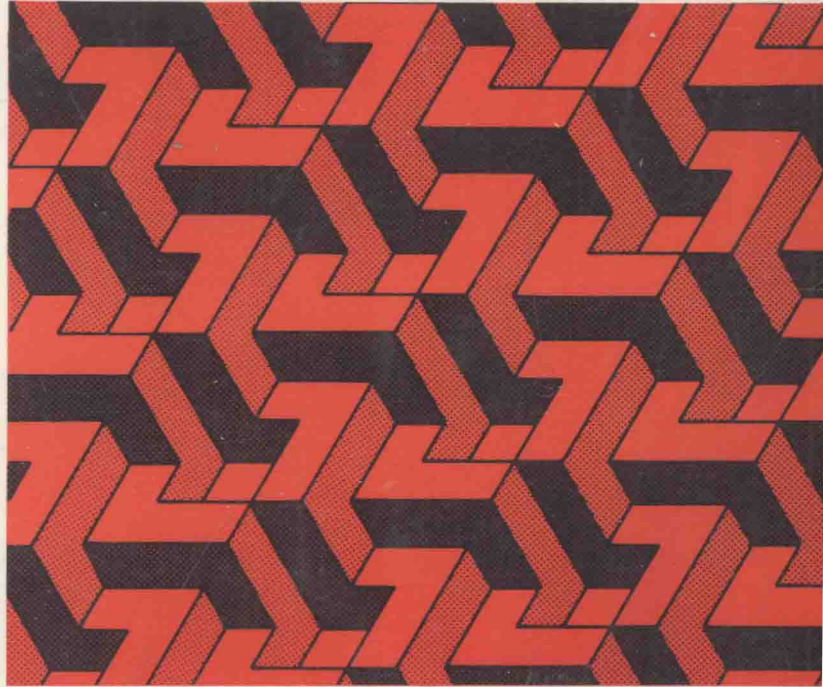


GRAHAM C. KINLOCH

# SOCIETY



# AS POWER

AN INTRODUCTORY  
SOCIOLOGY

Graham C. Kinloch

*Florida State University*

# **Society as Power**

*An Introductory  
Sociology*

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**For Those We Lost and Miss**

# Preface

Introductory sociology has been a major part of the discipline since the profession's foundation. So many texts have been published over the decades that a complete tally would be extremely difficult to accomplish. The number of contemporary texts available is also high, making any prospective author hesitate to add yet another to the mountainous pile. However, their predominantly bland, descriptive, and often conservative nature is readily apparent upon examination, and many of them run through lists of topics like menus, with little critical analysis. While there are exceptions, I shudder every time I open those heavy cardboard packages filled with glossy tomes, instructor's manuals, and even calendars on occasion.

This text attempts, in modest fashion, to analyze contemporary society in a more conceptual and interpretive fashion, focusing on inequality within it on individual, group, and institutional levels, taking a conflict-oriented approach but attempting to avoid the doctrinaire. My concern is with how power operates on all these levels through the processes of individual socialization, group discrimination, institutional organization, possible future developments, and sociology's potential relevance to the social problems so produced. Such an approach is neither encyclopedic nor exhaustive; rather, it attempts to introduce the disci-

pline to students in a focused, relevant, and limited fashion by concentrating on major, continuing issues in contemporary America.

I would like to thank the following people for their interest, encouragement, patience, and help in accomplishing this task: Ed Stanford, Bill Webber, Nancy Roberts, and Jim West of Prentice Hall, all of whom were most helpful; Jean H. Cardinali, of Monroe Community College, Paul Schervish, of Boston College, and Michael Weichbrod, of Montgomery College, for their extremely useful reactions to earlier versions of the manuscript; Dana, for her patience and help; and my family, whose tolerance, as usual, is subjected to considerable strain by my presence.

Finally, I should note that many of my observations on inequality are based as much on my experience in academia as in society at large. The "Ivory Tower," in many respects, is as competitive, ethnocentric, ideological, materialistic, and egocentric as the society which supports it. While this is not surprising, it makes the task of analyzing and reducing stratification more difficult.

Graham C. Kinloch

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# *chapter 1*

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# **The Sociological Perspective**

Think, for a moment, of the different kinds of people around you: rich and poor, healthy and sick, black and white, male and female, powerful and powerless, high- and low-status, gifted and retarded. What do these contrasts reflect, and in what ways are they significant? Now think of the social problems that surround you: poverty, unemployment, disease, discrimination, and exploitation. Why are these problems still very much a part of contemporary America, despite federal, state, and local efforts to eradicate them through programs designed to ensure equal opportunity and positive social conditions? Sociology provides us with a way to answer both questions.

*Inequality* exists when *power*, or the possession and control of material resources and human beings, is distributed unequally. Modern society is divided into groups of people with varying degrees of power—people who have significantly different amounts of financial resources, political clout, and social status. Consequently, the rich, powerful, and

The Urban Poor—Dramatic Evidence of Contemporary Inequality.



prestigious tend to control the poor, the powerless, and those with little social status, with wide-ranging effects.

In this book we will explore how contemporary society is based on inequality, and how inequality functions on individual, group, and institutional levels. To help you appreciate the kinds of social differences, problems, and changes going on around you, we will explore several areas: how inequity works within the individual by affecting the inner self and personal identity; how it works outside the individual by affecting the racial, sexual, and age-based minority groups that surround him or her; how it affects institutional structures such as the family, education, the economy, religion, and politics; and how it is a part of the ongoing process of social change.

Sociology involves a major attempt to understand the causes and results of the kind of inequality that is a major part of U.S. society. This introductory chapter outlines how sociology developed and some of its major characteristics as a social science, describes the conflict view of society taken in this book, and outlines the discussions that will follow. A final point: Sociology is a science that is full of personal meaning. The more you apply the concepts and analyses in this book to the social environment that surrounds you, the more you will see that this is so. At each stage along the way, clear definitions, examples, and glossaries are presented to help you discover how sociology applies to you.

## THE PROFESSION AND PERSPECTIVE OF SOCIOLOGY

What is sociology and how did it develop? For now, we define it as the *scientific study of modern industrial society and the social problems within it*. Sociology first emerged as a profession in nineteenth-century Europe, in particular France, Germany, and England, as a response to the decline of the traditional feudal order. The Church and the nobility had ruled this community-based society, whose economy had been primarily agricultural. The nobility controlled the serfs, as feudal order dictated. But the situation had become highly volatile—various political revolutions attempted to overthrow the monarchies and bring about more democratic forms of government, while the Industrial Revolution wrought its changes also. Shaking the foundation of the society was a flood of new concepts: concern with labor conditions, property changes, the city, technology, the factory, liberty, equality, rationalism, individualism, secularism, and international order.<sup>1</sup> Social conflict and disruption were not the exception, but the rule.

As a result, society became much more diverse and complicated, with many new problems accompanying industrialization and urbanization. Questions of how to proceed now arose: Now that revolution had changed traditional, fixed arrangements, on what basis were people to



relate to society and to one another? Now that the family, agriculture, and the local community were no longer the foundation of social order, what would integrate this modern industrial society, with its economic specialization, secular ideas, individualism, and emphasis on political equality? The central issue of unity within diversity, of order within this “new hierarchy,” came to the fore.

Ideas about what constituted knowledge had also changed significantly. The theological view, which assumed God to be at the center of the universe and knowledge to be divinely revealed, gave way to a more secular, scientific, and relative view, which assumed that “nature” and “natural law” regulated everything and that their workings were accessible to the human mind. Called Enlightenment philosophy, this new view of knowledge and how to attain it emerged in the nineteenth century, based on a particular set of ideas:<sup>2</sup>

1. *Rationalism*: The assumption that there is an “underlying order” to all phenomena, waiting to be discovered through science.
2. *Naturalism*: The assumption that nature and natural law are the basis of this order.
3. *Evolutionism*: The idea that this natural order is subject to change through adaptation and evolution, moving from the traditional toward the industrial and modern. Such an assumption reflects the application of Darwin’s theory of evolution to society and changes within it.
4. *Idealism*: A belief that human nature and society might be perfected by discovering the natural laws underlying them.
5. *Positivism*: A belief that the application of the scientific method to an understanding of this natural order could help bring about this utopian or more perfect state.

The scientific study of natural law and evolution as the basis of social improvement represents the central aims of Enlightenment philosophy. In this tradition, Auguste Comte of France (1798–1857) developed sociology as a kind of “social physics.” The new science was designed to prevent the disruption or “moral disorganization” of society by establishing social laws and reorganizing society in accordance with them.<sup>3</sup>

Comte, the son of a monarchist family, was educated in the Enlightenment tradition, specifically in the fields of medicine and physiology. He experienced many of France’s post-Revolutionary conflicts and political upheavals. He is best known for developing Positive philosophy and for giving sociology its name. According to Comte, sociology would attempt to bring about social unity in this modern specialized and individualized hierarchy by employing a scientific understanding of the natural order and laws of evolution underlying it. It reacted against revolution and individualism and focused instead on the importance of community (social bonds), authority (legitimate control), status (an indi-