

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND DISORGANIZATION

BY

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CROWELL'S SOCIAL SCIENCE SERIES

Edited by

SEBA ELDRIDGE

University of Kansas

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**SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND
DISORGANIZATION**

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SEBA ELDRIDGE

Department of Sociology, University of Kansas

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PREFACE

FOR some years there has been an animated discussion of what relationship does or should obtain between the study of Sociology and the study of Social Problems. To some people the two fields are identical. To others they are utterly different. The first group holds that there is no Sociology unless it be the study of social problems and that the study of social problems is *ipso facto* Sociology. The second is really two groups: sociologists devoted to pure theory and social workers who scorn theory. Finally, there is a growing body of those who believe that Sociology has something to contribute to the study of social problems. They are by no means agreed as to the precise nature of this contribution, but their common faith and their numerous discussions seem to be yielding some return.

Twenty-five years ago they were giving courses on "Dependents, Defectives, and Delinquents," bringing together a hodgepodge of miscellaneous data about many types of persons, problems, and social programs. Then came separate courses on "Poverty and Dependency," whose chief emphasis was economic; courses on "Criminology," stressing sometimes psychological factors in delinquency and sometimes the mechanics of handling offenders; courses on "Race Problems," "Immigration," and "Eugenics," which combined the treatment of biological and sociological problems with plans for social reform. More recently we have had courses on "Social Pathology," starting with individuals in trouble—physical, mental, or economic—and searching for the ways in which their personal difficulties were involved in social relationships. Latest of all there have been appearing courses on "Social Disorganization," devoted to the study of social groups, institutions, interpersonal relationships, and processes through which these are disrupted or destroyed.

The basic assumption underlying this book is that the study of social problems demands the specialization and collaboration of workers in a variety of fields—biologists, psychologists, economists, political scientists, sociologists, and others. Their divi-

sion of labor must be somewhat empirical and flexible, but it is believed that each has a distinctive contribution to make. From the biologists we expect increasing knowledge of heredity, growth, disease, and the problems of physical well-being. To the psychologists we look for information about individual behavior and mentality and the problems of feeble-mindedness and insanity. On the economists we count for better understanding of the processes of production and distribution and the problems of poverty. The political scientists are our prospective source of further insight into the nature of government and the problems of graft and inefficiency. The sociologists have sometimes regarded themselves as charged with the duty of integrating the work of other social scientists. But today they are more and more conceiving their task to be the more limited one of studying groups, institutions, and social interaction.

Now there is unavoidable overlapping of these fields of study, but that is not serious so long as each has a distinctive assignment for which its students assume primary responsibility. The task of integration can not be left to any single group, but requires teamwork between them all. However, every student of human society may properly be expected to show the relation of his particular problems, techniques, and discoveries to those of other social scientists.

In accordance with these presuppositions we have endeavored to make this volume a sociological contribution to the study of social problems. Its major emphasis is on group disorganization, institutional decline, and the social maladjustment of individuals. But to guard against distortion these negative or destructive processes are treated in juxtaposition to the positive or constructive processes of group organization, institutional growth, and personal-social adjustment.

In the effort to understand and interpret the processes of social organization and disorganization we have drawn heavily on the achievements of predecessors and contemporaries. To acknowledge our full indebtedness in all its details would, however, be quite impossible. We can only name those of whose contributions we are especially aware and those to whom we are grateful for specific courtesies. Among these are Seba Eldridge, editor of the series in which this volume appears, whose comments and criticisms have been particularly helpful; Edwin H. Sutherland and Warren S. Thompson, who rendered similar services for parts of the manuscript; and the following who have

authorized the use of previously published materials—Louis Adamic, Edmund de S. Brunner, Lyford P. Edwards, Carlton J. H. Hayes, E. T. Hiller, Gerald W. Johnson, E. T. Krueger, Lewis L. Lorwin, Parker T. Moon, Dwight Sanderson, Clifford R. Shaw, Jesse F. Steiner, Louis Wirth, Kimball Young, and Pauline V. Young. To the following publishing houses we are grateful for the privilege of reprinting copyrighted material—University of Chicago Press, University of North Carolina Press, Commonwealth Fund Division of Publications, F. S. Crofts and Company, The Century Company, Henry Holt and Company, Longmans, Green and Company, and G. P. Putnam's Sons. Similar thanks are due the editors of periodicals—*American Journal of Sociology*, *The Family*, *Mental Hygiene*, *The New Republic*, *Sociology and Social Research*, *Social Forces*, *The Survey*, *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, and *Consumers' Research*, Inc. To these and all others who have helped in any way in the making of this book we express our hearty appreciation.

This is a coöperative venture; it is the product of joint planning and mutual criticism. At the same time there has been a clear division of labor. Major responsibility for Chapters I, II, III, V, VII, VIII, IX, X, XI, XII, XV, and XX was assumed by Mr. Queen; responsibility for Chapters IV, VI, XIII, and XIV by Mr. Bodenhafer; responsibility for Chapters XVI, XVII, XVIII, and XIX by Mr. Harper.

STUART A. QUEEN
WALTER B. BODENHAFFER
ERNEST B. HARPER

December, 1934.

EDITOR'S NOTE

THE present volume is in many ways an exceptional one. It features the case approach to social problems, so conducive to the development of interest and insight. It encourages independent work by the student, so essential to his progress in this as in other fields. It emphasizes the importance of objective analysis, with its implication that problems must be understood before practical treatment may be safely undertaken. Moreover, it departs from the conventional practice, in treating together the processes of social disorganization and the patterns of social organization with which they are intertwined. This sets the problems of social pathology in their proper background and lends perspective to the consideration of social institutions themselves. These and other features should commend the book to teachers and students in this field, and also to social workers and community leaders concerned in the treatment of the practical problems.

S. E.

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PART I
INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER I

SOCIAL PROBLEMS AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

It is a commonplace that we all live in social groups. Each of us is a member of from one to a hundred—family, gang, neighborhood, community, religious denomination, political party, trade union, professional association, civic league, social club, nationality; any or all of these and many others. It is equally true, though perhaps a little less obvious, that our individual happiness and success are bound up with the functioning of these groups. They give us companionship, affection, security, prestige, and financial gain. They make demands upon us for loyalty, enthusiasm, time, energy, money, and sometimes life itself. Thus it is almost impossible to conceive ourselves as working, playing, loving, fighting, hoping, and fearing, except as members of social groups.

Our lives are also bound up with a lot of impersonal agencies which we call institutions—corporations, churches, governments, schools, professions, laws, customs, morals, literature, and language. They set us apart from the other animals; they serve us in a multitude of ways; but also they control and restrict our activity. We can never wholly escape from the limitations they set, yet we can achieve nothing without them.

In a sense our whole life may be regarded as a system of relationships—relationships between kinsmen, friends, lovers, business associates, citizens, students; relationships between communities, states, factions, sects, races, and nations. Persons and groups are attracted to one another or repelled; they dominate or submit to one another or work together as peers. They scorn, tolerate, or appreciate; they trust, suspect, or fear; they love, enjoy, or hate; they coöperate, assist, or fight. There is perpetual give and take in the kaleidoscope of human relations.

Most of the time our relationships, groups, and institutions operate with such smoothness and efficiency that we take them for granted and give them little heed. Like the habitual and automatic functioning of the human body they require little

attention except when something unusual occurs. But change is always going on. Some groups are gaining strength while others are breaking down. New institutions are being established and old ones are being modified or abolished. New relationships are being entered while others are being altered or dropped. Some of these changes bring satisfaction while others bring disappointment and grief. But always they require attention, adjustment, accommodation. Sometimes little effort and slight modification of habits suffice to meet the new situation. But often the old arrangements are so upset that prolonged and strenuous efforts are necessary, whose end results are far reaching changes in human relations, groups, and institutions.

The systems of groups, institutions, and relationships together with the processes through which they change may be called social organization and disorganization. When there is a state of affairs or a trend of events characterized by harmony, team-work, understanding, approval, and the like, we may speak of organization. When the opposite is true and there is a condition or tendency marked by tension, conflict, or drifting apart, we may speak of disorganization.

For the most part, however, the problems of life do not present themselves at the outset as problems of social organization and disorganization. They are very concrete issues of health, finance, and morals; of friends, family, and foes. Hence, before proceeding further, it will be helpful to review the nature and scope of some current social problems. Somewhat arbitrarily we have chosen to examine: unemployment, poverty amid plenty, homelessness and transiency, sickness and disablement, feeble-mindedness and insanity, desertion and divorce, illegitimacy and prostitution, crime and delinquency. This list corresponds very closely to the chapter headings that will be found in books bearing such titles as *Social Pathology*, *Current Social Problems*, *Socially Inadequate*, and the like.¹ Each item in the list may be studied as a type of individual behavior or hardship, for such it is. Then attention may be centered on its extent or scope, because anything which affects large numbers of persons may be regarded as a social problem. Looking further we may seek out

¹ Queen, Stuart A., and Mann, Delbert M., *Social Pathology* (1925); Gillin, J. L., *Social Pathology* (1933); Bossard, J. H. S., *Problems of Social Well-Being* (1927); Phelps, H. A., *Contemporary Social Problems* (1932); Gillette, J. M., and Reinhardt, J. M., *Current Social Problems* (1933); Bruno, Frank J., *The Socially Inadequate* (forthcoming).

the social relationships, groups, or institutions involved in the appearance of the difficulty. Next we may investigate effects of the troublesome event or condition on social organization. Finally we may search for ways of bringing the whole thing under control. In this book major emphasis will be on the third and fourth types of study just mentioned, that is, on the ways in which problems of health, finance, conduct, and the like are involved in the processes of social organization and disorganization. Initially, however, we shall proceed to examine the "sore thumbs" of contemporary civilization just as they present themselves in everyday life.

UNEMPLOYMENT

In March, 1933, the American Federation of Labor estimated that in the United States there were 13,700,000 men and women, eligible for jobs, but utterly without work or income. The exact figures are, of course, unknown—we do not bother much with such matters in this country. But everyone agreed that the situation was very serious. It was serious to the unemployed workman and his family because it meant the exhaustion of savings and credit, going hopelessly into debt, loss of furniture, car, house, or farm; doing without the comforts of life, then without the necessities; hunger and malnutrition, ragged clothes and shabby dwelling, postponed dental and medical care; dropping out of church, lodge, or club; discouragement, irritation, and bitterness. It was serious to social workers, because they found themselves swamped by hosts of destitute persons and families, whose stories they could not stop to hear, whose needs their funds were inadequate to meet. It was serious to taxpayers who found themselves confronted with mounting bills for relief. It was serious to grocers, druggists, landlords, and doctors, whose customers, tenants, and patients were unable to pay for goods and services rendered. On a purely individualistic basis this was a very trying situation to millions of Americans.

It was peculiarly baffling because we had been brought up to believe that every man should support himself and his family (rugged individualism); that if he would only bestir himself, self-maintenance was available to him (land of opportunity); that if each man sought his own advantage the welfare of all would be best promoted (harmony of individual and social interests); that government and charity should not interfere with the benign workings of inscrutable economic laws (*laissez faire*);