

The Wadsworth Sociology Reader Series

UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY



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AN INTRODUCTORY READER

Understanding Society

An Introductory Reader

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Preface

“If you really acquire the sociological perspective, you can never be bored,” writes June Jordan, a contemporary African American essayist. We agree and present these readings to help students see how fascinating the sociological perspective can be in interpreting human life. This anthology is intended for use in introductory sociology courses. Most of the students in these courses are first- or second-year students, many of whom are not majoring in sociology. We wanted to compile an anthology that would excite these students about the sociological perspective and show them what such a perspective can bring to understanding the society in which they live.

We have selected articles for this collection that would engage students and would show them what sociology can contribute to their understanding of the world. Most of the readings have been carefully excerpted and kept short for student comprehension. The collection includes articles with a variety of styles and perspectives—a global perspective is apparent throughout. Readers will find a strong focus on diversity. The book also features more current research than that found in competing texts. And, the book presents a balance of classic and contemporary readings that professors teaching the course find important. We developed this book with five themes in mind:

- **Contemporary research:** We wanted students to see examples of strong contemporary research, presented in a fashion that would be accessible to beginning undergraduates. The articles included here feature different styles of sociological research. For example, Amy Schulz’s article on identity among

Navajo women uses a qualitative interview study to examine the construction and meaning of identity. In contrast, Alan Hedley's study uses a comparative analysis of seven nations wherein he examines the impact of technological changes and the information revolution on the global diffusion of culture.

- **Classical theory:** Although beginning students sometimes find classical sociological theory difficult to read, we think it is important that they learn about the contributions of classical sociological theorists. Thus, in many sections we have included selections from the classics, but we have limited the number and length of such readings to keep the book accessible to introductory students. Many of the discussion questions for these readings ask students to think about the current application of these writings. For example, Max Weber's argument about the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism is fascinating to think about in the contemporary context of increased consumerism and increased class inequality. Students might ask whether contemporary patterns of wealth and consumption no longer reflect the asceticism and moral calling about which Weber wrote. At the same time, they will see how beliefs about the worth of different groups in this stratification system continue to be shaped by the ideologies that Weber identified. Likewise, W. E. B. Du Bois's reflections on double consciousness continue to be very important in discussions of race and group perceptions. And, Georg Simmel's analysis of how group behavior shapes society can easily be used to understand social interaction in society today.
- **Diversity:** In keeping with our knowledge that the society is increasingly diverse, we have selected articles that show the range of experiences that people have by virtue of differences in race, gender, class, sexual orientation, disability, and other characteristics (like age and religion). These factors differentiate human experience in contemporary society. Numerous articles in the reader focus on African Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, women, gays and lesbians, Jewish Americans, and people with disabilities, among others. Some of the selections bring a comprehensive analysis of race, class, and gender to the subject at hand, thus adding to students' understanding of how diverse groups experience the social structure of society. As an example, Yen le Espiritu's discussion of gender stereotypes of Asian American women and men shows how race and gender together construct images of social groups.
- **Global perspective:** We have also incorporated a global perspective into the reader, with many sections including articles that broaden students' worldview beyond the borders of the United States. Articles like Arlie Hochschild's essay on "The Nanny Chain" will help students see how patterns of domestic help and contemporary immigration link the experiences of those in U.S. families to women from other nations who are increasingly being employed to provide domestic help for professional workers in the United States. Similarly, Anne Fadiman's essay contrasts Western medical care with that of Hmong people, showing students how different cultures can perceive Western culture.

- **Applying sociological knowledge:** Our students commonly ask, “What can you do with a sociological perspective?” We think this is an important question and one with many different answers. Sociologists use their knowledge in a variety of ways: to influence social policy formation, to interpret current events, and to educate people about common misconceptions and stereotypes, to name a few. Because we want to show students how sociological knowledge can be used, we have included a number of readings that demonstrate how sociological analyses can be applied to specific issues. For example, Arloc Sherman and Jodi Sandfort’s essay in the opening section on the sociological perspective discusses how sociologists can effectively communicate their research findings to a public increasingly influenced by media “sound bites.” For a generation of students absorbed by the media, we think this piece will be especially interesting. Likewise, Jill Quadagno’s selection on Social Security reform discusses the likely shortfall of funds in the Social Security system and explains some legislative measures proposed to address this problem.

In sum, with this anthology we hope to capture student interest in sociology, provide a balance of classical and contemporary research and theory, incorporate the analysis of diversity into the core of the sociological perspective, analyze the increasingly global dimensions of society, and show students how what they learn about sociology can be applied to real issues and problems. We believe this collection of readings will engage students and help them learn to think critically about social issues.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

Understanding Society can be used to accompany Margaret L. Andersen and Howard F. Taylor’s text, *Sociology: Understanding a Diverse Society*, or their book, *Sociology: The Essentials*, but it can also easily be used in courses with other texts. The outline of the book begins with an introduction to the sociological perspective and sociological research, followed by sections that look at socialization, social interaction, groups and social structure, sexuality, deviance, social inequalities (by class, global stratification, race, gender, and age), social institutions (family, education, religion, work, politics, and health care), and patterns of social change (including population, urbanism and the environment; collective behavior and social movements; and social change). There are twenty-two sections in all, each section topic based on usual subjects of different chapters in introductory textbooks.

NOTE ON LANGUAGE

We have kept the language as stated in the original readings. Thus, students will see some diversity in how various authors identify particular groups (as Latino or Hispanics, for example, or African American or Black). In some of the classical

articles, students may find some of the sexist language jarring, such as in the use of “man” when purportedly referring to all human beings. We ask that readers be forgiving of such sexist language, understanding it in the context of the time it was written. Indeed, it would be a good lesson in critical thinking to have students ask whether, in hindsight, the same argument would hold up had the language been more specifically inclusive.

PEDAGOGICAL FEATURES

In addition to the sociological content of this reader, we have included a number of pedagogical features to enrich student learning and to help people teach with the book. Each essay has a **brief introductory paragraph** that identifies the major themes and questions being raised in the article. We follow each article with **discussion questions** that students can use to improve their critical thinking and to reinforce their understanding of the article’s major points. Many of these questions could also be used as the basis for class discussion, student papers, or research exercises and projects.

In addition, students using the book will be given passwords to the online **InfoTrac College Edition** system. We include terms at the end of each article which students will be able to use to find additional information on different subjects. These, too, can be the basis for students’ papers and projects.

Unlike many anthologies, we have included a **glossary** at the end of the book that contains the definition of basic terms and concepts that students will encounter in the readings. Finally, we have also included a **subject/name index** to help students and faculty locate specific topics and authors in the book.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people helped in a variety of ways as we were developing this anthology. We thank Sheryl Ruzek, Dave Ermann, Elizabeth Higginbotham, and Joanne Nigg for suggesting various selections. We thank Vicky Bayne, Lisa Huber, Linda Keen, Jeffrey Quirico, Rika Schmidt and Judy Watson for their help and support. Maggie especially thanks Al Camarillo, Margarita Ibarra, and Monica Wheeler of the Stanford University Center for Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity for their support during the time we were developing this book. We especially thank Alison Bianchi, now completing her graduate degree in Sociology at Stanford, for her expert work in compiling the glossary.

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SUPPLEMENTS

Instructor's Manual and Testbank

This supplement offers teaching tips, lecture suggestions, student activities, and much more. It also contains test items, such as Multiple Choice and True/False, which test students' understanding of the articles.

InfoTrac College Edition

Ignite discussions or augment your lectures with the latest developments in Sociology! *InfoTrac College Edition* (available as a free option with this text) gives you and your students free access for 4 months to an easy-to-use online database of reliable, full-length articles (not abstracts) from hundreds of top academic journals and popular sources. Contact your Wadsworth/Thomson Learning representative for more information. Exclusive to Wadsworth/Thomson Learning. Available to North American college and university students only. Journals subject to change. As mentioned, included after each reading in *Understanding Society* are InfoTrac College Edition search terms that will help students and instructors find related articles.

Student Guide to InfoTrac College Edition

<http://sociology.wadsworth.com/infotrac/index.html>

This is an online supplement prepared by Tim Pippert, of Augsburg College, which contains exercises and suggested readings on InfoTrac College Edition. It consists of critical thinking questions for each of the following standard topics in introductory sociology: Culture, Socialization, Deviance, Social Stratification, Race and Ethnicity, Gender, Aging, Family, Economy/Work, Education, Politics/Government, Health/Medicine, Population, Social Change, and Religion. It is accessible via the web sites of Wadsworth introductory sociology texts, as well as from the Virtual Society home page.

Web Site-Virtual Society: The Wadsworth Sociology Resource Center

At **Virtual Society: Wadsworth's Sociology Resource Center** you and your students can find a career center, "surfing" lessons (tips on how to find information on the web), links to great sociology web sites, and many other selections.

Visit the Andersen and Taylor online resources that accompany each text:

Sociology: The Essentials at http://sociology.wadsworth.com/andersen_essen/

or

SOCIOLOGY at http://sociology.wadsworth.com/andersen_diverse/index.html

Features of the Andersen and Taylor online resources include:

Hypercontents: chapter-by-chapter resources available on the Internet

Chapter Quizzes: online self-quizzes for each chapter in the text

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Join the Forum: an online threaded discussion forum



About the Editors

Margaret L. Andersen (Ph.D., University of Massachusetts, Amherst) is Professor of Sociology and Women's Studies at the University of Delaware and completed this book while a Visiting Professor at Stanford University. She is the author of *Thinking about Women: Sociological Perspectives on Sex and Gender*; *Race, Class and Gender: An Anthology* (with Patricia Hill Collins); *Sociology: Understanding a Diverse Society* (with Howard F. Taylor); and *Sociology: The Essentials* (also with Howard F. Taylor). She has won the University of Delaware's Excellence in Teaching Award and is a past president of the Eastern Sociological Society and former editor of *Gender & Society*.

Kim A. Logio is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia where she teaches courses in research methods, drugs and society, and race and criminal justice. Her Ph.D. dissertation (University of Delaware, 1998) is entitled, "Here's Looking at You, Kid: Gender, Race, Body Image, and Adolescent Health." She is the coauthor of *Adventures in Criminal Justice Research*, revised edition (with George Dowdall, Earl Babbie, and Fred Halley) and is currently working on a victimization study in Philadelphia and research on the connection between drug use and body image. She is the former Managing Editor of *Gender & Society*.

Howard F. Taylor (Ph. D., Yale University) is Professor of Sociology at Princeton University. He is the author of *Balance in Small Groups*; *The IQ Game*; *Sociology: Understanding a Diverse Society* (with Margaret L. Andersen); *Sociology: The Essentials* (also with Margaret L. Andersen); and a forthcoming book, *Race, Class, and the Bell Curve in America*. He is the winner of the DuBois-Johnson-

Frazier Award given by the American Sociological Association for distinguished research in race and ethnic relations and of Princeton University's President's Award for Distinguished Teaching. He is past president of the Eastern Sociological Society and a member of the Sociological Research Association, an honorary society for distinguished research.



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