

# PERSPECTIVE

**Perspective:  
An Introduction  
to Sociology**

**Burton Wright II  
John P. Weiss  
Charles M. Unkovic**

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An Introduction  
to Sociology**

**Burton Wright II**

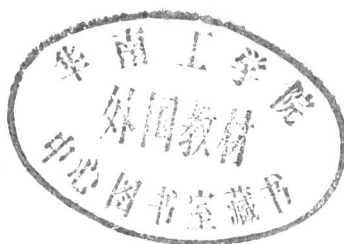
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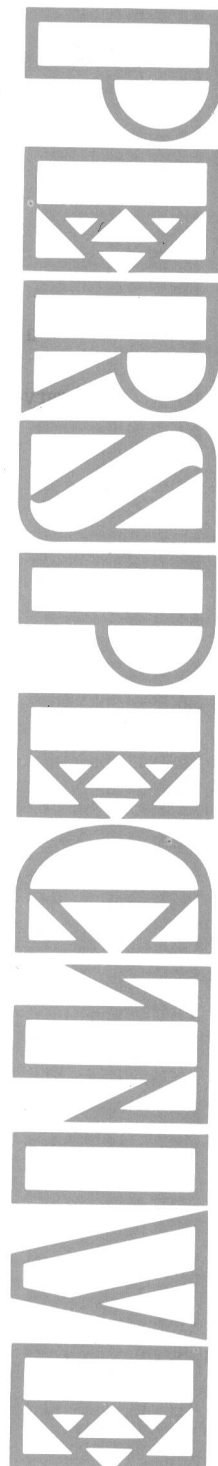
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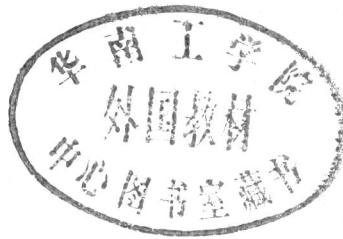
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**To the late Joseph C. Byers,  
Editor and Friend**

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In writing this book we considered not only the student majoring in sociology but also the thousands of students who will take only one or two courses in sociology and never be formally exposed to the discipline again. While we have a close, personal interest in our majors, it is our opinion that, in the long run, sociology will have its greatest effect through the general population. Since college students constitute an important part of the general population, we would argue that it is essential for students to somehow or other understand the importance of taking an analytical view of society. This cannot be accomplished either by polemics or requiring students to memorize innumerable facts derived from sociological research.

The general orientation of this book is analytical, by which we mean a functional analysis in the sense used by Robert K. Merton. We have interpreted Merton's concept to mean an analysis of society, not from any particular point of view—neither structural-functional nor conflict—but from the standpoint of manifest and latent functions. We have, of course, not avoided some consideration of dysfunctions. But we have indicated that to label something as “dysfunctional” is possible only with a value or values as a point of departure. While we recognize that complete objectivity is impossible, we have maintained explicitly and implicitly that sociologists should attempt to approximate objectivity. It seems to us that an overemphatic espousal of any one position renders any degree of objectivity not only unlikely but impossible.

Recognizing that sociology is a probabilistic science, we have concentrated on bringing to the student a reasonably adequate sampling of sociological knowledge with an emphasis on the *process* of analysis and those things that most sociologists would agree possess a reasonable degree of validity. In other words, we have tried not to make this book a mere compendium of facts. With respect to students, our intent has been heuristic; we have attempted to induce the students to discover for themselves the excitement and usefulness of an intellectual, objective, analytical approach to the study of society.

Implicit in this text is the belief (clearly a value judgement on our part) that objectivity coupled with rationality is by no means a dull, unexciting way to approach the study of sociology. It is, for example, essential to indicate that some segments of our society are denied equal opportunity to compete for the rewards available. This finding emerges clearly from an objective analysis of the relations between the dominant segment of a society and that society's minority groups. We would argue that any rhetoric about injustices, however understandable, is less likely to produce constructive changes than a careful analysis of the societal factors underlying discrimination and prejudice. For example, it has been widely assumed that merely bringing Black and white students together in schools will serve to reduce if not eliminate racial discrimination and prejudice. Yet as a recent careful study by Elizabeth



Cohen and Susan S. Roper indicates, it takes much more than social propinquity to solve the racial problem.\*

In the early stages of this book, we asked ourselves this question: Did we want to stir up students and arouse their emotions? Did we want to get them angry about the many injustices and inequities that plainly exist in our own and other societies? Or did we want to give them the best information we have on culture and society, particularly the dynamics underlying the human interaction which produces both culture and society? We opted for a concentration on the latter while hoping for a leavening of the former. We do not argue for cold objectivity, but we would maintain that passion without knowledge is a source of trouble. Indeed many of the world's more serious problems can be traced to the autonomic nervous system functioning without any effective restraint from the temporal and frontal lobes of the brain.

As we said earlier, we were particularly mindful of the fact that the only formal exposure the vast majority of college and university students receive to sociology is in introductory courses. It is our belief that a knowledge of sociology is important to these young people specifically and society in general. It seems thoroughly reasonable to assume that some of these students will be leaders in future years and that many others will be in positions to exert some influence on the form of society. It seemed to us that the value and practical usefulness of the analytical approach to society and to people in groups was the essential idea we wanted students to take with them from a study of this text. While it would be foolish to argue that the analytical approach is any panacea for the things that ail men in particular and societies in general, it would seem correct to state that reasonably well developed habits of objective analysis are more likely to produce truly viable results than rhetoric, insults, and violence.

As the title of this book suggests ("perspective" purposely being in the singular), we have stressed the unique subject matter of sociology by emphasizing the approaches of such individuals as Emile Durkheim and Max Weber. With some minor variations, we have attempted to follow the example set by these two men by emphasizing the sociological method, the force of ideas, and the logic underlying inferences with respect to men in groups including societies. While far from social behaviorism, we have favored a mildly positivistic approach. Although the scientific method as utilized in the natural sciences transfers to some extent to sociology, it has been necessary to develop some research methods and techniques that are peculiar to sociology. Sociologists are, after all, part of the subject matter they are studying, a handicap from which natural and physical scientists do not suffer.

\* Elizabeth G. Cohen and Susan S. Roper, "Modification of Interracial Interaction Disability: An Application of Status Characteristic Theory," *American Sociological Review* 37, no. 6 (1972), pp. 643-657.



In conclusion, we would like to acknowledge the important assistance we have received from a number of individuals who were concerned with bringing this book to its final form. First of all, there is a debt that we can never repay to the late Joseph C. Byers, the Dryden editor who worked closely with us from the inception of the book until it had neared completion. His intelligence, sensitivity, encouragement, and sound advice were assets the ultimate value of which can never be estimated. In addition, we want to specifically mention the skilled, perceptive, and enthusiastic assistance and expert help we received from Ray Ashton, Dryden editor; Stephen Rapley, art editor; Ellen F. Farrow, free lance editor; and Yvonne Freund, photographic consultant. We are also greatly indebted to Reece McGee who worked with us continuously during the preparation of this text. And our thanks to our two typists, JoAnn Russell and Sharon Wilson. We, of course, take full responsibility for any flaws that may remain.

Orlando, Florida  
November 1974

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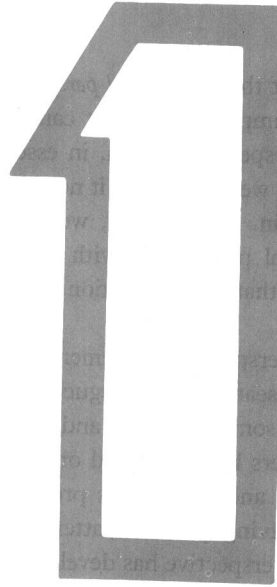
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