



SOCIOLOGICAL FOOTPRINTS

INTRODUCTORY READINGS IN SOCIOLOGY

LEONARD CARGAN

JEANNE H. BALLANTINE

9TH EDITION

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NINTH EDITION

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Wright State University

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Wadsworth/Thomson Learning
10 Davis Drive
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Asia
Thomson Learning
5 Shenton Way #01-01
UIC Building
Singapore 068808

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PREFACE

THE PRIMARY OBJECTIVE OF THIS ANTHOLOGY is to provide a link between theoretical sociology and everyday life by presenting actual samples of both classical and current sociological studies. If students are to grasp the full meaning of sociological terms and topics, they must be able to translate the jargon of sociology into real and useful concepts that are applicable to everyday life. To this end, *Sociological Footprints* presents viewpoints that demonstrate the broad range of sociological applications and the value of sociological research.

Selecting the readings for the ninth edition involved a number of important steps. As with the previous eight editions, we constantly received feedback from hundreds of students. Feedback was also requested from colleagues who are knowledgeable about the various topics of this anthology. An exhaustive search of the literature was conducted for additional material that was interesting and highly readable, that presented concepts clearly, that represented both recent and classic sociology, and that featured authors of diverse backgrounds. In meeting these criteria we often had to replace popular readings with more comprehensive and up-to-date ones. About one-third of the articles included in this edition are new selections that update all issues and address new concerns. As a final step, we utilized reviewers' comments to make the anthology relevant and useful. In this manner, each edition of *Sociological Footprints* becomes the strongest possible effort in producing a sociologically current, interesting, and highly readable collection.

In This Edition

The ninth edition builds on the strengths of early editions, and also changes with the changing world. Students will gain from reading classical sociological selections and from contemporary views of organizational and societal issues.

The relevance of this collection is seen in the variety of topics and in our effort to cover subjects found in Introductory Sociology courses. The **classical sociological readings** include, among others, Peter Berger's "An Invitation to Sociology" (5), C. Wright Mill's "The Promise" (2); Kingsley Davis's "Final Note on a Case of Extreme Isolation" (6); Horace Miner's "Body Ritual of the Nacirema" (11); D. L. Rosenhan's "On Being Sane in Insane Places" (54); and two articles by the foremost of the early sociologists, Emile Durkheim, "What Is a Social Fact?" (1) and "The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life" (32). There are also two articles by

one of the foremost current sociologists, Robert K. Merton, “Discrimination and the American Creed” (46) and “Social Structure and Anomie” (50).

Besides covering a wide spectrum of classic sociological issues, the new edition of this anthology now covers such **contemporary sociological topics** as AIDS (3 and 59), domestic violence (25), the changing family (23 and 26), educational inequality (28, 29, and 30), cults (34), the future of work (36 and 37), credit cards (39), criminal justice (51 and 52), and environmental issues (55 and 56). Also added are reactions and changes brought about by September 11 and terrorism (44 and 63) and new global challenges (60 and 62).

Not ignored are such **important sociological variables** as gender; culture; cross-cultural issues; intergroup behavior; class and stratification; inequality; crime; and the major institutions of marriage and family, education, religion, economics, politics, and health.

In sum, this anthology contains a balance of readings in each major section that—according to students, instructors, and reviewers—make the collection a valuable excursion into sociology. Although several of the readings have been condensed, the original message has not been altered. To emphasize key points, digressions, repetitions, and detailed descriptions of quantitative data have been omitted.

Features and Organization

We hope this new edition of *Sociological Footprints* will be as valuable to teachers as it is to students—an intention reflected in the book’s organization. First, each major part has an introduction that covers the major themes of the topic area, noting how each reading relates to these themes. Second, each reading is also introduced by a comment about the important points in the reading. Third, we provide questions before each reading to guide the reader toward the important points. Fourth, although anthologies do not usually define concepts used in their readings, before many readings we include a glossary of important terms to give students a basic understanding of special terminology.

Supplements

Instructor’s Manual with Test Bank

This instructor resource offers instructors teaching suggestions and a correlation grid that correlates each chapter with the chapters of major introductory sociology texts that may be used in conjunction with this reader. The manual also contains a summary analysis of each article in the reader, stating the thesis, findings, and conclusions of each reading. Test items are also provided, including five to ten multiple-choice questions and up to five essay questions for each article.

Web Site

<http://sociology.wadsworth.com>

At *Virtual Society, Wadsworth's Sociology Resource Center*, students and instructors can access a sociology career center, Internet links and exercises, InfoTrac® College Edition, MicroCase® Online, CNN® video clips with critical thinking questions, and Wadsworth's other special sociology resources such as *Census 2000: A Student Guide for Sociology* and *Terrorism: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*. Instructors can also access an online version of the Instructor's Manual with Test Bank.

Acknowledgments

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TO THE STUDENT

THE PURPOSE OF THIS ANTHOLOGY IS to introduce you, the beginning student in sociology, to a wide range of sociological perspectives and to demonstrate their relevance to real-life situations. As you apply sociological perspectives to everyday events, you will begin to realize that sociology is more than jargon, more than dry statistics, more than endless terminology to be memorized. It is an exciting and useful field of study. Unfortunately, no textbook can fully describe the many applications of sociology. This anthology should help to fill the gap by supplying classical readings balanced with contemporary readings on current issues and research.

From our experience in teaching introductory sociology, we know some of the problems that anthologies can present to the student: unexplained terms, readings seemingly unrelated to the text, and different emphases from those of the instructor's lectures. Therefore, to enjoy and benefit fully from *Sociological Footprints*, you should take the following steps:

1. Read and study the related textbook chapter and lecture materials. You must be familiar with the concepts and perspectives before you can clearly observe their daily application.
2. Read the introductions to the assigned sections in the anthology. They are designed to summarize the primary themes of the topic area and relate them to specific readings. In fact, the introductions will not only make the readings easier to understand, they will facilitate your application of the readings to other class materials and real-life situations.
3. Use the glossary that precedes the selection before you read each reading. Knowing the terms will make the reading more interesting and understandable.
4. Read each reading thoroughly. Note the problem or issue being discussed, the evidence the author supplies in support of his or her contentions, and the conclusions drawn from this evidence. Answer the questions posed at the beginning of the piece.
5. Summarize the main ideas of each reading in your own terms, relating them to other material in the course and to your own everyday experiences.

Step 5 is particularly important. Many of the readings address topics of current interest—political issues, population problems, environmental issues, the women's movement, and more. Because these are contemporary problems, you will see related materials in newspapers and magazines and on television. By applying what you have learned from the lectures and this anthology, you should develop a clearer understanding of current issues and of how sociology has aided you in this understanding.

We feel strongly that sociology is a field of study highly relevant to your world and that it can give you a fuller comprehension of day-to-day living. Our aim has been to provide you with a readable, understandable, and enlightening anthology that will convey this relevance.

The Essential Wisdom of Sociology

(Paraphrased from a paper from Earl Babbie from 1989 ASA Annual Meeting)

“I say this by way of a disclaimer. The essential wisdom of sociology may have twelve or thirteen points, but I’m going to quit at ten.”

1. Society has a *sui generis* existence or reality. “You can’t fully understand society by understanding individual human beings who comprise it. For example, few people want war, but we have wars all the time.”
2. It is possible to study society scientifically. “Society can be more than learned beliefs of ‘common sense.’ It is actually possible to study society scientifically, just as we study aspects of the physical world.”
3. Autopoiesis: society creates itself. “Autopoiesis (Huberto Maturana’s term) might be defined as ‘self-creating.’ A powerful statement that sociology has to offer is that society is autopoietic: society creates itself.”
4. Cultural variations by time and place. “Gaining awareness that differences exist is only the beginning, however . . . Our second task in this regard is to undermine . . . implicit ethnocentrism, offering the possibility of tolerance.”
5. Relation of individual and society. “[One might] want to skirt the edge of suggesting that individuals are merely figments of society. Without going quite that far [one might suggest that] individual identity is strongly sociogenetic.”
6. System imperatives. “Society is an entity [and] as a system, it has ‘needs.’ ”
7. The inherent conservatism of institutions. “The first function of an institution is institutional survival.”
8. Determinism. “. . . We operate with a model that assumes human behavior is determined by forces and factors and circumstances that the individual actors cannot control and/or are unaware of.”
9. Paradigms. “. . . paradigms are ways of looking at life, but not life itself. They focus attention so as to reveal things, but they inevitably conceal other things, rather like microscopes or telescopes, perhaps. They allow us to see things that would otherwise be hidden from us, but they do that at a cost.”
10. Sociology is an idea whose time has come. “Finally . . . on a possibly chauvinist note: All the major problems that face us as a society and as a world are to be found within the territory addressed by sociology. I say this in deliberate contrast to our implicit view that most of our problems will be solved by technology.”

INTRODUCTION: WHY STUDY SOCIOLOGY?

WHAT IS THIS SUBJECT CALLED SOCIOLOGY? What will I learn from studying sociology? Why should I take sociology? What work do sociologists do? How is sociology useful to me or to the world? If I major in sociology, what can I do when I graduate? These are some of the questions that may be in the back of your mind as you approach your study of sociology. Perhaps you are reading this book because you are curious about the subject, or because sociology is a required course, or because you had sociology in high school and wanted to find out more about it, or because your instructor assigned the book and this article. Whatever the reasons, you will find an introduction to the field of sociology in the discussion that follows.

What you read in the next few pages will only begin to answer the questions just posed. As you learn more about sociology, pieces that at first seemed fragmentary will start to come together like pieces in a puzzle. These pages provide the framework into which those pieces can be placed to answer the opening question: Why study sociology?

What Is This Subject Called Sociology?

First questions first: Sociology is the study of people in groups, of people interacting with one another, even of nations interacting during peace or war. Sociologists' interests are sparked when they see two or more people with a common interest talking or working together. They are interested in how groups work and in how nations of the world relate to one another. When two or more people are interacting, sociologists have the tools to study the process. It could be a married couple in conflict or a teacher and students in a classroom situation; it could be individuals interacting in a work group, sports teams on a playing field, or negotiating teams discussing nuclear disarmament.

Sociology shares a common bond with other social sciences. All are concerned with human behavior in society; they share the perspective of the scientific method and some of the same data-collection methods to study their subject matter. Sociology is the broadest of the social sciences; its main concern is with predicting human group behavior.

"That's a lot to be interested in," you may be saying. In fact, most sociologists specialize. No one sociologist is likely to be an expert in everything, from studies of a few people or small group interaction (microlevel sociology) to large numbers of

people in big groups like organizations or nations (macrolevel sociology). Consider the following examples of sociological specializations:

- determining the factors that lead to marital longevity
- identifying effective teachers by classroom observation
- examining public attitudes about the presidency and its policies
- locating satisfaction and problems in certain jobs

The results of these diverse interests lead sociologists into many different areas. Some sociologists specialize in social psychology, a field that considers such questions as how individuals behave in groups, who leaders are and what types of leaders are effective, why some groups accomplish more than other groups, why individuals usually conform to group expectations, and many other topics involving individuals as functioning members of groups. Another area of specialization is political sociology, which studies political power, voting behavior, bureaucracy, and political behavior of individuals and groups. Anthropology examines the culture of different groups; so does sociology. But the methods of study and primary focus differ. Anthropologists often study preliterate groups, whereas sociologists focus primarily on modern groups. Another area that concerns sociologists is social history, which emphasizes the use of history to understand social situations. These are only a few examples of the diverse interests of sociologists and how sociology shares its interests with some other social sciences.

What Will I Learn from Studying Sociology?

Consider that in some societies premarital sex is not only allowed but expected; in others, premarital sex is cause for banishment and death. Even though sociologists, like everyone else, have personal opinions, the task of the sociologist is not to judge which social attitude is right or wrong but to understand *why* such divergent practices have evolved. We all have opinions. Usually they come from our experiences, common sense, and family teaching. Some opinions are based on stereotypes or prejudices, some on partial information about an issue. Through systematic scientific study, sociologists gain insight into human behavior in groups, insight not possible through common sense alone. They attempt to understand all sides of an issue; they refrain from making judgments on issues of opinion but try instead to deal objectively with human behavior.

Consider the person who is going through the anguish of a divorce. Self-blame or hostility toward the spouse are often reactions to this personal crisis. Sociology can help us move beyond “individual” explanations to consider the social surroundings that influence the situation: economic conditions, disruptions caused by changing sex roles, and pressures on the family to meet the emotional needs of its members. Thus, sociology teaches us to look beyond individual explanations of our problems to group explanations for behavior; this practice broadens our worldview and gives us a better understanding of why events take place.

A typical college sociology program starts with a basic course introducing the general perspective of sociology; sociological terminology and areas of study; how sociologists get their information, that is, their methods; and the ideas, or theories, that lay the foundations for sociological study. Further sociology courses deal in greater depth with the major components of all societies: family, religion, education, politics, and economics.

The sociology department may also offer courses on social processes such as social problems, deviance and corrections, stratification, socialization, and change, or in other areas of social life such as medical, community, urban, sports, or minority sociology.

Family sociology, for instance, usually considers the family social life cycle: young people breaking away from their parents' home, forming a home of their own by selecting a spouse through the courtship process, marrying, selecting a career, making parenting decisions, raising a family, having their children leave home, retiring, and moving into old age.

Students who major in sociology generally take courses in *theory*—the basic ideas of the field—and *methods*—how sociologists approach the social world objectively and do their research. Some sociology departments offer practical experiences where students can use their sociological skills in a job setting.

These are a few examples of what you will learn from the study of sociology and how you will learn it. There is much more to the field of sociology than this, however.

Why Should I Take Sociology?

Whether you take a number of sociology courses or only one, you will profit in a number of ways. You will gain personal knowledge, new perspectives, skills needed by employers, background training useful in entering other fields, personal growth and development, new perspectives on the world, and a new way of looking at your relationships with others and your place in society. You will gain tolerance for and fascination with the variety of people in the world around you and their cultural systems. You will be able to understand your interactions with your family and friends better; you will be able to watch the news or read the paper with keener perception. You will have an understanding of how to obtain information to answer questions that you or your boss need answered. And the more sociology you take, the more ability you will have to express your thoughts logically, objectively, and coherently.

It is nice to know that the subjects you take in college will have some personal relevance and professional usefulness. Sociology should provide you with a number of “life skills,” such as

1. Ability to view the world more objectively
2. Tools to solve problems by designing studies, collecting data, and analyzing results
3. Ability to understand group dynamics
4. Ability to understand and evaluate problems
5. Ability to understand your personal problems in a broader social context

We know from studies that employers value those applicants with the broad training of such fields as sociology because of the skills they provide. The following are skills employers look for, in order of importance:

1. Ability to work with peers
2. Ability to organize thoughts and information
3. Self-motivation
4. Ability to plan effectively

5. Willingness to adapt to the needs of the organization
6. Ability to interact effectively in group situations
7. Self-confidence about job responsibilities
8. Ability to handle pressure
9. Ability to conceptualize problems clearly
10. Effective problem-solving skills
11. Effective leadership skills
12. Ability to listen to others

Although a college graduate in engineering, computer sciences, or business may enter the job market with a higher salary, the sociology liberal arts major is more likely to rise through the managerial and professional ranks to positions of responsibility and high pay. Businesses and organizations value the skills listed here. In today's rapidly altering society, many of us will change jobs or careers several times during a lifetime. Sociological skills can help us adapt to the expectations of new situations.

Because of the knowledge and skills learned in sociology courses, study in this area provides excellent preparation for other undergraduate and graduate fields. From nursing, business, and education to law and medicine, the knowledge of sociology can be applied to a wide variety of group situations. For instance, a current concern of sociologists who study educational settings is what characteristics make schools effective; by singling out certain characteristics, sociologists can make recommendations to improve schools. Teachers and educational administrators profit from this information.

If we are curious about understanding ourselves and our interactions with others and about why our lives take certain directions, sociology can help us understand. For instance, sociologists are interested in how our social-class standing affects how we think, how we dress, how we speak, what our interests are, whom we are likely to marry, what religion (if any) we belong to, and what our "life chances" are, including how long we will live and what we are likely to do in life. Sociologists have even examined how individuals from different social-class backgrounds raise their children, and implications of child-rearing techniques for our lifestyles. Some use physical punishment and others moral chastisement, but the end result is likely to be a perpetuation of the social class into which we are born.

What Work Do Sociologists Do?

The most obvious answer is that sociologists *teach*; this is primarily at the higher education level, but high school sociology courses are also offered as part of the social science curriculum. There would be nothing to teach if sociologists were not actively engaged in learning about the social world. Their second major activity is to conduct *research* about questions concerning the social world.

Many sociologists work in business organizations, government agencies, and social service agencies. *Practicing sociologists* are engaged in a variety of activities. Some do family counseling with the whole family group; some conduct market research for companies or opinion polls for news or other organizations; some do surveys for the government to determine what people think or need; some work with juvenile delin-

quents, prison programs and reforms, and police; some predict how population changes will affect schools and communities.

Applied sociologists use their sociological knowledge to help organizations. They assess organizational needs, plan programs to meet those needs, and evaluate the effectiveness of programs. For instance, a community may want to know how many of its elderly citizens need special services to remain at home rather than be moved to nursing institutions. Sociologists assess this need, help plan programs, and evaluate whether programs are meeting the needs they set out to meet.

The position a sociology major ultimately gets depends in part on the degree he or she holds in sociology. The following are some examples of jobs students have gotten with a B.A. or B.S. degree: director of county group home, research assistant, juvenile probation officer, data processing project director, public administration/district manager, public administration/health coordinator, law enforcement, labor relations/personnel, police commander/special investigations, trucking dispatcher, administrator/ social worker, counselor, child caseworker, substance abuse therapist, medical social worker, data programming analyst, activities director at senior citizens center, director of student volunteer program, area sales manager, jury verdict research editor, insurance claims adjuster, employment recruiter, tester for civil service, unemployment office manager, child services houseparent, crisis worker volunteer, advertising copywriter, probation officer, travel consultant, recreation therapist, public TV show hostess, adult education coordinator, research and evaluation specialist, neighborhood youth worker.

Sociologists holding an M.A. or Ph.D. degree are more skilled in sociological theory and methods than B.A. degree holders. They are often involved in research, teaching, or clinical work with families and other clients.

How Is Sociology Useful to Me and to the World?

Technology is rapidly changing the world. New policies and programs are being implemented in government and private organizations—policies that affect every aspect of our lives. Because sociologists study social processes, they are able to make concrete contributions to the planning of orderly change. Sociological knowledge can also be useful to legislators and courts in making policy decisions. For example, sociologists can assist a juvenile facility to design programs to help young people convicted of crime redirect their energies; how successful such programs are in achieving their goals can be studied by evaluation research.

In summary, sociology is the broadest of the social sciences and, unlike other disciplines, can give us an understanding of the social world. The knowledge and tools of sociology make students of this field valuable in a number of settings, from business to social service to government to education. As you embark on this study, keep in mind that sociology helps us have a deeper understanding of ourselves and our place in the world as well.

Sociology is a study of all people, for all people. To enjoy your encounter with the field and to make the most use of your time in sociology, try to relate the information you read and hear to your own life and relationships with others within the broader context of your social world.

How Will You Spend the 21st Century?

PETER DREIER, OCCIDENTAL COLLEGE

The following article, How Will You Spend the 21st Century?, describes some of the occupations sociology majors have achieved and the many tasks that people with sociology degrees can take on.

. . . I assume some of the parents in the audience today are like my parents were, 30 years ago, when I told them I was going to major in sociology. They weren't quite sure what sociology was, or whether you could get a job with a degree in sociology.

My father was worried that I might become a *social worker*. My mother was worried that I might become a *socialist*.

Well, let me assure you that your sons and daughters will be able to put their sociology degrees to good use. Some of our nation's most outstanding leaders, today and in the past, majored in sociology.

I'm a sports fan, so I've created a Sociology All-Star Team. The team captain is *Regis Philbin*, who majored in sociology at Notre Dame. . . . Other sociology majors in the world of entertainment include comedian *Robin Williams*, actor *Dan Aykroyd*, *Paul Shaffer* (the band leader on the David Letterman show), and Oscar-nominated actress *Deborah Winger*. And those of you who grew up in the 50s will remember the singer and TV star Dinah Shore, who studied sociology at Vanderbilt. Another sociology major from the world of arts and culture is novelist *Saul Bellow*, winner of the Nobel Prize for literature. The world of sports includes *Alonzo Mourning* (the Miami Heat's All-Star center); *Joe Theisman* (the NFL Hall of Fame quarterback); *Brian Jordan*, the Atlanta Braves' star outfielder; and, from the University of Oregon, *Ahmad Rashad*, the sportscaster and former football star.

Sociology has been a launching pad for people into the world of politics and law. A good example is *Richard Barajas*, chief justice of the Texas Supreme Court, who majored in sociology at Baylor University.

Over the years, quite a few sociology majors have been elected to political office. For example, *Shirley Chisholm*, the first black woman elected to Congress, in 1968, majored in sociology at Brooklyn College. The current Congress includes *Maxine Waters* (the Congresswoman from Los Angeles) and U.S. Senator *Barbara Mikulski* of Maryland.

Quite a few urban majors are on our sociology All-Star team, including *Wellington Webb*, the Democratic mayor of Denver; *Brett Schundler*, the Republican mayor of Jersey City, New Jersey; and *Annette Strauss*, the former mayor of Dallas.

Who can name a President of the United States who majored in sociology? The answer is *Ronald Reagan*, who has a sociology degree from Eureka College in Illinois.

Sociology is perhaps most well-known as a training ground for social reformers. Whether they go into politics, law, teaching, business, journalism, the arts, urban planning, the clergy, or any other field, they see their professional careers as a means to improve society and help others. Most sociologists, in other words, are *practical idealists*.

I think playwright George Bernard Shaw had the best understanding of sociology. He said: "Some men see things the way they are and ask: why? Others dream things that never were and ask: why not?" One of those practical idealists was *Saul Alinsky*, the founder of community organizing, who studied sociology at the University of Chicago. Another was *Martin Luther*

King, who majored in sociology at Morehouse College in Atlanta.

On the list of great Americans who studied sociology, one of my favorites is Frances Perkins. She may not be a well-known name to many of you, but she was one of the most influential social reformers in American history. Frances Perkins was part of the first generation of women to attend college, entering Mt. Holyoke College in 1898. In one of her courses, students were required to visit a factory and do a survey of its working conditions. Perkins visited several textile mills and paper mills. There she saw the dangerous conditions and low pay that workers endured every day. This project opened her eyes to how “the other half lived.”

After graduating in 1903, Perkins got involved in social work among poor immigrants and did extensive sociological research about slum housing and unsafe working conditions in laundries, textile mills, and other industries. She was soon recognized as a national expert in the new field of industrial sociology.

The tragedy of the Triangle Fire galvanized New York City’s social reform groups. Perkins became the head of a citizens group called the Committee on Safety. Thanks to this group, within a few years, New York State had enacted 36 new laws protecting workers on the job, limiting the hours of women and children, and compensating victims of on-the-job injuries. Perkins continued this kind of social reform work for the rest of her life. In 1932, President Franklin Roosevelt asked her to become the nation’s secretary of labor, the first woman ever to hold a cabinet position, where she became the central figure in the New Deal’s efforts to improve the lives of America’s poor, unemployed, and elderly. These included the passage of the Social Security Act and of the Fair Labor Standards Act, which established the minimum wage and the eight-hour day. This social legislation forever changed the living and working conditions of most Americans. Frances Perkins was in college 100 years ago. Try to imagine yourselves sitting in a commencement ceremony in 1901.

It is the beginning of a new century. What was America like back then? What kind of soci-

ety were sociology majors like Frances Perkins about to inherit? In 1901, women didn’t have the right to vote. Suffragists, who fought to give women that right, were considered radicals and utopians. Few people could look forward to retirement. Most people worked until they were no longer physically able to do so. And when they could no longer work, they often fell into poverty. A hundred years ago, reformers were calling for “social insurance” for the elderly.

In 1901, lynching was a regular occurrence in the South. Lynching kept black people terrorized. The NAACP was founded back then to fight to outlaw lynching and to abolish laws that denied black people the right to vote.

One hundred years ago, conditions in our factories and our urban housing were incredibly dangerous. Many people were regularly killed or seriously injured on the job. Many apartments were constructed so poorly that they were often fire traps, lacking ventilation. Epidemic diseases like TB were widespread because there were no laws dealing with basic sanitation. Back then, sociologists documented these conditions and worked with reformers for basic changes like government regulations regarding minimal safety standards for factories, schools, and apartment buildings as well as for laws outlawing the exploitation of child labor.

One hundred years ago, these and many other ideas, that today we take for granted—laws protecting consumers from unhealthy and unsafe food; laws regulating air pollution from factories and cars; Pell grants to help students pay college tuition; a minimum wage; government health insurance for the elderly and poor—were considered dangerous, or impractical, or even socialistic.

Each of these ideas has improved the day-to-day lives of Americans. Today, Americans enjoy more rights, better working conditions, better living conditions, and more protection from disease in childhood and old age than anyone could have imagined 100 years ago.

Thanks to Frances Perkins and people like her, America is a much better society than it was 100 years ago.

But that doesn't let you off the hook! There are still many problems and much work to do. Like all agents for social change, whether or not they studied sociology in college, Frances Perkins and Martin Luther King understood the basic point of sociology, that is, to look for the connections between people's everyday personal problems and the larger trends in society.

Things that we experience as personal matters—a woman facing domestic violence, or a low-wage worker who cannot afford housing, or middle-class people stuck in daily traffic jams—are really about how our institutions function. Sociologists hold a mirror up to our society and help us see our society *objectively*. One way to do this is by comparing our own society to others. This sometimes makes us uncomfortable—because we take so much about our society for granted. Conditions that *we* may consider “normal,” other societies may consider serious problems.

For example, if we compare the U.S. to other advanced industrial countries like Canada, Germany, France, Sweden, Australia, Holland, and Belgium, we find some troubling things:

- The U.S. has the highest per capita income among those countries. At the same time, the U.S. has, by far, the widest gap between the rich and the poor.
- Almost 30 percent of American workers work full-time, year-round, for poverty-level wages.
- The U.S. has the highest overall rate of poverty. More than 33 million Americans live in poverty.
- Over 12 million of these Americans are children. In fact, one out of six American children is poor. They live in slums and trailer parks, eat cold cereal for dinner, share a bed or a cot with their siblings, and sometimes with their parents, and are often one disaster away from becoming homeless.
- Approximately four million American children under age 12 go hungry.
- Only three out of five children eligible for the Head Start program are enrolled because of the lack of funding.
- About seven million students attend school with life-threatening safety code violations.
- The U.S. has the highest infant mortality rate among the major industrial nations.
- One fifth of all children under two are *not immunized* against serious diseases.
- The U.S. is the only one of these nations without universal health insurance. More than 43 million Americans—including 11 million children—have no health insurance.
- Americans spend more hours stuck in traffic jams than people in any of these other countries. This leads to more pollution, more auto accidents, and less time spent with families.
- Finally, the U.S. has a much higher proportion of our citizens in prison than any of these societies . . .

. . . What would you like *your* grandchildren to think about how *you* spent the 21st century? . . . No matter what career you pursue, you have choices about how you will live your lives. As citizens, you can sit on the sidelines and merely be *involved* in your society. Or you can decide to become really *committed* to making this a better world.

What's the different between just being *involved* and really being *committed*? Think about the eggs and bacon that you had for breakfast this morning. The hen was *involved*. But the pig was really *committed*!

Today, there are hundreds of thousands of patriotic Americans committed to making our country live up to its ideals. Some focus on the *environment*, others focus on education, and still others focus on *housing*, or working conditions, or *human rights*, or *global trade*, or *discrimination against women, minorities, and gays and the physically disabled*.

They are asking the same questions that earlier generations of active citizens asked: Why can't our society do a better job of providing equal opportunity, a clean environment, and a decent education for all? They know there are many barriers and obstacles to

change, but they want to figure out how to overcome these barriers, and to help build a better society.

So ask yourselves: What are some of the things that *we* take for granted today that need to be changed? What are some ideas for changing things that today might seem “outrageous,” but that—25 or 50, or 100 years from now—will be considered common sense?

In fact, your generation has done quite well already. The media stereotypes your generation as being apathetic—but the reality is that a record number of college students today are involved in a wide variety of “community service” activities—such as mentoring young kids in school, volunteering in a homeless shelter, or working in an AIDS hospice.

As a result of this student activism, more than 100 colleges and universities have adopted “anti-sweatshop” codes of conduct for the manufacturers of clothing that bear the names and logos of their institutions.

Positive change *is* possible, but it is *not* inevitable. For about the last decade, America has been holding its breath, trying to decide what kind of country we want to be. I am optimistic that your generation will follow in the footsteps of Frances Perkins and Martin Luther King—not only when you’re young, but as a lifelong commitment to positive change.

I know you will *not* be among those who simply “see things the way they are and ask: why?” Instead, you will “dream things that never were and ask: why not?”