

Problems in New York City

Social Problems.

New York City has many of the same problems other cities have. But it is so much larger than other cities that the problems are greatly magnified. New York's major social problems include poverty, crime and drug addiction, and racial conflict.

Poverty is one of New York City's most expensive problems. The city budgets more than \$4 billion a year on welfare programs to provide food, clothing, housing, medical care, and other benefits for about 1 1/2 million people. Yet unskilled immigrants continue to move into the city while the demand for unskilled labor continues to decline. As a result, the problem of poverty is difficult to solve.

Because of its large population, New York City has more crime than any other U.S. city. But the crime rate--the number of crimes committed for every 100,000 residents--is actually lower in New York than in many other cities. New York's crime and drug addiction problems are closely related. About half the drug addicts in the United States live in New York City. They commit many of the city's burglaries and attacks on individuals to get money for drugs.

Racial conflicts in New York City have had many causes. A major cause has been discrimination against blacks, Puerto Ricans, and other minority groups in jobs and housing. Many minority group members have had trouble obtaining well-paying jobs. Many also have had difficulty moving out of segregated neighborhoods and into neighborhoods where most of the people are white and of European ancestry. When members of a minority group have begun moving into such a neighborhood, the white residents often have begun moving out. In this way, segregated housing patterns have continued, and the chances for conflicts between the groups have increased.

Recent Developments.

Since the 1940's, New York City has been troubled by many problems. These problems have grown severe since the early 1960's. Air and water pollution have harmed New York City's environment. Highways and mass transportation systems have become overcrowded and outdated. Housing shortages have increased. Racial conflicts have worsened.

New York City has also faced a series of damaging strikes by public employees. In 1966, transit workers struck for 12 days, halting all subway and bus service. In 1968, striking sanitation workers let garbage pile up on city streets for 9 days. In 1971, police officers refused to go on patrols for 6 days and fire fighters refused to perform nonemergency duties for a week. These and other strikes involved disputes over such matters as wages, various benefits, and working conditions.

New York City experienced a financial crisis in 1975, when the city's government lacked enough money to pay all its bills for the year. The state legislature helped ease the situation by establishing the Municipal Assistance Corporation, which lent the city some money. The federal government also provided funds for the city. To help pay its expenses during the late 1970's, New York City increased city taxes, eliminated thousands of city government jobs, and reduced city services.

Democrat Edward I. Koch was elected mayor of New York City in 1977 and reelected in 1981 and 1985. In 1981, he became the first person ever nominated by both the Democratic and Republican parties. During the 1980's, the city's economic situation improved. David N. Dinkins, a Democrat who was elected in 1989, became New York City's first African-American mayor. Dinkins served through 1993.

In February 1993, a powerful bomb exploded in a parking garage of the World Trade Center. The blast killed 6 people and injured more than 1,000. It caused more than \$300 million in damage to the Trade Center. Seven men were charged with participating in or planning the bombing. Later, 15 men were charged with having planned to bomb the United Nations (UN) headquarters, the

Holland and Lincoln tunnels, and other sites in the New York City area. One of the 15, Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman, an Egyptian Muslim cleric, was charged with being a chief planner of those operations.

In March 1994, four of the seven men charged with involvement in the World Trade Center bombing were convicted. In May, the four were sentenced to 240 years in prison each with no chance of parole. Two of the other men have not been caught, and charges against the seventh man were dropped. Trials of 12 of the 15 men charged with planning to bomb the UN and other sites were scheduled to begin in September 1994. The 13th man pled guilty.