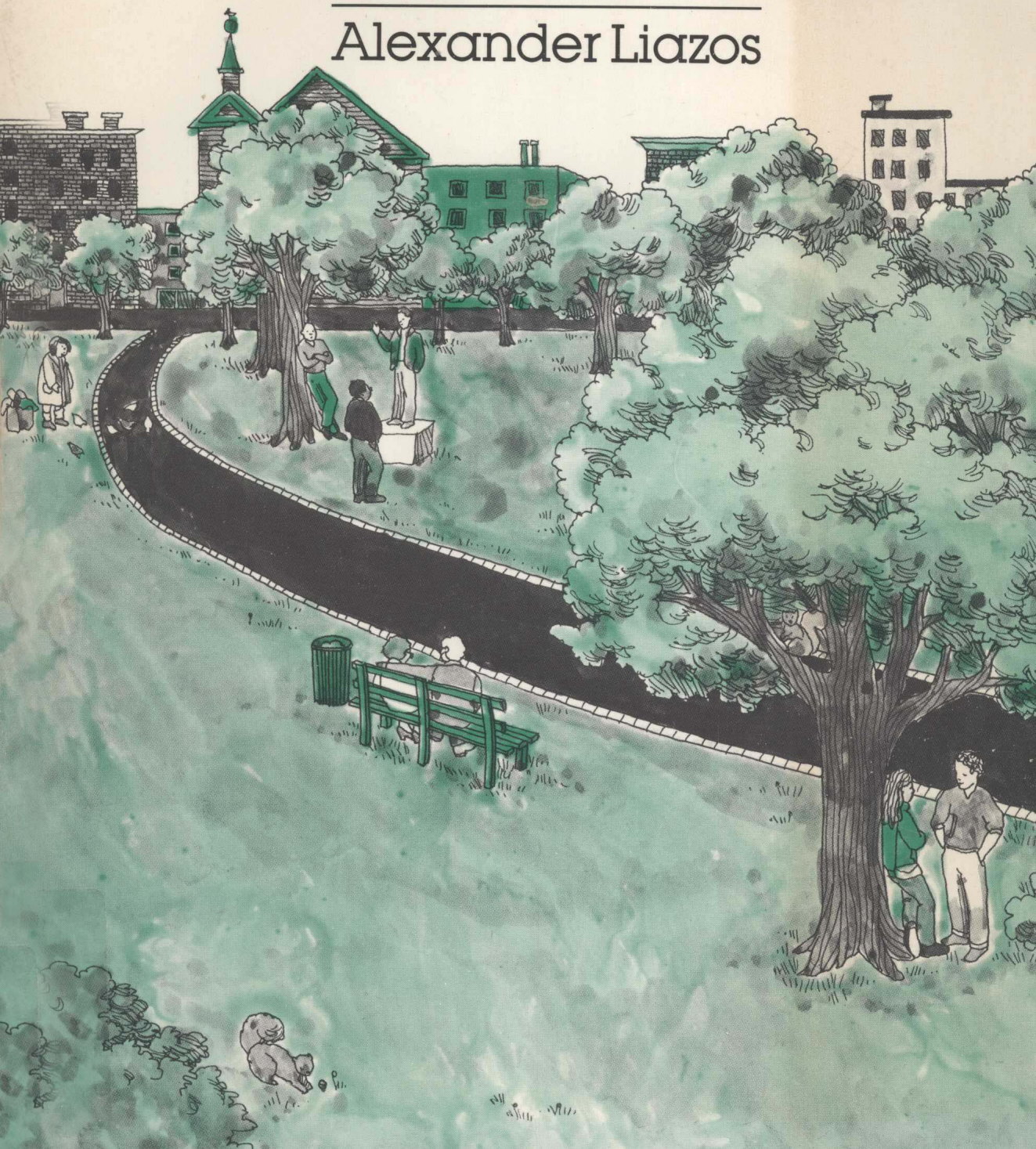


Sociology

A Liberating Perspective

Alexander Liazos

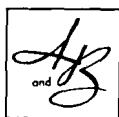


Sociology

A Liberating Perspective

Alexander Liazos
Regis College

ALLYN AND BACON, INC.
London Boston Sydney Toronto



*With affection and love for
Georgia and Theodore Liazos,
Melissa and Ariane, and Bobbie Colasanti,
Their presence and love have given me
inspiration and nourishment.*

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Preface

In this book sociology is presented from a different perspective than it is in other introductory sociology texts. While *Sociology: A Liberating Perspective* includes approaches, views, concepts, and research from traditional sociology, it also contains a Marxist perspective that is deeply committed to democratic principles and to the struggle for an egalitarian society, a society without classes and free of sex and racial oppression and exploitation. This text offers studies and perspectives from humanistic anthropology, an ecological view showing how we must live in harmony with nature and have a better understanding of it, and events and descriptions from my own life and family, both in the United States and Albania.

I not only see sociology as a very personal and subjective enterprise but also one that is grounded in objective social reality. It is a disciplined but also a personal search to understand the world around us and our place in it. It gives us some answers, but they are tentative answers, posing more questions and possibilities. It is guided by a sense of curiosity, wonder, questioning, and examination of our preconceptions and perceptions of social reality. I see sociology simultaneously as a personal-subjective and a social-objective undertaking.

Given this view, I make extensive use of studies of other societies, notably the BaMbuti of Zaire (*The Forest People* by Colin Turnbull) and the !Kung of southwest Africa (*Nisa* by Marjorie Shostak, and the other studies of the !Kung). I also refer to many other anthropological studies of hunting and gathering, horticultural, and agricultural (peasant) societies. These studies offer us a window to human and social realities vastly different from our own yet similar in the essential humanity we share with people everywhere. Inherently fascinating and intellectually stimulating, they offer comparisons and contrasts of different peoples—their behaviors and attitudes. They show us what past human societies were like, and they expand our vision of what they may be in the future. If sociology is to be more than a study of society as it exists in modern industrial societies (especially capitalist ones like the United States), if it is to be a study of human societies in general, we need to study societies in many places and in different times. I have taught cultural anthropology since 1971

and have become increasingly convinced that the distinction between anthropology and sociology is a historical remnant reflecting past and present traditions rooted in struggles for academic turf. It does not reflect any fundamental differences in the subject matter or issues we study. My understanding of human evolution, of inequalities and egalitarian conditions, of norms, roles, and the relationship between individuals and societies, of sex roles and childhood, and of other issues and debates has been profoundly shaped by my study of the BaMbuti, the !Kung, and other pre-industrial societies.

I am a Marxist socialist, a perspective I explain carefully in Chapters 1, 8, and 9. Personal experiences and reading have shown me that class inequalities pervade the United States, other capitalist societies, and socialist societies. These inequalities cause profound psychic injuries, material suffering, social unrest, and now with the specter of nuclear war facing us daily, threaten life itself. We cannot understand modern societies if we do not focus on class differences, the exploitation of most people by small ruling classes, and the struggle to create justice and equality. These are the fundamental social realities of our time. But this is not to say I subscribe to a mechanical, dogmatic, and simplistic Marxism (one Marx would certainly have rejected himself). I use Marxist concepts to understand a changing world, not to fit the world into a preconceived and rigid dogma. I draw from many sources and many traditions. I am committed to an honest and open-minded search to understand social realities and conditions and to a democratic, egalitarian, and just society for all women and men.

Marx wrote that people “make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.”

We make history, and we are limited by traditions and conditions that define the context in which we live. Both statements are true: Social reality does limit and shape us; there is a social script we follow, but we—individually and collectively—choose how to interpret and re-interpret traditions passed on to us. We are not robots. We do change and shape social reality as much as it shapes us. There is no “society,” no entity above and beyond us, that dictates, rules, and directs. The Marxist sociology I espouse sees people as actors in and molders of history, not as passive recipients. This does not mean we are totally free to choose and act as we wish, but it does mean we are not completely at the mercy of outside forces. There are limits, but there are also choices and possibilities.

In raising my two daughters, teaching sociology and anthropology, reading about pre-industrial societies (especially the !Kung), and struggling against social inequalities, I have become committed to the creation of equality between women and men. Sex inequalities, as with all inequalities, threaten the humanity of all of us. In Chapter 11, we will study societies where women and men are

equal in an effort to understand why inequalities arise and to aid in the struggle to create a society of sexual equality.

In many chapters I refer to and discuss personal and family experiences, both in the United States and Albania. Personal experiences illuminate social reality. They are part of the information in our study of the world, but they are never sufficient by themselves. They provide a starting point, an essential beginning, but they are never an ending. I use examples from my life in this spirit. All of us need to begin with our own lives, but we cannot stop there. We need to look at other social scenes—those near us in space and time *and* those removed in space and time.

Here and in the rest of the book I often use the first person singular. Some people may find such usage improper for a textbook, but given my view of sociology as a personal journey and understanding, disciplined by social and objective realities, I cannot write otherwise. I limit such personal references, but I do not hesitate to use them where they are appropriate and necessary. I explain in Chapter 2 that I do not see sociology and sociologists as possessing professional expertise not available to non-sociologists. Sociologists need to be humble in claiming they use tools and theories that give them a more valid understanding of the social world than that of non-sociologists. With curiosity, an open mind, and some time to study, anyone can be a sociologist. Thus, since I do not see sociology as a field of knowledge only open to trained professionals, I write personally and directly to the reader. I do not wish to impress you with scientific answers that you must accept as true. As I have said, sociology is a personal journey for all of us, and I present it as such. I want to share my experiences and understanding with you, to draw and entice you into a debate and an exploration, not to present you with indisputable findings.

Let me briefly explain the organization of this text. Part I introduces sociology, the different sociological perspectives, sociological methods and their problems. Part II presents what I see as the fundamental realities of our natural and social worlds, and the conditions that make us social human beings: the evolution of human societies and the natural world around us, culture, community, family, and socialization. Part III explores the three fundamental social inequalities that divide us from each other and diminish our humanity and social existence: class, race, and sex inequalities.

The subjects discussed in chapters 3 and 5 (social evolution, the environment, nuclear war, and community) are either absent from or only briefly discussed in other introductory sociology texts. It is included here in separate chapters because community (or its absence), the physical world in which we live, nuclear war are essential realities in our lives. We cannot understand our individual and social experiences if we do not appreciate the importance of community and our physical-natural existence.

On the other hand, since this is not intended to be an encyclopedic tome, I have de-emphasized topics found in many texts: crime and deviance, health, education, and so on. They are discussed in the context of other chapters (for

example, deviance is in Chapter 4 on culture), but I do not devote whole chapters to them. May I suggest teachers supplement the text with lectures or additional reading.

I would also like to call your attention to the appendix that follows Chapter 12. Originally it was a chapter that followed Chapter 2 and served both as a concise summary of the perspective of the book and an overview of the following ten chapters. But because it differed significantly from the other chapters and seemed out of context, the editors and I decided to include it as an appendix. It may still be used to introduce Parts II and III of the text or as a summary of the book at the end of the course.

Since this text is based on a personal approach to sociology, I will end this preface with a brief autobiographical statement. This book communicates to you certain bodies of knowledge from traditional sociology, Marxism, and anthropology, but this information comes to you through me. I join and fuse them to create an understanding of people and the societies they create. Given this, a brief account of my life may help you understand my view of sociology; it will at least tell you who I am.

I was born in Llongo, Albania, in April 1941. I am the fifth of eight children (second of five who survived childhood and are still living) of Georgia and Theodore Liazos. My father and his male ancestors have lived in the village of Llongo for approximately four hundred years. The village is located in southern Albania, which is populated by Greek nationals who still carry on their language and customs.

In 1941, World War II was raging, with the Nazis shortly to conquer Albania. My earliest memory (1943 or 1944) is of hiding in the cellar with my family, protecting ourselves from the bombardment of German troops. The Albanian communist party fought the Nazis, and when the Nazis withdrew, Albania became a socialist society in November 1944.

In 1947, when I was six, my brother Christos (then ten) and I were separated from our parents. We lived in Greece until 1955, raised by our paternal grandmother Afroditi Liazos. We were very poor, as were most people in Greece then. Our home was one-third of a room in an old school building. It was used for housing people who had left the villages near the town of Ioannina in northwest Greece because of the civil war in Greece. The poverty left me with deep impressions (which I discuss briefly in Chapter 8), but I also have fond memories of that period of my life. There were few cars on the streets, so we could roam and play in the streets freely. I remember friends with great fondness and nostalgia. And I remember the summer camps set under the olive trees by the sea or up in the mountains.

Our grandmother struggled to raise two young children in her old age, and she did so with love, determination, courage, and a few eccentricities. In 1955, when she was seventy-five years old and no longer able to care for us, the three of us came to the United States. Aunts and other family in Worcester, Massachusetts, brought us over, and we lived with an aunt for two years.

From 1957 to 1964, as I attended high school and college (Clark University in Worcester), my grandmother, brother, and I had our own apartment. During these years I reflected on culture and community (see chapters 4 and 5). Even though I became an American citizen, I was filled with a longing for my family in Albania and my friends in Greece. I experienced some social isolation as I tried to fit into a strange new culture. I have only vague memories of the first six years of my life, but I have many vivid memories of my eight years in Greece and my first nine years in America. As I travel through my forties, I reflect on those years and their influence on my life.

From 1956 to 1962, I worked as a busboy and dishwasher in a restaurant in Worcester, and from 1962 to 1964, I worked in a factory cutting and shaping hardboard (pressed paper). In those eight years, I was in close contact with working class white people and poor black people. My life with them made a deep permanent impression on me about the lives and problems of working people in the United States.

In 1964 I left Worcester to study sociology at Brandeis University. My grandmother first went to live with my brother and his wife near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and then returned to Worcester to live with one of her daughters (my father's sister). In May 1965, at the age of eighty-five, she died alone at 3:00 A.M. in a hospital room. I still cry when I think of the loneliness and aloneness of her last moments of life. All I write about family, culture, community, and social change has been permanently shaped by her life and death, and the sadness I still feel.

Later in 1965 I was married to Karen Judge. I continued my studies at Brandeis until 1968. In 1967–68 while teaching part-time at Simmons College, I studied an institution for emotionally disturbed adolescent boys. It became my dissertation, and I received my Ph.D. in sociology from Brandeis in June 1970.

I began teaching at Quinnipiac College in Hamden, Connecticut, in 1968. I stayed there until 1971. These three years were profoundly important to my personal, social, and political growth. I had been marginally active in the civil rights movement in Worcester in the early 1960s, and I had gone to some demonstrations against the Vietnam War in 1965, 1966, and 1967. But while in New Haven, I joined AIM (the American Independent Movement), an organization that worked for civil rights, against the war, and for social equality for all Americans. My road to Marxism and socialism began there.

Two other experiences were important. As I was writing my dissertation on the boys' home (1968–1970), I read about one of the former residents who had died in Vietnam. It shook me and forced me to re-think my analysis of the institution and its function. I realized then that various institutions channel working-class people into limited lives and send boys to fight imperialist wars for the ruling class.

After three years of teaching a course on deviance at Quinnipiac College, I came to understand that sociology and the sociology of deviance focus on the crimes of the poor, but they ignore the crimes of corporations and the rich. A

paper I wrote in 1971, "The Poverty of the Sociology of Deviance: Nuts, Sluts, and Perverts", discusses this understanding. (It was published in 1972 and has been reprinted in ten books.) It marked another step in my gradual but steady political awakening that led to *People First*, a text I wrote in 1977–1980 (published in 1982).

Since 1971, I have been teaching at Regis College in Weston, Massachusetts. I have also taught evenings and summers at Middlesex Community College, Framingham State College, Northeastern University, and Clark University. In 1975–76, four colleagues, John Baumann, Jim Brady, Richard Quinney, Richard Speiglman, and I organized a study group of Marxist criminologists. It was at this time that my understanding of socialism and Marxism reached its maturity. This is not to say I have stopped thinking, growing, and changing (I will probably never stop until the day I die), but only that the foundation of my political consciousness was established and reached its maturity at this point. *People First*, three other papers I have written, this book, and my work with Nuclear Free Cambridge have been other steps in my social and political growth and practice.

In 1974 and 1976, my former wife and I had two daughters, Melissa and Ariane. I have shared in their upbringing, and I have rich, warm experiences and memories of their childhood. As we raised them, I learned much about sex roles, sexism, and childhood in America. I have read books to and with them. We have visited and explored many places around greater Boston. In all seasons, we have taken walks through lovely New England woods. We have played many games and watched *Sesame Street* and other television shows. I changed and washed their diapers, and I fed them when they were little. I wove bedtime stories for them and sang them lullabies as they fell asleep in my arms. I have sweet memories of their early years. Today, we continue to read together, tell stories, explore New England woods, but now we talk about social classes, wars, nuclear war, and other experiences of life they meet as they grow up.

In 1980, after thirty-three years of separation, I was able to visit Albania and meet my parents Georgia and Theodore, my brother Vangel and sisters Kleoniki and Ifigenia with their families, and various other relatives. In chapters 5 and 6, I recount some of my experiences and memories of those four weeks. My sense of family and community, and my appreciation of their significance, were enlivened and enriched during those twenty-eight days. That visit was a profound personal and emotional experience. The most rewarding part of it was the almost daily afternoon talks I had with my mother. I relived and was reunited with my family and my childhood self, a self long buried and repressed. I began to see that so much of me now was true of me as a child (this is discussed briefly in Chapter 7).

George Michelis, who came from Greece at the age of eighteen in 1968, shared an office with me at Regis from 1980 to 1984. He retained strong ties with his Greek heritage, and his singing and our frequent talks (mostly in Greek) awakened my Greek identity and culture. The discussion on culture owes much to our friendship and his influence on me.

In 1981 I was separated from Karen Liazos. We were divorced in 1984. It was a difficult decision and a painful experience. Although Melissa and Ariane have been staying with me two days each week, and I see them parts of four days each week, and on days I do not see them we talk on the phone, I miss them terribly. They remain the most important people in my life, and we are very close.

In 1982 I joined Mobilization for Survival, an organization working for equality and against sexism, racism, war, and nuclear war. In 1983 I worked with one of its task forces, Nuclear Free Cambridge, which campaigned for a referendum to stop all nuclear weapons research in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The weapons industry spent \$507,000 in its campaign against the referendum compared to the \$24,000 spent by NFC). The referendum lost by 59 to 41 percent. But that was a temporary defeat in a long struggle against nuclear weapons and war, and for equality and justice in the United States and the whole world. The struggle against class inequalities and against wars is one we need to wage constantly.

My brother Chris and his wife Helena, and their sons Andrew and Teddy, together with our aunts and cousins have been a constant presence in my life, even during the years when I saw them infrequently. They have been the family, the continuity with the past, and the community we all need and seek but which is often fragile and problematic.

Since late 1981, Bobbie Colasanti has been a loving friend and companion. We have shared many experiences, have had many talks, and have gone for walks. We have encouraged and supported each other constantly.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Once more, it is with pleasure, gratitude, and thanks that I acknowledge my debt to the many people without whom this book would have never been written. It was only after I came to write *People First* that I realized how much an author owes to so many people.

Janet Horrigan deserves my first and foremost thanks. She typed the entire manuscript directly from longhand drafts, deciphering it accurately and speedily. Without her prompt and careful typing I could never have completed this book in a summer and two semester breaks.

Al Levitt, editor at Allyn and Bacon, twice has been courageous, perceptive or foolhardy (depending on one's viewpoint) in agreeing to publish two very unusual textbooks. For both our sakes, I hope this book is received favorably. These books have provided me the opportunity to organize and develop my social

and political perspective, and to present it to students and others. I am deeply grateful, Al.

Rebecca Davison deserves a special thanks for the unenviable task of editing a textbook. Writers are attached to their work and reluctant to change it, so it takes a very patient and skillful person to edit a book. Her suggestions, questions, and clarifications improved the text immensely. Where I had thought my meaning was clear she showed me how it was not, and the changes have improved my argument. In some places where she suggested different phrasing I chose to keep the original wording, and the responsibility is mine for any remaining deficiencies.

The four people who reviewed this book, Sheila Balkan, Louise Lopman, Charles Petranek, and Gerald Turkel, helped improve it considerably. With their encouragement, suggestions, constructive criticisms, and occasional strong disagreements, they forced me to make changes and additions that clarified and strengthened my perspective and arguments. Gerald Turkel, as he was for *People First*, was the ideal reviewer: strongly supportive yet always urging me to take my argument a step further. Louise Lopman, my colleague at Regis College since 1977, has been an ideal co-worker in a very supportive department. She gave the manuscript a very careful and encouraging reading.

The citations in the text and in the bibliography make it abundantly clear that the following journals have been indispensable as sources of information, ideas, and inspiration: *Guardian*, *Monthly Review*, *Radical America*, *Progressive*, *Dollars and Sense*, and *Nation*. Their editors and contributors have educated me and made this text relevant and timely. I recommend these journals to you; they are thought provoking, challenging, encouraging, irritating, and inspiring.

Any text is the combined product of the writer's work and perspective and of his or her knowledge gathered from the labors of thousands of writers and researchers. All these people, many of whom would not necessarily agree with my use of their work, are listed in the bibliography. I thank them all.

The following people, their writings, perspectives, analyses, information, and often personal examples, have influenced and inspired me at various stages of my life. I have not met most of them, yet they have become part of me. Their impact on my social consciousness and political and intellectual development is evident throughout the book. I list them alphabetically (their writings are listed in the bibliography):

John Bodley, for his emphasis on egalitarian social conditions and ecological consciousness in primitive societies;

Harry Braverman, for his powerful analysis of the dehumanization of work under capitalism;

Bill Chambliss, for his studies of crime, law, and criminal justice in capitalist societies, for his very supportive comments on *People First*, and many other insights;

Barry Commoner, for his ecological consciousness;

Irwin Deutscher, for his insistence that we study what people *do*, not only what they say they do;

G. William Domhoff, for his pioneering studies of the American ruling class;

Frederick Douglass, for his courageous struggle against oppression and for his profound insights on the destructiveness of all systems of inequality, both to the oppressed and the oppressors;

Barbara Ehrenreich, for her historical analyses of women's social place, her commitment to equality, and her focus on women *and* men as victims of sexism and capitalism;

Barbara Grizzuti Harrison, for revealing the depth of sexism and engaging in the struggle to end it;

John Holt, for reminding us that learning occurs mostly in daily life, not in schools that inspire fear of learning;

Eleanor Burke Leacock, for her historical and anthropological studies of women's social conditions from a Marxist perspective;

Dorothy Lee, who first introduced me to the humanity and egalitarian conditions of primitive societies;

Robert S. and Helen Merrell Lynd, for their descriptions of social and political changes in American community life;

Jerre Mangione, for his moving account of ethnic family life;

C. Wright Mills, whose sociological and political studies first showed me the possibilities of sociology as a tool for liberation and a new consciousness;

Richard Quinney, who introduced me to Marxist criminology, and who has been a friend and ideological and spiritual fellow traveler;

Paul Radin, who insisted that we focus on the social and spiritual accomplishments of primitive societies;

Majorie Shostak and Nisa, who showed me !Kung life in all its richness, beauty, and complexity;

Paul Sweezy and Harry Magdoff, for their many papers, editorials, and editing of *Monthly Review*, which have revealed to me socialism and Marxism in all its depth, relevance, and liberating possibilities;

Studs Terkel, who unearthed the deeply buried longings, dreams, hopes, and frustrations of all of us;

Colin Turnbull, who showed us the beautiful world of pygmies and awakened in me visions of a better world;

and David Lindsay Watson, who first made me aware that the study and understanding of people and societies is a task for all people, not only professional social scientists.

I am also deeply indebted, as all of us are, to the millions of people, dead and alive, who have struggled for their liberation and the liberation of all humanity. They have given us hope and a better world. Among them have been the Americans, black and white, who struggled for racial justice and equality since the 1950s; the Vietnamese who fought against imperialism, and those Ameri-

cans who protested against the Vietnam war; the women who bravely started and created the feminist movement, liberating both women and men; the poor and exploited who have given their lives in liberation wars in all continents; and those everywhere working to prevent nuclear war, to create justice for all, and to shape societies where all people can live together without exploitation, hunger, and inequalities.

I end with some personal acknowledgements. For three years, George and Aleka Michelis, who are now living in Greece, helped me relive my Greek past; Chris and Helena have been present and supportive during very difficult times; Melissa and Ariane have shared my joys, have taught me about childhood and awakened the buried child in me, and have shown me their love in surprising and touching ways; and Bobbie for her love, tenderness, deep social concern, companionship, and constant support.

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