filibuster by the minority party, and the Republicans used this to block change (*Nation*, 2009:3).

## Affordable Care Act/ObamaCare

Because the Democrats controlled both houses of Congress, different bills reforming health care passed in the House and in the Senate. The final bill that emerged from a conference committee did not provide universal health insurance through a single-payer plan, which dismayed progressives. However, it did increase the role of government in the health care system, which upset conservatives. The Affordable Health Care Act (also known as “ObamaCare”) was passed in 2010, and despite more than 50 repeal attempts by the House and Senate, the Supreme Court ruled in 2012 and 2015 to uphold the Affordable Care Act as law.

ObamaCare (a name embraced by President Obama) is legislation with these changes to the status quo:

- There is a mandate that everyone take out health insurance, just as drivers are legally required to have car insurance or pay a fine. The government will subsidize people with low incomes, covering their premiums through expanded Medicaid coverage or tax credits. The rationale for the mandate is twofold: to protect people from the consequences of going unprotected and to prevent society from having to pay for the health costs of the uninsured (Coy, 2012).
- Individuals can keep their existing insurance plans if they choose.
- Exchanges were created on which small businesses and people who buy their own coverage directly from insurers could choose from an array of private plans that would compete for their business (called the Health Insurance Marketplace).
- A Medicare oversight board was created with authority over reimbursement rates.
- There is security for those who are laid off or change employers, or switch to employers that do not offer insurance, as they are now guaranteed coverage.
- Individuals cannot be denied coverage for a preexisting medical condition or because their medical bills are too expensive.
- Insurance companies are blocked from putting lifetime caps on coverage.
- Young adults are covered by their parents’ policy until age 26.

According to the Act, beginning in 2014: (1) Almost everyone is required to have insurance or pay a fine. This sounds ominous, but it affects only 7 percent of

the population, and most of them will be eligible for subsidies to help purchase their coverage (Urban Institute study, reported in Pugh, 2012); (2) businesses employing more than fifty employees face fines if they do not offer coverage for their employees; (3) newly created insurance markets make it easier for individuals and small businesses to purchase affordable coverage; (4) insurance companies are now limited to spending no more than 15 cents out of every dollar on non-medical costs (overhead); (5) insurers are prohibited from denying adults and children coverage or from charging them more if they have preexisting health problems; (6) health insurance is expanded to include psychiatric disorders; and (7) the Medicaid system is expanded to include all people within 133 percent of the poverty line.

The Supreme Court addressed this last point when it ruled that the federal government could not deny funds to the states for their existing Medicaid programs if they rejected the expansion of Medicaid called for under the Affordable Health Care Act. In effect, the states cannot be compelled to expand Medicaid; that is, they are free to choose to not cover all of their low-income residents through their Medicaid programs (Starr, 2012). Some states, whose leadership is hostile to this health care legislation, will likely refuse to comply. Rick Perry, the Texas governor, for example, refused to enlarge the Texas Medicaid program, arguing that it would make "Texas a mere appendage of the federal government when it comes to health care." By opting out, Texas chose to not cover the 6.2 million poor people, including 1.2 million children, who lacked health insurance (Fernandez, 2012). If a few states opt out of the Medicaid expansion, there will be a gap from state to state in coverage. The poor in the South and much of the Midwest will be denied the benefits of other states.

**WHAT THE PLAN IS NOT** There appear to be many misunderstandings regarding ObamaCare. First, the Affordable Health Care Act is not socialism. If it were, the government would provide the health insurance, own the hospitals, and hire health professionals as employees. The government regulates and subsidizes health insurance, but it is not a takeover of the American health care system. Although considered in the legislative process, a public option is not included in the final bill. This would have allowed the government to compete with private insurance, thus providing more competition, lower rates, and more government intrusion in the marketplace. In short, the plan keeps health care as a mostly private system.

The plan does not hurt the commercial health insurers. Although constrained by no longer being able to turn away costly patients, health insurers benefit by an increased number of insured people because everyone is required to have insurance, and they do not have to compete with government insurance.

**THE BIG PICTURE** The Supreme Court's ruling to uphold ObamaCare moved the United States closer to other advanced industrial societies that guarantee health insurance to their citizens. Not perfectly, since millions are still uninsured. But clearly the Act, validated by the Supreme Court, was a move in that direction.

The Affordable Health Care Act affirmed the high value that Americans have for equality of opportunity as it did do much to help the disadvantaged (children, young adults, women, the very poor, those suffering from chronic medical conditions, and those uninsured by their employers). Since enrollment began, the share of uninsured

Americans has dropped from 15.5 percent to 11.7 percent, meaning almost 9 million Americans have insurance that did not have it in 2013 (Banco, 2015). Furthermore, opponents who argued that there would be a decline in full-time employment so that employers could avoid paying health benefits to their employees appear to be wrong. Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics show that the number of part-time workers fell by 230,000, while full-time employment grew by more than two million in the year that ObamaCare went into effect (Ungar, 2014).

## The Future of the Affordable Health Care Act

The Affordable Health Care Act is not perfect. It angers progressives, who feel that it does not go far enough to provide universal health care. Moreover, it leaves most private health care in the hands of a for-profit insurance industry, with huge administrative costs and paperwork. Conservatives are hostile to the health care reform because it gives too much power to the federal government. The future of the Act hinges greatly on the presidential election in 2016. Given the overwhelming opposition to ObamaCare by the Republicans, a Republican president will most likely scale down or completely dismember the Affordable Care Act, and Democratic Presidential candidate Hillary Clinton defends the Affordable Care Act but vows to modify and improve the legislation. Therefore, it remains to be seen what the future of health care in the United States will look like. Perhaps lessons from other societies, discussed in the next section, can serve as a model for the United States.

## Models for National Health Care: Lessons from Other Societies

### 16.5 Compare and contrast the Bismarck, the Beveridge, and the National Health Insurance models of health care.

The United States, as we have stated, spends much more for health care, both in total dollars and as a percentage of its gross national product, than any other nation. Yet, all major indicators of national health show that other nations are getting more for their health dollars than the United States.

Given this gloomy health climate, are there reforms that would improve the health care system in the United States? Other advanced societies have found ways that fit their history, politics, economy, and national values. The general patterns fit into three basic arrangements (the following depends on Reid, 2009: 17–20).

### The Bismarck Model

Named after Otto von Bismarck, who invented the welfare state in Germany in the nineteenth century, this system is found today in Germany, Japan, France, Belgium, and Switzerland. Like the U.S. system, it uses private health insurance plans, usually financed by both employers and employees. Unlike the United States, though, Bismarck-type plans cover everyone, and the insurance companies do *not* make a profit. There is tight government regulation of medical services and fees to contain cost.

## The Beveridge Model

This system, named after a British reformer, is found in Great Britain, Italy, Spain, Cuba, and most of Scandinavia. Health care is provided and financed by the government. There are no medical bills since medical treatment is a public service, like the public library (Reid, 2009:18). The government owns most hospitals and clinics, and many doctors are government employees. There are private doctors who are reimbursed by the government for their services. There are low costs because the government controls what physicians can do and what they can charge. Ironically,

The two purest examples of the Beveridge Model—or “socialized medicine”—are both found in the Western Hemisphere: Cuba and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. In both of those systems, all the health care professionals work for the government in government-owned facilities, and patients receive no bills. (Reid, 2009:18)

## The National Health Insurance Model

This system, found in Canada, Taiwan, and South Korea, includes elements of both Bismarck and Beveridge models. Health care providers are private, but the payer is a government-run insurance program. This is known as a **single-payer plan**. The government insurance plan (either a federal or a provincial plan) collects monthly premiums from every citizen and pays the medical bills.

Since there’s no need for marketing, no expensive underwriting offices to deny claims, and no profit, these universal insurance programs tend to be cheaper and much simpler administratively than American-style private insurance. As a single-payer covering everybody, the national insurance plan tends to have considerable market power to negotiate for lower prices [for lower pharmaceutical costs, for example]. (Reid, 2009: 18–19)

Most advocates of universal health insurance argue that the United States should adopt a single-payer plan similar to the Canadian plan. This plan would serve all citizens at lower cost; Canada spends 10 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) on health care, compared to 17.8 percent in the United States. Canadians spent \$3,678 per person in 2009 on health care, compared to \$6,714 for each American, yet Canada has better health outcomes (see Figure 16.3). It would be more efficient not only in serving everyone but also in reducing bureaucracy and paperwork; health administration costs in the United States are double the costs in Canada. David Himmelstein and Steffie Woolhandler, cofounders of Physicians for a National Health Care Program, argued that if the United States cut its medical bureaucratic costs to Canadian levels, it would save nearly \$400 billion annually (cited in Hastings Center, 2009: para 5). (See “Social Policy: A Canadian Doctor Diagnoses U.S. Health Care” for an analysis of the Canadian and U.S. health care systems, written by a Canadian physician.)

### Single-payer plan

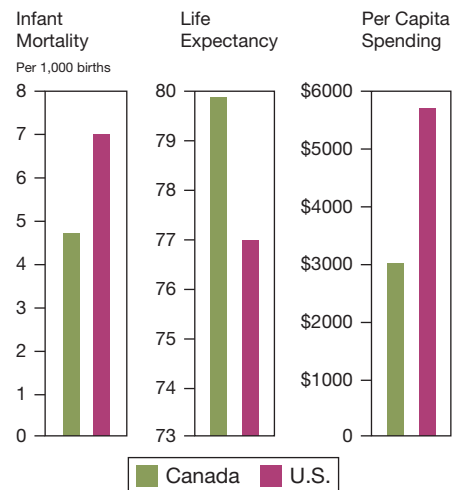
Tax-supported health program in which the government is the sole insurer.

**Figure 16.3** Health Outcomes: United States vs. Canada

**SOURCE:** Reprinted from “Health Care for All,” the Fall 2006 *YES!* Magazine, PO Box 10818, Bainbridge Island, WA 98110.

#### Side-by-Side: No Comparison

Canada and the U.S. used to be twins on public-health measurements. Here’s how it looks after 35 years of Canadian universal health care:



## Social Policy

### A Canadian Doctor Diagnoses U.S. Health Care

Michael M. Rachlis

Universal health insurance is on the American policy agenda for the fifth time since World War II. In the 1960s, the United States chose public coverage for only the elderly and the very poor, while Canada opted for a universal program for hospitals and physicians' services. As a policy analyst, I know there are lessons to be learned from studying the effect of different approaches in similar jurisdictions. But, as a Canadian with lots of American friends and relatives, I am saddened that Americans seem incapable of learning them.

Our countries are joined at the hip. We peacefully share a continent, a British heritage of representative government, and now ownership of GM. And, until fifty years ago, we had similar health systems, health care costs, and vital statistics.

The United States' and Canada's different health insurance decisions make up the world's largest health policy experiment. And the results?

On coverage, all Canadians have insurance for hospital and physician services. There are no deductibles or co-pays. Most provinces also provide coverage for programs for home care, long-term care, pharmaceuticals, and durable medical equipment, although there are co-pays.

On the United States side, 46 million people have no insurance, millions are underinsured, and health care bills bankrupt more than 1 million Americans every year.

Lesson No. 1: A single-payer system would eliminate most U.S. coverage problems.

On costs, Canada spends 10 percent of its economy on health care; the United States spends 16 percent. The extra 6 percent of GDP amounts to more than \$800 billion per year. The spending gap between the two nations is almost entirely because of higher overhead. Canadians don't need thousands of actuaries to set premiums or thousands of lawyers to deny care. Even the U.S. Medicare program has 80 to 90 percent lower administrative costs than private Medicare Advantage policies. And providers and suppliers can't charge as much when they have to deal with a single payer.

Lessons No. 2 and 3: Single-payer systems reduce duplicative administrative costs and can negotiate lower prices.

Because most of the difference in spending is for nonpatient care, Canadians actually get more of most services. We see the doctor more often and take more drugs. We even have more lung transplant surgery. We do get less heart surgery, but not so much less that we are any more likely to die of heart attacks. And we now live nearly three years longer, and our infant mortality is 20 percent lower.

Lesson No. 4: Single-payer plans can deliver the goods because their funding goes to services, not overhead.

The Canadian system does have its problems, and these also provide important lessons. Notwithstanding a few well-publicized and misleading cases, Canadians needing urgent care get immediate treatment. But we do wait too long for much elective care, including appointments with family doctors and specialists and selected surgical procedures. We also do a poor job managing chronic disease.

However, according to the New York-based Commonwealth Fund, both the American and the Canadian systems fare badly in these areas. In fact, an April U.S. Government Accountability Office report noted that U.S. emergency room wait times have increased, and patients who should be seen immediately are now waiting an average of 28 minutes. The GAO has also raised concerns about two- to four-month waiting times for mammograms.

On closer examination, most of these problems have little to do with public insurance or even overall resources. Despite the delays, the GAO said there is enough mammogram capacity.

These problems are largely caused by our shared politico-cultural barriers to quality of care. In nineteenth-century North America, doctors waged a campaign against quacks and snake oil salesmen and attained a legislative monopoly on medical practice. In return, they

promised to set and enforce standards of practice. By and large, it didn't happen. And perverse incentives like fee-for-service make things even worse.

Using techniques like those championed by the Boston-based Institute for Healthcare Improvement, providers can eliminate most delays. In Hamilton, Ontario, seventeen psychiatrists have linked up with 100 family doctors and eighty social workers to offer some of the world's best access to mental health services. And in Toronto, simple process improvements mean you can now get your hip assessed in one week and get a new one, if you need it, within a month.

Lesson No. 5: Canadian health care delivery problems have nothing to do with our single-payer system and can be fixed by re-engineering for quality.

U.S. health policy would be miles ahead if policymakers could learn these lessons. But they seem less interested in Canada's or any other nation's experience than ever. Why?

American democracy runs on money. Pharmaceutical and insurance companies have the fuel. Analysts see hundreds of billions of premiums wasted on overhead that could fund care for the uninsured. But industry executives and shareholders see bonuses and dividends.

Compounding the confusion is traditional American ignorance of what happens north of the border, which makes it easy to mislead people. Boilerplate anti-government rhetoric does the same. The U.S. media, legislators, and even presidents have claimed that our "socialized" system doesn't let us choose our own doctors. In fact, Canadians have free choice of physicians. It's Americans these days who are restricted to "in-plan" doctors.

Unfortunately, many Americans won't get to hear the straight goods because vested interests are promoting a caricature of the Canadian experience.

**SOURCE:** Michael M. Rachlis. 2009. "A Canadian Doctor Diagnoses U.S. Healthcare." *Los Angeles Times* (August 3), online: [http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/la-oe-nachlis3-2009aug03\\_0,538126.story](http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/la-oe-nachlis3-2009aug03_0,538126.story).

## Chapter Review

### 16.1 Understand the extent of the health care crisis in the United States.

- The U.S. health care system is the most expensive among advanced nations. Americans spend \$2.3 trillion annually on health care, more than twice what most advanced nations spend. The reasons: (a) profit drives the system, (b) inefficiency, (c) defensive medicine to ward off expensive lawsuits, (d) costly new drugs, tests, equipment, and treatments, (e) the overuse of specialists, and (f) the wide use of prescription drugs.
- The high cost of health care does not translate into better health outcomes compared with other advanced nations.

### 16.2 Explain how access to health care varies by social class, race, and gender.

- Economic disadvantage is closely related to health disadvantages. The poor are much more likely than the affluent to die in infancy, to suffer from certain diseases, and as adults to die sooner.

They are less likely to receive medical attention because of being uninsured or underinsured, and when they do receive medical care, to receive inferior service.

- Race is also related to health, with racial/ethnic minorities disadvantaged by a combination of economic disadvantage and racial discrimination.
- AIDS, once a death sentence, can now be controlled for the most part by combinations of very expensive drugs. Although African Americans make up about 13 percent of the population, they account for about half (46 percent) of all people in the United States who live with HIV.
- Health and ill health are also related to gender differences. Women have health advantages over men because of their physical differences and differing gender expectations. Childbearing places women at risk, however, with the greater likelihood of unnecessary surgery such as hysterectomies and tubal ligations, the relative lack of medical research using women as subjects,



and the still-common sexist practices by some physicians, who are predominantly male.

**16.3 Describe the characteristics of the health care system in the United States that led to the 2010 reform.**

- The U.S. health care system has unique characteristics, some of which contribute to the growing health care crisis: (a) different plans for different categories of people, (b) private insurance, (c) for-profit hospitals, and (d) managed care networks.

**16.4 Understand the Affordable Care Act of 2010.**

- In 2010, after heated debate, Congress passed the Affordable Health Care Act. Included in the reform bill that passed were these provisions: (a) mandates for everyone to have medical insurance, (b) an oversight board, (c) guarantees that

insurance companies cannot deny coverage, and (d) coverage of young adults through their parents' policy until age 26. The Supreme Court in 2012 and 2015 upheld the Act.

- Obamacare is not socialism. It is not a government takeover of the health care system. The plan keeps health care in a mostly private system.
- The future of the Affordable Care Act hinges greatly on the presidential election in 2016.

**16.5 Compare and contrast the Bismarck, the Beveridge, and the National Health Insurance models of health care.**

- There are three major systems of universal health care employed by other advanced societies: the Bismarck model, the Beveridge model, and the National Health Insurance model (single-payer plan). The United States does not have a universal health care plan.

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## Key Terms

**Defensive medicine** The practice of requiring extra diagnostic tests and medical procedures to protect the physician from liability.

**Infant mortality rate** Number of deaths before age 1 per 1,000 live births.

**Medicaid** Government health program for the poor.

**Medicare** Government program that provides partial coverage of medical costs primarily for people age 65 and older.

**Medlining** Practice of managed care organizations of limiting the number of patients with health problems while maximizing the number of healthy patients.

**Patient dumping** Practice by physicians and private hospitals of treating only patients who can afford their services.

**Single-payer plan** Tax-supported health program in which the government is the sole insurer.

## Chapter 17

# National Security in the Twenty-First Century



## Learning Objectives

- 17.1** Describe the size, strength, and cost of the U.S. military.
- 17.2** Understand the threats of domestic and international terrorism.
- 17.3** Understand the consequences of the United States' invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq.
- 17.4** Discuss the changes in warfare in the twenty-first century.

**National security**

The ways nations organize to protect borders, guard their national interests, and shield their citizens and businesses abroad with armies, military bases, intelligence networks, embassies, and consulates.

The mission of the United States Department of Defense is to protect the American people and advance the nation's interests. Every four years the Pentagon reviews the mission of the military in the light of changes in international and domestic environments. The 2014 Quadrennial Review prioritizes three pillars of U.S. **national security**: defending the homeland; building security globally by projecting U.S. influence and deterring aggression; and remaining prepared to win against any adversary (U.S. Department of Defense, 2014).

The sections of this chapter describe (1) the magnitude of the U.S. military establishment, (2) the threat of domestic and international terrorism, (3) national security and the war on terror, and (4) conducting war in the twenty-first century.

## The U.S. Military Establishment

### 17.1 Describe the size, strength, and cost of the U.S. military.

Nation-states organize to defend their national security by protecting borders, guarding their national interests, and shielding their citizens and businesses abroad with armies, military bases, intelligence networks, embassies, and consulates. National security in the United States is a responsibility of the president and the cabinet members who run the departments of State, Justice, Defense, and Homeland Security. National defense does not necessarily mean involvement in a war, but it often has. While the numbers vary based on the inclusion or non-inclusion of certain conflicts, different media sources report that America has been involved in some war or conflict for 222 out of 239 years, or 93 percent of the time (WashingtonsBlog, 2015).

### The Size of the U.S. Military

The size of the U.S. military establishment is enormous. Here are the facts:

- The Department of Defense employs more than 3 million people in 5,000 different locations.
- In 2015 there were 1,309,239 active military personnel. This is an all-volunteer military (see “Speaking to Students: Recruiting an All-Volunteer Military”). Conscription can be enacted by request of the president and approval of Congress.
- The military operates 865 military bases and other facilities in 135 nations located on every continent. The cost to maintain these bases exceeds \$100 billion a year.
- The headquarters of the Department of Defense is the Pentagon in Washington, DC. It is one of the world's largest office buildings, with 17.5 miles of corridors.
- The military has a worldwide satellite network providing constant intelligence, surveillance, and communication.
- The United States has the world's largest navy, larger than the next thirteen navies combined (Pena, 2010). Included in the fleet are fifty-seven nuclear-powered attack and cruise-missile submarines, more than the rest of the world combined (Ramirez, 2010).
- The carbon footprint of the military is huge (e.g., the military uses 4.6 billion gallons of fuel annually).

- The government outsources some military operations to private firms. There are more of these nonmilitary personnel in Iraq and Afghanistan than military personnel.
- In 2015, there were approximately 22 million military veterans. In 2016 the budget for Veterans Affairs is \$168.8 billion.
- There are 1,271 government agencies and 1,931 outside contractors devoted to counterterrorism (*USA Today*, 2010).

## The Cost of Maintaining U.S. Military Superiority

Military might has been the typical security strategy of nations. Since World War II, the United States, for example, has spent more than \$20 trillion (adjusted for inflation) on military defense. The **defense budget** represents the government's spending plan for the military. For fiscal year 2015 it was \$598.5 billion (54 percent of the total discretionary spending budget). Not included in the military budget are the indirect costs of war: veterans benefits, including health care and disability costs, federal debt payments due to military expenditures, covert intelligence operations, federal research on military and space programs, cleaning up toxic waste from the development and production of nuclear weapons, and homeland security.

### Defense budget

The government's spending plan for maintaining and upgrading the military defenses of the United States.

### Speaking to Students

## Recruiting an All-Volunteer Military

The Pentagon in 2009 had a \$5 billion recruiting budget. In that year, the U.S. military met its annual recruiting goals for the first time in thirty-five years. This shift occurred because of three factors. The first was unplanned. That is, the economic downturn (the Great Recession) and rising joblessness led more youths to enlist (Tyson, 2009). Pentagon research shows that a 10 percent increase in the national unemployment rate generally translates into a 4 to 6 percent improvement in recruiting (reported in *The Progressive*, 2009).

A second reason for the rise in volunteer recruits in 2009 was that recruits were enticed by an average signing bonus of \$14,000 compared to \$12,000 in 2008.

Third, military recruiters were armed with information on each potential recruit, giving them an edge in gaining rapport and softening them up to the decision to join up.

In the past few years, the military has mounted a virtual invasion into the lives of young Americans. Using data mining, stealth websites, career tests, and sophisticated marketing software, the Pentagon is harvesting and analyzing information on everything from high school students' GPAs and SAT scores to which video games they play. Before an Army recruiter even picks up the phone to call a prospect, the soldier may know more about the kid's habits than do his own parents.

To put all of its data to use, the military has enlisted the help of Nielsen Claritas, a research and marketing firm whose clients include BMW, AOL, and Starbucks. Last year, it rolled out a "custom segmentation" program that allows a recruiter armed with the address, age, race, and gender of a potential "lead" to call up a wealth of information about young people in the immediate area, including recreation and consumption patterns. The program even suggests pitches that might work while cold-calling teenagers. "It's just a foot in the door for a recruiter to start a relevant conversation with a young person," says Donna Dorminey of the U.S. Army Center for Accessions Research. (Goodman, 2009: 21–22)

The United States outspends all other nations on national security. For example, in 2013 the U.S. spent roughly the same amount as the next nine largest military budgets around the world combined. The United States outspends its nearest rival in military expenditures, China, by three times, and Russia, the world's third military power, by six times (National Priorities Project, 2016).

There are at least four reasons why U.S. defense spending is so high and continues to grow. First, there is the ongoing fear of nuclear weapons. Russia, which has a huge nuclear arsenal, although much less a threat than before 1990, remains a potential threat to U.S. security. Rogue states such as North Korea and Iran pose a significant threat as they join the nuclear club.

Second, the world, even without the Soviet threat, is an unsafe place, where terrorism and aggression occur and must be confronted and contained. Several nations, including regimes with expansionist agendas and hated enemies, have nuclear weapons or soon will have them. They also have chemical and biological weapons. Several nations are suspected of supporting terror and working to develop **weapons of mass destruction** (nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons capable of large-scale deaths and destruction). Iran, in particular, is a special worry in the tense Middle East, especially for Israel.

Third, defense expenditures bring profits to corporations, create jobs, and generate growth in the economy. For example, many corporations benefited from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as Defense Department contracts more than doubled from 2000 to 2009. The three largest contractors in 2014 were Lockheed Martin (\$30.6 billion), Boeing (\$20.9 billion), and Raytheon (\$13 billion) (U.S. Department of Defense, 2015). With huge contracts available, these corporations spend millions on lobbying. Corporate military contractors are eager for more contracts, for the following reasons (Parenti, 2008:80):

- There are few risks. Unlike manufacturers who must worry about selling the goods they produce, defense corporations have a guaranteed contract.
- Almost all contracts are awarded without competitive bidding and at whatever price the corporation sets. If the cost exceeds the bid (cost overruns), then the government picks up the tab.
- The Pentagon directly subsidizes defense contractors with free research and development, public lands, buildings, and renovations.
- Defense spending does not compete with the consumer market. Moreover, the market is virtually limitless, as there are always more advanced weapons systems to develop and obsolete weaponry to replace.

Members of Congress are eager to support an expansive military machine for two reasons. First, only a rare politician would campaign to reduce the military for fear of being labeled unpatriotic and thereby risk defeat in the next election. Second, politicians gain support from their constituents if they bring military money to their corporations, communities, and state. The corporations supplying military supplies exploit this by distributing their operations across many states and many districts within those states.

Lawmakers even team up with defense contractors to fight for certain targeted programs even when the Pentagon says it does not need the weaponry in question. For example, every year from 2006 through 2009, the Pentagon argued that it had enough C-17 cargo planes (produced by Boeing for about \$250 million apiece). But every year, Congress overruled the military and authorized more funds for these planes (\$2.5 billion in the 2010 budget) (Elgin and Epstein, 2009: 47).

### Weapons of mass destruction (WMDs)

Nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons capable of large-scale death and destruction.

In 2014, Virginia led the way, with defense contract expenditures in that state totaling \$19.1 billion, followed by California (\$15.1 billion) and Texas (\$13.8 billion). In sum, business, labor, the states, Congress, and academia combine to present a unified voice supporting massive and increasing military expenditures. Opposing this behemoth are only faint voices from individuals and groups seeking to reduce the huge costs of the military-industrial complex.

Finally, the disproportionate amount that the United States appropriates for war is based on the assumption that by having the world's costliest military force and being so far ahead of other nations in military strength and technology, no one would dare challenge us militarily. Although other nations may have more people (China and India), they do not have the United States' sophisticated weaponry, weapons delivery systems, and nuclear stockpile. The United States chooses to retain this superiority because its leaders believe there is "peace through strength."

This strategy succeeded for the most part during the Cold War years, as the United States and the Soviet Union engaged in an expensive arms race to strike first if necessary and to scare the other side into not attacking first. The attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon showed that this rationale does not hold for the terrorism that we confront in the twenty-first century.

## The Threat of Terrorism

### 17.2 Understand the threats of domestic and international terrorism.

Terrorism is a major national security threat, as the United States experienced with the ramming of hijacked planes into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. **Terrorism** is any act intended to cause death or serious injury to civilians or noncombatants to intimidate a population and weaken their will or draw attention to the perpetrator's cause. Thus, terrorist acts are political acts. In the case of the September 11 terrorist attack, Al-Qaeda, Osama bin Laden's organization, sought to show the vulnerability of the United States and to rally other extremist Islamists in a war against—in their words—"the Great Satan." So, too, was the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City by ex-soldier Timothy McVeigh, who had grievances with the U.S. government. Also, when Joseph Stack flew an airplane into a building housing Internal Revenue Service offices in Austin, Texas, to advance his political grievances, it was an act of terrorism (Greenwald, 2010b). Similarly, the killing of abortion doctors and the bombing of abortion clinics are terrorist acts, making political statements and intimidating their opponents.

Terrorism is "not an enemy; it is a methodology of using violence to gain political objectives" (Greider, 2004: 11). It is a tactic used historically by groups against governments and organizations viewed as unjust and oppressive. Terrorists believe they are legitimate combatants, fighting for a just cause, by whatever means possible. The warfare is asymmetric—that is, terrorism is the method of less well-armed and less powerful opponents. Because, typically, they do not have sophisticated weapons, terrorists use what is cheap and available. Instead of guided missiles, they use suicide bombers—"the poor man's air force" (Davis, 2006). Because they do not have weapons of mass destruction, they use "weapons of mass disruption" such as arson, infecting computers with viruses (cyberterrorism), and disrupting mass transit. They instill fear through kidnapping, raping, and torturing victims and even showing the beheading of these victims on television. Note that terrorism as a method of asymmetric warfare

#### **Terrorism**

Any act intended to cause death or serious injury to civilians or noncombatants to intimidate a population and weaken their will or draw attention to the perpetrator's cause.

is not exclusively a Muslim or Al-Qaeda method but also a method used, for example, by the American revolutionaries, the Irish Republican Army, the Viet Cong, and anti-dictatorial forces in Latin America.

Terrorism is a social construction (Turk, 2004). That is, what is defined as terrorism and who is labeled a terrorist are matters of interpretation of events and their presumed causes. Consider the different meanings for these words: terrorist/freedom fighter or suicide bomber/martyr.

The powerful conflict parties, especially governments, generally succeed in labeling their more threatening (i.e., violent) opponents as terrorists, whereas attempts by opponents to label officially sanctioned violence as “state terrorism” have little chance of success unless supported by powerful third parties (e.g., the United Nations). (Turk, 2004: 272)

While terrorism is typically seen as having international implications, it can be domestic in origin as well. We begin the discussion with the internal terrorist threat: attacks by Americans on Americans.

## Domestic Terrorism

Typically, we think of terrorism as deadly acts committed by foreigners, usually Islamic fundamentalists from the Middle East. Thus, when a bomb destroyed the federal building in Oklahoma City in 1995, killing 168, the immediate suspects were Muslim extremists. But Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols, two U.S. military veterans, were convicted of that crime. (McVeigh received the death penalty for detonating the bomb and was executed in 2001; Nichols was sentenced to life imprisonment for his involvement in planning the attack.) As extreme as the Oklahoma City bombing was, the act of an American detonating a bomb to harm other Americans is not unusual because there are about 2,000 illegal bombings annually within the United States.

Foreigners acting alone or as agents of their organization or government killing Americans is relatively easy to understand, but Americans killing Americans is more difficult to comprehend. The history of the United States, however, is full of examples of various dissident groups that have used violence against their neighbors to achieve their aims. Colonists, farmers, settlers, Native Americans, immigrants, slaves, slaveholders,

Extremist militia groups have always existed in the United States.



laborers, strike breakers, anarchists, vigilantes, the Ku Klux Klan and other White supremacist organizations, anti-war protesters, radical environmentalists, and prolife extremists have acted outside the law to accomplish their ends. Just in recent years, antiabortion terrorists have bombed abortion clinics and murdered abortion doctors. One of those doctors, George Tiller, was wounded in 1993, his clinic was bombed and vandalized, and then in 2009 an antiabortion zealot killed him. In 2015, an attack on a Planned Parenthood clinic left three people dead and nine wounded, the result of

an antiabortion extremist. Various extremists have also bombed African American churches, Jewish synagogues, and Islamic mosques throughout the United States, U.S. Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service offices, and the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta. In addition to bombings, there have been acts of arson, beatings, killings, and letters/packages with bombs or anthrax addressed to political targets.

Extreme actions by the government have persuaded some individuals to become part of extremist groups. The government's actions in conducting the Vietnam War and its reactions to protesters (e.g., the killing of Kent State students by the National Guard) led some groups such as the "Weathermen" to use violence to further their cause. Two events in the 1990s energized the Patriot movement. In 1992, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) attacked Randy Weaver, a White supremacist in Idaho, for gun violations. In the process, ATF snipers killed Weaver's wife and son. The second event was the 1993 assault by ATF on David Koresh and the Branch Davidians near Waco, Texas. This siege, again over gun violations, ended with the deaths of eighty-six men, women, and children. Those in the Patriot movement interpreted these acts as government run amok, using its power to take away the liberties that individuals are granted by the Constitution. Thus, the membership in this movement, "far from thinking itself outside the law, believes it is the critical force making for a restoration of the Constitution" (Wills, 1995: 52) (see "Voices: A Letter from Timothy McVeigh").

The Patriot movement faded somewhat in the late 1990s, although pockets remained. But ten years later, the momentum was revived. In 2014, the number of hate groups rose to 784, up from 602 in 2000; see Figure 17.1 (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2015).

## Voices

### A Letter from Timothy McVeigh

Three years before he ignited a bomb that destroyed the federal building in Oklahoma City, killing 168 people, Timothy McVeigh wrote a letter to his hometown newspaper, the Lockport (N.Y.) *Union-Sun & Journal*, listing his concerns about the government.

Crime is out of control. Criminals have no fear of punishment. Prisons are overcrowded so they know they will not be imprisoned long....

Taxes are a joke. Regardless of what a political candidate "promises," they will increase taxes. More taxes are always the answer to government mismanagement....

The "American Dream" of the middle class has all but disappeared, substituted with people struggling just to buy next week's groceries. Heaven forbid the car breaks down!...

Politicians are out of control. Their yearly salaries are more than an average person will

see in a lifetime. They have been entrusted with the power to regulate their own salaries, and have grossly violated that trust to live in their own luxury....

Who is to blame for the mess? At a point when the world has seen communism falter as an imperfect system to manage people, democracy seems to be headed down the same road. No one is seeing the "big" picture....

What is it going to take to open up the eyes of our elected officials? AMERICA IS IN SERIOUS DECLINE.

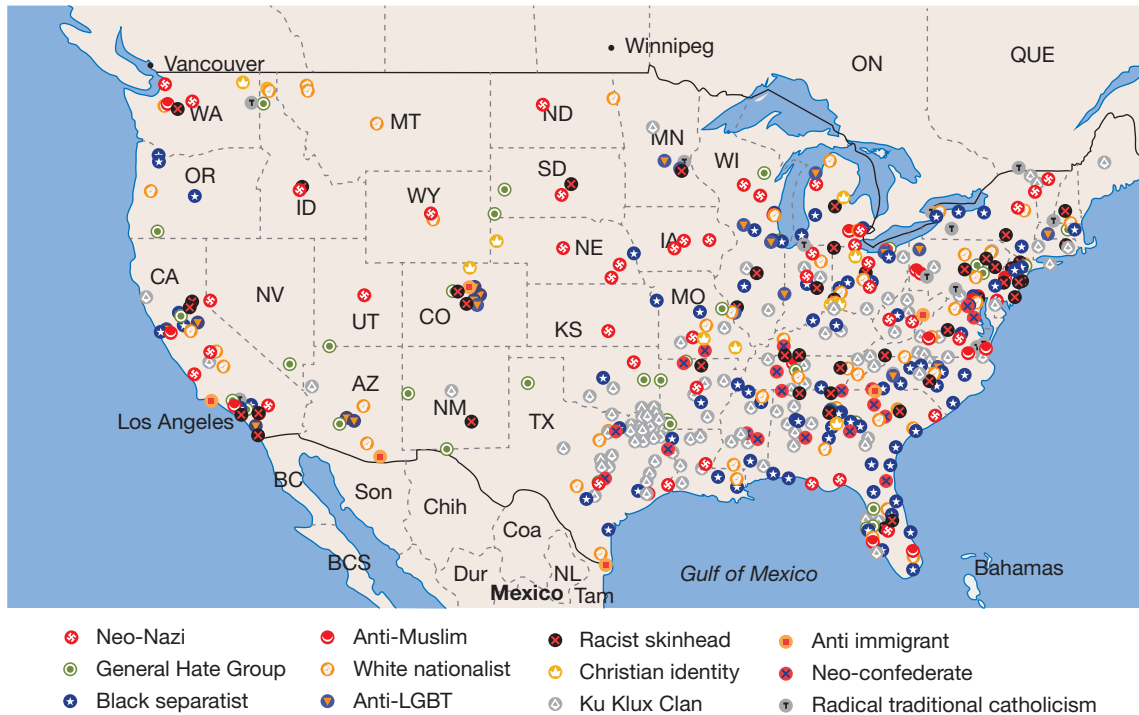
We have no proverbial tea to dump; should we instead sink a ship full of Japanese imports? Is a Civil War imminent? Do we have to shed blood to reform the current system? I hope it doesn't come to that. But it might.

**SOURCE:** McVeigh. 1992. Letter to *Union-Sun and Journal* (Lockport, New York) (February 11). Copyright 1992 by Lockport Union Sun & Journal. Reprinted by permission.



**Figure 17.1** Active Hate Groups in the United States, 2014

**SOURCE:** Hate map from Southern Poverty Law Center, <https://www.splcenter.org/hate-map>. Copyright © Southern Poverty Law Center. Reprinted by permission.



There was a resurgence of populist anger coinciding with the Great Recession in 2009. Leading the charge was the Tea Party movement (there is some dispute over the name's origin: Was it taken from the 1773 tax revolt, or is it an acronym for "taxed enough already"?). This movement is a platform for conservative populist discontent. It embodies a brand of politics historically associated with libertarians, populists, and those on the fringe: militia groups, hate groups, and anti-immigration advocates. Tea Party activists, although divided on a number of issues, agree, "Government is too big. Spending is out of control. Individual freedom is at risk. And President Barack Obama's policies are making it all worse" (Associated Press, 2010a: para 1). The election of President Obama raised two fears for some in the movement: that he was African American and that he was a Muslim. There is more than a hint of racism here. "For some white Americans of a certain age and background, the sight of a black man in the Oval Office, even one who went to Harvard Law School and conducts himself in the manner of an aloof WASP aristocrat, is an affront" (Cassidy, 2010: para 2). Also, there is an anti-Islam strain among some in the movement. Summarizing this line of thought, Southern Poverty Law Center's Mark Potok, said:

For many extremists, President Obama is a lightning rod, a symbol of all that's wrong with the country. He's the "Kenyan" president, the "secret Muslim" who is causing our country's decline. (*SPLC Report*, 2012: 1)

Fanning these flames, one segment of the movement—the birthers—questioned the legitimacy of Obama to be president because, they argued, his birth certificate was bogus and his father was an African. These fears were fomented by conservative talk show hosts on radio and cable television, who “have gone out of their way to provide a platform for conspiracy theories and apocalyptic rhetoric” (Krugman, 2009: para 5). Most significant, under Obama and the Democrats, broad federal programs were initiated, such as national health care; bailouts of Wall Street banks (actually begun by President Bush), General Motors, and Chrysler; the \$787 billion stimulus (TARP); and an immense and rapidly growing national debt. These were interpreted as moving the nation toward a totalitarian socialist state, with subsequent loss of freedoms, again fueled by talk show rhetoric from the political Right. Obama, by the way, receives an average of thirty death threats a day (a 400 percent increase from the number received by President George W. Bush; Harnden, 2009).

Obama’s government programs were not only perceived as centralizing authority (an orchestrated “power grab”) but also that they benefit the wealthy and educated elites but not average people. And many of these average people were suffering in the bad economy. They were worried about their jobs, their retirement incomes, and their mortgages and paying for their children’s education. Some were concerned that Whites were losing their numerical majority to non-Whites. For them, immigration, especially illegal immigration, has to be stopped. White supremacist organizations and other extremists use these fears and frustrations to recruit new members, often using social media for recruitment.

## International Terrorism

The context for international terrorist activity in today’s world varies. The terrorists may be seeking separation from the dominant group by establishing an independent state, which is the goal of the Basques in Spain, the Chechnyans in Russia, and Northern Ireland, which seeks independence from Great Britain. They may be rival religious groups such as the Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland or Sunnis and Shiites, warring Muslim sects in the Middle East. Ethnic/religious groups in the former Yugoslavia—Serbs (Eastern Orthodox), Croats (Catholics), and Bosnians (Muslims)—have fought each other with brutal tactics for centuries. Palestinian terrorists attack the Israeli government that keeps them in secondary status. Israeli extremists attack the Israeli government (e.g., the assassination of a moderate leader) when they believe that it will compromise with the Palestinians, as do Palestinian extremists who fear their leaders are not being militant enough with Israel. Various African countries have warring groups seeking control through ethnic cleansing, and governments such as in Sudan use ethnic militias to terrorize through killings, rapes, and destruction of villages and farms to quell rebellious groups.

Globalization has quickened the pace, scale, and fear of terrorism. As nations become connected, they are increasingly vulnerable to terrorist attacks. The United States, in particular, is relatively unprotected from terrorist attacks because it is a mobile, open society with porous borders that are difficult to police. Every day, more than a million people enter the country legally (and many others illegally), as do almost 3,000 aircraft and more than 16,000 containers on 600 ships. Satellite communications give the world an instant look at the consequences of terrorist acts. This capability heightens the motivation of terrorists, who seek to dramatize their grievances to a wide audience. Modern

societies provide a huge array of possible targets for terrorists. The United States, for example, has 60,000 chemical plants and 103 nuclear plants that could be sabotaged. So, too, could hydroelectric dams, power grids, oil refineries, oil and natural gas pipelines, water treatment plants, and factories. Transportation systems (planes, trains, cargo ships) can be easily disrupted with explosions or computer glitches.

Clearly, humankind lives in an increasingly dangerous world—the context in which nations must seek national security. This became apparent in November 2015 when gunmen and suicide bombers killed 130 people and wounded hundreds of others when they attacked multiple locations in Paris, France. The next section broadly outlines the challenges to the United States by the new terrorism; the U.S. response to terrorism, using the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as the case study; and the consequences of this response for these nations, the United States, and the world.

## U.S. National Security and the War on Terror

### 17.3 Understand the consequences of the United States' invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq.

The events of September 11, 2001, changed the course of history.

On the morning of September 11, 2001, four commercial planes left East Coast airports loaded with passengers and fuel for cross-country flights. These flights were

taken over by hijackers who piloted the planes to new destinations, and the course of history was changed. The first plane left Boston for Los Angeles but headed instead for New York City, where it rammed into the World Trade Center's north tower, setting its upper floors ablaze. Fifteen minutes later, a second plane, scheduled for a Boston to Los Angeles flight, steered into the south tower of the World Trade Center. Within the next hour, both towers, each 110 stories high, melted from the intense heat and collapsed. A third plane departed from Washington, DC, for Los Angeles, but turned around and plunged into the Pentagon. The fourth plane left Newark for San Francisco, changed direction, but, possibly because of heroic passengers attacking the hijackers, failed in its mission, presumably to dive into the White House or Capitol Hill, crashing instead in rural Pennsylvania. Thus, within about two hours, these four planes, commandeered by terrorists in synchronized suicide missions, had attacked two symbols of the United States—the World Trade Center, the hub of U.S. capitalism, and the Pentagon, the headquarters of the world's greatest military—killing nearly 3,000 people, about the same number of Americans who died at Pearl Harbor. “Not since the Civil War have we seen as



much bloodshed on our soil. Never in our history did so many innocents perish on a single day” (Gergen, 2001:60).

## The War on Terror

Responding to the acts of terrorism against the United States that took place on September 11, 2001, President Bush, just nine days later, declared the war on terror. The president could have declared the 9/11 event a criminal act, limiting the response to capturing the criminals and bringing them to justice. The decision, however, was to declare a war. Moves against Al-Qaeda—the terrorist group that carried out the 9/11 attacks—would begin the war, he said, but the war would not end “until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated.” The president advised Americans to expect “a lengthy campaign, unlike any other we have ever seen.”

This “war on terror” was to be a war like no other. In the twentieth century, wars were fought by nations over land, resources, and ideology. But the terrorists of 9/11 did not represent a nation, and they were not intent on occupying territories. Terrorists do not have battleships and airfields to be targeted. Instead of an organized army, they are loosely organized through small groups with embedded “cells” to carry out terrorist activities. Containment, the strategy of the Cold War, was no longer possible when there are, as the U.S. State Department noted, thirty-seven foreign terrorist organizations with bases in at least twenty-five nations and the Palestinian territories. These terrorists located around the globe do not wear uniforms but rather live in their host countries as students or workers, just as other residents. If the leaders are identified and killed, others will take their place. Combat includes the use of conventional force as well as car bombs and suicide bombers (the “guided missiles” of the poor). In this new warfare, the combatants will not know victory. “There’s no land to seize, no government to topple, no surrender that will bring closure” (Parrish, 2001:2). Finally, in this new kind of warfare, great advantages in military technology, as demonstrated by the successful attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, do not make a nation safe.

**THE BUSH DOCTRINE** Believing in the rightness of their cause and the evil of the terrorists, the Bush administration developed guidelines for U.S. military actions in the war on terror and the longer-range plan for national security in the twenty-first century. This policy, known as the **Bush Doctrine**, has its roots in a particular vision about America’s role in the world.

The great struggles of the twentieth century between liberty and totalitarianism ended with a decisive victory for the forces of freedom—and a single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise.... These values of freedom are right and true for every person, in every society—and the duty of protecting these values against their enemies is the common calling of freedom-loving people across the globe and across the ages.... Today, the United States enjoys a position of unparalleled military strength and great economic and political influence. We seek...to create a balance of power that favors human freedom: conditions in which all nations and all societies can choose for themselves the rewards and challenges of political and economic liberty. (The White House, 2002b:i)

### Bush Doctrine

The policy guiding U.S. military actions in the “war on terror” and the long-range plan for national security in the twenty-first century.

From this vision flow the strategic principles that guide U.S. military actions in the war on terror.

- **The Line in the Sand.** Addressing the nation on the day of 9/11, President Bush said, “We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them” (Bush, 2001b:1). He clarified later that the United States was drawing a line in the sand, and that all world nations had a “decision to make.” “Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists,” the president proclaimed (Bush, 2001a:3). Later, that binary principle of “us versus them” led the president to his now famous designation of Iraq, Iran, and North Korea as an “axis of evil” and his denunciation of our allies such as France and Germany when they chose not to join in the Iraq war.
- **Unbounded U.S. Military Superiority.** A second principle of the Bush Doctrine calls for building a military “beyond challenge” and for “experimentation with new approaches to warfare” to give the United States the “capability to defeat any attempt by any enemy” and “dissuade potential adversaries...with hopes of surpassing, or equaling, the power of the United States” (The White House, 2002b: 29–30). In a separate classified policy statement, the Bush Doctrine policy-makers even declared that the United States reserves the right to respond to danger with overwhelming force—including potentially nuclear weapons—if necessary (*Washington Times*, 2003).
- **Unilateral Preventive War and Regime Change.** The Bush administration asserted the right of the United States to carry out preventive wars unilaterally to remove governments (regime change) that it deems to be engaged in long-range plans to develop weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and to support terrorism. This pillar of the Bush Doctrine, an astonishing departure from U.S. practice and tradition, was first conveyed by the president in a graduation speech to West Point cadets. “We must take the battle to the enemy, disrupt his plans, and confront the worst threats before they emerge. If we wait for threats to fully materialize, we will have waited too long” (quoted in Ricks, 2006:38). “We cannot let our enemies strike first. The overlap between states that sponsor terror and those that pursue WMD compels us to action... To forestall or prevent such hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary act preemptively” (quoted in Ricks, 2006:62).

The Bush Doctrine includes the assertion that the United States can engage in a **preventive war** as well as a **preemptive war**. The late historian Arthur Schlesinger notes the differences in these two principles.

#### Preventive war

A war in response to a presumed future threat.

#### Preemptive war

A war in response to a direct, immediate, and specific threat.

The distinction between “pre-emptive” and “preventive” is well worth preserving. It is the distinction between legality and illegality. “Pre-emptive” war refers to a direct, immediate, specific threat that must be crushed at once; in the words of the Department of Defense manual, “an attack initiated on the basis of incontrovertible evidence that an enemy attack is imminent.” “Preventive” war refers to potential, future, therefore speculative threats. (Quoted in Singh, 2006: 18–19)

Using this distinction, Robert Singh said, “The Iraq war was as clear an instance of preventive war—illegal under the U.N. Charter—as possible” (Singh, 2006: 19).

The Bush Doctrine does not require imminent threat for the United States to swing into full offensive military force; it requires only distant threat as determined

by U.S. leaders. This is the “One Percent Solution,” as enunciated by Vice President Cheney (hence, also known as the “Cheney Doctrine”): “If there was even a one percent chance of terrorists getting a weapon of mass destruction... the United States must now act as if it were a certainty” (quoted in Suskind, 2006:62). In March 2003, Operation Iraqi Freedom became the first proof of U.S. commitment to this principle for national security in the war on terror.

## The War in Iraq

The Bush administration justified a preventive war against Iraq because its leader, Saddam Hussein, was guilty of mass murder against his own people, but also because, it was alleged, he was amassing weapons of mass destruction (nuclear, chemical, and biological), and there was a strong connection between Saddam Hussein and Al-Qaeda’s terrorism. A debate rages as to whether these last two charges are factual, as claimed by the Bush administration, or was the Bush administration convinced too easily by evidence that showed them what they wanted to see? Or was the president acting reasonably on information that appeared solid at the time? (*USA Today*, 2007:13A). Historians will eventually provide a definitive answer to this crucial debate that during the war and postwar years was so highly politicized.

Operation Iraqi Freedom began in March 2003 without a clear United Nations mandate. As in the war in Afghanistan, the initial offensive moved swiftly. Some 340,000 U.S. military personnel were deployed in the Persian Gulf region, along with more than 47,000 British troops and smaller numbers from a few other nations, to carry out the initial invasion of Iraq. After just twenty-five days, the United States and coalition forces were in some degree of control of all major Iraqi cities. President Bush declared an end to major combat operations on May 1, 2003, yet the war continued until the last troops were withdrawn in December 2012. No weapons of mass destruction were found, and the rationale for the war shifted to bringing democracy to Iraq, which would serve as a model for democracy for other nations in the Middle East to adopt.

After almost nine years of war, the Pentagon declared an official end to its mission in Iraq in late 2011. There was no clear sense of what had been won or lost in this war (Shanker, Schmidt, and Worth, 2011). The conflict claimed 4,486 American lives and 32,226 more Americans wounded in action. The aftermath of the war proved complicated and very costly for the United States. Iraqi institutions were not equipped to restore civil order, rebuild the infrastructure, and provide basic services because they were challenged by a persistent Iraqi resistance movement and sectarian violence.

Although most of the U.S. troops were withdrawn from Iraq, the U.S. continued its influence both directly and indirectly. There is a huge U.S. embassy in Baghdad. How involved is the United States, through this embassy, in the internal affairs of Iraq? Moreover, the Iraqis have bought more than \$15 billion of U.S. military hardware, including fighter planes, tanks, armored personnel carriers, and surveillance drones. The Iraqis insist these are for defensive purposes. But how will these purchases of weapons be interpreted by its neighbors in Iran, Syria, Turkey, and Israel? Will they increase or lessen tensions in the Middle East? And how will the supplying of these weapons by the United States be interpreted?

## The War in Afghanistan

With broad international support, Operation Enduring Freedom launched the war on October 7, 2001, as President Bush had promised, against the Taliban of Afghanistan, which supported Al-Qaeda. The immediate war offensive moved rapidly so that control of all the major cities of Afghanistan had been wrested from Taliban control within two months of the beginning of combat. A year after starting the operation, the U.S. government claimed that “al-Qaeda went on the run...losing their power, their safe havens and much of their leadership....They are fragmented and their leaders are missing, captured, killed or on the run” (The White House, 2002a: 1).

This optimistic view proved to be wrong in the long run. At the beginning of 2016, almost 15 years after the war began, the United States is still at war with terrorists in Afghanistan. Defense Secretary Ash Carter announced in early 2016 that U.S. troops will remain in Afghanistan for years to come (Mcleary, 2016).

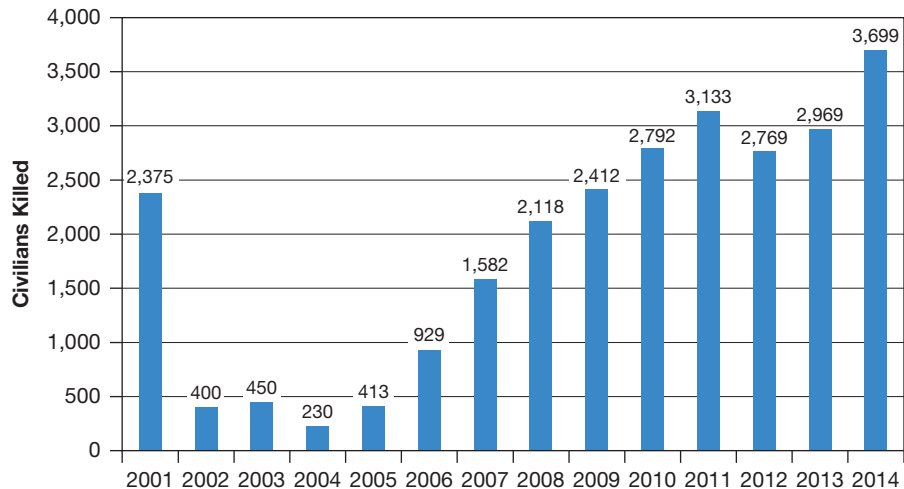
## The Costs of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars

No matter what your position on war, whether for or against, there is no denying the overwhelming consequences of both wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

**LOSS OF HUMAN LIFE** As of February 2015, the Pentagon’s official death toll from both wars was 6,800 U.S. service members and more than 6,900 contractors. In addition to the deaths of U.S. military personnel, approximately 43,000 uniformed Afghans, Iraqis, and other allies (coalition partners) have died (Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, 2015). Finally, approximately 210,000 Afghan, Iraqi, and Pakistani civilians have died as a result of both wars (see Figure 17.2)

**Figure 17.2** Afghanistan Direct Civilian War Deaths, 2001–2014

**SOURCE:** Crawford, Neta. 2015. “War-related Death, Injury, and Displacement in Afghanistan and Pakistan 2001–2014.” Watson Institute for International Studies, Brown University. <http://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2015/War%20Related%20Casualties%20Afghanistan%20and%20Pakistan%202001-2014%20FIN.pdf>, page 2. Reprinted by permission from Neta C Crawford.



**THE INJURED** More than 970,000 Iraq and Afghanistan veteran disability claims have been registered with the Department of Veterans Affairs (Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, 2015). Just counting U.S. troops, at the beginning of 2012 some 320,000 U.S. veterans had brain injuries (Griffis, 2012). Moreover, the Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that 170,000 veterans suffer hearing damage and 200,000 veterans have mental problems (reported in Sandels, 2010). The number of troops with brain and spinal injuries is high because of better protective equipment and improvements in medical trauma care; more injured troops are surviving these wars than in previous wars. Although this is good news, the downside is that because of the terrible force of explosions the combat soldiers experience, more are surviving with brain injuries.



More than 970,000 veteran disability claims have been registered with the VA from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In addition, the trauma of war haunts many soldiers when they return home. More than 17 percent of returning soldiers suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), with symptoms of flashbacks, nightmares, feelings of detachment, irritability, trouble concentrating, and sleeplessness. Those who have been deployed more than once have a 50 percent increase in acute combat stress over those who have been deployed only once (Thompson, 2007). Indicative of the higher stress levels felt by wartime troops, in 2012, a Veterans Administration investigation found that in 2010 there were an average of thirty-three suicide attempts by veterans a day, with eighteen being successful (Somander and Gilani, 2011). Put another way, 20 percent of all deaths in the military are by suicide, compared to 7 percent of all deaths among civilian men ages 17 to 60 (Thompson and Gibbs, 2012).

Often overlooked in the injuries of war are the consequences of long separations and psychological trauma on the intimate lives of soldiers and their spouses, resulting in a rising divorce rate. The incidence of spouse abuse within military couples has also increased as the war progressed, especially with male veterans with PTSD, who are two to three times more likely than veterans without PTSD to engage in intimate partner violence (Somander and Gilani, 2011).

**MONETARY COSTS** Before the invasion of Iraq, the Bush administration estimated that combat operations there would cost about \$50 billion. According to the Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, the United States has spent about \$4.4 trillion on these conflicts (2015). These costs will continue after the wars cease, as the war debt is repaid and the care and treatment of many U.S. military veterans continue indefinitely for brain and spinal injuries.

A major cost of the wars was that it drained resources from social programs that could have lessened their severity as societal social problems. *New York Times* columnist Bob Herbert interviewed Nobel laureate economist Joseph Stiglitz,



asking how the massive funds for the military might have been better spent. Stiglitz replied,

About \$560 billion, . . . would have been enough to “fix” Social Security for the next 75 years. If one were thinking in terms of promoting democracy in the Middle East, the money being spent on the war would have been enough to finance a mega-mega-mega-Marshall Plan, which would have been so much more effective than the invasion of Iraq. (Quoted in Herbert, 2006: para. 12)

“Social Policy: Shifting Some Military Spending to Alternative Programs” (below) provides some further suggestions for funneling military spending into social spending.

These wars were funded primarily with borrowed money. As a result, at least \$2 trillion has been added to the nation’s national debt. By 2013 about \$260 billion in interest had been paid on war debt, and another \$1 trillion will accrue in interest alone through 2020. This adds significantly to the national debt of \$18.9 trillion (in 2016), an amount used by some legislators to justify massive cuts in social programs.

## Social Policy

### Shifting Some Military Spending to Alternative Programs

The United States spends as much on military spending as the next nine nations combined. By itself, the United States accounts for 37 percent of all global military spending. In effect, the United States and its friends and allies account for more than two-thirds of the military spending worldwide (Lindorff, 2010). When is enough enough? Are we overspending on defense at the expense of other crucial societal concerns? Because we spend so much on the military, is it reasonable to assume that the United States could reduce its spending on defense without jeopardizing national security?

President Eisenhower said: “Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed.” Similarly, Martin Luther King, Jr. pointed out: “When a nation becomes obsessed with the guns of war, social programs must inevitably suffer” (quoted in Solomon, 2010). Could policymakers reduce the military budget by one-fourth or so (or even more) and put that money to work on mass transit, low-cost housing, job

training, green jobs, subsidized education, infrastructure projects, and the like? If so, we could produce more jobs than when we create military projects.

It is commonly argued that military spending is more productive than most industries in creating jobs. Actually, research shows that for each \$1 billion spent, more than 17,000 jobs would be created in clean energy, or about 20,000 in health care, and more than 29,000 in education, compared to that same \$1 billion spent in the military, resulting in 11,600 jobs (Garrett-Peltier, 2010).

If we take the formal military budget of about \$598.5 billion (not including veterans’ benefits), a reduction of 25 percent (roughly \$150 billion) could be achieved immediately by withdrawing from Afghanistan, cutting weapons systems that the Pentagon has deemed unnecessary, and closing half of the 800 U.S. military bases abroad. That \$150 billion could be used to reduce the national debt, to provide funding for schools, or to provide a safety net for those in poverty, among other social problems.

## The Legacy of the Wars

The United States chose to respond to the 9/11 terrorist attacks by invading Afghanistan and later Iraq. As we have seen, this response has had enormous consequences for the United States, for the people of Afghanistan and Iraq, for the Middle East, and for international relations. Recognizing that the U.S. involvement in the Middle East continues and the end results are unknown, this section outlines the consequences of the wars and speculates on the long-term legacy of U.S. actions.

The Bush Doctrine was the first attempt at a grand strategy since the end of the Cold War. But did it work? Did it eliminate the threat from terrorist networks and rogue states? Did it spread democracy to the Middle East? Did it unify these fractured nations?

Supporters of the wars argued that Saddam Hussein had been captured, tried, and executed and bin Laden assassinated. But while the deaths of these terrorist leaders were symbolically significant, they did not destroy Al-Qaeda and prevent future acts of terrorism. Terrorism now emanates from places like Iran, Yemen, Pakistan, and Somalia.

The long-term consequences of the U.S. military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq appear to be serious and far-reaching. We do not know the full extent of the ramifications, but we have some clues. We begin with the successful scenario, followed by a number of negative possibilities.

**THE EFFORT IS SUCCESSFUL** Vice President Cheney gave this optimistic prediction of our wars to stifle terrorism:

Ten years from now, we'll look back on this period of time and see that liberating 50 million people in Afghanistan and Iraq really did represent a major, fundamental shift, obviously, in U.S. policy in terms of how we dealt with the emerging terrorist threat—and that we'll have fundamentally changed circumstances in that part of the world. (Quoted in Nye, 2006: para. 2)

Cheney was correct on two counts. First, the U.S. effort freed Iraq from the tyranny of Saddam Hussein in Iraq and the leadership of bin Laden in the Al-Qaeda organization. But are the Iraqis and Afghans better off? Will democracy get a foothold in these countries and spread across the Middle East as apologists for the war believe? Fifteen years after the war in Iraq began, the answers to these questions are negative. Long term, these are questions for historians to answer. And, second, Cheney asserted that the Middle East will be fundamentally changed by U.S. efforts. He was correct, but will the U.S. war on terror bring about beneficial changes for that region? Or will they be overwhelmingly detrimental?

**THE EFFORT DOES MORE HARM THAN GOOD** The United States did liberate Iraq from the oppressive Saddam Hussein regime and Osama bin Laden is dead, but in the process, the wars destroyed much of Iraq's and Afghanistan's infrastructure (e.g., roads, bridges, buildings, private homes, and the means for providing essential services such as electricity and water). The United States was held responsible for this destruction, which was compounded by the slow rebuilding of the infrastructure because of terrorist acts, bureaucratic mismanagement, scandal, profiteering, and insufficient funds.

As the *New York Times* editorialized, "The United States' failure to restore utilities and rebuild schools and hospitals has turned once sympathetic Iraqis against the American presence in their country" (*New York Times*, 2006: para. 2).

The war on terrorism has not been won. Actually, U.S. involvement in the Middle East has caused resentment among local populations. In effect, U.S. violence and occupation increased the threat of terrorism (McGovern, 2012). Or, as the late historian Howard Zinn asked: “Is our war in Afghanistan ending terrorism, or provoking it?” (Zinn, 2008). It provokes terrorism as a consequence of the U.S. meddling in the affairs of other sovereign nations but also because of the collateral damage (the deaths and injuries to civilians) from indiscriminate shelling or drone attacks. Muslims have been outraged by videos showing Marines urinating on Taliban bodies, the burning of the Koran, and soldiers holding up body parts of their enemies as trophies. These acts enhanced the threat of terrorism rather than diminished it. Even President Obama admits in an interview, “ISIL is a direct outgrowth of Al Qaeda in Iraq that grew out of our invasion, which is an example of unintended consequences” (quoted in Hussain, 2015).

Polls by Zogby International and the Pew Research Center in 2010 and 2011 found that many in the Arab world had an unfavorable rating of the United States. Moreover, these already low ratings declined even more in the first years of the Obama administration compared with the ratings at the end of the Bush administration. For example, favorable ratings of the United States fell at least 9 percent in Morocco, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates from 2008 to 2010. In Egypt, the favorable rating fell from 30 percent to 5 percent (Al Jazeera, 2011; Ukman, 2011).

Among the reasons many Middle Eastern Muslims have less regard for the United States since the Iraq and Afghanistan wars were the perceived indirect attack on Muslims, and the widespread assumption that the United States’ involvement was to take advantage of the oil supply in Iraq, the secret prisons, and the torture of Muslims (per the images of prisoners at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba), expanding the war in Afghanistan, the assassination of Osama bin Laden, and the continued U.S. support of Israel.

**INHUMANE TREATMENT OF SUSPECTED TERRORISTS AIDS THE CAUSE OF THE TERRORISTS** The **Geneva Conventions** are international agreements on humane treatment of combatants and civilians by opposing governments and military forces during times of war. The first of these treaties dates back to 1864, and since then, the agreements evolved so that nearly every nation (188 of them) was a signatory to the Geneva Conventions at the beginning of the war on terror. Although the Bush administration never suggested that the United States withdraw from these core provisions of international law, there has been a pattern of circumventing them. The pattern began after the 2001 military campaign in Afghanistan, which netted thousands of captive Taliban supporters and suspected Al-Qaeda operatives, many of whom were imprisoned and subjected to sometimes barbaric treatment in “defiance of American and international law” (Conason, 2007: 12). This practice continued during the Obama administration, as suspects were kidnapped and taken to prisons around the world for months and years at a time. Under American law, these acts were illegal.

In 2006, Congress passed the Military Commissions Act. When President Bush signed this act, he announced: “In memory of the victims of September 11, it is my honor to sign [this Act] into law” (quoted in Sussman, 2007: 7). This act (Herman, 2006):

- Significantly broadens the definition of “enemy combatant” and makes it a matter of presidential discretion. An “enemy combatant” is defined as a person who is

### Geneva Conventions

International agreements on the humane treatment of combatants and civilians during war, including the basic rights of wartime prisoners.

designated by the commander-in-chief as someone who has engaged in hostilities against the United States.

- Removes habeas corpus rights of noncitizens. **Habeas corpus**, a human right considered fundamental to the Western world since the Magna Carta (CE 1215), prevents the police from arresting and holding someone without cause. In other words, enemy combatants are denied the right to challenge their detentions in civil courts.
- Permits aggressive interrogations in secret prisons. The act does not list acceptable and unacceptable “methods of interrogation.” The legislation keeps methods open-ended and subject to the president’s interpretation of the Geneva Conventions.
- Suspension of normal rules of evidence and due process. The act, unlike the procedures in U.S. courts, permits the use of hearsay and coerced evidence and evidence obtained in warrantless searches, and it fails to allow prisoners on trial ensured access to the evidence against them.

**Habeas corpus**  
A basic human right in the Western world that prevents the police (or government) from arresting and holding someone without cause.

The Military Commissions Act may eventually be declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court because it violates the Bill of Rights. But in the meantime, the U.S. reaction to terrorism was a “five-year transformation from beacon of freedom to autocratic torture state” (Rall, 2006: 19), paving the way for the rise of reactionary extremist groups fueled by anti-American sentiment.

**THE EROSION OF CIVIL LIBERTIES IN THE UNITED STATES** Faced with the threat of terrorism, the president sought, and Congress passed, the USA PATRIOT Act of 2001 (Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism). This act was hailed by supporters as a crucial piece of legislation giving the nation’s law enforcement and intelligence-gathering personnel the “tools they need” to catch terrorists and stop another 9/11. The provisions of the USA PATRIOT Act:

- Expanded the ability of law enforcement personnel to conduct secret searches and conduct phone and Internet surveillance and to access a wide range of personal financial, medical, mental health, and student records. Government monitoring of communication between federal detainees and their lawyers is allowed. Judicial oversight of these investigation activities is reduced by the act.
- Expanded the legal definition of terrorism beyond previous laws in a manner that subjects ordinary political and religious organizations to surveillance, wiretapping, and criminal action without any evidence of wrongdoing.
- Allowed FBI agents to investigate any American citizen without probable cause of crime if they say it is for “intelligence purposes.” As a result, some American citizens, mostly of Arab and South Asian origin, have been held in secret federal custody for weeks or months, many without any charges filed against them and without access to lawyers.
- Allowed noncitizens to be jailed based on suspicion, even without evidence. Suspects can be detained indefinitely without judicial review, and hundreds have been detained. Immigration hearings for post-9/11 noncitizen detainees are conducted in secret.

Some argue that ordinary law-abiding folks have nothing to fear from laws like the USA PATRIOT Act unless they are involved in some kind of clandestine activity.

But this reaction misses the point, according to critics. The USA PATRIOT Act is only one of hundreds of laws and legal regulations rewritten by the Bush administration to create barriers to the possibility of terrorists penetrating U.S. borders. More than any other legal change, it points out the uncanny contradiction of the war on terror policies. Under the Bush Doctrine, the United States has conducted aggressive military campaigns to liberate Afghans and Iraqis and bring democracy to “the greater Middle East.” Yet, the actions of the government have restricted civil liberties that are the foundation of the U.S. Constitution and democracy. How can we expand democracy in the wider world when we do not practice it in fortress America?

Senator Russ Feingold from Wisconsin was the only senator to vote against the PATRIOT Act. His rationale delivered to his colleagues was,

There is no doubt that if we lived in a police state, it would be easier to catch terrorists. If we lived in a country where the police were allowed to search your home at any time for any reason; if we lived in a country where the government was entitled to open your mail, eavesdrop on your phone conversations, or intercept your e-mail communications; if we lived in a country where people could be held in jail indefinitely based on what they write or think, or based on mere suspicion that they were up to no good, the government would probably discover and arrest more terrorists, or would-be terrorists, just as it would find more lawbreakers generally. But that would not be a country in which we would want to live, and it would not be a country for which we could, in good conscience, ask our young people to fight and die. In short, that country would not be America. (2001:2)

To conduct the war on terror, the FBI, the Defense Department, Homeland Security, and the National Security Agency conduct domestic surveillance programs. Here are some examples of domestic spying:

- The departments of Justice, State, and Homeland Security buy commercial databases that track Americans’ finances, phone numbers, and biographical information (Woellert and Kopecke, 2006).
- Using a “national security letter,” the FBI can demand that an Internet provider, bank, or phone company turn over records of who you call and e-mail; where you work, fly, and vacation; and the like. No judge has to approve the demand. Moreover, the individual under surveillance is unaware of what is happening because it is classified (*USA Today*, 2005).
- The Department of Homeland Security recruited utility and telephone workers, cable TV installers, postal workers, delivery drivers, and others who regularly enter private homes to become federal informants, informing of suspicious persons, activities, and items that they observed (Conason, 2007: 194).
- To qualify for federal homeland security grants, states must assemble lists of “potential threat elements”—individuals or groups suspected of possible terrorist activity (Kaplan, 2006).
- The Justice Department funded a private contractor, Matrix (Multistate Anti-Terrorism Information Exchange), that used “data mining” technology to search public records and matched them with police files to identify some 120,000 “suspects” with “high terrorist factor” scores.

Proponents argue that the dangers are serious, and these and other security measures are needed to make the nation secure by making it easier to identify, prevent, and punish terrorists.

Critics, on the other hand, argue that these measures go too far in expanding the government's abilities to intrude on citizens' lives, thereby weakening individual rights. Citizens have guarantees from the Constitution that protect them from government surveillance, reading the mail, and listening to phone conversations of its citizens—in short, Americans have the right to privacy and freedom from unreasonable search and seizure. Moreover, there is a high probability that the invasion of privacy will not be randomly distributed but more likely will be directed to noncitizens, Muslims, and people who look “Middle Eastern.”

There is a fine line between what is needed for security and protecting the freedoms that characterize the United States. If we stray too far toward restricted freedoms, we end up, ironically, terrorizing ourselves. Another irony is that President Bush declared on the night of the assault on the World Trade Center and Pentagon that “America is the brightest beacon for freedom in the world and no one will keep that light from shining,” yet the domestic antiterrorism actions taken by the government “darken that very beacon of freedom by making a new attack on our own people's already endangered civil liberties” (Hightower, 2001: 1).

## Twenty-First Century Warfare

### 17.4 Discuss the changes in warfare in the twenty-first century.

Throughout most of U.S. history, the threat to national security was organized violence by nation-states. This threat, while still plausible, has diminished. Now ethnic tribes and clans, drug cartels, ethnic nationalists, and religious fundamentalists are the threats. But these potential enemies will not be defeated by conventional means. As former Senator Gary Hart observed, our strategic weapons, large Army divisions, and navy warships will have little impact on the new enemies (Hart, 2011:76).

### Minimizing Personnel

In twenty-first-century warfare, the number of military personnel is kept at a minimum in two ways. One method is to extend the combat tours of the military personnel and to give them multiple combat tours. This overworking of soldiers takes its toll in mental fatigue increasing the likelihood of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). One manifestation of the stress is the relatively high rate of suicide. In the past ten years, for example, the U.S. army lost more soldiers to suicide than to enemy fire in Afghanistan (Maddow, 2012:204).

The second tactic used to limit the size of the military has been to privatize many military functions. In other words, the Pentagon hires private contractors to do work once done by soldiers, in effect outsourcing such activities as cooking, maintenance work, building and remodeling structures, furnishing transportation, providing security (just a bit ironic), data processing, and gathering intelligence. The privatizing of the military benefits the Pentagon by allowing the expansion of war activities, shifting parts of the Pentagon budget to other government agencies, but keeping many activities away from public view. In short, this allows the military to go beyond the limits set by

Congress without political consequences. Moreover, the number of deaths and injured among private contractors are not included in the toll of wars, thus hiding the actual cost of lives from civilian notice. But they die, nevertheless, for U.S. goals. As previously discussed, more contractors have died in Iraq and Afghanistan than U.S. soldiers.

## Shielding the Public

The public has been shielded from the loss of American lives in the wars of the twenty-first century. From 2003 to 2008, for example, the Bush administration banned news photographers from the ceremonies when flag-draped caskets were removed from planes at U.S. air bases. Moreover, the president and vice president did not attend military funerals, and the Pentagon effectively banned images of wounded troops when it required news agencies to get signed consent forms from soldiers photographed after they were wounded (Maddow, 2012). So, instead of shared grief and national honor for the loss of American lives, the grief is privatized to the families of the fallen. Among Rachel Maddow's recommendations, after reviewing the various aspects of wars as they are now fought, is that "going to war, being at war, should be painful for the entire country, from the start" (Maddow, 2012: 249; see also Ricks, 2012). But that is not how wars are conducted in the twenty-first century. Americans have been systematically made oblivious to the grisly human price of war (Shane, 2012). This makes it too easy for leaders to lead us toward war.

## The Use of Drones

Drone strikes are especially relevant to twenty-first-century warfare. These are unmanned aerial vehicles used for surveillance and bombing strategic targets. The United States has deployed 7,000 drones in six countries. The CIA and the U.S. military operate the drones but a far distance from the strikes (as far away as Langley,

Stealth attacks by drones have assassinated suspected terrorist leaders, but their collateral damage has also killed innocents.



Virginia). Not only does this remove combatants from the enemy, drone operations are classified and thus cannot be openly debated in Congress, thus removing the program from public view and responsibility (Cole, 2012).

Drones are used to assassinate those responsible for terrorist attacks. This has meant strikes in sovereign nations without their permission (acts that Americans would not tolerate if they were directed at the United States). The United States, for example, conducted over 300 drone strikes in Pakistan from 2004 to 2012, over the strong objections of the Pakistani government. These stealth attacks have assassinated suspected terrorist leaders, but their collateral damage has also killed innocents, leading to intense hatred of the United States and increasing support of the terrorists (*The Nation*, 2012). In particular, drone strikes lead many Pakistanis and Yemenis, driven by hatred and revenge, to join militant groups opposed to the United States (Mothana, 2012).

Drones and other new technologies have freed the executive branch from seeking approval of Congress. President Obama and his administration unilaterally order the killing of foreigners located far from the battlefield without the oversight of the other branches of government (*New York Times*, 2012). This trend of presidents bypassing Congress on matters of war began with Kennedy and Johnson in the Vietnam War and later with Reagan, and continuing to the present, with an ever-greater convergence of power in the executive branch (Maddow, 2012).

## The Threat of Nuclear Weapons

Nuclear weapons involve the most destructive technology on Earth. During the **Cold War** (the intense tension and arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union that lasted from the end of World War II until 1990), the two superpowers had most of the nuclear weapons. The United States spent almost 8 trillion in 2012 dollars on nuclear weapons in the last half of the twentieth century. That nuclear budget was more than that half-century's federal combined spending on Medicare, education, disaster relief, social services, non-nuclear research, environmental protection, highway maintenance, and prisons (Maddow, 2012: 219). The United States and Russia in 2009 possessed 96 percent of the world's nuclear warheads, each aimed at the other.

Other nuclear power holders were France, Britain, China, Israel, Pakistan, India, and North Korea (*Guardian*, 2009). The year 1998 was a turning point, as the world entered a new nuclear era when India tested five bombs, followed two weeks later by its rival neighbor, Pakistan.

Thus, in this globalized world, we face a threatening situation in which as many as forty countries have the capacity to develop nuclear weapons in a very short time span. The newcomers to the nuclear club, unlike the charter members, are not governed by elaborate rules and sophisticated technology designed to prevent accidents (like nuclear radiation leaks) and firing in haste. Instead, they are dealing with the savagery of ethnic strife, intense religious differences, and insecure nations. Moreover, there is the danger of nuclear weapons or weapons-grade materials falling into the hands of terrorists—"the one enemy we know would probably not hesitate to use them" (Keller, 2003: 51).

Nuclear technology is expected to accelerate as nations turn to atomic power for their domestic energy requirements. This technology gives them the ability to make reactor fuel, or with the same equipment and a little more effort, bomb fuel. Thus, the tension and the threat of nuclear warfare will continue to accelerate in the twenty-first century.

### Cold War

The tension and arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union from World War II until 1990.



## Chapter Review

### 17.1 Describe the size, strength, and cost of the U.S. military.

- U.S. national security encompasses defending the homeland; building security globally by projecting U.S. influence and deterring aggression; and remaining prepared to win against any adversary.
- The Department of Defense employs more than 3 million people in 5,000 different locations.
- The U.S. military is the largest and most expensive in the world. Military spending is high because (a) of the fear of nuclear weapons held by others; (b) of the threat of terrorism; (c) defense spending benefits business, labor, and the economy; and (d) outspending others is said to give the United States “peace through strength.”

### 17.2 Understand the threats of domestic and international terrorism.

- Terrorism is a strategy of using violence to gain political advantage. It is a social construction. That is, what is defined as terrorism and who is labeled a terrorist are matters of interpretation.
- Domestic terrorism (Americans killing Americans) has occurred throughout U.S. history. The current threats come from individuals and groups focusing on particular issues such as abortion or gun control or a more generalized fear of government overreach and government mistakes.
- Globalization has quickened the pace, scale, and fear of terrorism. As nations become connected, they are increasingly vulnerable to terrorist attacks. The United States, in particular, is relatively unprotected from terrorist attacks because it is a mobile, open society with porous borders that are difficult to police.

### 17.3 Understand the consequences of the United States’ invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq.

- The Bush Doctrine that emerged to guide national security in response to the September 11, 2001,

attacks included the following principles: (a) the right of the United States to engage unilaterally in preventive wars and to change governments it deems to be dangerous, (b) the spread of democracy, (c) the building of a military beyond challenge, and (d) dividing nations into those who are with us and those who are against us.

- Operation Iraqi Freedom began in March 2003 without a clear United Nations mandate. After just twenty-five days, the United States and coalition forces were in some degree of control of all major Iraqi cities. President Bush declared an end to major combat operations on May 1, 2003, yet the war continued until the last troops were withdrawn in December 2012.
- With broad international support, Operation Enduring Freedom launched the war on October 7, 2001, as President Bush had promised, against the Taliban of Afghanistan, which supported Al-Qaeda. At the beginning of 2016, almost 15 years after the war began, the United States is still at war with terrorists in Afghanistan. Defense Secretary Ash Carter announced in early 2016 that U.S. troops will remain in Afghanistan for years to come.
- The war on terror has been very costly in human life. As of February 2015, the Pentagon’s official death toll from both wars was 6,800 U.S. service members and more than 6,900 contractors, 43,000 uniformed allies, and approximately 210,000 Afghan, Iraqi, and Pakistani civilians.
- The United States has spent about \$4.4 trillion on these wars, adding to the national debt.
- The possible long-term negative consequences of these wars include (a) the loss of Iraqi and Afghani support as the efforts of the United States do more harm than good, (b) unintended support for the cause of the terrorists through U.S. actions against suspected terrorists, and (c) the loss of civil liberties in the United States.

### 17.4 Discuss the changes in warfare in the twenty-first century.

- In twenty-first-century warfare, the number of military personnel is kept at a minimum in two ways. One method is to extend the combat tours of the military personnel and to give them multiple combat tours. The second tactic used to limit the size of the military has been to privatize many military functions. This outsourcing minimizes the cost of wars for the public by not counting casualties by contractors in the official statistics, by distributing the costs of the military to a number of departments, and by limiting debates on military matters in Congress.
- The conduct of wars in the twenty-first century differs from earlier times. Unmanned drones often carry out stealth attacks. These attacks have assassinated suspected terrorist leaders, but their collateral damage has also killed innocents, leading to intense hatred of the United States and increasing support of the terrorists.
- Nuclear weapons are the most destructive weapons on Earth. In this globalized world, we face a threatening situation in which as many as forty countries have the capacity to develop nuclear weapons in a very short time span.

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## Key Terms

**Bush Doctrine** The policy guiding U.S. military actions in the “war on terror” and the long-range plan for national security in the twenty-first century.

**Cold War** The tension and arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union from World War II until 1990.

**Defense budget** The government’s spending plan for maintaining and upgrading the military defenses of the United States.

**Geneva Conventions** International agreements on the humane treatment of combatants and civilians during war, including the basic rights of wartime prisoners.

**Habeas corpus** A basic human right in the Western world that prevents the police (or government) from arresting and holding someone without cause.

**National security** The ways nations organize to protect borders, guard their national interests, and shield their citizens and businesses abroad with armies, military bases, intelligence networks, embassies, and consulates.

**Preemptive war** A war in response to a direct, immediate, and specific threat.

**Preventive war** A war in response to a presumed future threat.

**Terrorism** Any act intended to cause death or serious injury to civilians or noncombatants to intimidate a population and weaken their will or draw attention to the perpetrator’s cause.

**Weapons of mass destruction (WMDs)** Nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons capable of large-scale death and destruction.

## Chapter 18

# Progressive Plan to Solve Social Problems



## Learning Objectives

- 18.1** Describe the sociological approach to social problems and social change.
- 18.2** Understand the principles that should guide public policy in reducing or eliminating social problems.
- 18.3** Explain how the United States could finance a progressive agenda.

Social problems are human arrangements, created and sustained by people. The politicoeconomic system of a society, from which social problems emanate, does not simply evolve from random events and aimless choices. The powerful in societies craft policies to accomplish certain ends within the context of historical events and political constraints.

Social policy is about design, about setting goals and determining the means to achieve them. Do we want to regulate and protect more, as the well-developed welfare states do, or should we do less? Should we create and invest in policies and programs that protect citizens from poverty, unemployment, and medical inattention, or should the market economy sort people into winners, players, and losers according to their abilities, efforts, and the luck or misfortune of the families into which they were born and raised? In the past two decades, decision makers in the United States have opted to reduce drastically the welfare system (e.g., elimination of Aid to Families with Dependent Children [AFDC]) while the taxes on the affluent have been reduced significantly and subsidies such as the tax exemption on the interest and taxes paid on housing have been retained. Congress and state legislatures have reduced or completely rejected subsidies to low-income families for childcare, medical care, and job training. Similarly, the boards of corporations, faced with major profit gains and increased productivity, have rewarded their executives with ever-more-generous salaries and stock options. Meanwhile, these same corporations have downsized their workforces, reduced entry-level wages, hired more temporary and contingent workers, moved jobs to low-wage societies, and reduced health and other benefits to employees. Thus, the combined acts of federal and state governments and corporations have increased the gap between the top one-fifth (“the fortunate fifth”) and those in the bottom one-fifth of the income/wealth distribution. The resulting inequality gap is a major source of social problems.

The important sociological point is that if societies are designed, and some of the arrangements result in social problems, they can be changed to reduce or eliminate those problems. In other words, the design can be changed.

Such change is not easy, though. Social arrangements can be tradition bound and often imbued with religious approval, which impedes efforts at change. The status quo is defined as natural, and those who challenge it are seen as “impractical, ridiculous, crazy, dangerous and/or immoral. By definition, the conventional wisdom of the day is widely accepted, continually reiterated and regarded not as ideology but as reality itself” (Willis, 1998:19).

## Sociology, Social Problems, and Social Change

### 18.1 Describe the sociological approach to social problems and social change.

This textbook is a sociological introduction to the understanding of social problems, their sources, and their consequences. Let us look more closely at the discipline of sociology and make explicit what has been implicit throughout this text.

### The Sociological Imagination and Social Problems

Among the components of the sociological imagination is that it involves moving away from thinking in terms of the individual and her or his problem and focusing rather on the social, economic, and historical circumstances that produce the problem

for many. In other words, when seeking solutions to social problems, we focus on changing the social structure rather than on changing problem people.

As an example, changing attitudes to reduce or eliminate racism, although important, does not solve the underlying problem of institutional racism in U.S. society. Changing the structure of society to ensure equality of opportunity for jobs, income, education, housing, and health care is the solution.

## Sociological Paradox: Structure and Agency

Throughout the discussions in this text, we have emphasized the power of social context and the social forces that so strongly affect human behavior (the following is from Eitzen, Baca Zinn, and Smith, 2010: 521–522). This **deterministic view** is too strong, however. Although society constrains what we do, it does not always determine what we do. Although society and its structures are powerful, the members of society are not totally controlled. We are not passive members. We can take control of the conditions of our own lives. Human beings cope with, adapt to, and change social structures to meet their needs. Individuals, acting alone or with others, can shape, resist, challenge, and sometimes change the social organizations and social institutions that impinge on them. These actions constitute **human agency**.

The paradox of sociology—the power of society over its members versus the power of social actors to change society—has several important meanings and implications. Foremost, society is not a rigid, static entity composed of robots. People in interaction are the architects of society in an ongoing project. That is, society is created, sustained, and changed by people.

Second, the social forms that people create often take on a sacred quality—the sanctity of tradition—that constrains behavior in socially prescribed ways. The sociological insight is, to restate the previous point, that what many consider sacred and unchangeable is a social construction and can therefore be reconstructed.

A third implication is that because social structures are created and sustained by people, they are imperfect. There are both positive and negative consequences of the way people have organized. Many are content with the status quo because they benefit from it. Others accept it even though they are disadvantaged by it. But some also seek change to improve the social structure or, perhaps, to transform it into something completely different. They are the agents of change.

In sum, the essence of agency is that individuals, through collective action, are capable of changing the structure of society and even the course of history. But although agency is important, we should not forget the power of the structures that subordinate people, making change difficult or, at times, impossible.

## A Sociological Dilemma: Recognition and Rejection

Sociologists wish to be taken seriously by those in power. We have answers, not all by any means, but many, nonetheless, based on empirical research (see any issue of the sociological journals *Contexts* and *American Sociological Review*). But society's governmental and corporate leaders rarely seek sociological expertise in tackling social problems. Repeatedly, for example, sociologists have pointed out to political deaf ears that it “costs less to educate people than to leave them untrained. It costs less to provide prenatal care than to care for underweight babies. It costs less to house people than to build prisons to warehouse them” (Jackson, 1998:20). It costs less and is more effective to deal

### Deterministic view

The belief that social forces determine human behavior.

### Human agency

Individuals acting alone or with others shape, resist, challenge, and sometimes change the social organizations and the social institutions that impinge on them.

with children before they get into trouble than to ignore them and put them in the criminal justice system after they have become disheartened, alienated, and angry because they have no hope of conventional success. But this understanding goes unheeded as budgets for Head Start–type programs dry up and budgets for prisons escalate.

Many reject the message of sociologists because it challenges the core of society's dominant ideology. The economy of the United States is capitalism. This system has its strengths, but it also leads to many social problems, as has been amply shown throughout this book.

Related to capitalism is the emphasis in U.S. society on individualism. Unlike Canada, the Scandinavian countries, and the nations of Western Europe, the United States focuses more on individual achievement and competition, letting the losers fend mostly for themselves. In essence, we say for the most part, you are on your own; get an education; get a job; take care of yourself and your family; and you are not obligated to take care of others. Thus, government programs to help the economically disadvantaged are minimal. The governments of the other Western democracies have a different philosophy. They are much more inclined to provide for the common good (e.g., generous welfare programs to lift people out of poverty; universal health insurance; more public resources for parks, orchestras, and mass transit). Sociologists are quick to point out the difference between the United States and its peers, noting that although the United States is the wealthiest country, compared with other modern industrialized nations it has the highest proportion of people living in poverty, the highest proportion of children growing up in poverty, and the most unequal income and wealth distributions. Thus, the individualism that pervades U.S. society has a severe downside, leading to serious social problems. But because the individualist ideology is a core belief of most Americans, any criticism of it is viewed with alarm, as being unpatriotic. Thus, when sociologists examine and report what they see as the consequences of public policy, which has as its foundation the emphasis on individualism, they are moved to the margins of public discourse about social problems.

We assume that many of the readers of this book have found the sociological examination of social problems uncomfortable. Perhaps you have found it subversive because it questions underlying assumptions about U.S. society. Even though this critical approach may be uncomfortable to many people, it is necessary to understand human social arrangements and find solutions to social problems. Thus, we ask that you think sociologically: (1) to view social arrangements critically and (2) to view social problems as emanating from social structure, not bad people. In essence, we ask that you overcome the societal bias against sociology by adopting the sociological imagination as you consider what society should do about its social problems.

## Impediments to Social Change and Progressive Principles to Guide Policy

### **18.2 Understand the principles that should guide public policy in reducing or eliminating social problems.**

This text has focused on the structural basis for social problems. These problems are formidable, but not unsolvable. This effort to change problematic social arrangements is the essence of human agency.

What, then, do we do to solve social problems? The first step must be to determine the facts. We must challenge the myths that often guide public opinion and policymakers. The major goal of this text is to provide the facts and demythologize social life.

The second step is to establish, as a society, the principles that will guide public policy to accomplish the common good. This, we realize, is politically impossible at the moment for the following three related reasons: The power of money in decision-making; politicians avoiding any issue related to higher taxes; and gridlock among decision-makers.

## The Power of Money in Decision-Making

Foremost, underlying many of the problems in the United States is the power of money over the decision-making process, a problem that was magnified by the 2010 Supreme Court ruling giving corporations and other organizations the right to give unlimited amounts of money to affect the political process. The problem, of course, is that the powerful use money to retain and expand their power, and the relatively powerless (e.g., single mothers, the homeless, renters, children, the working poor, recent immigrants, and contingent workers) are left with no effective political voice. This is not democracy; it is a **plutocracy** (a government where the wealthy class rules).

Until campaign finance is straightened out, no significant change is possible (Lessig, 2010; Moyers and Winship, 2010). As it is, politics is guided by the “golden rule”: Those who have the gold will make the rules. Donald Kaul, writing about the Supreme Court decision, provides this dire assessment:

The decision, *Citizens United vs. Federal Election Commission*, ended limits on the money corporations and unions can spend on influencing elections, thus writing a finish to the experiment in democracy we’ve been conducting for 220 years.

We’ll still have elections and rallies and arguments and tea parties. So what? It’s all a show, the political equivalent of professional wrestling. (2010:23)

If money rules, we do not have a democracy. The public must demand campaign finance reform and accept nothing less.

### Plutocracy

Government in which the wealthy class rules.

Politicians seem unable to raise taxes to improve the crumbling infrastructure because they fear they will be defeated by those favoring small government and reduced taxes.



## Progressive Social Change and Higher Taxes

The second stumbling block to change is that politicians (at both state and federal levels) are “incapable of tackling long-term social and economic challenges, whether the solutions come from the left or the right” (Harwood, 2010: para. 5). The reason: One rarely gets elected to public office by asking citizens to sacrifice by paying higher taxes to pay for problems with long-term positive consequences for society. Consider infrastructure: The American Society of Civil Engineers prepares a

“report card” on the state of the infrastructure—roads, bridges, dams, levees, ports, water systems, sewage systems, the electric grid, etc. The most recent grade was “D+,” and the cost of bringing all systems up to adequacy was estimated at \$2.2 trillion over five years (2014). Is there a politician who would run on a platform to remedy this serious (and very costly) problem now and with higher taxes? Added to this is the political component: Many (e.g., about 20 percent of adult Americans identified with the Tea Party movement in 2010) view government as the problem, not the solution. Hence, for them, the government has no role in solving national problems. What, then, is the solution to the crumbling infrastructure? But not only the physical infrastructure but the social infrastructure as well needs fixing. Do we not need public investment in health care, education, childcare, and nutrition programs? Or are these problems to be left to local decisions or the marketplace? The problem is not only weak legislators who vote on the safe side to get reelected. “The fault lies everywhere. The president, the Congress, the news media and the public are to blame. Shared sacrifice is not part of anyone’s program” (Herbert, 2010: para. 12). Significant in their culpability are the people who favor candidates who, for example, pledge to never vote for higher taxes. This unwillingness of lawmakers to sacrifice for the public good is the dark side of democracy.

## Gridlock Among Decision-Makers

The third obstruction to solving social problems is gridlock among decision-makers at the state and federal levels (Beinart, 2010). We concentrate here on Congress. To begin, the filibuster in the Senate has made it virtually impossible to enact important legislation. This has worsened as Congress has become more divided in the last twenty years or so. In the late 1960s, for example, senators filibustered less than 10 percent of major legislation, but in 2009 Senate Republicans filibustered 80 percent of important legislation. Behind this is the polarization of Congress. Winners in primary elections, where only members of a party can vote, tend to side with their party’s base, which has unyielding beliefs about civil rights, abortion rights, climate change, immigration, spending on the military, the role of the federal government, and the regulation of the free market system. The result is fewer moderates becoming candidates in the general election and less compromise with the opposition when elected. This is exacerbated by the practice of **gerrymandering**, the carving up of districts by the party in power to maintain their favorable balance of power. The politicians favored in this arrangement have no incentive to compromise. Compromise and bipartisanship are rare qualities in today’s politicians and political bodies. These are further complicated by the dysfunctional political structure of Congress.

### Gerrymandering

The practice by the political party in power to carve up voting districts in a manner that keeps them in power.

## Progressive Principles to Guide Public Policy

Assuming that the bias of money in politics, the short-term outlook of politicians, and the gridlock in our political bodies can be overcome—dubious assumptions at best—let us propose some principles that we believe ought to guide public policy to reduce or eliminate major social problems that plague U.S. society. We realize, of course, that this is a controversial exercise, but we ask you to ponder these proposals and improve on them.

1. **A call for policies and behaviors that enhance our moral obligation to our neighbors (broadly defined) and their children, to those unlike us as well as those similar to us, and to future generations.** This principle runs counter to our



societal celebration of individualism. But, we argue, the emphasis on individualism over community leads to exacerbated inequality; the tolerance of inferior housing, schools, and services for “others”; and public policies that are punitive to the economically disadvantaged. Moreover, exaggerated individualism is the antithesis of cooperation and solidarity—the requirements of community.

What happens when the gap between the rich and the poor widens? This phenomenon of income inequality has implications for democracy, crime, and civil unrest.

The welfare states of Canada, Western Europe, and Scandinavia have comprehensive social supports for their peoples. They provide universal health care insurance systems. They have a much more ample minimum wage than does the United States. They provide generous pensions and nursing home care for the elderly. They have paid maternity (and in some cases paternity) leave. Education is free through college. These benefits are costly, with income, inheritance, and sales taxes considerably higher than in the United States. The tradeoff is that poverty is rare, and the population feels relatively safe from crime and from the insecurities over income, illness, and old age. Most important, there is a large middle class with a much stronger feeling of community and social solidarity than is found in the United States. And, the people are better off. As Robert Borosage stated:

On every social indicator—health, longevity, education, social cohesion, crime, generosity—more equitable societies fare better than richer, less equitable ones like our own. (2010: 12; see also Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010)

In sharp contrast, the United States has the highest poverty rate by far among the industrialized countries, a withering bond among those of different social classes, a growing racial divide, and an alarming move toward a two-tiered society. Should we move further toward an extreme bipolar society, the following is likely to occur:

If you had a million dollars, where would you want to live, Switzerland or the Philippines? Think about all the extra costs, monetary and otherwise, if you chose a vastly unequal country like the Philippines. Maybe you’d pay less in taxes, but you’d wind up shuttling between little fenced-in enclaves. You’d have private security guards. You’d socialize only in private clubs. You’d visit only private parks and beaches. Your kids would go to private schools. They’d study in private libraries. (James Fallows, quoted in Carville, 1996: 87)

The United States is not the Philippines, but we are already seeing a dramatic rise in private schooling and home-schooling and in the number of walled and gated affluent neighborhood enclaves on the one hand and ever-greater segregation of the poor and especially poor racial minorities in deteriorating neighborhoods and inferior schools on the other. Personal safety is more and more problematic as violent crime rates increase among the young and disaffected.

Finally, democracy is on the wane as more and more people opt out of the electoral process, presumably because, among other things, they are alienated and their choice among politicians is limited to those whose interests favor the wealthy, not the economically disadvantaged.

There is a flaw in the individualistic credo. We cannot go it alone entirely—our fate depends on others. Thus, it is in our individual interest to have a collective interest.

- 2. Acceptance of the first principle leads to the second: A call for government programs that provide for people who cannot provide for themselves.** This is a call to bring all members of society up to a minimum standard of dignity. At a minimum, this includes universal health insurance, jobs, a living wage that places workers above the poverty line, and guaranteed and adequate pensions.

This position is opposite the direction of current policymakers in Congress and the state legislatures, whose stance is to reduce rather than expand the already constricted U.S. welfare safety net. The ideological consensus among the Republicans, the Blue Dog (conservative) Democrats, and various pressure groups has two related propositions. First, government subsidies exacerbate social problems rather than solve them. Second, individuals who fail are to blame for their failure. Ironically, these propositions are assumed by the powerful to hold for individuals but not for corporations.

Since the 1930s, the United States has had a social safety net of AFDC, food stamps, Head Start, subsidized housing, and the like to help those in need. Conservatives see this safety net as the problem because they believe that it destroys incentives to work and encourages poor single mothers to have children. They argue, then, that welfare is the problem and that social problems will get worse if we are more generous to the poor. By this logic, if we spend less on welfare, we save money, government is reduced, and the lot of the poor improves. Thus, since about 1970, the federal government has gradually reduced or eliminated welfare programs. Has this dismantling of a relatively meager welfare program helped the poor? Has it made society safer?

From the progressive position, the poor have fared badly “because of an erosion of their labor market opportunities, not because of an erosion of their work ethic” (Danziger and Gottschalk, 1995:4).

- 3. Acceptance of these principles leads to a third: A special commitment to children, all children, and to implement this commitment with viable, universal programs.** Such a commitment to children involves providing prenatal and post-natal medical care, childhood immunization, protection from exposure to toxic chemicals, adequate nutrition, the elimination of child poverty, access to preschool and after-school programs, safe neighborhoods, and equitably financed schools.

Jonathan Kozol, the longtime children’s advocate, speaking on behalf of these children, argues that children who receive government aid must prove themselves worthy of such aid, according to conservatives. He further argues that society is willing to pay more to incarcerate delinquent children than to educate them, calling this our collective sin as a country.

Kozol’s term “collective sin” is important for our consideration because the neglect of children is not just a matter of the neglect of individual parents, as it sometimes is, but much more important, it is a matter of society’s neglect. As a society, the United States could eliminate poverty, provide universal health care, and ensure that all children receive preschool training. But as a society, we continue to look the other way (see “Looking Toward the Future: The Childswap Society: A Fable”).

- 4. A call to redistribute societal resources to lift those urban and rural areas that are economically disadvantaged.** Some areas of the nation are especially at risk. There are many pockets of rural poverty, such as Appalachia, the Mississippi Delta, and the Rio Grande Valley in Texas, where jobs are few and poorly paid and poverty rates are many times higher than the national average. These areas

# Looking Toward the Future

## The Childswap Society: A Fable

Sandra Feldman, president of the American Federation of Teachers, wrote of a pretend society in which a national child lottery was held every four years:

Every child's name was put in—there were no exceptions—and children were randomly redistributed to new parents, who raised them for the next four years. Babies were not part of this lottery. Parents got to keep their newborn children until the next lottery, but then they became part of the national childswap. The cycle was broken every third swap, and kids were sent back to their original parents until the next lottery. So by the time you were considered an adult, at age 26, the most time you could have spent with your birth parents was ten years. The other sixteen were simply a matter of chance.

Maybe one of your new parents would be the head of a gigantic multinational company and the most powerful person in the country or the president of a famous university. Or you might find yourself the child of a family living in a public housing project or migrant labor camp.... People in the childswap society took the lottery for granted. They didn't try to hide their children or send them away to other countries; childswapping was simply a part of their culture. And one thing the lottery did was to make the whole society very conscientious about how things were arranged for kids. After all, you never knew where your own child would end up after the next lottery, so in a very real sense, everyone's child was—or could be—yours. As a result, children growing up under this system got everything they needed to thrive, both physically and intellectually, and the society itself was harmonious.

What if someone wrote a story about what American society in the [early twenty-first] century takes for granted in the arrangements for its children? We might not want to admit it, but don't we take for granted that some kids are

going to have much better lives than others? Of course. We take for granted that some will get the best medical treatment, and others will be able to get little or none. We take for granted that some kids will go to beautiful, well-cared-for schools with top-notch curriculums, excellent libraries, and computers for every child, and others will go to schools where there are not enough desks and textbooks to go around—wretched places where even the toilets don't work.

We take for granted that teachers in wealthy suburban schools will be better paid and better trained than those in inner-city or rural schools. We take for granted, in so many ways, that the children whom the lottery of birth has made the most needy will get the least. "After all," we say to ourselves, "it's up to each family to look after its own. If some parents can't give their children what they need to thrive, that's their problem."

Obviously, I'm not suggesting that the United States adopt a childswap system. The idea makes me cringe, and, anyway, it's just a fable. But I like to imagine what would happen if we did. We'd start with political figures and their children and grandchildren, with governors and mayors and other leaders. What do you suppose would happen when they saw that their children would have the same chance as the sons and daughters of poor people—no more and no less? What would happen to our schools and healthcare system—and our shameful national indifference to children who are not ours? I bet we'd quickly find a way to set things straight and make sure all children had an equal chance to thrive.

**SOURCE:** From Sandra Feldman, "The Child-Swap Society." Reprinted by permission of the American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO. [www.aft.org/presscenter/speeches/columns/wws/1998/0198.htm](http://www.aft.org/presscenter/speeches/columns/wws/1998/0198.htm).

need federal assistance for schools, job training, and infrastructure. They need government subsidies through tax rebates to encourage businesses to locate there and hire local workers (the subsidies to be received when company performance conditions—jobs, pay, benefits to workers—are met).

There are extraordinary numbers of recent immigrants in California, Texas, and Florida who are poor and have special needs such as job training. Those people need jobs, shelter, food, and services such as education and health care. Those states especially affected by immigration need help from the federal government

to supply assistance to the immigrants. At present, immigration is a federal policy, but the states are left with the financial responsibility. This overburden results in either the immigrants not receiving the necessary assistance or the states stretching their welfare budgets too thin for the immigrant and nonimmigrant poor. Clearly, these states need federal assistance to meet the special needs of recent immigrants.

The other important area of neglect is the declining central cities. The central cities have been abandoned by the middle classes, who have moved to the suburbs, and by corporations that have moved their businesses (and jobs) to the suburbs, to other parts of the country, or out of the country. The tax base in the cities has eroded, leaving declining transit systems, parks, and services, most notably schools. This erosion contributes to cutbacks in services and more flight to the suburbs. The high unemployment and continued job flight lead to despair, hopelessness, drug and alcohol abuse, and crime, further justifying the decisions of businesses and families to leave.

5. **Although some social policies should be made and administered at the local level, others must be largely financed, organized, and administered by the federal government.** This principle is based on the assumption that some issues are national in scope and require uniform standards (e.g., nutrition guidelines, immunization timetables, preschool, elementary through high school goals, the certification of teachers, and health care guarantees). Other policies, such as reducing poverty, require the massive infusion of money and compensatory programs, coupled with centralized planning.

While dismantling the welfare system, the strategy has been to cut funds and move the programs from the federal level to the states (called **devolution**). This devolution trend has the effect of making benefits very uneven, as some states are relatively generous while others are much less so.

#### Devolution

Process of shifting federal programs to the states.

## Progressive Social Policy

### 18.3 Explain how the United States could finance a progressive agenda.

Three questions remain: (1) Why should we adopt a progressive social agenda? (2) How do we pay for these programs? (3) Is there any hope for enacting progressive solutions to social problems?

### Should a Progressive Plan Be Adopted by U.S. Society?

Why should the United States adopt a progressive plan to deal with its social problems? Foremost, these are serious problems, and market solutions will not alleviate them. Reliance on the bottom line (profits) means, for example, that companies will move their operations wherever labor is cheapest. It means lobbying to remove government oversight of their operations. Market-based strategies result in winners and losers and, moreover, it means opposition to social programs to help these “losers.” We are convinced that public policy based on abandoning the powerless exacerbates social problems.

A second reason to favor progressive solutions has to do with domestic security. We ignore the problems of poverty, wealth inequality, and a rationed health care system at our own peril. If we continue on the present path of ignoring these problems

or reducing or eliminating programs to deal with them, we will be less secure, and we will have more problem people who require greater control—and at an ever-greater social and economic cost.

The final argument for a progressive attack on social problems is an ethical one. We need, in our view, to have a moral obligation to others. We need to restore a moral commitment to the safety net. We should take the moral high ground, as Jonathan Kozol has argued: “There is something ethically embarrassing about resting a national agenda on the basis of sheer greed. It’s more important in the long run, more true to the American character at its best, to lodge the argument in terms of simple justice” (quoted in Nore, 1991:36). Or, in the words of 2016 Presidential candidate Bernie Sanders, “We need to create a culture which cannot just be based on the worship of money” (2016).

Or consider this moral warning from an unlikely source, the very conservative British Chancellor of the Exchequer Kenneth Clarke, who explained his resistance to calls for a minimalist state: “This is a modern state. It is not the fifties . . . not southeast Asia. I believe in North American free-market economics, but I do not wish to see [here in Great Britain] the dereliction and decay of American cities and the absolute poverty of the American poor” (*The Nation*, 1996:5).

## Financing the Progressive Agenda

There are several sources of additional funds. The first is to reduce defense spending. We are the world’s mightiest nation by far, and although there no longer is a Soviet threat, there is the threat of terrorism. The United States maintains a global network of bases, many of which are not needed. Similarly, there are expensive forms of military equipment that are no longer required. The U.S. defense budget is enormous. If the United States reduced annual military spending by \$200 billion, it would still outspend everyone else—by a lot.

A second source of funds would be to reduce or eliminate corporate welfare and subsidies to the wealthy. At the moment, corporations receive much more than \$100 billion in direct subsidies and tax breaks. The wealthiest Americans pay lower tax rates and have more tax loopholes than found in any other modern nation. Annually, we have about \$400 billion in “tax expenditures” (i.e., money that is legally allowed to escape taxation). The economically advantaged receive most of these tax advantages.

A third source of funds is to increase the taxes on the wealthy, the opposite position of the Bush administration and the Republican-controlled Congress. Congress, with the urging of President Bush, provided tax cuts in 2001, 2002, and 2003, totaling \$1.7 trillion over ten years. Imagine if the government took that money (\$170 billion a year) to help pay for various aspects of the physical infrastructure (repairing or replacing aging bridges and water systems, providing better transportation systems, replacing crumbling school buildings), and social infrastructure (e.g., universal health care, adequate pensions, a living wage, free education through college, and subsidized daycare).

## Is There Any Hope of Instituting a Social Agenda Based on Progressive Principles?

The final issue—and, of course, the crucial issue—is: Is there any hope of mounting a successful progressive program? At first, the negative side seems overwhelming. We have already mentioned several formidable obstacles: (1) the widely held belief

in individualism as the core of American ideology, (2) the current anger by the Tea Partiers and others at the federal government, which appears more beholden to Wall Street than to Main Street; this level of anger and angst is the highest in two decades, and (3) the two major parties and political candidates are financed by Big Money, and Big Money favors the status quo. Big Money opposes public investment in health care, education, and various social supports.

There are at least three other barriers to progressive change. The first is the massive, multitrillion-dollar debt (\$18.9 trillion in 2016), which is viewed by politicians of both parties as a giant weight on government that makes it difficult to fund existing programs, let alone institute new ones. The momentum is to cut programs. Adding to this impetus toward reduced government are the overall low tax rates, which limit revenues to the federal government.

Another major obstacle is the present weakness of the union movement in the United States. Each of the generous welfare states of Canada, Scandinavia, and Western Europe has a heavily unionized workforce. Unions use their collective power to work for pensions, universal health care, worker safety, a strong minimum wage, and other benefits to workers and their families. This condition is not present in the United States.

The final barrier to progressive change is that those who will benefit most from progressive social policies (the poor, the working poor, racial minorities, inhabitants of the inner cities, and the rural poor) are the least likely to vote, and they do not have the money to fund lobbyists and politicians sympathetic to their needs. So their speech (which the Supreme Court has defined as spending money to support political causes) is limited, whereas the speech of the advantaged is not. The disaffected do not vote because neither political party speaks to their needs. Is it because there is little difference between Republicans and Democrats, both of whom direct their attention to the White, affluent voters?

The Tea Party movement, which is opposed to progressive reforms, steps into this vacuum to speak to the needs of the politically alienated. There is a question, though, as to whether the Tea Party movement is a passing fad, reflecting a transient political mood, or one with a lasting impact (Schmitt, 2010).

Given these obstacles to progressive change, is there a possibility that the progressives might eventually prevail? We are in the midst of societal upheaval. The Great Recession has ravaged the middle class. Employment is difficult to obtain and keep. Wages are stagnant, yet the big banks and corporations, bailed out by the government when they were on the brink of disaster, are reaping large benefits. This leads to two possible scenarios. One is that the Tea Party movement gains momentum and is successful in reducing government significantly by lowering taxes and by reducing government programs. This dooms progressive social policies at least in the near term. But there is an alternative scenario.

Looking at lessons from history (Dionne, 1996; Weisberg, 1996), more than 100 years ago, the Progressive movement began as a reaction to unchecked capitalism, the robber barons, economic exploitation, and political corruption. Out of the Progressive era came an activist government that addressed problems of the workplace by instituting workplace safety regulations, prohibiting child labor, mandating the eight-hour workday, and providing disability compensation. The government broke up business monopolies, established a national parks system, and gave women the vote.

During the depths of the Great Depression, President Roosevelt and Congress passed sweeping social programs including Social Security, unemployment insurance, AFDC, and massive public building projects that provided jobs, wages, and physical infrastructure (bridges, dams, roads, parks, schools, gymnasiums, libraries, rural electrification, and water conservation).

Following World War II and lasting for about three decades, society became more inclusive with the racial integration of the armed forces, sports, and workplaces. Despite significant opposition, civil rights protections, including the right of all citizens to vote, were mandated by the law. After World War II, Congress opened up college education to all social classes by passing the GI Bill, which made a college education a reality for millions of returning veterans of all class and racial backgrounds. In short, there are times in U.S. history when progressive steps were taken.

The choices are there for legislators and the public. Small government or big government? A society of individuals on their own or a society working for the common good? In our view, if we take the individualistic view, then there will be a further unraveling of social solidarity, and our society will be less secure. And, a hopeful note that may lead to a search for new answers—perhaps a new progressive era, just as it did 110 years ago.

In sum, society's structural arrangements are not inevitable. Individuals converging across lines of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation can work at the grassroots level organizing opposition, educating the public, demonstrating to promote a cause, electing allied candidates, using the courts, or employing other tactics to transform society. Human beings are the agents of change if they choose to be. The choice is ours.

Frances Fox Piven, the eminent social scientist, in writing about the need for social change to solve our current social problems, said,

No one has ever successfully predicted the movements when ordinary people find their footing, discover new capacities for solidarity and power and new visions of the possible. Still, the development of American democracy depended on the perennial emergence of popular revolt in the past, and it does once again. (1996:67)

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## Chapter Review

### 18.1 Describe the sociological approach to social problems and social change.

- Among the components of the sociological imagination is that it involves moving away from thinking in terms of the individual and her or his problem and focusing rather on the social, economic, and historical circumstances that produce the problem for many.
- The sociological paradox involves two opposing forces affecting human behavior. On the one hand, social forces constrain what we do.

But although societies and their structures are powerful, people are not totally controlled. They shape, resist, challenge, and sometimes change the social organizations and social institutions that impinge on them. These actions constitute human agency.

- Sociologists, as the experts on social life, have answers to many social problems based on empirical research. Many reject the message of sociologists because it challenges the core of society's dominant ideology.

### 18.2 Understand the principles that should guide public policy in reducing or eliminating social problems.

- The first step to solving social problems is to determine the facts. We must challenge the myths that often guide public opinion and policymakers. The second step is to establish, as a society, the principles that will guide public policy to accomplish the common good. This, we realize, is politically impossible at the moment for the following three related reasons: The power of money in decision-making; politicians avoiding any issue related to higher taxes; and gridlock among decision-makers.
- We propose five progressive principles to guide public policy: (a) policies and behaviors that enhance our moral obligation to others; (b) government provision of benefits to people who cannot provide for themselves; (c) a special commitment to all children to ensure health, safety, preparation for school, and equal funding for schools; (d) a redistribution of jobs and resources to economically troubled rural and urban locations; and (e) addressing many problems with federal money, standards, and administration.

### 18.3 Explain how the United States could finance a progressive agenda.

- A progressive agenda is needed because (a) it would reverse the current trend toward greater inequality; (b) it would make society more secure; and (c) it would promote social justice.
- Reducing the military budget, eliminating corporate welfare and subsidies to the wealthy, and increasing tax revenues, although expensive, could finance a progressive agenda.
- Historically, there have been progressive periods (the progressive era of the 1890s, the Great Depression, the thirty years following World War II) when social programs were instituted, corporate power thwarted, and inclusive policies implemented.
- Society's structural arrangements are not inevitable. Individuals converging across lines of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation can work at the grassroots level organizing opposition, educating the public, demonstrating to promote a cause, electing allied candidates, using the courts, or employing other tactics to transform society. Human beings are the agents of change if they choose to be.

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## Key Terms

**Deterministic view** The belief that social forces determine human behavior.

**Devolution** Process of shifting federal programs to the states.

**Gerrymandering** The practice by the political party in power to carve up voting districts in a manner that keeps them in power.

**Human agency** Individuals acting alone or with others shape, resist, challenge, and sometimes change the social organizations and the social institutions that impinge on them.

**Plutocracy** Government in which the wealthy class rules.



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